Highly Sensitive Person: A Way of Being – A Humanistic Synthesis of Lived Experience

by

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Abstract

The lived experiences of highly sensitive people (HSPs), understood through the construct of sensory processing sensitivity, are gaining increased attention among clinicians and comprise 20%–35% of the population. These clients describe deep thinking, emotional depth, overstimulation, and being able to notice subtle nuances, all of which differ from typical patterns. Despite this emerging visibility of HSPs, the counselling field lacks cohesive and non-pathologizing clinical frameworks capable of addressing the dual reality of sensitivity, both as a strength and vulnerability. Existing research focuses on quantitative methods that assess traits, stress, or links to psychopathology. This capstone synthesizes eight qualitative studies exploring the lived experiences of HSPs. Using a humanistic, person-centred framework and a thematic synthesis methodology, the project integrates findings across line-by-line coding, descriptive themes, and analytic interpretations. The synthesis produced four themes: empathic resonance, identity, self-care, and emotional and perceptual amplification. Findings reveal that HSPs experience both profound depth and heightened overwhelm, are prone to transliminality and boundary thinness, navigate stigma while constructing affirming identities, and rely on pacing and grounding to stay regulated. These insights informed the development of the GENTLE framework, a person-centred, neurodiversity-affirming model for supporting HSPs. Together, the synthesis and GENTLE framework offer clinicians a cohesive, strengths-based lens for understanding sensitivity, challenging deficit-based narratives, and creating a culturally responsive and ethically grounded practice with HSP clients.

Keywords: highly sensitive person, sensory processing sensitivity, highly sensitive people, qualitative, lived experience

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Dedication

I dedicate this capstone to my children, Maria and Brett, whose presence has been a constant reminder of what matters most. Your patience, humour, and support have accompanied me through it all. You are my inspiration. I love you more than you will ever know.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Sensitivity is a unique but profoundly human way of experiencing the world. It is a way of being that can shape how individuals process emotion, interpret relationships, and engage with their internal and external environments (Aron et al., 2012). However, despite its prevalence, sensory processing sensitivity (SPS) is still an overlooked and often misunderstood aspect of human diversity within counselling psychology. This capstone seeks to address this gap by synthesizing qualitative research on the lived experiences of highly sensitive people (HSP) and interpreting these findings through a humanistic, person-centred, constructivist, and neurodiversity-affirming lens. This work aims to move beyond deficit-based narratives and instead illuminate sensitivity as a meaningful, adaptive, and culturally relevant way of being.

Overview of the Topic

Understanding Highly Sensitive People

SPS is an innate, heritable temperament trait, coined by Aron and Aron (1997), characterized by a heightened central nervous system responsiveness, resulting in deeper cognitive processing of emotional, social, and physical experiences (Aron et al., 2012; Jagiellowicz et al., 2011). Research done in a twin study confirmed that environmental sensitivity shows moderate heritability and shares genetic variance with both well-being and emotional problems (Assary et al., 2024). Approximately 20% to 35% of the population show high levels of SPS (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Greven et al., 2019; Morales-Botello et al., 2025), illustrating a substantial but overlooked portion of human diversity. Individuals who possess this trait, also referred to as HSPs, frequently report both the joys and burdens of experiencing life so intensely (Aron & Aron, 1997; Bas et al., 2021). Research consistently shows that high SPS amplifies emotional responses to both positive and negative experiences, highly influenced by their environments (Carroll et al., 2025; Greven et al., 2019; Iimura & Yano, 2024; X. Li et al., 2023). SPS is not a pathological condition but rather a stable and adaptive variation in human functioning, rooted in

evolution and biology (Acevedo et al., 2018; Damatac et al., 2025; Greven et al., 2019).

Aron (2010) conceptualized SPS by developing the acronym DOES to highlight four central attributes of the trait: depth of processing, overstimulation, emotional responsiveness, and sensitivities to subtleties. First, depth of processing refers to the tendency to think more deeply, reflect extensively, and pause to evaluate new situations before responding. Second, overstimulation or overarousability reflects a heightened susceptibility to overwhelm because HSPs absorb and process more sensory and emotional input from their surroundings than the average person. Third, Aron (2010) explained that emotional responsiveness and empathy capture the pronounced affective depth and interpersonal attunement found among HSPs, who often experience both their own emotions and the emotions of others with greater intensity and relational sensitivity. Finally, sensitivity to subtleties highlights the ability to notice fine details and nuanced cues, whether it be sensory, environmental, or social, that others may easily overlook (Aron, 2010).

Initially, SPS was first measured by the Highly Sensitive Person Scale (HSPS), a one-factor model that served as a self-report psychological assessment (Aron & Aron, 1997). In later years, research added a three-factor measure that included subscales for additional aspects such as ease of excitement, aesthetic sensitivity, and low sensory threshold (Iimura & Yano, 2024). The most recent measure, the DOES scale, demonstrates strong psychometric properties in confirmatory factor analyses, which supported the unidimensionality of each subscale (Gubler et al., 2024). Adaptations of the various scales have been made for various countries in various languages, highlighting the flexibility for cultural considerations. These countries include Chile in Spanish (Salinas-Quintana et al., 2024), China in Chinese (Y. L. Li et al., 2024), Germany in German (Konrad & Herzberg, 2019), Japan in Japanese (Takahashi, 2016), Netherlands in Dutch (De Gucht et al., 2023), Russia in Russian (Ershova et al., 2018), Spain in Spanish (Chacón et al., 2021), and Türkiye in Turkish (Şengül-İnal & Sümer, 2020).

Strengths and Vulnerabilities

SPS falls under the umbrella concept of environmental sensitivity, which attempts to explain individual differences in processing external environmental stimuli (Greven et al., 2019; Pluess, 2015; Roxburgh, 2023). Also under this umbrella, sitting alongside SPS, are the theories of differential susceptibility and biological sensitivity to context. They all posit that individuals vary in their sensitivity to environmental influences, showing heightened responsiveness to both adverse (risk-promoting) and supportive (development-enhancing) contexts (Ellis et al., 2011). As a result, it can be argued that HSPs have an evolutionary advantage, allowing them a heightened responsiveness to both negative and positive environments (Pluess & Belsky, 2013; Roxburgh, 2023). Historically, research on HSPs mainly focused on investigating the adverse outcomes (Carroll et al., 2025; Kenemore et al., 2025) including positive correlations with stress (Bakker & Moulding, 2012; Benham, 2006; Gerstenberg, 2012; Gulla & Golonka, 2021; Simione & Pieroni, 2023), anxiety (Bakker & Moulding, 2012; Gulla & Golonka, 2021; Liss et al., 2008), depression (Bakker & Moulding, 2012; Liss et al., 2008), and burnout (Golonka & Gulla, 2021). Research also indicates that HSPs have more difficulties with physical health, such as increased pain (Morellini et al., 2023), gastrointestinal symptoms (Iimura & Takasugi, 2022), and sleep difficulties (Carr et al., 2021; Pieroni et al., 2024). Newer research has begun to focus on the positive aspects of SPSs, such as vantage sensitivity, which examines how certain individuals benefit from positive conditions (de Villiers et al., 2018). Carroll et al. (2025) discovered that HSPs flourish more when connected to nature and Kenemore et al. (2025) found that being highly sensitive actually decreased individuals' resting heart rate. Therefore, SPS reflects an environmentally sensitive way of being in which individuals respond more intensely to both supportive and aversive contexts. This results in a dynamic interplay of strengths and vulnerabilities that have too often been misinterpreted through a deficit lens rather than understood as a meaningful aspect of human diversity.

Pathologizing Sensitivity

Given the research connecting HSPs and negative mental health concerns, recognizing SPS as a valid and contextually influenced temperament is imperative for counselling practice. There is a relevant concern for psychologists not to confuse SPS with other personality traits, nor should it be diagnosed as a disorder (Rajić, 2024). In fact, in their study, Ayano et al. (2021) found that 39% of clients who have severe psychiatric disorders were misdiagnosed. Findings by Acevedo et al. (2018) confirmed that SPS is distinct from autism spectrum disorder (ASD), posttraumatic stress disorder, and schizophrenia. The authors demonstrated this by showing that SPS engages brain areas associated with memory, reward, self-other processing, physiological homeostasis, awareness, and empathy when responding to emotional and social stimuli. Furthermore, Damatac et al. (2025) found that SPS is not associated with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and reiterated the distinction from ASD. However, if exposed to negative environments, HSPs have an increased risk of developing mental and physical symptoms, including traits of ASD (Damatac et al., 2025; Greven et al., 2019). Given these distinctions, therapists may find it helpful to explore high sensitivity during the assessment process when clients exhibit features of SPS, adding an alternative, often unrecognized aspect that may be contributing to their mental health difficulties (Roxburgh, 2023). Therefore, while research distinguishes SPS from neurodevelopment and psychiatric conditions, it also highlights the vulnerability of HSPs in adverse environments, underscoring the importance of contextual understanding in therapeutic work.

Cultural and Ethical Practice

Sensitivity influences how individuals perceive and interpret sensory, emotional, and relational environments, often extending into domains of spirituality and meaning making (Buchtova et al., 2024; Malinakova et al., 2024). Neurobiological evidence indicates that HSPs process environment and interpersonal stimuli with greater depth and emotional salience (Acevedo et al., 2018; Greven et al., 2019) while qualitative studies link this attunement to connectedness, empathy, and existential

reflection (Bas et al., 2021; Carroll et al., 2025; Roxburgh, 2023). By honouring sensitivity and framing SPS in a neurodiversity-adjacent type of context, this aligns cultural and ethical therapy with emerging multicultural and neurodiversity-affirming paradigms (Dwyer, 2022). By doing so, this shifts the clinician's mindset from curing the individual to one that recognizes neurocognitive diversity as a natural way of being (Zaks, 2025). This orientation aligns closely with psychological ethical frameworks, such as the Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA; 2017) *Code of Ethics* and the College of Alberta Psychologists' (CAP; 2023) *Standards of Practice*, which emphasize inherent worth, nondiscrimination, and attention to personal characteristics and abilities.

Contemporary research suggests that clinicians adopt cultural humility, "a willingness and interest to learn about another's culture, along with self-reflection of one's own cultural identities, values, and beliefs" (Bauer et al., 2025, p. 644), because it leads to improved case conceptualizations, stronger therapeutic alliances, and reduced barriers. Not only are clinicians ethically obligated to acquire cultural knowledge, but they are also encouraged to integrate it to enhance their self-awareness, thereby reducing 'othering' (Konidaris & Petrakis, 2025). In summary, recognizing SPS through this lens supports the cultural and ethical considerations required to validate clients' lived experiences and avoid pathologizing normative neurobiological differences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this capstone project is to synthesize qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of HSPs through a humanistic, person-centred framework. By integrating the voices of individuals with SPS, this project aims to develop a strengths-based, nonpathologizing conceptualization of sensitivity that reflects its dual potential for both depth and distress. The goal is to generate an evidence-informed understanding of how sensitivity shapes emotional, relational, and existential experiences, and to translate these insights into meaningful guidance for culturally responsive and ethically attuned counselling practice. This topic was selected in response to the growing number of

sensitive clients I witnessed firsthand during a practicum at a rural, northern Alberta mental health clinic, and to examine whether these clinical observations were reflected in empirical literature. This capstone project was also born out of my frustration with the current lack of cohesive clinical frameworks available when I was seeking to support their unique needs without reinforcing deficit-based narratives. The findings of this capstone are intended to inform counsellors, psychologists, supervisors, educators, and researchers who seek to understand and honour sensitivity as a meaningful aspect of human diversity and therapeutic identity.

