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ARTICLE

Embodied superpower: A qualitative study of the experience of highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners

Charlotte Friedrich · Tim Lomas

Abstract: *Purpose:* Research has identified that approximately 20-31 percent of the global population can be considered highly sensitive—carrying the trait of sensory-processing sensitivity (SPS). SPS, associated with increased sensitivity and responsiveness to internal, environmental, and social stimuli, is often considered to be a vulnerability. Despite this, it has been shown to have the potential of becoming an asset to people. However, a gap exists in the research literature regarding the experience of highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners and how they can best manage their high sensitivity to the benefit of themselves and others. *Design:* A qualitative approach explored how highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners experience and deal with SPS in the context of working with clients. *Method:* In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with ten practitioners, drawn from a number of wellbeing professions. *Results:* The qualitative grounded theory analysis revealed the overarching theme of experiencing SPS as an 'embodied superpower' and a complex, interwoven dynamic interplay between four major themes: appreciation, challenges, journey, and client work. The results show that, if managed well, SPS can indeed be a valuable asset to practitioners. *Implications:* As the first of its kind to investigate this topic in a systematic, scientific manner, the study has significance in exploring SPS, especially in relation to embodiment theory. Findings have implications for highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners, contributing to the understanding of their trait and offering practical suggestions on how to best manage it.

Keywords: sensory-processing sensitivity; vantage sensitivity; wellbeing practitioners; highly sensitive person; wellbeing; embodiment

1. Introduction

Psychological and subjective wellbeing have increasingly moved into the focus of businesses, politics, and individuals alike with more than 40 countries complementing their economic and social targets with wellbeing indicators (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2015); and so have a wide number of wellbeing professions. Within psychology, the field of positive psychology— "the science and practice of improving wellbeing" (Lomas, Hefferon, & Ivtzan, 2015, p. 4)—is at the forefront of this development. Coaching psychology, providing scientific evidence to the scarcely regulated field of coaching (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011), also concerns itself increasingly with the study of wellbeing (e.g. Biswas-Diener, 2009; Oades, 2016). Other wellbeing approaches which are gaining popularity include yoga (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2015; Yoga Journal & Yoga Alliance, 2016), meditation (e.g. Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016; Ospina et al., 2007), and various forms of bodywork such as breathwork (e.g. Brulé, 2017; Grof & Grof, 2010).

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Within the wellbeing community, sensory-processing sensitivity (SPS) has become a topic of conversation (Fowler, 2018; Schnitzer, 2019; Moon, 2021). When SPS is experienced by the individual, they are commonly referred to as being a highly sensitive person (HSP) (Aron, 1996). While new research is published regularly, this trait—associated with increased sensitivity and responsiveness to internal, environmental, and social stimuli (Aron & Aron, 1997b; Aron, Aron, & Jagiellowicz, 2012)—is still notoriously under-researched. Much of the literature available is anecdotal, descriptive, and at times speculative. While 20-31 percent of the general population are considered highly sensitive (Aron & Aron, 1997b; Lionetti et al., 2018), indications show that many find their calling in helping professions (Parlow, 2003). The aim of this current study was to gain a better understanding of the unique experience of highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners (HSWPs)—for their own wellbeing, as well as that of their clients'.

This paper provides a summary of the existing and relevant literature on HSPs; the methods, research design, and process by which the study was conducted; an outline of the results; a detailed discussion with reference to the existing literature, including implications for practice, limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research.

1.1 Literature review

Studies on SPS are scarce, with little focus on HSPs' every day experience or work-related issues. Therefore the review will include findings on related sensitivity concepts of *biological sensitivity to context* (Boyce et al., 1995; B. J. Ellis & Boyce, 2008) and *differential susceptibility* (Belsky, 1997; Belsky & Pluess, 2013). As these constructs are often used interchangeably, recent attempts have been made to bring them together as *environmental sensitivity* (Lionetti et al., 2018). However, theories differ in certain theoretical details (Greven et al., 2019), and research has not agreed on a term which incorporates all facets of sensitivity. Therefore, this study will refer to sensitivity using the original scientific operationalisation and most commonly used term: SPS.

1.1.1 Sensory-processing sensitivity

SPS is "proposed to be a genetically determined temperament trait involving a deeper […] cognitive processing of stimuli that is driven by higher emotional reactivity" (Aron et al., 2012, p. 261) and is considered the defining trait of HSPs (Aron & Aron, 1997). Thus, HSPs are more responsive to both positive and negative stimuli. Their experience can be better understood through the acronym DOES: the depth (D) in which they process information (consciously and unconsciously) —'pausing to check' before acting in novel situation; the overstimulation (O), occurring as deeper processing leads to cognitive resources being more easily depleted; the emphasis on emotional reactions and empathy (E), and sensitivity (S) to subtle nuances of their environment (Aron, 2012).

Since Aron and Aron (1997) first proposed the concept of SPS based on self-report questionnaires and interviews, a steadily growing body of research has provided further support, increasingly associating SPS with various markers—including identifiable genes (Homberg, Schubert, Asan, & Aron, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2011; Assary et al., 2021) and neural correlates (Naumann et al., 2020; Acevedo et al., 2014; Aron et al., 2010). Physiology-related research focusses primarily on the brain (Acevedo, 2020) and descriptions of the sensitive body appear to be limited to how well its needs are met: The "infant body", writes Aron, is "wonderfully content and cooperative when it is not overstimulated" (1996, p.63). Yet, there are indications that HSPs' bodily experiences may extend beyond the image of the helpless infant. Research arguing for beneficial effects as well as contextual adversity provide evidence for Aron's (1996) initial view of SPS as a 'package deal'.

1.1.2 Vulnerability, asset, or neutral trait?

SPS has long been primarily considered a vulnerability for certain pathological conditions, in accordance with the *diathesis stress model*, assuming that certain endogenous characteristics lead to a greater propensity to being affected by adverse or negative events (Caspi et al., 2003). It has become clear that these effects are essentially dependent on childhood environment (Aron, Aron, & Davies, 2005; Belsky & Pluess, 2009). While a troubled upbringing could generally predict problems in adulthood, HSPs seem more affected—due to their thorough processing. Approximately one third of HSPs experience adverse childhood events and are therefore more vulnerable to mental health issues, including depression and anxiety (Aron et al., 2005; Liss, Mailloux, & Erchull, 2008). For all other HSPs, sensitivity may be the only differentiator in their experience, showing no increased vulnerability.

