

The Highly Sensitive Person

BOOK REVIEW

by Steve Hansen

Once in a great while, a truly profound book shows up, one that gives lots of treasured “aha” moments. Two books by Elaine N. Aron, Ph.D., fill that bill. I don’t know if she knows about EIs or not, but her description of the typical Highly Sensitive Person fits me very well, as well as the two dozen or so EIs I’ve lived next to over the years.

Aron is a psychologist and is highly sensitive herself. Her books don’t set us out as psychologically ill at all, in fact she celebrates the twenty percent of the population she considers highly sensitive and shows our benefits to society. This is a book to feel good about. She demonstrates how highly sensitive people think differently than the rest of society, and have a different brain chemistry that explains our different needs. From her perspective, being sensitive is no more a psychological illness than being born a man or a woman.

The problem is that many societies, especially the United States, value the non-sensitive personality more. Here, Superman and Superwoman are the desired types, the ones who take charge, storm the trenches, and work around the clock. And they don’t much care about the effect they have on other people. Meanwhile, the sensitives fill the indispensable function of giving thoughtful advice and support, without which Superman would break too much china in the closet. However, contemporary society does not celebrate that role, though we would have more social justice and fewer wars if it did.

In her first book, *The Highly Sensitive Person*, she doesn’t even talk about illness, beyond telling us that sensitive people tend to have more allergies. In her second book, *The Highly Sensitive Person in Love*, she looks deeper, and concludes that if we sensitives try to conform too much to society’s norm and do not take care of ourselves, we are likely to run into health problems “around the age of forty,” and she mentions many kinds of common EI sensitivities.

The second book brings new research forward and can be read by singles, not just couples, as it really pertains to all kinds of human interaction. Aron offers a free newsletter at her website, www.hsperson.com. Her other books are *The Highly Sensitive Person’s Workbook* and *The Highly Sensitive Child*.