Research Question

Given the complexity and breadth of the topic of sensitivity, a straightforward guiding question was needed to serve as the compass for this project. In qualitative inquiry, research questions are designed to be open-ended, flexible, and exploratory in nature (Creswell & Poth, 2024). To achieve this purpose, this capstone was guided by the following research question: How can HSPs be supported within a therapeutic context, based on themes emerging from qualitative studies of lived experience?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are paramount in research, helping researchers communicate common assumptions and principles, position methodological choices, and enabling the accumulation and exchange of knowledge across a discipline (Brydges & Batt, 2023). As this capstone seeks to explore and synthesize the lived experiences of HSPs, a guiding framework is needed to ensure that sensitivity is interpreted in a manner consistent with the project's purpose and research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This capstone adopted an integrated lens grounded in humanistic, person-centred theory, constructivist understanding of meaning-making, and neurodiversity-affirming perspectives. Together, these theoretical influences support a nonpathologizing and contextually responsive interpretation of SPS, positioning sensitivity as a valid and meaningful way of being that holds both clinical importance and ethical significance within counselling practice.

Person-Centred Theory

Person-centred theory, developed by Carl Rogers (1957, 1961, 1980), views sensitivity as an authentic way of being rather than a pathology. Rogers emphasized that people have inherent worth and a natural drive toward growth, wholeness, and self-actualization, which blossoms in a therapeutic environment of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (Yao & Kabir, 2023). In practice, the person-centred therapist provides a nonjudgmental, accepting relationship and trusts the client's subjective experience as a guide for the therapy (Renger, 2021). Importantly, Rogers did not believe diagnostic labels were necessary for therapy and took a stance that avoided pathologizing the client's experience (Oberreiter, 2025). This theoretical orientation aligns closely with the needs of HSPs, whose depth of processing and emotional responsiveness often make them particularly attuned to the quality of therapeutic relationships (Aron, 2010). Moreover, the person-centred focus on subjective experience is especially relevant, given that SPS is defined by heightened sensory and emotional perception (Aron et al., 2012). Understanding sensitivity, therefore, requires attention to the clients' phenomenological experience rather than external assumptions or pathologizing labels (Sanders, 2024). By grounding this capstone in person-centred principles, sensitivity is conceptualized not as a disorder to be corrected but as a meaningful and adaptive way of being that counselling can support.

Constructivist Perspective

This framework also incorporates constructivist principles, viewing identity and knowing as being co-constructed through lived experience and context (Creswell & Poth, 2024). For HSPs, the environment plays a crucial role in how their trait is expressed and understood. Research on SPS shows that individuals vary in their reactions to environmental stimuli (Acevedo et al., 2018), and the same sensitivity trait can be an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the context (Carroll et al., 2025). Pluess (2015) described high sensitivity within an environmental sensitivity framework, stating that HSPs will flourish in supportive, attuned settings but may struggle in harsh or dismissive environments.

Empirical evidence supports that HSPs show more positive outcomes than less sensitive peers when raised in nurturing, validating conditions, but are more negatively affected by stressful or invalidating environments (Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Davies et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2011; Pluess, 2017). By situating SPS within a constructivist framework, this capstone highlights that sensitivity is not a static trait but a dynamic process of interaction between the individual and their world and perhaps one that could be transformed through understanding, validation, and therapeutic reflection.

Neurodiversity-Affirming Perspective

The neurodiversity-affirming perspective provides an essential ethical and cultural foundation for the capstone, positioning SPS as a natural variation within the spectrum of human temperament rather than a deficit or disorder. Emerging from the neurodiversity movement (Leadbitter et al., 2021; Walker, 2021), this framework challenges deficit-based models of mental health by emphasizing that neurological, sensory, and emotional differences reflect meaningful diversity in the human experience. Originating in the work of Judy Singer and other pioneering activists, the neurodiversity paradigm recognizes neurological and sensory differences as part of the normal range of human diversity, akin to variations in race, gender, or culture (Botha et al., 2024; Fung & Doyle, 2021). Nick Walker (2021) expanded on this idea, describing neurodiversity as both a scientific reality and a social justice movement. He asserted that “the neurodiversity paradigm is, at its heart, a social justice movement. It demands the same rights, respect, and opportunities for neurodivergent people as are afforded by any other recognized social minority group” (p. 18). A neurodiversity-affirming stance rejects the pathology paradigm, the assumption that there is only one kind of normal or healthy kind of mind, and instead calls for a shift toward understanding, respect, and inclusion of all neurotypes (Walker, 2021). Within this framework, SPS can be understood as a neurodiversity-adjacent concept, as it is not yet considered part of the neurodivergent family to date (Marschall, 2025).

Methodology

Literature Search

A systematic literature review was conducted to gather relevant qualitative articles for a thematic synthesis exploring the lived experiences of HSPs. The City University library repository was used to perform a broad search to maximize search results. The first search occurred on July 19, 2025, and again for a second time on October 10, 2025, yielding the same number of results. Each search was filtered to include only peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last five years. The Boolean search string ("Highly Sensitive Person" OR "Sensory Processing Sensitivity" OR “Highly Sensitive People") AND ("qualitative" OR "lived experience" OR "phenomenological" OR "interpretative phenomenological analysis" OR "IPA" OR "thematic analysis" OR "narrative inquiry") yielded 15 results. Based on these results, the studies were further evaluated for inclusion in this capstone using inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1), leaving only five eligible studies. A final Google Scholar search was performed to confirm that a comprehensive reach was accomplished. Using the same search string and inclusion/exclusion criteria, an additional three studies were identified, resulting in a final sample of eight studies (see Table 2).

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Category	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Publication date	2020–2025	Prior to 2020
Language	Available in English	Published in languages other than English
Population	Adults (18+) who identify as HSPs or as having SPS	Child or adolescent samples (under age 17)
Study focus	Studies examining the lived experiences of HSPs or individuals high in SPS	Studies focusing on sensory issues unrelated to SPS (e.g., ADHD specific sensory sensitivity) Studies narrowly focused on a single contextual domain (e.g., parenting only, foreign language learning, students)
Methodology	Qualitative studies using methods that include verbatim participant quotations	Quantitative or mixed methods studies Studies lacking primary qualitative data or participant quotations.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Theses, dissertations, grey literature, conference papers Meta-analyses, scoping reviews, or other secondary research

Note. HSP = highly sensitive person; SPS = sensory processing sensitivity; ADHD = attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Table 2

List of Studies Included for Synthesis

Authors	Year	Title	Journal	Country
Bas, S., Kaandorp, M., de Kleijn, Z. P. M., Braaksma, W. J. E., Bakx, A. W. E. A., & Greven, C. U.	2021	Experiences of adults high in the personality trait sensory processing sensitivity: A qualitative study https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm10214912	*Journal of Clinical Medicine*	Netherlands
Black, B. A., & Kern, M. L.	2020	A qualitative exploration of individual differences in wellbeing for highly sensitive individuals https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0482-8	*Palgrave Communications*	Australia
Friedrich, C., & Lomas, T.	2024	Embodied superpower: A qualitative study of the experience of highly sensitive wellbeing practitioners https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v14i3.3455	*International Journal of Wellbeing*	United Kingdom
Miller, D. C., & Lynch, M. F.	2024	The gender socialization experiences of highly sensitive men. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000463	*Psychology of Men & Masculinity*	United States
Rafiq, R., Saleem, M., Khan Durrani, A., & Manzoor, Z.	2023	Unveiling self-cursing patterns in sensitive individuals: A qualitative inquiry from a Pakistani context https://wahacademia.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/29	*Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences*	Pakistan
Roth, M., Gubler, D. A., Janelt, T., Kolioutsis, B., & Troche, S. J.	2023	On the feeling of being different–an interview study with people who define themselves as highly sensitive https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0283311	*PloS One*	Germany
Roxburgh, E. C	2023	"It's like feeling and experiencing everything in HD": An interpretative phenomenological analysis of sensory processing sensitivity https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000297	*The Humanistic Psychologist*	United Kingdom
Roxburgh, E. C., & Wright-Bevans, M.	2025	Therapists' lived experiences of identifying with sensory processing sensitivity: A phenomenological inquiry https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12857	*Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*	United Kingdom

Analytic Review Strategy

The Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP, 2025) was used to evaluate the quality of the qualitative studies that were analyzed in this capstone. It was chosen because this tool is among the most commonly used for more novice qualitative researchers conducting qualitative research synthesis (Long et al., 2020). A more detailed explanation of the CASP process can be found in Chapter 2.

To analyze the data, the thematic synthesis method by Thomas and Harden (2008) was employed. This method offers a structured approach for identifying and developing analytical themes from primary qualitative data, enabling researchers to generate new interpretations, explanations, or hypotheses that extend beyond the original study (Hammond & Marczak, 2025). Thematic synthesis has three stages: line by line coding, developing descriptive themes, and generating analytic themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). First, each of the eight articles was printed, and any direct quotations from participants were highlighted, and a sequential alphanumeric code was assigned. Each code was derived by combining the page number and a letter indicating order (e.g., 3a, 3b, 3c), except for the Bas et al. (2021) study, because the quotations were already assigned codes (e.g., P20). Common themes were already emerging after the first reading, but I needed to be patient to validate my premonitions of the themes with the data.

Initially, handwritten notes were made on paper copies next to each participant's quote, but it quickly became apparent that this method was not ideal. So, these quotation codes were then entered into an Excel spreadsheet, alongside the initial codes that consisted of the general meaning of each participant's quotes. The goal was to assign concise, data-proximal labels to capture meanings (e.g., easily wounded by criticism; deep emotional reactivity; metaphor of vulnerability), which were continually being refined through constant comparison within and across studies.

The second step in Thomas and Harden's (2008) method was to develop descriptive themes, in which the initial codes were grouped into higher-order categories that summarized patterns in the data

while remaining close to participants' language. These descriptive themes needed to represent what the data said across studies, independent of my theoretical interpretation.

Third, I moved beyond description to interpret how these patterns might answer the research question through a person-centred lens (unconditional positive regard, accurate empathy, and congruence). The ultimate objective was to produce integrative, counselling practice-relevant themes that could serve as the foundation for a practical framework to guide therapists working with HSPs. Throughout, I regularly checked that the analytic themes were grounded in the underlying quotes. See Table 3 for an example of the code chain that was used during this process.

Table 3

Example of Code Chain

Quote ID	Bas et al. 2021_P20
Verbatim quote	"When I am at a party for example and I say, like: 'What nice tableware' or something like that and somebody says, like: 'Well, I think it actually looks terrible', then I can suddenly start thinking: ouch! That it cuts me deeper than I perceive it cutting people around me. And then I really feel like a scared little animal that's easily hurt or something."
Initial code	Easily wounded by criticism; deep emotional reactivity; metaphor of vulnerability
Descriptive theme	Emotional sensitivity; social hurt
Analytical theme	Need for unconditional positive regard to buffer against social hurt
Primary theme	Emotional-perceptual amplification
Subtheme	Depth

Contribution to the Field

In counselling practice, there is recognition that ethically and culturally competent care is a core component and requires consideration of the cultural identity of the client, which can be defined in the broadest terms as "one's subjective sense of self" (Chu et al., 2022, p. 363). The CPA *Code of Ethics for*

Psychologists outlined this requirement through the most heavily weighted Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples, which emphasizes “inherent worth, non-discrimination, moral rights, distributive, social and natural justice” (CPA, 2017, p. 4). Additionally, the CAP *Standards of Practice* requires psychologists to obtain and maintain cultural competency, recognizing differences in “culture, nationality, ethnicity, colour, race, religion, gender, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, physical and/or mental abilities, age, socio-economic status” (CAP, 2023, p. 36). Moreover, the field of psychology has proven that a therapist's cultural humility is linked to higher client outcomes through stronger working alliances (Dixon et al., 2022; Mehra et al., 2025; Orlowski et al., 2025), further highlighting the importance of recognizing diverse expressions of culture and identity in clinical practice.