Increasingly research on the positive aspects of SPS is emerging. The *vantage sensitivity model* (Pluess & Belsky, 2013) offers support that SPS may act as an asset, making individuals particularly receptive for positive experiences. Other benefits include a higher receptivity to positive events, including preventative mental health interventions (Pluess & Boniwell, 2015), good intuition (Aron, 1996), high empathy, and a number of other advantages in connection to the responsiveness to social cues (Acevedo et al., 2014). Gulla and Golonka (2021) point out that their ability to 'sense the subtle' can be a source of resilience in HSPs and may prevent exhaustion in the workplace.

Evolutionary-biological theories (Aron et al., 2012; Ellis et al. , 2011; Pluess & Belsky, 2013) consider SPS to be one of two survival strategies and converge on their emphasis of SPS advantages—especially in social contexts. A main benefit can be seen in an increased awareness of certain situational aspects, which allows individuals to learn and make better choices in a similar situation in the future. Ideally, increased sensitivity also leads to increased responsiveness to their own and others' needs—a key component to create trust in relationships (e.g. McNamara, Stephens, Dall, & Houston, 2009). In other cases, being less sensitive is beneficial. For example, if a situation shows little similarity to any encountered previously. Here, SPS confers biological costs. Due to increased cognitive and metabolic demands, HSPs tend to be easily overwhelmed by too intense, frequent, or novel stimuli (Aron et al., 2012). Research concurs that SPS "confers benefits to individuals in 'good-enough' social environments, but vulnerability to negative outcomes in poor ones" (Acevedo et al., 2014, p. 581). SPS could therefore be viewed as an ambivalent trait, which can turn into both a vulnerability and an asset.

1.1.3 Managing sensitivity

A number of strategies have been proposed in the past to decrease risks and increase benefits, first by Aron (1996):

1. Increasing self-knowledge, by understanding the trait, its effects, and the HSP's own body and needs.
2. Reframing past and future situations through the lens of SPS.
3. Resolving adverse childhood experiences or the feeling of 'being different' through cognitive-behavioural, interpersonal, physical, and spiritual practices.
4. Balancing involvement 'in the world' with 'downtime' to avoid 'overdoing it'.

Cooper (2014), like Aron, emphasises the importance of self-care, including physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects. Enablers and barriers of wellbeing identified by Black and Kern (2020) show similarities to the strategies proposed by Aron (1996) and widen our understanding of wellbeing through the HSPs' perspective. Apart from this rare research – one of only two qualitative SPS

studies published– to the authors' knowledge, most lists of 'survival strategies' available (e.g. Zeff, 2004) are unspecific and based on a small number of general papers.

1.1.4 HSPs at work

Studies focused on the professional experiences of HSPs are sparse and generalised (Evers, Rasche, & Schabracq, 2008; Wyrsch, 2016). Jaeger (2004) provides the most academically sound explorations of SPS at work, while Cooper's unpublished dissertation offers a rich qualitative exploration of HSPs' "journeys of self-discovery" (2014, p. 125). Both concord that HSPs—challenged by work stress yet displaying a strong desire for meaningful work—may need different work environments to non-HSPs. A reduction of prolonged emotional overload could support HSPs' wellbeing at work and mitigate burnout symptoms (Golonka & Gulla, 2021). Aron (1996) describes HSPs as the 'royal-advisor class', who make great therapists and coaches, due to their strong intuition, awareness of subtleties, receptivity to 'spiritual guidance', and a natural ability to 'create sacred space'. To date, however, to the best of this researcher's knowledge there are no studies examining the experience of HSWPs, except some recommendations for coaches and therapists on Aron's website (2023). While informed by her unquestionably extensive research, these are not linked to any specific studies and therefore offer little academic relevance.

1.2 Purpose of this study

Given the great influence of SPS for HSPs' wellbeing and their professional and personal experience, and thus the potential impact on HSWPs and their clients, there is need for research into HSWPs' experiences. This includes their general understanding of SPS, its development over time and strategies for managing challenges and increasing benefits. With no research covering the experience of HSWPs available, the current study adopts an open approach to explore the following research question: How do highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners experience working with their clients in the light of sensory-processing sensitivity?

2. Method

2.1 Design

The research explored the experience of ten HSWPs using semi-structured interviews for data collection and Charmaz's (2006) social constructivist approach to grounded theory (GT) for data analysis. HSWPs were recruited through the researcher's personal network and via snowball sampling, with initial contacts referring further participants (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). To mitigate potential biases, researchers reached out to practitioners from distant social groups who didn't know each other. Participants could take part in the study if they had a minimum of two years' experience working as a wellbeing practitioner and if their score on Aron's HSP Self-Test (1996) indicated high sensitivity. (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2022), Wellbeing practitioners were defined as professionals concerned with increasing their clients' wellbeing – their subjective quality of life – through a variety of modalities such as meditation or coaching. This differentiated them from other groups such as therapists and health professionals, whose focus is primarily on improving health. All interested wellbeing practitioners received an official invitation letter (Appendix A), including background information on research and purpose. A short pre-interview questionnaire (Appendix B) gathered demographics, ensured diversity within the sample and included the HSP Self-Test (Aron, 1996) (Appendix C). Full informed consent was gained (Appendix D) and a suitable interview time was arranged. Interviews were conducted

and recorded via video-conferencing; participants received verbal and written debriefing (Appendix E).

2.2 Participants

Ten HSWPs, two males and seven females, and one who identified as both male and female took part in the study. They came from varied cultural backgrounds and worked in a range of wellbeing professions including coaching approaches, massage therapy, breathwork, and yoga (Table 1) and were all certified in their area of expertise. None of the HSWPs received any kind of compensation for their participation. All HSWPs engaged in the interviews with enthusiasm noteworthy to the researcher.

