EXPLORING YOUR FULL SEXUAL POTENTIAL, PART 2: SENSITIVITY, A POSSIBLE MISMATCH





You are sensitive. Most men and women who experience Same-Sex Attractions (SSA's) find themselves belonging to that category. You are not alone, though. Roughly a quarter of the population is there with you. But many are not. How hard is it to identify with men who are far less sensitive?

1. Homosexual feelings

Are Same-Sex Attractions bad or sinful? Well, those feelings are there, whether you approve of them or not. And all the praying in the world will not magically change your fascination about men.

After all, men are great. And so are you. You can pray in church but behind you is this gorgeous-looking married man with those eyes! Of course, you can close your eyes while praying. But when you open them, you connect to that hunk. *"I hope no one notices it in church"*. Does that sound familiar? The Christian Hunk in row 6?



Why don't gorgeous hunks just go and pray in a church of their own, so as I won't get tempted? Why do they come around here and radiate how great they are? I need to walk away, then casually turn around and just sneak one more peek, before shaking hands with the vicar. Will you have a look at that! That smirk on his face! What a guy. And that casual hairdo!

Let's face it: men are great and so are you.

That last remark *"and so are you"!* Easier said than done. Am I so great, am I so at ease, am I so good looking, am I so popular, am I the center of attention, am I king of the world, am I out on the streets and making a great impression on every woman, young and old, in the process?

Why is Saint Gorgeous in row 6 so different? What makes him tick? Although you may be getting over SSA's, you still may feel different from those other guys like him who are far more at ease at being male, at being a hunk and who even are affectionate to one another, whereas we SSA-guys feel some sort of guilt for existing and some sort of hesitance when we should

be trying to connect.

We are weird and we don't tell anyone. Please don't! Let's keep it a secret. We are sort of different. Why? I will tell you.

2. High sensitivity

More often than not, we are highly sensitive. And our feelings are hardly described in any textbook or therapeutic manual. No recognition, not even in gay-lib rhetoric. Only in recent years has this trait been recognized and described in psychology as a problem. We are called Highly Sensitive Persons (HSP's).

In her book *"The Highly Sensitive Person"*, Elaine Aron asks: Is this you?



She says:

-Are you easily overwhelmed by such things as bright lights, strong smells, coarse fabrics, or sirens nearby?

-Do you get rattled when you have a lot to do in a short amount of time?

-Do you make a point of avoiding violent movies and TV shows?

-Do you need to withdraw during busy days into bed or a darkened room or some other place where you can have privacy and relief from the situation?

-Do you make it a high priority to arrange your life to avoid situations that are upsetting or overwhelming?

-Do you notice or enjoy delicate or fine scents, tastes, sounds, or works of art?

-Do you have a rich and complex inner life?

-When you were a child, did your parents or teachers see you as sensitive or shy?

Here is the good news: your trait is normal. It is found in 15 to 25% of the population, too many to be a disorder, but not enough to be well understood by the majority of those around you.

It is innate. It is seen as a certain type of survival strategy, being *observant before acting.* The brains of highly sensitive persons (HSP's) work a little differently than the brains of others. You are more aware than others of subtleties. This is mainly because your brain handles and processes information without discarding it immediately, as other people's brains do. Yours reflects on it more deeply.

You are also more easily overwhelmed. If you notice everything, you are naturally going to be overstimulated when things are too intense, complex, chaotic, or novel for a long time.

This trait is not a new discovery but it has been misunderstood. Because HSP's prefer to look before entering new situations, they are often called *"shy."* But shyness is learned, not innate. In fact, 30% of HSP's are extroverts, although the trait is often mislabeled as introversion. It has also wrongly been called inhibitedness, fearfulness, or neuroticism.

Sensitivity is valued differently in different cultures. In the Western world, it is not highly valued. We see male HSP's there tending to have low self-esteem. You are told *"don't be so sensitive!"* You need to be quick and snappy. This makes you feel abnormal. In Buddhist and many indigenious cultures, however, you would be doing great.