Historical cultural competency frameworks have often emphasized the importance of understanding clients’ ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, alongside other factors such as gender and socioeconomic contexts (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Hays, 1996: Sue, 2001). However, while these aspects remain crucial, they do not entirely encompass the full spectrum of human diversity. Arthur (2018) noted that there may be other salient aspects of an individual’s identity. In 2017, the American Psychological Association (APA) expanded their *Multicultural Guidelines* to stress an intersectional, ecological approach, in which multiple identity facets, including less obvious ones, intersect to shape a person’s cultural experience (APA, 2017). It was stated that culture is not limited to one’s nationality or ethnicity, but also includes values, norms, and lived experiences associated with other group identities or personal characteristics (APA, 2017; Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019). Therefore, expanding cultural competency means recognizing how nontraditional expressions of diversity may have distinct cultures. Just as one would strive to understand a client’s ethnic culture, one should strive to understand neurodiversity, or the norms of rural living, or the worldview of someone who identifies as an HSP. With this objective in mind, this capstone project aims to synthesize qualitative research based on the lived

experiences of HSPs through a humanistic, person-centred lens to develop a strengths-based, nonpathologizing framework that captures the dual potential of sensitivity, its capacity for both depth and distress, and offers practical guidance for culturally responsive therapeutic practice.

This capstone attempts to contribute to the field of counselling psychology by addressing a critical gap in how SPS and HSPs' experiences are conceptualized and supported in therapeutic contexts. With HSPs accounting for approximately 20% to 35% of the population (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Greven et al., 2019; Morales-Botello et al., 2025), this topic is highly relevant. Although research on SPS has expanded in recent decades, much of the existing literature has focused on the negative aspects of the trait (Carroll et al., 2025; Kenemore et al., 2025). This deficit-oriented focus has inadvertently reinforced a pathologizing narrative that frames sensitivity as a clinical liability rather than as an adaptive and meaningful human trait. There remains limited integration of SPS research into counselling theory and practice, beyond random practice suggestions hidden within articles, and even fewer models that offer guidance for clinicians seeking to understand and support sensitive clients. During this search, only two existing frameworks addressing high sensitivity in clinical practice were identified, highlighting a significant gap in the literature and reinforcing the need for this project. In her book *Psychotherapy and the Highly Sensitive,* Elaine Aron (2010) offered one such framework for therapists to improve outcomes for HSPs. However, her approach is grounded in depth psychology and draws heavily on the work of Carl Jung, thereby representing only one type of therapy modality. More recently, Lauer (2023) introduced the second, a practical, evidence-based framework in *DBT Skills for Highly Sensitive People*, applying dialectical behaviour therapy principles to support emotional regulation and distress tolerance among highly sensitive clients.

By synthesizing qualitative research on the lived experiences of HSPs through a humanistic, person-centred lens, the capstone attempts to reframe sensitivity as a valid and culturally relevant way of being shaped by environmental, relational, and existential factors. In doing so, it moves the discourse

away from pathology and towards possibility, offering an alternative narrative grounded in acceptance, self-awareness, and growth. The resulting synthesis highlights how HSPs' traits of empathy, depth, and intuitive perception can be therapeutic assets when recognized and supported rather than suppressed. This perspective contributes to the field by equipping counsellors with conceptual and practical tools to foster empowerment, emotional regulation, and authenticity with sensitive clients.

Furthermore, this project situates sensitivity within the broader framework of neurodiversity and cultural competency, extending the scope of diversity-aware counselling beyond traditional categories such as ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Integrating SPS into a multicultural and neurodiversity-affirming practice aligns with ethical obligations outlined by the CPA (2017) and CAP (2023) to provide inclusive care that honours individual differences. In doing so, this capstone challenges Western systemic biases within the helping professions that prize emotional stoicism, high stimulation, and productivity over reflection, empathy, and attunement. Recognizing and validating sensitivity then becomes not only a clinical innovation but a matter of social justice and ethical responsibility within counselling practice.

Ultimately, the capstone contributes to the advancement of counselling psychology by articulating a framework that integrates sensitivity into humanistic and neurodiversity-informed care. It offers a foundation for future empirical and theoretical exploration, encourages the development of training materials and supervision practices that prepare clinicians to work effectively with HSPs, and strengthens the profession's commitment to equity, compassion, and the affirmation of human diversity.

Reflexivity and Positionality Statement

To truly understand this capstone, it is necessary to understand my way of being as both a researcher and a developing psychologist. My work is grounded in a relational, humanistic worldview that values authenticity, self-awareness, and the continuous process of becoming. I approach research

as a meaning-making endeavour rather than a detached exercise, guided by a social constructivist and transformative interpretive framework that acknowledges knowledge as co-created through lived experiences and as having the power to advocate for and help individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Reflexivity is imperative to this framework, as well as to qualitative research in general, requiring awareness of how the researcher's own values, assumptions, and social characteristics influence the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2024). My positionality is shaped by my identity as a neurodivergent and HSP who experiences the world through heightened perception, deep emotional processing, and intuitive understanding. This way of processing mirrors the very construct I am studying, positioning my sensitivity not as a bias to be eliminated, but as an asset that enables me to understand the depth, nuance, and context of sensitive experience.

While I personally identify as an HSP and resonate deeply with many of the lived experiences reflected in the research, I understand the importance of bracketing in this process and have challenged myself to look for ways the findings contradict my own lived experiences (Walsh, 2025). I acknowledge that sensitivity manifests in diverse and individualized ways, and there is no one single expression of what it means to be HSP. So, my awareness of this diversity encourages me to approach this work with humility and openness. I am a White, divorced woman who grew up in rural Saskatchewan and now resides in northern Alberta. My social location influences how I perceive and interpret the construct of sensitivity, shaped by both the values of rural collectivism and the realities of working within northern healthcare and community systems. It is impossible, and arguably undesirable, to become a blank slate. Therefore, I took advantage of my subjectivity and considered it an important role in the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). To support this, I used a reflexive journaling process to document interpersonal dynamics, moments of analytical insight, and emotional or cognitive reactions that arose during synthesis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

Ultimately, I view this capstone not only as the culmination of my academic training but as an

embodied exploration of identity, meaning, and sensitivity. Throughout it, I attempted to model a form of scholarship that is both rigorous and self-aware; one that recognizes the researcher as inseparable from the research. This project represents an integration of my personal, professional, and philosophical selves, reflecting my belief that research, like counselling, is most transformative when it is relational, reflexive, and grounded in the authenticity of lived experiences.

Definition of Terms

The following section defines the key terms used throughout this capstone. These definitions are provided to support a shared understanding of language and constructs important to this project.

Biological Sensitivity to Context. A theoretical model suggesting that individuals differ in their physiological reactivity to environmental conditions, displaying heightened responsiveness to both adverse and supportive contexts (Boyce & Ellis, 2005; Ellis et al., 2005). This model emphasizes the biological mechanisms, such as stress, that underlie environmental sensitivity.

Constructivism. An epistemological perspective asserting that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed through experience and interaction rather than objectivity discovered (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Within this capstone, constructivism provides a lens for understanding how HSPs interpret and create meaning from their lived experiences.

Differential Susceptibility Theory. A developmental framework proposing that some individuals are more susceptible than others to environmental influences, meaning they are more affected by both negative and positive contexts (Belsky & Pluess, 2009). This framework extends the idea of sensitivity beyond vulnerability, emphasizing potential for flourishing under supportive conditions.

Environmental Sensitivity. An umbrella concept encompassing individual differences in sensitivity to environmental stimuli, including sensory processing sensitivity, differential susceptibility, and biological sensitivity to context (Greven et al., 2019). It refers to the extent to which people are influenced by their surroundings.

Highly Sensitive Person (HSP). A term introduced by Aron and Aron (1997) to describe individuals high in sensory processing sensitivity. HSPs are characterized by deep cognitive and emotional processing, heightened empathy, awareness of subtle stimuli, and greater susceptibility to overstimulation.

Humanistic Psychology. A psychological approach emphasizing human potential, authenticity, and the innate drive toward growth and self-actualization (Buhler, 1971). Humanistic psychology views individuals as inherently worthy and capable of meaning-making (Buhler, 1971), aligning with this project's strengths-based interpretation of sensitivity.

Neurodiversity. A paradigm recognizing neurological differences, such as ASD, ADHD, etc., as natural variations within the human population rather than disorders to be cured (Marschall, 2025). A neurodiversity-affirming stance in counselling promotes inclusion, acceptance, and respect for cognitive diversity (Marschall, 2025).

Person-Centred Therapy. Developed by Carl Rogers (1951), person-centred therapy is grounded in the belief that psychological healings occur within relationships characterized by empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence.

Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS). A genetically influenced temperament trait found in approximately 20-35% of the population, involving deeper cognitive processing of sensory and emotional information, stronger reactivity to environmental stimuli, and greater emotional responsiveness (Aron & Aron, 1997). SPS is the foundation for the construct of the HSP and represents a biologically based form of environmental sensitivity.

Vantage Sensitivity. A related construct to differential susceptibility, vantage sensitivity describes the degree to which individuals particularly benefit from positive and supportive environments (Pluess & Belsky, 2013). It highlights the potential for growth and thriving among those high in sensitivity when nurtured in.

Outline of Capstone Chapters

This capstone is organized into three chapters that progress from conceptual grounding to synthesis and practical application. Each chapter builds upon the last to provide a cohesive exploration of HSPs as a meaningful and nonpathologizing way of being, framed through a humanistic, person-centred lens.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 established the foundation of the capstone by introducing the research topic, its purpose, and the guiding research question: How can HSPs be supported within a therapeutic context, based on themes emerging from qualitative studies of lived experience? It presented the background and rationale for examining the lived experiences of HSPs within counselling psychology, framing this as both an ethical and a cultural competency concern. This chapter outlined the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study and described the qualitative thematic synthesis methodology. It also included a reflexivity and positioning statement, definitions of key terms, and this outline of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive synthesis of the qualitative research related to SPS and the lived experience of HSPs. Using thematic synthesis as outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008), this chapter identifies and organizes key patterns across existing studies to capture the emotional, relational, and existential dimensions of sensitivity. The review critically examines both deficit-oriented and strengths-based perspectives in the literature and highlights theoretical, methodological, and practical gaps in current understandings of HSPs. Emphasis is placed on how the construct has been framed, pathologically, temperamentally, and culturally, and how humanistic and neurodiversity-affirming frameworks can recontextualize sensitivity as a valid and valuable expression of human diversity. The synthesis forms the conceptual foundation for the applied and reflective work in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Applied Practices

Chapter 3 integrates the findings from the literature synthesis and explores their implications for counselling practice, theory, and professional identity. It begins by revisiting the capstone's purpose and research question, interpreting how the synthesized themes enhance understanding of SPS and the lived experiences of HSP. The discussion highlights the ethical and cultural importance of moving from deficit-based to strengths-based conceptualizations of sensitivity and addresses existing limitations and structural biases in the literature. Building on these insights, the chapter introduces a new framework that offers practical guidance for fostering validation, emotional regulation, and empowerment in therapy. This capstone concludes with a reflection on the personal and professional learning, highlighting how embracing sensitivity as a form of human diversity can deepen both counsellor development and the practice of inclusive, compassionate care.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction and Overview of Literature

Chapter 2 reviews and synthesizes the qualitative literature on SPS and the lived experiences of HSPs. While SPS has increasingly been examined in quantitative research and linked to personality traits, temperament, and differential susceptibility (Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Gubler et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2025; Williams & Blagrove, 2024), comparatively much less attention has been paid to first-person, phenomenological accounts of what it is actually like to live as a highly sensitive adult. For example, a search of the City University of Seattle library database done on November 5, 2025, yielded 16 peer-reviewed journal articles using the search terms HSP/SPS and qualitative, 15 of which were published within the last five years. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to in-depth exploration of the complexity of the human experience, especially in areas that are new, under-theorized, or characterized by debated constructs (Creswell & Poth, 2024), such as SPS. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of subjective meaning, emotional experience, and contextual influences that may be overlooked in quantitative measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2024). At the same time, qualitative research is not without limitations. It has been criticized for its reliance on researcher interpretation, which may introduce subjectivity and limit statistical generalizability, as well as the potential influence of researcher bias (Mwita, 2022). Nevertheless, for counsellors, I have witnessed firsthand how this experiential dimension is crucial because it is often the client's felt sense of being too much, too emotional, or different that brings them into therapy, not their score on a sensitivity scale

The focus of this chapter is therefore on primary qualitative studies in which adults are identified as HSP or having SPS, and where sensitivity is explored through the participant's first-hand experiences. Across these eight studies, sensitivity emerges as more than an individual trait; it is an experience that is shaped by relational, cultural, and environmental contexts, and the meanings people attach to being sensitive (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch,

2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). The literature reflects both deficit-oriented narratives and a strength-based perspective that frames sensitivity as a valid and potentially valuable way of being, given the right conditions of support and fit.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the body of qualitative research was synthesized using a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008), guided by humanistic, person-centred theory. Rather than gathering results by individual study, the aim here is to identify shared patterns of meaning across studies and to consider how these patterns illuminate the emotional, relational, and existential dimensions of SPS. This approach emphasizes the subjective experience of participants using their own language and interpretation, consistent with the person-centred emphasis on phenomenology, unconditional positive regard, and respect for the client's internal frame of reference (Cooper & Bohart, 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2024).