Table 1. *Situating the Sample*

Gender	Nationality	Expertise
Female	British	Transformational Coach, Meditation & Yoga Teacher, Energy Healer
Female	Indonesian	Breathwork Facilitator & Reiki Teacher
Female	Australian	Yoga Teacher
Female	American	Somatic Psychotherapist & Coach
Female	American	Holistic Sexuality & Intimacy Coach
Female	New Zealand	Holistic Health Practitioner
Female	New Zealand	Massage Therapist & Yoga Teacher
Male-Female	New Zealand-Māori	Yoga Teacher
Male	British	Performance, Strength & Conditioning Coach
Male	Belarus	Positive Executive Coach

Note. Participants were between 32-49 years old, practicing for 2-20 years.

2.3 Data collection

The data collection included quantitative measurement in form of the HSP Self-Test and semi-structured interviews as part of GT.

2.3.1 Quantitative measurement

The HSP Self-Test (Aron, 1996) (Appendix C) was employed prior to interviewing, ensuring that participants' self-identification fit with the scientific conceptualisation of SPS. The 27-item self-report questionnaire— a simplified, yes/no format of the original HSP scale (Aron & Aron, 1997)––measures general sensitivity in adults. Aron and Aron's (1997) original studies showed an internal consistency reliability (alphas) of .87 and .85. A relative cut-off score (top 20 percent) is generally used to determine SPS on a group level (Aron et al., 2012), relative to a given research population. The HSP Self-Test was considered a better fit here, as the scale was needed only to identify HSWPs. Two potential interviewees answered less than fourteen questions (cut-off score) as true for themselves, indicating reduced probability of SPS. They were thanked for their interest, debriefed, and did not participate in the interviews.

2.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The main data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, lasting between 35 and 65 minutes. An interview agenda with six pre-determined, open-ended questions (Appendix F), provided *points of departure* (Charmaz, 2006) and was further refined throughout the research to explore emerging themes. The researcher used a number of additional interview questions to clarify or add depth to replies, including *prompts* ('can you tell me more about that?) and *probes* (what do you mean by 'integrated'?) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Thus the researcher could gather rich data—revealing participants' emotions, thoughts, intentions, and actions (Charmaz, 2006).

2.4 Analysis

Within GT, data collection, analysis, and theorising are inextricably linked and continue throughout the research process. Each interview was transcribed, reviewed, and coded prior to subsequent interviews. Line-by-line, open coding for actions and theoretical cues created an explorative pool of codes. Focused coding followed, identifying emergent themes and categories (Charmaz, 2006). Combined with theoretical coding, this allowed theory to be generated —an intertwined process, in which, the researcher starts moving back and forth between different parts of the data in constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As interview questions became increasingly focused, data collection led to a systematic development of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

While NVivo coding software was used in the first stages of coding (QSR International, 2017), additional conventional qualitative content analysis— memos and diagramming—allowed for deeper engagement with the data. The GT principal of memo writing—breaking categories into components for analysis and comparison, led to theoretical sampling through the gathering of additional data to complete emerging categories and concluded in theoretical sufficiency (Charmaz, 2006; Dey, 1999). Later in the process, NVivo helped reconfirm emerging categories and gather them into themes of conceptual similarity. This process resulted in around 30 themes, comprising of a number of sub-themes. In the final step of the analysis, the themes were further aggregated producing one core theme and four overarching meta-themes.

Occurring insights were shared and discussed between the researchers throughout the process to assist in researcher reflexivity and complemented by reflexive memos (Anderson, 1986; Rennie, 2012). While one author was primarily responsible for the analysis, the second author reviewed and provided feedback at each stage. While adopting this thorough process ensured all evidence is grounded (in data), this critical realist approach (Charmaz, 2006) is subject to a double hermeneutic (Ricoeur, 1981). The researchers have faith that the interpreted data provides useful, partially realistic representations of the participants experience. They also acknowledge that participants simultaneously seek to create meaning of their own experience and are critical and suspicious of potential construction.

3. Findings

The comparative analysis produced one core theme: 'embodied superpower'. HSWPs are drawn between deep 'appreciation' and daily 'challenges', on a 'journey' of managing their sensitivity and its potential in 'client sessions'. As D said, "*if you learn how to manage it and work with it and learn self-care […] then it's a superpower.*" The core-theme further reflects the relevance of the bodily experience of SPS across all sub-themes. The themes (Table 2) with their unique sub-themes will

be discussed in turn, with exemplary quotes from participants (using the letters A-J for identification to ensure anonymity).

Table 2. *Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
Appreciation	Sensing the subtle
	Connecting
	Eudaimonia
Challenges	Feeling too much
	Social situations
	Lack of understanding
	Identity struggles
Journey	Acknowledging sensitivity
	Self-care
	Connecting to something bigger
Client Work	Resonance body
	Directing awareness
	Intuition
	Holding space

3.1 Appreciation

At the time of the interviews all of the practitioners valued their sensitivity, with two wishing to increase it further. The appreciation of their sensitivity became obvious in relation to the following three themes:

3.1.1 Sensing the subtle

All practitioners reported an ability to sense subtleties within their environment and their own bodies. This leads to an increased awareness of nuances in everyday experiences and the *"ability to feel the richness of the tapestry of life and all its beauty"*, as H put it.

This richness extends to the experience of their inner lives, creating an *"intimacy with the inner realm"* (C) that is highly valued. C's experience of her sensitivity is exemplary: *"It's just like inner moments. I can have deep pleasure from very simple things. Just like enjoying the silence... there's so much richness and an aliveness."*

3.1.2 Connecting

The feeling of immediate connection their sensitivity brings matters greatly to the practitioners––it's something *"beautiful"* (B,C,F,H) that they *"would never trade in"*(B). It includes the connection to themselves, their bodies, emotions, and intuition as well as the connection to those around them, to a degree that C describes as *"a bit of a blurring between self and other"*. H believes that it's her *"ability to feel what it feels like to be in somebody else's shoes and that builds connection."* This connection is especially valued when they come in touch with likeminded people who are *"attuned in a similar way"* (C) and in client sessions. Seven practitioners also felt their sensitivity connects them to 'something bigger', which allows them to experience themselves as more than their 'limited selves' and 'receive guidance'.