3. Consequences

Being a HSP has consequences for your daily life. Once you use the term on yourself if this description fits you, then you can get more grip on understanding what makes you feel different, uncomfortable, or inferior compared to others.

You feel more deeply than your less-sensitive peers. You tend to process things on a deeper level. You are very intuitive and go very deep inside to try to figure things out.

You will find yourself to be more emotionally reactive. For instance, you may have more empathy and feel more concern for a friend's problems. You are probably used to hearing statements like *"don't take things so personally"* and *"why are you so sensitive?"*

You may prefer to do physical exercise solo. As a HSP, you may tend to avoid team sports where there's a sense that everyone is watching your every move. The majority of highly sensitive men appreciate individual sports (bicycling, running, fitness, bodybuilding, and hiking) more than group sports.

You will find it takes longer to make decisions because you are more aware of subtleties and details that could make decisions harder to make. Even if there is no *"right"* or *"wrong"* decision, HSP's will still tend to take longer to choose because they are weighing every possible outcome. This can make a very bad impression. And you also get more upset if you make a bad or wrong decision.

Your emotion is amplified because your own emotional reactivity is higher. HSP's are extremely detail-oriented. Often, they are the first ones to notice the details in a room, the new shoes that you're wearing, or a change in weather.

HSP's are known to be more prone to anxiety or depression but only if they've had a lot of past negative experiences, setting the nervous system to *"anxious".*

Annoying sounds are probably significantly more annoying to a HSP. Violent movies are the worst. Because HSP's are so high in empathy and more easily overstimulated, movies with violence or horror themes may not be their cup of tea.

As a HSP, you may find yourself having above-average manners. You are conscientious and because of this, you're more likely to be considerate and to exhibit good manners. You notice when someone else isn't being conscientious. For instance, HSP's may be more aware of where their cart is at the grocery store – not because they're afraid someone will steal something out of it, but because they don't want to be rude and have their cart blocking another person's way.

The effects of criticism are especially amplified in HSP's. They have reactions to criticism that are more intense than less sensitive people. As a result, they may employ certain tactics to avoid criticism, including people-pleasing (so that there is no longer anything to criticize), criticizing themselves first and avoiding the source of the criticism altogether.



When receiving criticism a lesser-sensitive person can say *"whatever!"* but a HSP feels it much more deeply.

4. The sensitivity mismatch

During the first few years of life when the world started making sense, your connecting to or identifying with Dad (or the father figure) lays the foundation for your future self-esteem as a male. This subject keeps coming back in the whole SSA predicament from a psychological point of view.

One of the painful memories from that time can be caused by a gap between your own sensitivity and the lack of sensitivity you perceived in other important males at that age.

It is called the Sensitivity Mismatch. And for many men who feel same-sex attractions (not all), this mismatch lies at the core of the matter: the insufficient identification with the same--sex parent and also with same-sex peers. You are a dude but you do not feel it to the same extent that everyone else apparently does. And no, it is not genetics. Your genes are fine. It is something else.

A very young boy identifies first with the mother or mother figure. Around the age of 2 to 3, he must let go of this identification and start to identify with the male parent or father figure in order to gain a healthy male identity. It will last him a lifetime.

And if this identification process succeeds sufficiently, he has assumed as much maleness inside himself as he needs to feel confidently male, no matter how close girls or women will come to him at later ages. He is confident in his maleness. He even learns to take it for granted. He loves his male identity and he's proud of it. He does so without wearing it on his sleeve. It is just there, like his buck-teeth and his freckles are.

When this identification is not sufficiently successful, however, he will remain unsure of his male identity. He will not feel the pride that others have. On the contrary, he may acquire feelings of shame about himself.

So, the less successful that the identification with the masculine has turned out to be, the less pride will set in and the more shame will emerge.

This shame is not caused by external influences, it comes from inside. It is the result of the genetically induced instinct to identify correctly. Identification issues occur in the mind of every child. It is an obsession for all boys. With every toy for boys, with every playful wrestling fight, with every loud and boisterous shout in the playground, the boy is asserting himself as a proud male, not due to an all-invasive society from outside, but due to his all-compelling set of genes from inside. It is who you are.