After examining the eight qualitative peer-reviewed articles, the synthesis generated four overarching themes that structure this chapter. The first, Empathy, Attunement, and Boundaries, captures HSPs' heightened sensitivity to emotional and interpersonal nuance, alongside the challenges of maintaining a clear sense of self and sustainable limits in relationships. The second, Identity, Stigma, and Meaning-Making, explores how individuals come to understand and name their sensitivity as a deficit or a gift. The third, Self-Care, Regulation, and Pacing, examines the strategies HSPs use to regulate arousal and conserve energy, as well as how they structure their lives to support well-being. The fourth, Emotional and Perception Amplification, describes the intensified sensory and emotional processing, including both its burdens and its rewards. Throughout this chapter, these themes are used to synthesize, rather than simply summarize, the existing studies. Points of convergence and divergence across the literature are highlighted. Additionally, attention is given to how sensitivity is framed, pathologically, temperamentally, or culturally, and what is missing or underrepresented in current research. The chapter concludes by identifying theoretical, methodological, and practical gaps and by

showing how this thematic synthesis provides a conceptual foundation for applied person-centred and neurodiversity-affirming work developed in Chapter 3.

Summary of Qualitative Evidence Base and Quality Appraisal

A systematic qualitative literature search was conducted, as described in detail in Chapter 1, using the City University of Seattle library databases and Google Scholar between July and October 2025. Search terms utilized SPS/HSP descriptors, combined with qualitative methodology keywords and were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles in English from 2020-2025. This search yielded eight qualitative studies, which represented the full body of peer-reviewed qualitative research meeting the inclusion/exclusion criteria and examining the lived experiences of adults who identify as HSP or high in SPS. The decision to concentrate exclusively on qualitative studies was therefore methodologically and empirically driven, as the research question sought to explore experiential and meaning-based dimensions of sensitivity that are not accessible through quantitative designs alone. In keeping with Thomas and Harden's (2008) thematic synthesis approach, the purpose of study inclusion was "purposive rather than exhaustive because the purpose is interpretive explanation and not prediction" (Doyle, 2003, p. 326).

Snapshot of Qualitative Evidence Base

Collectively, the eight studies provide a rich yet emerging qualitative evidence base on HSP/SPS. They span a range of cultural and contextual settings, including Western Europe (the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom), North America (the United States of America), Australia, and South Asia (Pakistan). The samples include adults who self-identify as highly sensitive, well-being practitioners and therapists who identify as HSP, highly sensitive men, and sensitive individuals in specific cultures (e.g., Pakistan). Methodologically, the literature base is dominated by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) but also contains thematic analysis and grounded theory. All the studies use semistructured or in-depth interviews and include verbatim participant quotes as a central part of the

results. Across all articles, sensitivity is explored as a lived, meaningful experience rather than a mere score on a psychometric scale.

Quality Appraisal Using CASP

Each study was appraised using the CASP qualitative checklist (CASP, 2025), as it is considered a good measure of transparency within academia (Long et al., 2020). Rather than using CASP as a pass/fail tool, it was applied to assess the trustworthiness and robustness of the evidence base and to inform how much interpretive weight to give particular findings in the synthesis (Long et al., 2020). A summary table of CASP ratings for all included studies is provided (see Table 4).

Table 4

Critical Appraisal Skills Program Appraisal of Included Qualitative Studies

Author (year)	Aim	Methodology	Design	Recruitment	Data collection	Reflexivity	Ethics	Analysis	Findings	Value
Bas et al. (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Black & Kern (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Friedrich & Lomas (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Miller & Lynch (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rafiq et al. (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell
Roth et al. (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes
Roxburgh (2023)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans (2025)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Strengths and Limitations

Building upon this appraisal, it is possible to identify common strengths across the studies, as well as recurrent limitations and blind spots that shape how the findings can be interpreted. When viewed together, these patterns provide important context for assessing the credibility, depth, and transferability of the qualitative evidence for SPS/HSP.

Strengths

Clarity of Aims and Methodology. Selecting the phenomenon and participants to be studied is a foundational step in qualitative research, as this decision defines the scope of inquiry and informs all subsequent methodological choices (Savin-Baden & Major, 2025). All eight of the studies included in the literature review articulated clear aims that focused on understanding the lived experiences of SPS/HSP within particular contexts. These contexts included everyday life and identity (Bas et al., 2021; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023), wellbeing and coping (Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023), gender socialization (Miller & Lynch, 2024), and clinical practice among therapists or wellbeing practitioners (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). In all cases, the chosen qualitative methodology was appropriate to these aims. IPA was most frequently used, with five of eight articles choosing it due to its focus on exploring the lived experiences of HSPs (J. A. Smith et al., 2022). Thematic analysis was used by Bas et al. (2021) and was an appropriate choice, as it is another popular method in qualitative research and is especially well-suited for analyzing thick data (Naeem et al., 2023). Finally, grounded theory is designed to develop theory directly from data (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Glaser & Strauss, 2017) and was chosen by the authors, Friedrich and Lomas (2024), to “feel, interpret, and understand the experiences of highly sensitive wellness practitioners” (p. 15). These methodological alignments strengthen confidence that the study designs could capture the nuanced, subjective, and relational aspects of sensitivity that this capstone is interested in.

Sampling, Recruitment, and Measurement Tools. Most qualitative research utilizes purposeful

sampling because it meets four criteria: that the sample adequately represents the context, captures diversity within the population, includes theoretically significant cases, and enables comparisons that clarify differences across individuals or settings (Savin-Baden Major, 2025). Most studies examined in this literature review employed purposive sampling and recruited participants via social media. Using social media for recruitment has many advantages, including access to a targeted audience, faster recruitment, and reduced costs (Oudat & Bakas, 2023). Roxburgh (2023) did not use social media as part of the recruitment process but instead utilized in-person meet-up groups. Black and Kern (2020) elected to use a subset of participants from their prior unpublished study, which also studied SPS. The original study included 430 participants, of whom 37 scored high on SPS; only 12 were interviewed. In general, recruitment strategies were clearly described, and the samples were appropriate for the research questions. All authors used the HSPS, developed by Aron and Aron (1997), as a measurement tool during recruitment to ensure that participants met a threshold for sensitivity. The HSPS has a proven acceptable level of internal consistency, with verification supporting both unidimensional and three-factor models (H. L. Smith et al., 2019). This measure has also been shown to perform adequately as a screening instrument (H. L. Smith et al., 2019).

Data Collection and Use of Quotations. Data collection procedures were typically well-described and appropriate to the depth of exploration required. All eight studies used semistructured qualitative interviews as the primary data collection method, tailored to their populations varying from single interviews (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025) to a multisession design (Miller & Lynch, 2024). Semistructured interviews offer a flexible yet systematic approach to exploring lived experience, though they require careful reflexivity and methodological transparency to mitigate interviewer influence and ensure analytic rigour (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Interviews were usually conducted one-to-one, either in person or online, with interview guides designed to elicit rich accounts of sensitivity. de

Villiers et al. (2022) noted that face-to-face interviews are the most natural and allow for superior communication because researchers can read facial and body cues. However, they indicate that video interviews allow for greater participant diversity due to their geographical span, but researchers may encounter greater technological difficulties. All authors demonstrated their expertise in interviewing by following an interview protocol, quintessential to qualitative research, which Creswell and Poth (2024) described as a set of key questions designed to reassure participants and encourage them to disclose about their lives. Friedrich and Lomas (2024) demonstrated this well by adding interview questions that prompted and probed participants, enabling the researchers to gather more information on "participants' emotions, thoughts, intentions, and actions" (p. 6).

A notable area of strength highlighted across the body of literature is the consistent use of rich, illustrative verbatim quotations. The use of verbatim transcription in qualitative research has been shown to improve the reliability and accuracy of participant data (Hill et al., 2022). Each study presented the participants' words to exemplify key themes, allowing readers to trace interpretive claims back to their lived experience. For this capstone, verbatim quotations are imperative for the thematic synthesis method, because it relies on line-by-line coding of the original findings reported in the study (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Additionally, this wealth of quotations also supports the person-centred lens being used. Rogers's emphasis on honouring the client's internal frame of reference underscores that how people describe their sensitivity is not merely illustrative, but the exact phenomenon being studied (Freire & Di Malta, 2024).

Limitations

Reflexivity and Researcher Positioning. Across all the studies reviewed, one of the most consistent limitations was related to reflexivity. In qualitative research, researchers must position themselves to develop a deeper understanding of how they, as individuals, influence the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Savin-Baden and Major (2025) highlighted that qualitative researchers

must include their personal stance, positionality, and reflexivity. These authors explained that personal stances are composed of deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and views of the world, and that they are shaped by cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic context, age, gender, and other factors. Researcher positionality arises from a personal stance but is more focused on the position the researcher chooses to adopt for the particular study in relation to the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2025). Reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher cannot remain outside the process but is an integral part of it, and that reflection is necessary to determine the influence on the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2025).

Apart from the Roxburgh (2023) and Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) studies, which included titled sections addressing reflexivity, the other studies only lightly touched on the subject. For some articles, reflexivity was inferred solely from their methodology (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023). However, Friedrich and Lomas (2024) did state their use of reflexive memos and sharing of insights between researchers. Some of the authors opted to include disclosure that they were highly sensitive themselves (Miller & Lynch, 2024; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). Roth et al. (2023) did not address personal stance, positionality, nor reflexivity at all. This lack of reflexivity discussion in the articles made it harder to fully assess how the interpretive lens and identities may have influenced what was noticed, pursued, or left out in interviews and analysis. Moreover, this is a significant gap from a person-centred and phenomenological perspective, where the relationship and frame of reference matter.

Sample Composition and Scope of Transferability. A second cluster of limitations concerns recruitment detail, sample composition, and the resulting scope of claims. Although the studies described the basic inclusion criteria and recruitment routes, there was minimal information about who declined participation, the demographics of nonresponders, or how sampling decisions may have shaped the narratives. In the reviewed studies, the majority were conducted in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) individualistic contexts, with the majority of participants

being female (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). However, two studies did offer important counterpoints. One study examined highly sensitive men navigating masculinity norms, with a varied participant pool including people of colour and various sexual orientations (Miller & Lynch, 2024), and the second examined Pakistani young adults' descriptions of their sensitivity (Rafiq et al., 2023). The Rafiq et al. (2023) article did a good job balancing the distribution of participants: ten males and 11 females. These two studies are important to the synthesis because they begin to challenge a purely Western feminine, middle-class picture of HSPs, but they remain numerically and geographically limited. Although qualitative studies do not seek statistical generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2024), these sampling patterns nonetheless represent a significant limitation of the current evidence base. Additionally, all studies used purposive or convenience sampling (via meet-up groups, social media, newsletters, or authors' networks) and, in several cases, skewed the gender or cultural composition, adding to the constraints on transferability beyond the studied groups (Andrade, 2021).