3.1.3 Eudaimonia

Eudaimonia—wellbeing derived from meaning and self-realisation (Ryan & Deci, 2001) —is an important facet of the practitioners' appreciation of sensitivity. Sensitivity is considered of utmost importance for their work with clients and the world as a whole. J emphasises that she could not do her work as a breathwork practitioner without being highly sensitive and sometimes believes she was *"chosen for doing this job."* Being their sensitive selves is a source of joy for them, as C explains: "*In my work that's what's asked for […] I can bring that [sensitivity] forward as a gift and that's satisfying for me, to be able to be in my full self."* Seven practitioners stated explicitly that they see a need for sensitive people in the world, as the *"canary in the coal mine"* (C) and to move from a personal to a more collective understanding.

3.2 Challenges

Having a superpower that enables these experiences is not without its challenges. While HSWPs appreciate their sensitivity, it took all but one of them a long time to get to that point. Many would still like to change certain aspects of it or "*wouldn't mind an off-switch"* (C). As G said, *"I find it really difficult to be sensitive. It's great, but it's challenging."* There was a clear agreement on some core challenges.

3.2.1 Feeling too much

The experience of 'feeling too much', was perceived as a key challenge. While certain other stimuli were reported as bothersome or uncomfortable (e.g. noise), feeling others *"residual emotional flavour"* (H) or *"taking on [their] energy"* (A,B,F) were the predominant reasons for emotional stress and overstimulation for all participants. Resulting primarily in physical sensations of heaviness or exhaustion, consequences extended to a degree at which the mental or physical health of six practitioners suffered. Three participants felt the need to isolate or *"hermit"* (D) themselves. A, for example, *"wanted to stop working all together"* and H said, *"certainly at times I've just been like, oh my god, I just want to trade the sensitivity of feeling the world […] for something else because it was just like, I can't see how I can live functional."*

3.2.2 Social situations

Challenges due to high sensory input have been described especially in big social situations leading to a dislike or even avoidance of crowds e.g. on public transport or bars. C, who struggles having conversations in crowded places, says, *"I sometimes feel like I miss out"*. G reports, "*I get my energy sapped when I'm with people. I love it. I love being with people but [...] there is an energetic cost"*. In this he mentions a struggle that all participants faced, and some find hard to accept: having a very social side but needing to 'relate differently'. A therefore prefers being only with a few friends, an approach which took her, *"a long time to work out"*. C, I, and E however remarked that not the number of people, but situational factors place the actual challenge. These include a feeling of *"incongruence"* (C) or *"people [being] unconscious"* (I) of themselves. Situations in which people are *"in their bodies"* (C), e.g. dancing or singing, are perceived as less problematic.

3.2.3 Lack of understanding

Another dominant sub-theme was the lack of understanding that HSWPs experience from others and themselves in relation to their trait. This secondary-challenge was often perceived as worse than the actual challenge of 'being sensitive'. H said, *"it was things that people teased me over. They were like, oh my God, you need so much alone time or you're so kind of … they found it really hard to*

understand." While some reported being judged directly, like F, who was told by her father to "*toughen up*", others experience the lack of understanding in more subtle ways. Seven wish they had found out about HSPs earlier and see a need for information and dialogue. "*More people need to be aware of it"*, thinks H.

3.2.4 Identity struggles

For all but one participant, the lack of understanding of their sensitivity led to a struggle with their own identity, feeling like *"something was wrong with [them]"* (B,C,F). This struggle, fuelled by feelings of shame, led to negative consequences for their physical and mental wellbeing due to trying to *"squash"* (F) their sensitivity and *"pushing"* (C,F,G,H) themselves beyond their limit. For H it led to a point where her *"body just packed up and just said, you, no more."* And F says, "*it's just who I was and is who I am still. I'm so impacted by everything. And it's the shame that was making it such a problem for me."*

3.3 Journey

The 'journey', an *in vivo* code used by eight HSWPs, describes how the practitioners learned to manage their sensitivity and turn it into a *"superpower"* (D,F,I). F for example said, *"it's really a journey and it's a spiral and it is like one day at a time, […] it happens over the course of the life."* While some practitioners emphasised that everyone had to find their own ways of managing their sensitivity, the analysis revealed a clear consensus on some supportive aspects.

3.3.1 Acknowledging sensitivity

A common step is the acknowledgement of being highly sensitive. It's a prerequisite to managing the sensitivity, reducing the challenges mentioned above. As H said, *"I think when you acknowledge something, it brings greater knowledge and understanding which is empowering. And so, once I acknowledged it […] it was like a huge relief."* While this process was in six cases triggered by significant events—discovering the HSP concept, illness due to pushing themselves too much or the loss of a loved one—it continues over time. This requires the practitioners to deepen their understanding of themselves, *"choosing to let [themselves] be sensitive over and over again"* (B).

3.3.2 Self-care

Another step, mentioned by all participants, was to learn to *"really look after [themselves]"* (B), with the key components being surprisingly consistent: making sure their basic needs are taken care of (sleep, healthy diet), having daily rituals or practices (especially mornings and bed times) and spending time alone, in silence and in nature. Essential techniques included 'working with the breath' (172 references); different forms of 'meditation' (83 references); 'grounding' (26 references), a technique in which one imagines dropping their 'energy' or *"roots"* (C) into the earth and 'embodiment work and movement' (for all ten practitioners), especially yoga.

This was supported by 'energy management': understanding 'what fills you up and what drains you' (for five practitioners) and setting clear boundaries e.g. by working less hours and managing social interactions (for six practitioners). Five HSWPs reported *"clearing"* themselves (e.g. through visualisations or with water) after client sessions or being around a lot of people. Without self-care HSWPs feel lethargic, exhausted and even anxious or depressed. Their mental and physical wellbeing suffers:

> *Self-care. Number one, […] this is the most important thing because that's what makes me a good coach. If I'm able to take care of myself, then I'm able to support my clients, I'm able to serve and give them the best of me*. (I)

3.3.3 Connecting to something bigger

HSWPs perceived 'connecting to something bigger' as important for managing SPS. All practitioners reported some form of spiritual practice that allowed them to attune *"with something beyond your normal state of awareness*" (I). Considered as a source of trust and guidance, it helps them work with and embrace their sensitivity. For G it is his meditation practice:

> *That to me is one of the most crucial things I have now. […] what that gives me is peace, it gives me clarity. […] And I think in my most profound meditation, it gives me insight into something more than me.*

Others refer to transcendental experiences such as a vision quest or psychedelic experiences (four practitioners). F who used the MDMA protocol[1] with a trained therapist shares: "*I have never in my life felt in my body what softening to my sensitivity felt like and what gentleness felt like until I was held in that way."*

3.4 Client work

Their sensitivity imparts HSWPs with specific qualities that influence their client work. F summarises: *"It's a superpower. It's a gift. I get the reflection every single day of the impact that it has. And people feel safe. They feel compassion, they feel loved and they feel free to be themselves with me."* Four sub-themes have emerged from the analysis.

