

## The Highly Sensitive Person in Love

By Elaine Aron

Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) – motto is “Look before you leap.” Or “A stitch in time saves nine.”

Non-HSP – motto is “He who hesitates is lost.”

### Positives

- ✓ Very intuitive – knowing how things came to be the way they are and how they will turn out, but without knowing how we know that.
- ✓ Good at using subtle cues to figure out what’s going on with those who can’t communicate with words – animals, plants, a sick person
- ✓ Close connection with the unconscious – vivid dreams
- ✓ Tendency to reflect more makes one conscientious
- ✓ More concerned about justice and threats to the environment
- ✓ Greater pleasure from the arts and from inner life
- ✓ Very spiritual
- ✓ Very neat
- ✓ Sensitivity to others’ needs
- ✓ *Preference for reflecting deeply on experience, so that Inner experiences are almost more valued than the original experience.*

### Negatives

- ✓ Easily overwhelmed by high levels of persistent complex stimulation
- ✓ Easily stressed
- ✓ More sensitive to criticism
- ✓ More easily depressed or anxious due to traumas, processing those things more deeply
- ✓ More sensitive to alcohol, caffeine, heat, cold, itchy fabrics or other irritants, change in amount of daylight, medications, and allergens.

### What it is not

- ✓ Not the same as introversion
  - 30% of HSP’s are extroverts.
  - 70% of HSP’s are introverts – may be because introversion is a good way to reduce stimulation
- ✓ Not shyness

### Why it is important

- ✓ Believed to be hard-wired; inherited trait
- ✓ Very important to relationships
- ✓ Sensitivity is crucial to human survival – most species have found two ways of surviving, so that if one “breed” can’t make it the other one can.

Cultures will favor one style over the other. In this culture, non-HSP's are favored. HSP's have to be affected by this status.

Both are needed for the culture to survive. Non-HSP's may be the rulers, while HSP's may give needed counsel.

High Sensation Seekers (HSS) – they want novel, complex and intense sensations and experiences.

This is a genetic trait.

This trait is completely independent of sensitivity.

HSP's have a strong Behavioral Inhibition System, or, Pause to Check System.

### Two Brain Systems

The hypothesis is that there are two systems, which vary in function, making a person either HSP or HSS.

Take in the current situation to see if it is anything like past situations before deciding what to do.

Behavioral Activation System -makes one curious, eager to explore.

### Four Types:

HSP / Non\_HSS – reflective, quiet life, not impulsive.

HSS / Non-HSP – curious, impulsive, eager, not aware of or interested in subtleties.

Non-HSP / Non-HSS – not curious, don't reflect deeply. Just live life in a simple, natural way.

HSP / HSS – vision and drive, but optimal level of arousal is very narrow because they are both easily overwhelmed and easily bored. Often conflicted because they do want NEW experiences but do NOT want to take risks. “One foot on the gas and one on the brake.”

### Blueprint

Bottom Floor (basic wiring): inherited temperament – sensitivity, sensation seeking, intelligence, energy level, talents.

Second Floor: personality traits – first and second floor interact with culture and family experiences – introversion, optimism, attachment style, desire or fear of intimacy, shyness, etc.

Third floor – visible behaviors – exercise, going to parties a lot, procrastinating, being charitable, etc.

### Not Feeling Like the Ideal

Men – you are not suppose to be sensitive

Women – you are suppose to be outgoing, flexible and strong in a non-HSP way.

### “Shyness” in children

Likely really HSP

Girls seen as shy by mother – overprotected, seen as less competent, described as favorite child. Grow up thinking they need protection by someone stronger - a man.

Boys seen as shy by mother – described as least favorite. Grow up expecting to be loved less by everyone.