Analytic and Ethical Transparency. Finally, analysis and ethical reporting were uneven in depth across the body of literature. Most articles clearly named an analytical framework, with IPA as the dominant choice. In contrast, Roth et al. (2023) did not specify a framework and left readers to speculate about its methodology from the description. Additionally, most articles offered some description of coding and theme generation. However, fewer provided step-by-step accounts, examples of coding matrices, or discussions of how multiple researchers collaborated, negotiated meaning, or resolved discrepancies. These gaps limit the appraisal of credibility and reproducibility (Creswell & Poth, 2024). For example, Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) outlined independent dual analysis and theme-merging procedures while Miller and Lynch described analytic memoing, participant feedback on emergent themes, and staged coding. Bas et al. (2021) noted double-coding, team discussion of codes, and a member-check meeting. However, several papers either described analytic steps more generally

or omitted these practices altogether (Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023).

In terms of ethics, ethical reporting was inconsistent and generally limited across all reviewed studies, representing another clear weakness. While all papers noted formal approval and basic consent/confidentiality procedures, few provided full ethics details such as data-availability statements, clear withdrawal/retention policies, or how researcher positionality was managed in relation to participant risk. For example, Friedrich and Lomas (2024) reported consent, anonymization, and storage procedures but lack a data-availability statement and offer limited detail on withdrawal timing. Roxburgh (2023) documents ethics committee approval and participant consent but provides limited information on transcript/member-checking procedures. Bas et al. (2021) confirm informed consent and participant feedback meetings yet provide only selective reporting of data-sharing and participant safeguarding steps. In the context-specific studies, they described consent and confidentiality but omit systematic statements on storage duration, participant debriefing, or formal data-availability routes (Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023).

Rather than excluding these studies because of their limitations, CASP was used heuristically to gauge the relative trustworthiness of each study. All eight studies met a reasonable standard of methodological quality, with no major methodological red flags warranting their removal from the synthesis. Each received an overall moderate to high CASP appraisal and provided sufficiently rich, verbatim participant quotations to allow for meaningful interpretive reading. As such, all studies were retained in the analysis and were given equal weighting. The next stage of analysis involved conducting a thematic synthesis, allowing for integration of findings across studies and the development of interpretive themes.

Thematic Synthesis

This synthesis revealed a set of interconnected themes that reflect how HSPs experience and make meaning of their heightened sensitivity across emotional, relational, and environmental contexts.

There were four overarching themes identified: Empathy, Attunement, and Boundaries; Identity, Stigma, and Meaning-Making; Self-Care, Regulation, and Pacing; and Emotional and Perceptual Amplification. Each theme encompasses subthemes that illuminate distinct but overlapping dimensions of the highly sensitive experience, illustrating both the enriching and challenging aspects of living with SPS.

Theme 1: Empathy, Attunement, and Boundaries

The first theme emerging from the literature review explores the relational and emotional dimension of sensitivity, highlighting how HSPs experience and manage their deep responsiveness to others and their surroundings. This theme captures the dual processes through which sensitivity manifests interpersonally, examining how individuals feel and notice emotional nuance, and how they work to maintain equilibrium within that openness. The subthemes discussed below include empathic resonance (Bas et al., 2021; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025), hyper-attunement/microcues (Bas et al., 2021; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025), and self-other differentiation/boundaries (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). Empathic resonance represents the affection aspect of connection, encapsulated in the phrase, I feel what you feel, where emotions are shared and absorbed through deep relational attunement. Hyper-attunement and microcues describe the perceptual side, reflected in the statement, I notice what you feel. This subtheme reflects the heightened awareness of subtle emotional shifts and environmental energies. Self-other differentiation and boundaries encompass the ongoing challenge of regulating this sensitivity, addressing the energetic merging that occurs when empathy and attunement blur the distinction between self and other. From a person-centred perspective, these processes reflect the delicate balance between empathy and congruence described by Rogers (1957, 1980), where authentic presence and self-awareness are essential to sustaining compassionate connection without emotional fusion. Collectively, these

subthemes illustrate empathy as both an extraordinary strength and a process that requires conscious boundary setting to preserve authenticity and emotional well-being.

Subtheme 1: Empathic Resonance. Across the reviewed studies, empathic resonance appeared as the emotional core of sensitivity. Participants in multiple qualitative studies described sensing and absorbing the emotions of others with immediacy and physicality. One participant shared, “I can just look around the group and immediately spot who is feeling well and who is fighting as a couple, or where there’s tension” (Bas et al., 2021, p. 8). In Roth et al. (2023), many spoke of entering a room and instantly feeling “what the others are feeling” (p. 7), suggesting that empathy for HSPs is less a deliberate act and more an embodied state of receptivity. Similarly, Roxburgh (2023) found that participants described reading faces, picking up on moods, and being both uplifted and depleted by this emotional permeability, a process often referred to as both a blessing and a curse. In Friedrich and Lomas (2024), therapists used phrases such as “resonance body” and “tap into” (p. 10) to describe how emotions were somatically felt and then gently reflected back to clients. Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans (2025) echoed this relational depth, describing how practitioners engaged in “matching or joining the energetic quality of the client” and could “read the atmosphere” (p. 5), a form of empathic mirroring that relies on intuition as much as awareness.

Subtheme 2: Hyper-Attunement and Microcues. While empathic resonance reflects the felt dimension of sensitivity, the subtheme of hyper-attunement and microcues captures its perceptual counterpart, I notice what you feel. Across the reviewed studies, participants consistently described an extraordinary capacity to detect subtleties in others and in the surrounding environment, often noticing shifts long before they were verbalized. Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) found that therapists “noticed a shift in the room,” could “read the atmosphere,” and “hyper attune to micro-changes in clients” (p. 5), describing a form of intuitive vigilance that operated beneath conscious thought. This heightened perception also appeared in general population samples. One participant in Roxburgh (2023)

reported how she “read faces quite well” (p. 385), another described “noticing subtleties in people’s body language” (p. 385), and another explained how she can “pick up on people, how they are presenting, how they are behaving” (p. 385). Friedrich and Lomas (2024) confirmed this in their theme Sensing the Subtle, in which wellbeing practitioners described perceiving faint, often invisible shifts, such as changes in tone, posture, or energy, within both their environments and their bodies.

Hyper-attunement was not limited to interpersonal cues, as it extended to sensory and environmental detail as well. In Bas et al. (2021), participants reported feeling like they had “a lack of a filter” and “perceiving the world in high definition” (HD; p. 9). A participant shared “I sometimes specifically notice that when you walk past some place while you’re with someone, you might see something really beautiful and the person you’re with just completely misses it or walks past it.” (Bas et al., 2021, p. 9). Roth et al. (2023) likewise reported participants experiencing “more detailed perception of stimuli” and needing more time to process the influx of nuanced information, especially emotional cues” (p. 8). Rafiq et al. (2023) supported this pattern across a different cultural context, identifying being “attentive,” “keen observation,” and “intensive feelings” (p. 181) as core features of the highly sensitive experience. Taken together, these studies portray hyper-attunement as a perceptual opening marked by rapid detection of subtle interpersonal, emotional, and environmental cues. Whether it is momentary tightening of a jaw, a shift in tone, or an atmospheric change in a room, HSPs consistently described noticing what others overlook.

Subtheme 3: Self–Other Differentiation and Boundaries. Another recurring pattern across the studies was the tendency for emotional boundaries to blur, with participants describing how easily the feelings around them could seep into their own internal experiences. Rather than simply responding to others, many found themselves absorbing the emotional atmosphere of a room or the people within it, sometimes without realizing it until they felt off-balance. This theme was especially evident in the work of Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025), in which the therapists spoke openly about moments of

confusion: “Am I feeling my client or am I feeling the people around me or is that mine?” (p. 7). This statement highlights how quickly empathic sensitivity could become entangled with the emotions present in their therapeutic spaces. Similar dynamics appear in Friedrich and Lomas (2024), where wellbeing practitioners described knowing “what fills you up and what drains you” (p. 9) as essential for managing emotional boundaries, particularly when they become the default container for others’ distress.

Because they could slip so easily into others’ emotional worlds, participants often found themselves needing grounding moments to reconnect with their own inner experience. Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) noted that therapists relied on processing time and clear limits to prevent emotional overload, while Friedrich and Lomas (2024) described “clearing themselves” (p. 9) after sessions through rituals, allowing emotional residue to release from the body. Many also spoke of becoming more mindful about the source of their intuitive impressions, learning to differentiate genuine insight from emotional fusion (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024). In Roxburgh’s (2023) study, HSPs described an ongoing journey of learning when to step back, recognizing that setting boundaries was not instinctive but developed through experience and, often, exhaustion.

Across cultural contexts, participants described a similar movement toward self-protection and containment. In Rafiq et al. (2023), participants repeatedly described withdrawing from emotionally demanding situations as a coping mechanism. Sometimes this meant leaving environments altogether, retreating into solitude, or masking their own feelings to avoid intensifying the emotional atmospheres. The tendency of “putting on the mask” or “putting on my game face” (Miller & Lynch, 2024, p. 208) was also expressed as a way to manage sensitivity. Additionally, Roth et al. (2023) described participants who learned to distance themselves from emotionally demanding environments or expectations in order to preserve their sense of self.

Theme 2: Identity, Stigma, and Meaning-Making

The second theme that emerged from the literature review concerns how participants made sense of their sensitivity across the lifespan. These subthemes include pathologizing/relief (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025), shame/otherness (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023), and acceptance/sensitivity as a gift (Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). Sensitivity was often first experienced through a lens of pathology, with internalizing messages or assuming their heightened responses reflected anxiety, depression, or personality disorders. Sensitivity was also understood as an inherent temperament, and often influenced by gender expectations, family norms, or broader sociocultural values. The subthemes discussed below illustrate the meaning-making journey many HSPs undergo as they move from insecurity and experiences of difference toward a more compassionate and integrated understanding of the trait. From a person-centred perspective, these identity narratives reflect the core therapeutic process described by Rogers (1959, 1961), which outlines the movement from externally imposed conditions for worth toward greater self-acceptance, authenticity, and congruence.

Subtheme 1: Pathologizing Versus Relief. Across the reviewed studies, a recurring and often painful theme that popped up was the experience of having sensitivity framed as something wrong at an early age. Some participants grew up with messages that they were crazy, too emotional, that it was not safe to be themselves, and that they were thin-skinned and complicated (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Roth et al., 2023). One participant recalled, “extreme emotions…and that was another thing I used to think was wrong about me because that’s what people say is wrong about you” (Roxburgh, 2023, p. 386). As a result of these messages, many sought clinical explanations for their

sensitivity, assuming they might have a psychiatric disorder, such as borderline personality disorder, simply because these were the only available narratives that resembled their intensity (Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). Some participants described entering adulthood with a profound sense of defectiveness, unsure whether their experiences reflected temperament, disorder, or a personal failing (Black & Kern, 2020).

For many, the eventual discovery of SPS/HSP marked a profound shift in meaning. Instead of locating their struggles within pathology, participants described feeling an almost immediate sense of recognition. Participants described it "like the puzzle pieces fell into place and a hundred things suddenly make sense" (Bas et al., 2021, p. 11). Learning that sensitivity could be understood as a normal and heritable trait, rather than a clinical diagnosis, offered deep clarity and relief. In Roxburgh (2023), one individual described how her experience "started to make sense for her within a normative framework (as features of a personality trait) rather than a pathological one (as symptoms of a personality disorder)" (p. 386) and several others questioned whether past diagnoses were misinterpretations of their sensitivity. This relabeling allowed participants to reinterpret years of overwhelm not as evidence of instability, but as predictable outcomes of sensory and emotional depth. Friedrich and Lomas (2024) similarly noted that many wished they had known about HSP earlier in life, believing it would have prevented years of confusion, self-blame, and shame.

