



# Are Highly Sensitive People more aware of environmental harm?

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## HIGHLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE

*"the highly sensitive person (HSP) has a sensitive nervous system, is aware of subtleties in his/her surroundings, and is more easily overwhelmed when in a highly stimulating environment." (Aron, The Highly Sensitive Person, 1997)*

### What is Sensitivity?

- A broad trait associated with people who display conscientiousness, emotionality, observation, sensitivity to pain, reactivity, and creativity (Aron, 2012; Aron, 1997)
- The term sensitivity is used by clinicians and the general population to describe this type of individual.
- Sensitivity can be associated with psychopathology but is not inherently pathological

### The Highly Sensitive Person

- Person who exhibits a high measure of Sensory Processing Sensitivity
- Excellent critical thinking skills and acute perception of the world
- Vast depth of emotion; HSPs have been noted as feeling in deeper extremes than non-HSPs, and may be more naturally inclined to compassion and empathy (Aron, Aron, Jagiellowicz, 2012)
- Inclined to observation before reaction, able to absorb environmental stimuli in a precise manner (Pluess, 2015)

## SENSORY PROCESSING SENSITIVITY AND EVOLUTION

### Why are some individuals more sensitive?

- Sensory processing sensitivity has been related to inheritance a short-variation serotonin gene (5-HTTLPR) (Pluess, 2015), occurs in about 20% of the population
- Not the same as a processing disorder
- This behavior is displayed in many species, and has been described as "hawks" vs "doves" – Reactive and Non-reactive.
- Independent from other major personality traits Introversion and Neuroticism (although may co-occur)
- Beneficial for finding sustainable food, water, and shelter

## ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES

### What is the difference?

- Attitudes refer to opinions and beliefs held nature, as well as degree of connection to nature. Topics covered include (not limited too) enjoyment of nature, beliefs about climate change, motivations to conserve, human right to nature, fragility of nature, ecocentric concern.
- Behavior refers to what actions are taken to protect the environment. This includes (not limited too) frequency of recycling, water conservation, meat consumption, conservation of natural resources.
- Pro-Environmental behavior and attitudes have been associated with culture, but are also influenced by our individual belief systems

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Hypothesis

It has been argued that a characteristic of a Highly Sensitive Person includes a unique and strong affinity for nature, but few studies have done connecting the two (Aron, 2010). This study will explore whether highly sensitive people exhibit greater pro-environmental attitudes, and whether they are more aware of environmental harm.

### Methods

- Quantitative data will be collected using four psychometric evaluations: The Highly Sensitive Person Scale (1997), The Environmental Attitudes Inventory (2010), The Pro-Environmental Behavior Scale (2013), and Connectivity with Nature (2007)
- The sample will consist of 40 – 60 undergraduate students at Lesley University, including LUCAD and CLAS students, completed voluntarily during class time
- Student results will be split into HSP and Non-HSP groups, and analyzed for pro-environmental attitudes, behavior, and connection

### Implications for Further Research

- Contribute to a greater body of research on the Highly Sensitive Person
- Research in this area can add to areas of environmental psychology, personality psychology, and ecopsychology