### How gender prejudices damage relationships for HSW (Women)

- ✓ Sudden, unsupported independence can seem overwhelming for an HSW
- ✓ Activism encouraged by women’s rights groups seems personally risky
- ✓ Being HSW, you will pick up on and process more deeply negative messages about women

### Sexual victimization

- ✓ HSW – naturally more cautious about potential dangers
- ✓ Can be ruled by the shadow of the violent male image
- ✓ If you experience sexual abuse, then joyful sexual relationships can be impossible without healing work.
- ✓ Do you “win” men over so they will share their wealth and superior status or rebel and not trust men?
- ✓ Probably both
- ✓ You realize there are good men, and not all are responsible for the bad behavior of a few
- ✓ How do you feel about them? Back and forth
- ✓ Makes you uneasy with them. Less clearheaded.

### How gender prejudices damage relationships for HSM (Men)

- ✓ Men are expected to act first
- ✓ Temperament dictates that you check to see before acting
- ✓ You may end up without a mate as a consequence of this.
- ✓ May be seen as feminine because you do not control or subtly dominate others.
- ✓ High sensitivity to pain may make HSP boy vulnerable to bullying

### Additional Damage

HSPs without parental support may be overly cautious and lack self-confidence

May turn down opportunities out of excessive fear

- ✓ HSW – tend to marry earlier in life despite the fact that in HS or college they are unusually independent or creative
- ✓ HSM – tend to marry and achieve career goals later in life

### Performance

HSP’s have trouble looking “cool.” Instead, look nervous.

In high pressure and competitive situations, we perform poorly

This can cause low self-esteem, lower confidence

Can cause “nervous stomach,” rashes, phobias, stuttering, shyness

Also lowers confidence and sense of being attractive

### Poor Boundaries

- ✓ Aware of what other people feel, want and need
- ✓ Also sense what will happen if they don't get what they want or need.
  - They may suffer, be angry, be disappointed in you.
  - Being sensitive, you will be deeply bothered by this.
  - So you try to give everyone what they want.
- ✓ *This is not co-dependency unless you make the wrong response to others' needs.*
- ✓ The label of co-dependent may ring true.
- ✓ Being sensitive, you have got to develop good boundaries
  - Boundaries – let in what is useful and keep out what is not.
- ✓ What is not useful – desire from others for you to respond in ways that will hurt them or you.

### Healing the effects of sexism

1. Work on low self-esteem
2. Improve boundaries
3. Replace stereotypes with knowledge of actual men and women
4. Work on your love-shyness. Vow to meet someone every week
5. Confront your ideas about HSM and homosexuality
6. Avoid being superman or superwoman. Identify what is causing you to try to be so perfect. Don't want to let anyone down?
7. Find a sensitive mentor of your gender
8. Protect yourself from those who do not respect you.
9. Use your dreams to heal gender hurts.

### **HSP and Fear of Intimacy**

#### Intimacy

Intimacy – being authentic with another, allowing them to be authentic with you. Based in trust.

#### Unconscious

The more you respect

#### Reasons for fear of intimacy

1. Fear of exposure and rejection. Self disclosure of these fears increase intimacy rather than reducing it.
2. Fear of angry attacks. Anger is a highly stimulating emotion. However, anger is required and healthy in instances of boundary violation. You can always ask that the other person turn down the volume of their anger or ask for a time-out.
3. Fear of abandonment.

4. Fear of loss of control. Have to develop good boundaries. Do this through developing a strong “observing ego,” the part that stands outside the fray and understands both sides, like a .n. Peacekeeper.
5. Fear of one’s “attack and destroy” impulses. Owning that side of yourself can lead to its integration, making it less likely to be acted out unconsciously and freeing you to use that instinct in useful ways.
6. Fear of being engulfed. Your psyche will not tolerate the suppression of your individuality for long. Milder form: may fear being overly influenced by criticism or praise. Solution – to be intimate you must be separate. If there is no one inside to be authentic you can not be intimate.
7. Fear of commitment. Hsps fear being responsible for others. Will we fail them? This is a boundary issue.
8. Fear of disliking the other for subtle annoyances. Don’t let this keep you from loving. Instead, ask with love that your partner not do the annoying things.