The act of naming the trait itself carried therapeutic power as well. Roth et al. (2023) found that, for many individuals, identifying as an HSP brought relief and a sense of normalcy. Participants in this study who had a long-held sense of being different or defective explained that they could replace it with a more positive understanding that increased their empathy, insightfulness, creativity, and consciousness. Black and Kern (2020) also suggested that learning about SPS could foster self-acceptance and reduce self-blame, especially for those who had internalized negative cultural or familial messages. This pattern was mirrored across cultural contexts. Rafiq et al. (2023) found that Pakistani

participants initially experienced sensitivity as a socially constructed weakness or emotional excess yet reported that recognition and understanding helped them reframe their sensitivity in a more compassionate light.

Subtheme 2: Shame and Otherness. The studies also uncovered another subtheme where many participants described a long-standing sense of being different or somehow misaligned with the emotional norms of their families, peers, and cultures. Participants in Roxburgh (2023) described that they had “always felt different” and “possibly wonky compared to a lot of people” (p. 386). Similarly, Roth et al. (2023) found that a pervasive sense of being unlike others was common and that the SPS label later replaced this feeling with more positive self-understanding. One participant shared the “feeling of being isolated, even within a group, and being somehow different” (Roth et al., 2023, p. 10). Bas et al. (2021) also identified feeling different as a core dimension of SPS identity and named this as part of their sixth theme. These longstanding perceptions of difference often functioned as early sources of shame, confusion, or isolation.

Experiences of teasing, bullying, or direct invalidation intensified these feelings of difference. Several participants across studies recalled being told to toughen up, stop overreacting, or hide their emotions, sending the message that sensitivity is a personal flaw (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023). Specifically, in Miller and Lynch’s (2024) study of highly sensitive men, participants described being mocked for their emotional depth, called gay, soft, or too sensitive, and pressured to suppress warmth and affection to conform to masculine norms. These encounters frequently generated shame around emotionality and reinforced the belief that sensitivity was socially unacceptable. Similar patterns emerged in Rafiq et al. (2023), where Pakistani individuals described being judged as weak, unsociable, or too hurt, reflecting a cultural environment in which emotional depth was often dismissed or stigmatized. Such invalidation across diverse contexts contributed to chronic self-doubt and reinforced the sense that sensitivity needed to be

hidden or managed to maintain acceptance.

Cultural and gender norms played a significant role in shaping these experiences. In Miller and Lynch (2024), highly sensitive men navigated hegemonic masculine expectations that positioned emotional expressiveness as a threat to social belonging and even physical safety. Black and Kern (2020) similarly noted that many individuals felt out of place in cultures that commend extraversion, productivity, and emotional restraint, leading participants to blame themselves for "not coping in certain environments" (p. 7). Roth et al. (2023) reported that participants frequently experienced negative social reactions when overstimulated or when expressing emotion, which reinforced the belief that their natural responses were excessive or inappropriate. These findings show how societal expectations can make emotional safety feel risky or unacceptable, contributing to isolation and identity conflict.

Experiences were further complicated when sensitivity intersected with marginalized identities. In Miller and Lynch (2024), men of colour described an added layer of vulnerability. They described how sensitivity conflicted not only with masculine norms but also with racialized expectations that demanded emotional toughness, leading to compounded pressure to suppress emotional expression. Rafiq et al. (2023) highlighted how cultural expectations of Pakistan, such as prioritizing others, enduring hardship silently, and avoiding emotional display, intensified feelings of marginalization among HSPs. These studies demonstrate that shame and otherness are not only personal but are shaped by broader sociocultural structures.

Despite these challenges, several studies have shown that learning about SPS offers a powerful reframing. In Roth et al. (2023), participants often described this shift as "liberation" (p. 10), replacing a long-held sense of being deficient with qualities of empathy, perceptiveness, and emotional depth. Roxburgh (2023) also found that as participants understood their sensitivity through a temperament lens rather than a pathological one, shame decreased and self-compassion increased. Friedrich and

Lomas (2024) reported that many practitioners wished they had known about SPS earlier, believing it would have helped them understand their experiences and feel less ashamed of their needs. This shift was also identified by Black and Kern (2020), who noted that participants reported that learning about SPS provided relief and promoted self-acceptance. However, Roth et al. (2023) cautioned that SPS terminology can be idealized, underscoring the need for a balanced and nuanced understanding.

Subtheme 3: Acceptance and Sensitivity as a Gift. The final subtheme identified across the reviewed studies reflected a gradual, hard-won shift in how participants came to understand their sensitivity. In many cases, individuals moved from confusion or self-doubt toward valuing sensitivity as an integral part of who they are. In Friedrich and Lomas (2024), all practitioners interviewed reported valuing their sensitivity, with one specifically describing the acknowledgement of it as a "huge relief" (p. 9) after years of self-questioning. Similarly, Roxburgh (2023) documented individuals who, through therapy or self-reflection, framed sensitivity from pathology to a trait they could live with more comfortably, achieving what one participant called "a better equilibrium" (p. 389). This process was echoed by Roth et al. (2023), who found that 19 participants reported improved well-being after recognizing themselves as highly sensitive. Black and Kern (2020) also found that learning about SPS prompted participants to adopt more self-care and experience "growing self-acceptance" (p. 7). All together, these findings illustrate how knowledge, reflection, and supportive contexts can shift sensitivity from a burden to an identity resource.

Participants also linked sensitivity to qualities they deeply valued, such as compassion, perceptiveness, creativity, spirituality, and even their professional purpose. In Friedrich and Lomas (2024), practitioners described their sensitivity as enabling profound empathy, intuitive understanding, and a capacity to offer holding space in ways that clients found uniquely safe and healing. Several of these practitioners explicitly tied their sensitivity to their vocation in helping professions, noting that their attunement to nuance and emotional depth enriched their therapeutic work. Similar findings were

reported by Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025), who described therapists noticing subtleties, matching clients' energetic qualities, and fostering relational depth due to their sensitivity. Roxburgh (2023) likewise reported that participants saw empathy as a defining aspect of their sensitivity, enabling them to support friends, family, and clients with unusual depth and presence. Creativity and appreciation of beauty also emerged as meaningful expressions of sensitivity, with Rafiq et al. (2023) noting that HSPs often describe deep appreciation for art, music, and aesthetic experiences. Spirituality formed another important dimension. Friedrich and Lomas (2024) highlighted that participants experiencing sensitivity as a form of "connecting to something bigger" (p. 10) through meditation, ritual, or even transformative experiences such as MDMA-assisted therapy. Rafiq et al. (2023) also identified deep spiritual experiences as part of sensitivity. These descriptions showed that for many, sensitivity felt not only acceptable but also very meaningful.

Some participants described their sensitivity as a gift or even a superpower, particularly when supported by adequate self-care, boundaries, and good emotional regulation. In Friedrich and Lomas (2024), multiple practitioners used this language directly, with one specifically saying, "It's a superpower. It's a gift. I get the reflection every single day of the impact" (p. 10). Roxburgh (2023) reported similar sentiments, with several participants noting that, when managed through therapy, routines, and healthy boundaries, their sensitivity felt like a gift rather than a liability. Therefore, sensitivity can become a superpower when the environment is supportive, when self-care is prioritized, and when individuals feel empowered to live congruently with their needs.

Although many participants embraced the positive side of sensitivity, ambivalence persisted for some. In Friedrich and Lomas (2024), one practitioner admitted they "wouldn't mind an off-switch" and another shared, "I find it really difficult to be sensitive. It's great, but it's challenging" (p. 8). Roxburgh (2023) similarly reported that participants sometimes wished they could be less sensitive, especially during moments of extreme emotion or self-doubt. In Miller and Lynch's (2024) study, highly sensitive

men described internalized stigma and self-devaluation tied to masculine norms, illustrating how cultural expectations could complicate acceptance. However, despite these examples of ambivalence, most narratives across studies revealed a gradual movement toward greater compassion and self-understanding.

Theme 3: Self-Care, Regulation, and Pacing

Themes one and two focused on the lived experiences of HSPs, providing for deeper insight into their lives. In contrast, theme 3 shifts toward the more practical strategies participants use to navigate and manage their sensitivity. Across all the studies, it was very clear that sensitivity requires active regulation with intentional strategies that help HSPs remain balanced and become more aware of their energy. The two subthemes of rituals/practices (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025) and solitude/pacing (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023) encompass how participants achieve this. From a person-centred perspective, these regulatory practices demonstrate a move toward congruence, the emerging ability to live in alignment with one's internal experiences rather than external practices (Cornelius-White, 2024).

Subtheme 1: Rituals and Practices. Participants described a wide range of intentional practices that helped them regulate emotional intensity and sensory input. In Roth et al.'s (2023) article, 21 individuals were using relaxation approaches such as autogenic training, yoga, or meditation. Practitioners in Friedrich and Lomas's (2024) study favoured grounding techniques such as yoga, breathwork, meditation, embodiment exercises, and time in nature to restore balance. Some also incorporated spiritual or transcendental practices, including meditation-based rituals, vision quests, or psychedelic-assisted protocols. Similar approaches were reported in Bas et al. (2021), where mindfulness, meditation, and yoga emerged as key strategies for processing emotional information and reducing intrusive thoughts. Roxburgh (2023) likewise noted that therapy, structured self-care routines,

and time outdoors supported participants. Creative practices emerged as another meaningful form of regulation. Friedrich and Lomas (2024) shared that several practitioners were deeply moved by music, art, or aesthetic experiences, using these moments to ground themselves and reconnect to their inner world. One practitioner expressed, “It’s just like inner moments. I can have deep pleasure from very simple things” (p. 7).

These practices serve both as ongoing maintenance and as scheduled down-regulation. Participants reported that neglecting self-care routines often led to exhaustion and anxiety, highlighting the importance of consistent practices (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024). Therapists in Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) echoed this sentiment, with one admitting that by the end of the work week, “My battery’s dead. I don’t have anything more to give. I can’t relate more. I can’t listen more, like that’s a very strong experience for me” (p. 7). Some individuals combine sensory-reducing approaches, such as quiet rooms and low lighting, with psychological strategies, such as mindfulness and cognitive reframing, to prevent or recover from overstimulation (Bas et al., 2021). Roxburgh (2023) similarly found that although participants viewed sensitivity as a gift, they became destabilized when it became unregulated. One individual shared their coping strategy, “every day I try to do something – it’s exercise or coming home and reading a book” (Black & Kern, 2020, p. 5). Black and Kern (2020) emphasized that cultivating this kind of balance is a key component for maintaining well-being.

Subtheme 2: Solitude and Pacing. Solitude and quiet were also described in many studies as not only helpful but also essential to maintaining emotional and sensory equilibrium. All participants in Black and Kern (2020) discussed how solitude was mandatory for their well-being, with one participant declaring, “solitude is something that’s very important for me to maintain some of my sanity and my energy” (p. 6). Others in this study discussed how being alone is built into their schedules and that it brings them happiness to retreat to the bush, away from everyone else, with only their dog. Similar themes appear in Roxburgh (2023), where a participant stated, “I can go into hermit mode; I just need to

be away from everything, people might not hear from me for a few weeks" (p. 386). These statements highlight how extended periods of retreat are sometimes necessary to recover from emotional or sensory overload. Bas et al. (2021) echoed these accounts, with all participants stating the need for quiet to prevent or recover from overstimulation. Consistent with this, several studies emphasized nature as a particularly restorative space with participants reporting a need to seek out forests, quiet outdoor settings, or simply time among the trees to decompress and feel grounded (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh, 2023).

Alongside solitude, participants described a range of pacing strategies that helped them moderate exposure to social and environmental demands. Although participants derived happiness from social interaction, many preferred one-to-one interactions or small groups, finding that large gatherings or crowds quickly drained them (Black & Kern, 2020). Individuals described turning down invitations after taxing weeks, noting that "I need to go home" (Black & Kern, 2020, p. 6) rather than push through additional socializing. Similar preferences were identified by Friedrich and Lomas (2024), who found that individuals avoided crowds and gravitated toward social contexts involving embodied or creative activities, such as singing or dancing, that felt less overwhelming. Highly sensitive men in the article by Miller and Lynch (2024) reported avoiding groups where they felt pressured to code-switch or perform normative masculinity, instead choosing to spend time with people who allowed emotional expression.