3.4.1 Resonance body

Within their client work seven HSWPs use their own body as a 'resonance body'. Like the body of a musical instrument which amplifies vibrations, the practitioners report feeling certain incoming stimuli, such as emotions or non-verbal cues, within their own body and reflecting them back to their clients—enabling them to be highly empathetic. They display high levels of embodiment, body awareness, and are *"energetically aware"* (D). Their body is as a 'source of information' which they can *"tap into"* (A,B,E). C explains: "*I listen to what's happening in my own body and just share transparently like, wow, I'm noticing I feel really tight right here. What are you noticing there?"*

3.4.2 Directing awareness

Practitioners describe using their own heightened awareness to increase and direct their clients' awareness. Often this means *"tuning in"* (40 references) and focusing inwards on certain feelings or body sensations. They act as a *"bridge to start building awareness"* (D), by using e.g. breathing, visualisations, or reflecting back. *"It helps people get curious about their own sensations, get more honest [and] experience their body in a, on a deeper level*", says F. Five HSWPs emphasise the value of 'intention setting' to direct the focus of a session: "*It all magically wraps up and gets to the completion point, which is where the, what the intention that was set to"*, explains D.

[1] Training protocol for MDMA-assisted psychotherapy provided by the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) to support safe use of psychedelics. MAPS is a non-profit organisation researching the benefits and use of psychedelics and marijuana (MAPS, 2019).

3.4.3 Intuition

Seven HSWPs report working intuitively. A 'feeling of knowing' helps them decide on the use of certain techniques, the focus of a class, or where they place their hands during a treatment. It also helps them to decide on the right timing for reflecting back certain emotions or feelings that they might sense in the client or experience in their own body. *"I wouldn't have the intel to be able to guide people in the way that I do if I didn't, if I wasn't highly sensitive or attuned or perceptive or intuitive"*, says H. Four practitioners see their sensitivity as the source of their intuition and G says, "*sensitivity to me now means intuition"*. There was however a recognition of risks of projections and (counter-)transference. Six practitioners emphasised the importance of being mindful about how they use their intuition, the way they offer their insights, and the source of their 'knowing'.

3.4.4 Holding space

HSWPs—highly attuned to their environment—are very particular about the details of their work space. While physical aspects, like cleanness, candles, flowers and light were mentioned by three practitioners, *"holding space"* (B,C,D,H) or creating a *"safe container"* (C,F) comes down to more subtle aspects. They mentioned a *"place of listening"* (C), "*a trusting and warm space"* (B) into which they bring their own calmness, presence, non-judgment, feelings of *"love"* (B,F,H) and *"enoughness"* (F). Five participants used or are using some form of ritual to create this space prior to a session and to 'clear it' afterwards. H describes it as, *"a very safe space, a very nurturing, trusting space where people feel comfortable to open up,"*

4. Discussion

This research was able to retrieve novel in-depth insights into the experience of HSWPs. The participants' rich reports have deepened our understanding of SPS as an 'embodied superpower', weaving together their daily experience in a complex, dynamic interplay of 'appreciation', 'challenges', 'journey', and 'client work'. This discussion will examine the findings in relation to previous research, explore practical implications and consider limitations of the study as well as directions for future research.

4.1 Between appreciation and challenge

SPS can be a challenging trait: characterised by a sensitive nervous-system and overwhelm from outside stimuli, e.g. in social situations. Even more so, due to depth and intensity of feeling (Aron, 1996; Cooper, 2014; Evers et al., 2008) and secondary challenges from a 'lack of understanding' and 'identity struggles' (Aron, 1996; Jaeger, 2004). This study provides support for these experiences in HSWPs. 'Taking on' or 'being affected by energy' also challenges them. Yet, a lack of scientific terminology impedes the communication of such experiences. Cooper covers, "taking in the energy of others" (2004, p.42) under the theme 'empathy' and psychotherapy might disregard it as (counter-)transference (e.g. Maroda, 2013). This paper proposes that we need a different vocabulary to understand and manage such experiences in an empowering way, which also conveys the appreciation with which participating HSWPs spoke of their sensitivity: a superpower, source of both, hedonic wellbeing—feelings of pleasure, connection and richness in life—as well as eudaimonic wellbeing—essential for their work and the good of the planet (Ryan & Deci 2001). Cooper (2014) concords SPS might bestow "greater capacity for enjoyment (of subtle stimuli) due to the deeper processing" (p. 61) and "holds the potential for great benefit to

society" (p. 2). A notion that has been supported from the start (Aron, 1996), and more recently by the *vantage sensitivity model* (Pluess & Belsky, 2013).

4.2 Embodied sensitivity

Across different themes, HSWPs primarily reported their sensitivity in connection to their bodies, which were either perceived as 'not functioning' or 'suffering' in the face of challenges or as a source of their 'super-strengths': Awareness, empathy, and intuition. HSPs strong intuition and somatic attunement has been mentioned briefly in SPS literature (Aron et al., 2012). Research on intuition— "knowing something without knowing how" (Sinclair, 2011, p. 4) —while still in its infancy, proposes somatic and affective aspects of intuition (Dane & Pratt, 2007). Thus, offering further support for the accounts of HSWPs in this study, who located the source of 'knowing' within the body. At this point it should be mentioned that research also emphasises what HSWPs touched on: Intuition has to be engaged in with caution and distinguished from other unconscious processes (Murray, 2004; Sheldon, 2017).