We daresay that almost all men who identify at a later age as *"gay"* or who express that they experience SSA's, have experienced insufficient male identification. They just do not feel that their father, or other men, are totally part of their identity, the real male *"me"*.

If I am not *"dad"*, and obviously not *"mom"*, then who the hell am I? I will tell you where you are: you are out on a limb. Don't worry, read on.

The cause is the absence of a father, or otherwise a distant father, or otherwise an emotional-

ly hard-to-get and aloof father, or otherwise an abusive father, or otherwise a father who just takes his son for granted, leaving it up to his wife to take care of the kids. (1)

Ever since you were a child, you felt different. This difference is a sensitivity mismatch between yourself and others, usually also between yourself and your father. HSP's make up 25% of the population, the others we can label less sensitive persons (LSP) on the *Sensitivity Scale* that Elaine Aron introduced.

You feel indeed different, not because you are inherently *"gay"* (there is no such thing; it is only a recent social construct) but because of the sensitivity gap. Due to this great mental distance, you may have had great difficulty identifying with your father (figure).

He was just not *"me"*, he was so *"other"* to the extent that he hardly noticed you.

But you noticed him and due to your sensitivity, you noticed his (lack of) sensitivity. But he did not notice your (high) sensitivity. Neither did he notice your craving for male identification, touch, recognition, and connection. You wanted, you needed to internalize his adult maleness (because that is your genetically driven urge) but with him you missed out.

To make matters worse, you blamed yourself for it, leading not to pride but to its opposite: a deeply ingrained shame and self-doubt, if not to say: self-hatred.

If this turn of events went this way for you, we are looking at a very unfortunate affair, happening in an extremely short space of time when your parents had more to do than just raise you (jobs, housing, tuition, family problems, alcohol maybe, who knows).

You were taken for granted. Inside you, that longing for male touch and affirmation, for feeling good about yourself as a boy, has gone underground. But it is still there, right under the surface.

For such is the call of the genes. And it will always keep on beckoning. It becomes a chronic, silent frustration, an anguish that only other people in the same situation recognize. Unfortunately, LSP's can't relate to this.

When the male hormones kick in, and you sexualize that which you are not, you will find you are not fully satisfied in your maleness due to the sensitivity gap you feel with so many around you. And you will sexualize that yearning.

You will yearn for male touch and closeness, and you will express: *"What a sincere wonderful guy!"* But you will also find yourself sexualizing it: *"What a hotty!"*

And in male orgasm, you will feel the thrill of maleness, at last. And you sexualize the other guy's maleness to fulfill that identification gap. And it works. At least, until the sexual urge declines. And then, you need another fix. And yet another: promiscuity and porn addiction set in. These attempts at identification wear off so fast.

You can stay that way. I warn you that Gay Affirmative Therapists will insist that you MUST stay that way. If you don't want an eternal future like that, then looking into the primary conflict of your youth, of your male identification issues, is the way to go. And to do so, you need to look into the identification gaps that you have experienced.

The sensitivity gap is one of them (although there are more, explained later on in this series). You need to learn to see this sensitivity gap, to investigate how it has possibly influenced you, and to see how it made you powerless as a child.

But now, you are an adult. When you revisit the original drama and the unfulfilled wishes, the needs, and the desires, it will not be as bad as it was back then. You will now be doing it with adult eyes, adult capabilities, and adult coping skills.

In the next part, we will look into the feelings for women that you have or not have acquired: the way you are still missing out. An interesting subject, to say the least, and one that all straight guys also wrestle with. You are not alone, but you do not realize it.

And there he is, in row 6, Saint Gorgeous, without a worry in the world. How jealous we feel! Please God, give me one more peek.

To be continued.

Job Berendsen, MD.

Next Part Complete Series Home

1. In some cases, it is sexual abuse by a same-sex peer or adult; we will deal with that, later on in this series.