Individuals also described structuring their work and daily responsibilities to minimize overstimulation. One participant explained that having "one big simple task" felt manageable, whereas juggling "ten smaller tasks" (Black & Kern, 2020, p. 7) produced significant stress. Bas et al. (2021) similarly observed that participants needed to space out activities, schedule quiet time, and sometimes engage in "doing nothing" (p. 10) to prevent overwhelm. When environments became too intense, many individuals just left. Roxburgh (2023) described a participant who sought out "head space" (p. 12)

by retreating into the woods and lying in a hammock to calm his nervous system. Others used practical tools to reduce sensory load, such as noise-cancelling headphones, sunglasses, or deliberately avoiding large venues (Bas et al., 2021; Roth et al., 2023).

A notable developmental shift appeared across studies, in which needs that once felt shameful or weird were gradually reinterpreted as legitimate forms of self-care. Friedrich and Lomas (2024) framed this as part of a broader journey where practitioners moved from concealing their sensitivity to embracing daily rituals and grounding practices that are essential to their well-being. Black and Kern (2020) found that learning about SPS contributed to this shift, enabling participants to say no without guilt. They also identified that participants started to recognize that feelings of overwhelm were not personal failings but predictable responses to high sensitivity. Roxburgh (2023) reported similar narratives where participants developed greater self-awareness and boundaries, reframing solitude and pacing as necessary for their health. Roth et al. (2023) also noted that after recognizing themselves as HSPs, many participants began paying more attention to their needs and treating them with greater respect.

Theme 4: Emotional and Perceptual Amplification

The final theme captured the emotional and perceptual amplification that most HSPs feel. It was uncovered that SPS is not experienced as simply feeling more, but as a kind of amplified noticing. This is a heightened intensity in emotional, perceptual, and bodily experience that affects everyday life in vivid and sometimes overwhelming ways. The two subthemes of depth (Bas et al., 2021; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025) and overwhelm/somatics (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025) illustrate the dual nature of this. Depth describes the positive and negative ways in which HSPs experience emotional and perceptual richness. It can be described as seeing the world in HD while everyone else sees it in black and white (Roxburgh, 2023). While this depth can enhance life with greater

vividness, it can also manifest as emotional saturation, lingering hurt, and difficulty letting go. The second subtheme, Overwhelm & Somatics, highlights the bodily experience of this amplification. It can include sensory overload, rapid physiological arousal, exhaustion, and somatic symptoms that feel like they are out of your control. In person-centred terms, this amplification represents a deeply responsive organismic valuing process that becomes distressing only when environments impose conditions that interrupt authentic experiencing (Rogers, 1959, 1961).

Subtheme 1: Depth. Participants in the studies reviewed consistently described their emotional and perceptual lives as unusually vivid and intense, with extraordinary depth. Participant Luke summed it up by saying, “I see it more as going deeper and experiencing things more vividly, more intensively than the population” (Roxburgh, 2023, p. 385). Several individuals reported experiencing emotions that felt “extreme” (Roxburgh, 2023, p. 385) compared to those around them. This intensity is not limited to distress, for many HSPs have strong, sometimes overwhelming, responses to beauty, art, music, nature, and spiritual experiences (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023). In Friedrich and Lomas (2024), one participant described it as the “ability to feel the richness of the tapestry of life and all its beauty” (p. 7) and several viewed these moments as pivotal to their well-being (Black & Kern, 2020). Similar patterns appeared in Rafiq et al. (2023), where aesthetic sensitivity and spiritual depth were highlighted as characteristics of high sensitivity. This amplification extended into the interpersonal realm as well. Participants described noticing subtleties in tone, atmosphere, microexpressions, and experiencing everyday scenes as if in HD (Bas et al., 2021; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025).

This ability to experience profound reverence for beauty also means that painful experiences cut deeper and last longer (Bas et al., 2021). Participants across several studies reported being deeply affected by conflict, criticism, injustice, or disturbing media that left them feeling emotionally destabilized long after the event passed (Bas et al., 2021; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh,

2023). Additionally, many described needing more time than others to process difficult interactions or stimulating situations (Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). It was explained “that inner and outer sensory stimuli just slip very crudely and unfiltered and uncategorized into my consciousness” (Roth et al., 2023, p. 7), therefore needing “more time to process and to collate them (Roth et al., 2023, p. 8). These accounts suggest that depth is experienced as a double-edged phenomenon. It is a source of richness and meaning, but also one of vulnerability when environmental conditions are less than ideal.

Subtheme 2: Overwhelm and Somatics. Alongside the depth described in the previous subtheme, another commonality that was frequently spoken of was the bodily cost of taking in so much, so quickly. When emotional or sensory input exceeded their capacity, many participants described hitting a point of stimulus saturation, often using vivid metaphors to communicate the experience. In Roth et al. (2023), participants shared feeling as though they were “internally imploding” or that their “head will explode” and “that their body is really sapped of energy” (p. 8). This imagery was echoed by therapists in Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) who described similar sensations when attuned to too many emotional inputs at once. These subjective experiences were accompanied by concrete physiological responses, such as a racing heart, breathlessness, headaches, and muscle tension (Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). For some, the feeling of overwhelm felt like hitting an energetic wall, described as “battery’s dead” and “flu-like exhaustion” (Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025, p. 7). Burnout was also a typical result when recovery or processing time was insufficient (Rafiq et al., 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025).

These reactions were often linked to demanding environments. Participants noted heightened sensitivity to noise, bright lights, crowded spaces, and rapid-fire demands; these circumstances quickly tipped the scale from alertness into overwhelm (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). Emotional intensity, especially in helping professions, can produce its own form of overload. Therapists spoke of absorbing their clients’ distress, blurring emotional boundaries, and

needing deliberate grounding practices to avoid collapse or emotional overflow (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). These authors described that in these moments, the body often signalled what the mind missed when limits were not honoured, appearing as somatic symptoms such as tension, fatigue, or complete bodily shutdown.

Cross-Cutting Critique and Gaps in Literature

The qualitative studies examined here offer rich insight into the lived experiences of HSPs. However, many gaps have emerged, affecting the field's theoretical scope, methodological strength, and practical applications. When viewed together, these gaps may suggest that the current literature may only capture a partial picture of what it means to be highly sensitive. The articles often underrepresented the relational, cultural, and contextual forces that shape the experience. This section outlines key areas that could use further development.

Theoretical Gaps

A notable limitation in the existing body of work reviewed is the tendency to frame SPS primarily as an individual trait. Many studies view sensitivity as a stable, internal characteristic, drawing on Aron's (1997) foundational model of personality constructs. While these frames provide conceptual clarity, they obscure how relational patterns, cultural norms, and environmental conditions actively shape whether sensitivity manifests as a vulnerability or strength. This capstone highlighted how participants frequently describe shame, overwhelm, and of not belonging arising not from sensitivity itself but from the contexts that demand emotional suppression and constant stimulation. Yet, very few studies conceptualized sensitivity as an interactional phenomenon, described by Hutchinson (2022) as only existing in the person because of their surroundings. Perhaps a theoretical shift toward relational, ecological, and sociocultural framing is needed to fully understand the complexity of HSP experiences.

Closely related is the absence of explicit engagement with humanistic and neurodiversity-affirming frameworks. Many of the participants' narratives echo core person-centred processes, yet

these connections remain largely unspoken in the literature. Interestingly, Elizabeth Roxburgh herself is a humanistic therapist, and so were the majority of the therapists interviewed in the Roxburgh and Wright-Bevans (2025) study. This may suggest a natural alignment between HSPs and humanistic therapy approaches. Additionally, the reframing of sensitivity from pathology to an aspect of identity, outlined in this capstone, strongly aligns with neurodiversity-informed perspectives. Most of the studies do not situate SPS within broader discussions of temperament diversity or environmental fit. However, Bas et al. (2021) did suggest that increasing public understanding of SPS could improve person-environment fit by fostering more accommodating contexts. With all this in mind, the field may benefit from theoretical models that more intentionally draw upon Rogers's (1961) concepts of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and the organismic valuing process, alongside neurodiversity's emphasis on difference rather than deficit (Leadbitter et al., 2021; Walker, 2021).

The studies synthesized reported HSP participant themes such as empathic resonance, identity struggles, overwhelm, and boundary development. Yet, they did so without integrating them into a coherent developmental or clinical model. Moreover, there was little said about how these areas interact over time. It would be interesting to discover how identity development affects coping over the lifespan or how relational environments in childhood influence adult empathic openness. Given the recurring patterns in HSP's narratives, the field may be ready for a more integrated, process-oriented model of SPS.

Finally, SPS remains a relatively young and emerging field of study that has caught traction in both popular media and scientific discourse (Greven et al., 2025). As a result, its conceptual foundations are still under debate. Roth et al. (2023), for example, argue that the distinctiveness of SPS "seems at least questionable from a scientific perspective" (p. 3), noting its substantial overlap with existing personality constructs such as neuroticism, openness, and introversion. They suggest that the appeal of the SPS label may lie in its more affirming, strengths-based framing of traits that are otherwise

associated with negative connotation. Ongoing disagreement over definitions, theoretical boundaries, and core mechanisms means that even SPS researchers have not reached consensus, complicating measurement, interpretation, and the coherence of the broader evidence base. This developmental stage does not invalidate the construct but does highlight that SPS research is still maturing, thereby leaving the field somewhat vulnerable.

Methodological Gaps

There were methodological limitations, but they were discussed more extensively earlier in this chapter. To recap, most studies drew on small, homogeneous WEIRD samples, in which participants were mostly White, educated, and from Western countries, and were already familiar with the HSP construct. This raises concerns about cultural bias and limiting the generality of the findings. The one non-Western study (Rafiq et al., 2023) confirmed that SPS does exist outside of Western contexts. However, the authors did not adequately describe Pakistani cultural values, relational norms, or social expectations. Thus, the study does little to illuminate what sensitivity looks like in a distinctly Pakistani cultural context. Reflexivity was also underreported across most studies. Although studying deeply subjective and embodied experiences, many authors offered minimal discussion about their own positionality or assumptions. This reduced the interpretive transparency. Furthermore, the methodological diversity is limited. Most studies relied on single interviews and thematic or IPA approaches with no longitudinal (Audulv et al., 2022), participatory (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020) or intervention-focused designs (Morgan-Trimmer & Wood, 2016). As a result, little is known about how sensitivity develops, how identity shifts unfold over time, or what supports meaningful change. And finally, adjacent constructs such as trauma histories and attachment patterns are often acknowledged but rarely examined in detail.

Practical Gaps

Despite the clinical relevance of SPS, practical guidance for counsellors remains surprisingly thin.

It was this exact revelation that inspired the creation of this capstone. HSPs frequently describe overwhelm, empathic over-absorption, shame, boundary challenges, and difficulties navigating relational context, but research rarely translates these challenges into clinical implications. There is almost no research exploring which therapeutic modalities or relational conditions best support HSPs. Additionally, there is little literature advising therapists on how they might differentiate SPS from anxiety disorders, trauma responses, or personality-based distress. Moreover, several studies noted that many therapists themselves identify as highly sensitive (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025) but do not investigate therapist sensitivity within the therapeutic relationship. Questions around empathic overidentification, supervision needs, burnout, or the most effective modalities remain largely unanswered. This represents a significant practical gap, especially given the prevalence of HSPs in helping professions.