This study proposes HSWPs experiences can further be viewed in the light of *embodiment theory*, which suggests that "thoughts, feelings and behaviours are grounded in sensory experiences and bodily states" (Meier, Schnall, Schwarz, & Bargh, 2012, p. 2). Surprisingly, the literature does not seem to have made this connection before. While Aron (1996) devotes a section of her book to the highly sensitive "infant body" (p. 63), she focusses primarily on its needs resulting from overstimulation, rather than potential abilities. Acevedo (2020) acknowledges the importance of focusing on sensitivity beyond the brain including the "inner chemistry, the nervous system, and the energy that surrounds us" (p. xiv).

Embodiment, "awareness of and responsiveness to bodily sensations" (Impett, Daubenmier, & Hirschman, 2006, p. 40), has been linked to both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing (Hefferon, 2013, p. ix)—and so has SPS within this study. HSWPs displayed high levels of body awareness––showing an understanding of the connection between emotions and body sensations, and identifying them confidently (Mehling et al., 2009). Acevedo et al.'s (2014) fMRI study on HSPs brain activity supports this finding, reporting an increased activity in HSPs' insula—a brain region associated with body awareness (Craig, 2009). These neurological markers may indicate *why* these abilities are especially prevalent in HSWPs.

The concept of *embodied social cognition* (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2012) links the theme 'holding space' to embodiment theory. By observing or matching others' bodily states (actions, emotions, sensations), both spontaneously or consciously, humans are able to experience these states themselves on a physiological level. As a result, they gain a better understanding of others, their intentions and needs (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2012; Gallese, 2007), displaying increased empathy (Wicker et al., 2003). And as Frederickson (2013) proposes in her 'theory on love and positivity resonance', even momentary, embodied experiences of love, compassion, and feelings of oneness. The current study consistently observed these states in HSWPs' personal and professional accounts. Participants further report creating the necessary preconditions to evoke these experiences when 'holding space'—including "perception of safety and sensory and temporal connection" (Hefferon, 2015, p. 797). This might explain how HSWPs enhance interaction quality and self-disclosure (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2012). HSPs' deep connection to others and their ability to 'hold space' have been previously observed (Cooper, 2014; Aron, 1996), however without embodiment theory as an explanatory model.

Thus, embodiment theory could help improve the dialogue on sensitivity—as HSWPs have called for—shifting from the image of the helpless 'infant body' (Aron, 1996) to the powerful 'resonance body'. HSWPs could be described as *"somatic savants"* (C). Their highly attuned

nervous-systems and fine-tuned body awareness enable them to understand physical sensations and feelings especially well—in themselves and others. By adding scientific vocabulary to the HSWPs' reports of sensitivity as an embodied phenomenon, this study hopefully helps validate their experiences and minimise the challenges they face.

4.3 Managing SPS

How HSWPs experience their sensitivity depends largely on how well they manage it—an ongoing learning process which HSWPs described as 'journey'. The use of this universal metaphor (Campbell, 1993; Murdock, 1990) has been previously reported in connection to HSPs at work (Cooper, 2014). Murray (2009) provides evidence that working with 'heroic journey models', if understood as a process, can increase self-knowledge development. Thus, it may be possible that this metaphor supports HSWPs in managing their sensitivity through increased self-knowledge.

'Connecting to something bigger' has been consistently reported as part of the practitioners' journey. There is evidence that spiritual practices promote psychological wellbeing (Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, & Prashar, 2013), especially eudaimonic factors (Ivtzan & Papantoniou, 2014). HSPs have previously reported beneficial effects of spirituality (Cooper, 2014; Black & Kern, 2020), with 'transcendence' (meditation, contemplation, prayer) being the "most essential" (Aron, 1996, p. 77) form of rest. Research on transcendence through psychedelics shows potentially beneficial interactions (e.g. Arnaud & Sharpe, 2020) and recent studies with psilocybin and MDMA show positive effects on reversing markers of post-traumatic stress disorder, while enhancing serotonin release and decreasing activation in the insula (Feduccia & Mithoefer, 2018). As SPS is associated with higher risks of traumatisation (Aron et al., 2012), differences in the serotonin transporter gene 5-HTTLPR (Homberg et al., 2016), and a greater activation in the insula (Acevedo et al., 2014), beneficial effects on HSPs seem possible. However, much research is needed before any recommendations in regard to HSPs can be made[2].

There is also discussion in the literature regarding the importance of self-care for HSPs at work and more extensively in relation to other helping professions, especially psychotherapy (Barnett, Baker, Elman, & Schoener, 2007; Barnett & Cooper, 2009). Self-care might directly influence self-awareness and wellbeing (e.g. Coster & Schwebel, 1997). In light of the severity of consequences that HSWPs describe as a result of neglecting self-care, its importance cannot be overemphasised. This study augments the self-care recommendations on Aron's (2004) website, finding support for the points 'downtime' and 'believe your trait is real'. However, a 'holistic' self-care practices in line with Cooper (2014) seems appropriate—balancing HSPs' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

4.4 Practical implications

Beyond theory, the reported approaches for managing SPS have practical value. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore all mentioned techniques in depth, Table 3 offers an overview and selected resources for further reading—a starting point for HSWPs aiming to build a holistic self-care practice.

[2] Disclaimer: This research is intended to convey insights into the participants experience. It is not intended to encourage the use of psychedelics, and no attempt should be made to use these substances for any purpose except in a legally-sanctioned clinical trial. It is a criminal offense in the United Kingdom and in many other countries, punishable by imprisonment and/or fines, to manufacture, possess, or supply psychedelics, except in connection with government-sanctioned research. The researchers expressly disclaim any liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, that is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the contents of this paper.

Table 3. *Tools and Recommendations*

Technique	Used by HSWPs	Further reading
Explore breathing practices	10	Just breath (Brulé, 2017)
Meditate	10	Mindfulness in Positive Psychology (Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016)
Move every day	9	Physical activity as a "stellar" positive psychology intervention (Hefferon & Mutrie, 2012)
Set personal and professional boundaries	9	The self-care imperative (Barnett et al., 2007)
Ground your energy	8	The effects of grounding (Oschman, Chevalier, & Brown, 2015)
Spend time in nature	6	A review of the benefits of nature experiences (Franco, Shanahan, & Fuller, 2017)

4.5 Limitations and future directions

The present research, serving as pilot work for understanding the implications of SPS for HSWPs, had limitations, which might have impacted the results, interpretations, and conclusions. These could be addressed in future research. First, while practitioners' nationalities varied, they were from similar socio-economic backgrounds. Our understanding of wellbeing from a 'western' perspective is still limited (James, 2007; Black & Kern, 2020) and thus, are the insights of this study. Including non-western or indigenous HSWPs who embrace the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit (Young & Koopsen, 2005) could provide context to holistic views HSWPs portrayed in this study. Second, substantially more female than male practitioners participated in the research. While men tend to score lower on the HSP scale, just as many are highly sensitive (Aron & Aron, 1997). The low representation could be due to the interviewer herself being female. It might also indicate that males are less likely to be aware of SPS or participate in research on their sensitivity—possibly influenced by certain masculinity norms which discourage emotional expression (e.g. Chaplin, Cole, & Zahn-Waxler, 2005). Future studies could involve researchers from different genders for recruitment. Third, it is possible that the interviewer's background, a HSWP herself, has influenced the analysis – an impact the researchers sought to mitigate through regular collective reviews during the analytic process. That said, it might have contributed to building rapport, thus supporting the gathering of rich data (Bola, 1995). Lastly, the reported outcomes for clients were generally very positive. Seeing them as potentially biased by social desirability, like most self-reports, is recommended (Ganster, Hennessey, & Luthans, 1983). While it was beyond the scope of the current study to establish whether HSWPs indeed create such outcomes for their clients, future studies could gather additional insights, e.g. by interviewing clients. However, even if the interviews were entirely disregarded as evidence in favour of sensitivity as 'superpower', the data are revelatory in terms of participants' understanding of sensitivity as an embodied phenomenon.

The prevalence of embodiment across the themes represents a major area that needs more exploration. A quantitative approach, e.g. the 'Body Intelligence Scale', could measure different forms of body awareness in HSWPs. Future research could address the role of embodiment for other HSPs. Researchers could further explore HSWPs self-care practices, considering effects and suitability—using questionnaires to increase sample size. Future studies could explore the 'heroic

journey models' with HSWPs, potentially leading to an intervention to help them understand how to best manage their sensitivity.

Overall, the pilot character of the study did not permit for including wellbeing practitioners with regular or low sensitivity levels. Future research could compare the experience of HSWPs with that of others scoring low in the HSP self-test or alternative SPS measures to gain insight to what extend the described experiences are unique to HSWP or might be shared by other wellbeing practitioners. It would further be advised to conduct research in which the HSWPs are unaware of their trait and the study's focus on SPS to understand how their experience at different stages of their 'journey' might vary – especially the influence that familiarity with concepts like SPS might have.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this study marks an important step towards opening the dialogue on sensory-processing sensitivity in a professional wellbeing context. A grounded theory approach enabled the researcher to feel, interpret, and understand the experience of HSWPs. While SPS places challenges, it is not perceived as a vulnerability but as an 'embodied superpower'. HSWPs are on a journey to embrace and utilise this power. What is needed is an open dialogue and scientific language to talk about it. This paper offers terminology from embodiment theory to fuel the conversations already occurring in wellbeing communities and invites related disciplines e.g. embodiment, intuition and consciousness studies, to join this dialogue and open their doors to the unique abilities that HSWPs have to offer. If, as G described it, "thoughts are the language of the brain [and] feelings are the language of the body" (Dispenza, 2012, p. 24), HSWPs are the interpreters we are looking for; the translators of the subtle; somatic savants. In our fast-paced world, which has lost touch with the constant communication of nature, within and around us, this is needed more than ever.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, [CF]. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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Appendix A: Participant Invitation Letter

University of East London - Research Study Invitation

Research Title: The highly sensitive wellbeing practitioner: The experience of sensory processing sensitivity and its effect on wellbeing in client work.

Principal Researcher: *Author*

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research study. This letter will provide you with all the relevant information about the study to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who Am I?
I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Master of Science in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What Is the Research?
I am conducting research into the experience of highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why Have You Been Asked to Participate?
You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who fits the kind of people I am looking for to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve wellbeing practitioners who are highly sensitive (or think they might be) and have at least two years of professional experience to share from.

I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.
You are free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What Will Your Participation Involve?
Participants will be asked to fill in a short questionnaire (5-10min) which will collect some demographic/professional data and check if they are highly sensitive in a way that fits with sensitivity construct I seek to investigate in this study (Sensory Processing Sensitivity; Aron & Aron, 1997).

If you agree to participate, we will set up a convenient time to conduct a semi-structured interview which will last for up to an hour. The interview can take place over Zoom or in person at a convenient and suitable location and will be recorded. During the interview, participants will be asked basic background information to discuss their experience of working as highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners. The interview will be relaxed and free flowing to provide you the space to feel safe.

Participants should be aware of the chance that challenging material may arise during the interview process. However, given your professional background as a wellbeing practitioner and ability to reflect over personal life aspects it is unlikely that this level of challenge will occur.

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research, but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of my research topic.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times.

Participants will need to provide their email address during the study in order to receive relevant information. schedule the interviews and possibly other contact details (phone number) in case of a personal interview or follow up questions. Participants will not be identified in data analysis, or in any publication of the research.

Prior to beginning the interview participants will be given a Unique Participant Number which will be used for the purpose of anonymising their data.

What will happen to the information you provide?

What I will do with the material you provide will involve many checks to protect your safety and confidentiality.

The interview will be recorded and later transcribed with any names being omitted or changed to preserve the anonymity of the participant and any clients/colleagues/companies discussed. The audio files for the study will be securely stored on a private, password protected computer which no one other than the researcher will have access to. After each interview has been developed into an anonymised transcript the audio file will be deleted and the anonymised transcript will be kept digitally and stored on a private, password protected hard drive for up to 5 years. The study's data will be used for the purpose of dissertation and possible publication.

What if you want to withdraw?

Participants are not obliged in any way to take part in this study and should not feel coerced in any way. You are free to personally withdraw from the research without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. In the case of participant withdrawal, their data will be destroyed and not included in the research. However, if you withdraw I would reserve the right to use material that you provide up until the point of my analysis of the data. You have the right to withdraw partial excerpts of data or data as a whole from the study at any time up until four weeks after the interview without any disadvantage and without being obliged to provide any reason or justification.

Contact details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Author

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor *author* School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email:

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: *contact details*

If you are happy to continue you will be provided with a consent form prior to your participation which will include your unique participant number. Please retain this invitation letter for your reference.

Thank you,
Authors

Appendix B: Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The following demographics and professional data are being collected to help better analyse the study's data. The true/false questionnaire will help check if you are highly sensitive in a way that fits with the sensitivity construct I seek to investigate in this study (Sensory Processing Sensitivity; Aron & Aron, 1997). If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Many thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Gender: Male/Female

Age:

Nationality:

How long have you been practicing as a wellbeing practitioner (in years)?

What type of wellbeing practitioner would you call yourself?

Do you work to with any specific modality/framework/approach?

Do you have any other accreditations/training e.g. counselling or therapy qualifications?

Appendix C: HSP Self-Test

Are you highly sensitive?

INSTRUCTIONS: This questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential. Answer each question according to the way you personally feel, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at All			**Moderately**			**Extremely**

____ 1. Are you easily overwhelmed by strong sensory input?
____ 2. Do you seem to be aware of subtleties in your environment?
____ 3. Do other people's moods affect you?
____ 4. Do you tend to be more sensitive to pain?
____ 5. Do you find yourself needing to withdraw during busy days, into bed or into a darkened room or any place where you can have some privacy and relief from stimulation?
____ 6. Are you particularly sensitive to the effects of caffeine?
____ 7. Are you easily overwhelmed by things like bright lights, strong smells, coarse fabrics, or sirens close by?
____ 8. Do you have a rich, complex inner life?
____ 9. Are you made uncomfortable by loud noises?
___ 10. Are you deeply moved by the arts or music?
___ 11. Does your nervous system sometimes feel so frazzled that you just have to go off by yourself?
___ 12. Are you conscientious?
___ 13. Do you startle easily?
___ 14. Do you get rattled when you have a lot to do in a short amount of time?
___ 15. When people are uncomfortable in a physical environment do you tend to know what needs to be done to make it more comfortable (like changing the lighting or the seating)?
___ 16. Are you annoyed when people try to get you to do too many things at once?
___ 17. Do you try hard to avoid making mistakes or forgetting things?
___ 18. Do you make a point to avoid violent movies and TV shows?
___ 19. Do you become unpleasantly aroused when a lot is going on around you?
___ 20. Does being very hungry create a strong reaction in you, disrupting your concentration or mood?
___ 21. Do changes in your life shake you up?
___ 22. Do you notice and enjoy delicate or fine scents, tastes, sounds, works of art?
___ 23. Do you find it unpleasant to have a lot going on at once?
___ 24. Do you make it a high priority to arrange your life to avoid upsetting or overwhelming situations?
___ 25. Are you bothered by intense stimuli, like loud noises or chaotic scenes?

___ 26. When you must compete or be observed while performing a task, do you become so nervous or shaky that you do much worse than you would otherwise?

___ 27. When you were a child, did parents or teachers seem to see you as sensitive or shy?

HSP Scale © 1997 E. Aron

Scoring:
If you answered more than fourteen of the questions as true of yourself, you are probably highly sensitive. But no psychological test is so accurate that an individual should base his or her life on it. We psychologists try to develop good questions, then decide on the cut off based on the average response.

If fewer questions are true of you, but extremely true, that might also justify calling you highly sensitive.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

University of East London - consent to participate in research study

Research Title: The highly sensitive wellbeing practitioner: The experience of sensory processing sensitivity and its effect on wellbeing in client work.

Principal Researcher: *author*

Research Supervisor: *author*

I have read the invitation letter relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and the purposes of the research study have been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand my involvement in this study, how my data will be used, anonymised and stored. I understand that only the researcher and supervisor involved in the study will have access to identifying data.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw partial excerpts of data or my data as a whole from the study at any time up time up until three weeks after the interview without any disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to provide any reason or justification.

Participant's Name:
Participant's Signature (Typed Name Accepted): Unique Participant Number:
Researchers Name: *author*
Researcher's Signature (Typed Name Accepted): *author*

Date:

Appendix E: Participant Debrief Letter

University of East London - Research study debrief

Research Title: The highly sensitive wellbeing practitioner: The experience of sensory processing sensitivity and its effect on wellbeing in client work.

Principal Researcher: *author*

Research Supervisor: *author*
Unique Participant Number:

I'd like to take the time to sincerely thank you for participating in this study. Highly sensitive people make up 20 to 30 percent of the population, many of them work as wellbeing practitioners. Despite the importance of the topic there has been very little research and subsequently a lack of clarity and theory with regards to the experience of highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners. But we need to understand it better, to do the work we do with the best outcome for our clients and ourselves, we need to understand this area better. With this research study I hope to be able to identify and explore implication of high sensitivity for wellbeing practitioners. From this hopefully anticipate the emergence and development of theory which we hope will be of much use to the profession and for furthering research in the field. Please keep your Unique Participant Number safe in case you wish to withdraw from the study. You can do this up four weeks after this interview has taken place by contacting me or *author* (project supervisor) on the email addresses above. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns with regards to the study also. If any challenging material did surface during the interview, we would encourage you to reach out to us or one of the services listed below.

One last big thank you for your input!

Thank you,
author

I have also included contact information for a few support agencies in the UK should you ever feel the need to reach out for help.

- The Samaritans support line: 020 8554 9004 Email: jo@samaritans.org
- NHS Direct: 0845 4647
- Anxiety Alliance: 0845 296 7877 Email: anxietyalliance@ntlworld.com
- Depression Alliance: 0845 123 2320

Appendix F: Interview Questions

- What does it mean for you to be sensitive?
- How do you experience working with clients in the light of your sensitivity?
- How does this experience influence your wellbeing?
- How, if so, has the experience of being a HSWP changed over time?
- If you could, would you change anything about your sensitivity?
- What are approaches or strategies, if any, do you use to manage your sensitivity?