Conclusion: From Synthesis to Application

This chapter brought together eight qualitative studies to illustrate how highly sensitive adults understand, navigate, and give meaning to their emotional and sensory lives. The four themes comprised the core contribution of this synthesis, demonstrating the multidimensional nature of sensitivity. Participants described the gifts and challenges of being an HSP. They discussed the capacity of empathic resonance and nuanced perception, the ache of the shame and stigma of sensitivity, the lifelong task of managing their energy through boundaries and pacing, and the vivid intensity that can enrich daily life but also overwhelm it. At the same time, the synthesis highlighted areas where the literature both supports and falls short for HSPs. On the one hand, these studies validated many sensitive individuals' lived realities. They helped normalize their depth, emotional responsiveness, and need for solitude. Additionally, they challenged pathologizing narratives and documented the developmental journey from self-doubt to self-acceptance. On the other hand, the literature revealed persistent gaps like cultural blind spots and limited diversity. There was also overreliance on trait-based

explanations, risking overlooking the relational and systemic factors that can either nourish or deplete HSPs. Few studies explored how counsellors can meaningfully support HSPs in building boundaries, navigating identity shifts, or creating environmental or relational fit. Similarly, the dual nature of sensitivity was not translated into applied therapeutic frameworks.

These synthesized insights form the foundation for Chapter 3, where they are translated into a person-centred, neurodiversity-affirming practice model designed specifically for highly sensitive adults. The GENTLE framework emerges directly from the themes identified in this chapter, integrating Carl Rogers's core conditions, contemporary neurodiversity principles, and the lived strategies participants used to feel grounded and understood. My hope is to offer clinicians a flexible clinical compass that guides them in honouring high sensitivity, empowering agency, and situating sensitivity within relational and cultural contexts. My goal is not only to deepen understanding of HSP through this thematic synthesis, but also to provide theoretical scaffolding for a compassionate, attuned approach to clinical practice.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Applied Practices

Building upon the momentum from Chapter 2, this chapter moves from synthesis to interpretation and application. While the previous chapter examined how highly sensitive people (HSPs) experience their emotional and sensory worlds, this chapter delves into what the insights mean for counselling practice. It revisits the guiding research question that explores how HSPs can be supported within a therapeutic context, and interprets the four themes that emerged through a humanistic, person-centred and neurodiversity-affirming lens. The connection between the theoretical lenses and HSPs is explored, and the GENTLE framework is introduced. This person-centred practice model is the applied contribution of this project. Finally, this chapter concludes with a reflective exploration of my personal learning throughout this capstone.

Discussion

The purpose of this capstone was to explore how highly sensitive adults understand and navigate their emotional, relational, and sensory experiences, and to consider how these insights may inform counselling practice. Grounded in a humanistic, person-centred framework, the project aimed to honour SPS as a meaningful aspect of human diversity, rather than a deficit or pathology. By synthesizing qualitative research on the lived experiences of HSPs, the goal was to identify thematic patterns that could help deepen clinical understanding and support the development of a compassionate, evidence-based practice model. This objective was guided by the central research question: How can HSPs be supported within a therapeutic context, based on themes emerging from qualitative studies of lived experience? Accordingly, the following section interprets the four themes through a person-centred, neurodiversity-affirming lens, clarifying their relevance for counselling practice.

Interpretation of Thematic Synthesis Themes

Choosing a person-centred lens for this thematic synthesis was a natural fit given Rogers's

(1951) commitment to phenomenology. He wrote:

> If we could empathically experience all the sensory and visceral sensations of the individual, could experience his whole phenomenal field including both the conscious elements and also those elements not brought to the conscious level, we should have the perfect basis for understanding the meaningfulness of his behavior and for predicting his future behavior. (pp. 494–95).

This stance affirms that an individual's subjective experience is the most trustworthy source of understanding. It positions sensitivity, not as a flaw, but as a natural way of encountering the world. Rogers's (1957, 1961, 1980) emphasis on empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence aligns closely with the needs expressed by HSPs across the reviewed studies. His belief that people move toward growth when they are deeply understood (Rogers, 1959) provides a meaningful frame for interpreting the lived experiences of HSPs. Through this lens, the themes identified can be understood as expressions of an organismic valuing process shaped by both support and constraining environments (Rogers, 1959).

Interestingly, Rogers's remarkable ability to articulate the nuances of empathy and emotional experience with such depth and precision raises the question of whether he himself may have possessed heightened sensitivity. Biographical accounts described Rogers as being viewed as over-sensitive in childhood, frequently retreating into his own imaginative world, and often feeling lonely (Monte, 1999; Schultz & Schultz, 2001; Thorne, 1991, all as cited in Philippou, 2021). What better theoretical stance for understanding sensitivity than one developed by someone who may have been highly sensitive himself?

Theme 1: Empathy, Attunement, and Boundaries

Empathy is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of others" (Ventura, 2023, p. xiii). Within a person-centred framework, empathy is understood as the therapist's ability to enter the client's world as if it were their own, while preserving differentiation (Rogers, 1951, 1957). Rogers

(1957) wrote,

> To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the "as if" quality—this is empathy…to sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it. (p. 99)

This articulation of empathy, holding another's emotional world while maintaining clear self-other differentiation, closely mirrors the descriptions found in the first theme of the synthesis. The findings from the synthesis suggested that HSPs live with a natural, heightened form of this capacity. The patterns described were intuitively sensing emotional shifts, reading microcues, and perceiving relational atmospheres long before they were verbalized (Bas et al., 2021; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). The participants described being able to naturally wade through other people's energy fields and feel as they do. Collectively, these explanations revealed empathy in HSPs as a deeply embodied way of being with others. It is an attunement that operates as much through the body as through thought, aligning with neurobiological findings of heightened mirror-system activity and empathy-related neural responses (Acevedo et al., 2018; Greven et al., 2019; Greven et al., 2025). While this embodied empathy was widely described as a strength that fosters compassion, trust, and connection many participants also expressed the emotional cost of such openness (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025).

Although having highly attuned perceptiveness, which enables connection easily, can be considered a blessing (Roxburgh, 2023), it does not come without its challenges. Several studies highlighted the difficulty HSPs experience in maintaining clear self-other boundaries. Many participants described being pulled into others' emotional states, struggling to distinguish their own internal experiences from the emotions of others (Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). From a person-centred perspective, this can be interpreted as a blurring of the as-if quality that distinguishes empathy from emotional overidentification (Rogers, 1957). This is understandable, as

many HSPs describe their energetic or emotional boundaries as more permeable than others. Additional research by Roxburgh et al. (2024) showed that HSPs exhibit high transliminality and boundary thinness. Transliminality is defined as “permeable mental boundaries that entail a susceptibility to, and awareness of, material from unconscious sources and the external environment” (Swami et al., 2024, p. 269), while boundary thinness is the ability to easily enter an altered state of consciousness (Hartmann, 1991, as cited in Roxburgh et al., 2024). As a result of this natural tendency, rather than asserting explicit boundaries, many HSPs relied on quiet distance, withdrawal, or emotional suppression as immediate strategies to regain equilibrium during times of blurred emotional and energetic boundaries (Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023). These strategies should not be seen as avoidance but as essential acts of care that allow HSPs to engage deeply with others without losing themselves in the process.

While HSPs possess a remarkable capacity for empathic resonance, their well-being depends on their ability to maintain differentiation and remain connected without getting lost in other people’s feelings. From a counselling perspective, this theme highlights the importance of helping clients cultivate boundaries that preserve empathic strength without compromising emotional stability. It is also a call for therapists to recognize that the emotions HSPs feel might not even belong to them, but rather to people in their proximity, or even to the energies of society at large. A person-centred approach, which emphasizes nonjudgment, self-trust, and relational clarity (Rogers, 1980), is uniquely positioned to support these tasks.

Theme 2: Identity, Stigma, and Meaning-Making

The second theme reflects the complex task of identity construction for HSPs, many of whom described moving through long periods of self-doubt, shame, or perceived defectiveness before arriving at a more integrated sense of themselves (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). This

developmental journey closely aligns with Rogers's (1961) concept of conditions of worth. He described these as the implicit or explicit messages individuals internalized about which parts of themselves are acceptable or which must stay hidden to maintain belonging. These experiences, described by HSPs, became embedded in internalized conditions of worth, shaping their identity around self-surveillance, emotional inhibition, and chronic self-questioning. Research by Buchtova et al. (2025) confirms that HSPs do experience higher levels of guilt and shame. At the same time, HSPs described this as a powerful meaning-making process that shifted them toward greater personal authenticity (Bas et al., 2021; Rafiq et al., 2023; Roth et al., 2023). As they encountered validating language, supportive relationships, or psychoeducation about sensitivity, many reported a sense of relief, coherence, and reorientation. In Rogers's terms, this reflects a movement toward congruence, harmony between the idealized self and the lived self (Rogers, 1951). Additionally, research on self-discrepancy theory suggests that the closer alignment between these self-representations, the higher the individual's level of self-esteem (Higgins, 1989, as cited in Kassin et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding sensitivity as a legitimate neurobiological and relational orientation can provide HSPs with a new way in which to construct their identity, leaving behind more pathologizing methods. Person-centred therapy describes this process as reclaiming the true self that had long been suppressed (Rogers, 1951).

However, the theme also highlights the social and cultural forces that shape meaning-making. Participants shed light on the stigma associated with emotional expressiveness, cultural expectations around stoicism or efficiency, gendered norms that penalize sensitivity and workplace values that prioritize speed over depth (Black & Kern, 2020; Miller & Lynch, 2024; Rafiq et al., 2023). These environmental pressures mirror Roger's belief that the social environment can either facilitate or inhibit the actualization tendency (Rogers, 1959). Recent literature also reiterated that HSPs are highly influenced by their environments (Carroll et al., 2025; Greven et al., 2019; Iimura & Yano, 2024; X. Li et al., 2023). In a Japanese study by Yano and Iimura (2026), the authors suggested that in collectivist

societies, having HSP traits is considered beneficial.

These insights emphasize that identity work with HSPs is less about teaching them to be different and more about creating the relational conditions in which they can finally be themselves. The therapist can honour and appreciate a client's sensitivity by adopting a neurodiversity-affirming ideology (Dwyer, 2022). Rather than focusing on a diagnosis, as exemplified by Rogers himself (Freire & Di Malta, 2024), counselling can become a place where sensitivity is no longer something to hide, manage, or justify, but something to understand and eventually appreciate. Through this lens, the therapeutic task in person-centred therapy then becomes helping clients transform the stories they inherited into ones that more accurately reflect their truth. The hope is that the actualizing tendency moves clients toward greater authenticity when the relational climate is safe and accepting.

Theme 3: Self-Care, Regulation, and Pacing

This theme highlights the central role that self-care, regulation, and pacing play in the lives of HSPs. Across the studies, participants described continually monitoring their energy, emotional states, and environmental stimulation in order to remain balanced and able to function in everyday life (Bas et al., 2021; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023; Roxburgh & Wright-Bevans, 2025). Behaviours such as seeking solitude, withdrawing temporarily, engaging in rituals, or slowing down were often framed not as avoidance but as essential forms of self-preservation (Bas et al., 2021; Black & Kern, 2020; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024; Roxburgh, 2023). There has been much recent research attention on the link between HSP and the positive effects of nature (Cadogan et al., 2023; Carroll et al., 2025; Duradoni et al., 2025; Holzer et al., 2024; Setti et al., 2022). From a person-centred perspective, these practices can be understood as expressions of the organismic valuing process (Rogers, 1961). Rogers (1961) believed that individuals have the innate ability to proceed towards experiences that are life-enhancing and away from those that threaten overwhelm. Therefore, when left to their own devices, HSPs naturally know how to self-regulate and restore equilibrium in their lives.

However, many participants from the synthesis frequently noted that these needs were misunderstood or pathologized by others (Black & Kern, 2020; Miller & Lynch, 2024). Many described pressure to match others' pace or to suppress their need for rest in environments that prioritized productivity, speed, or emotional detachment. This mismatch between internal regulatory needs and external expectations often led to shame, exhaustion, and self-criticism. In Rogers's (1951) terms, this creates conditions of worth that overshadow the individual's internal wisdom, making it harder to trust their needs for pacing and regulation, thereby taking HSPs further from congruence. Conversely, when participants felt genuine permission to honour their energetic rhythms, their sensitivity felt like a resource, and they flourished (Roth et al., 2023; Roxburgh, 2023).

This theme demonstrates the need for the relational nature of regulation and the awareness of environmental fit. Counsellors have the opportunity to offer both in the context of therapy. Supportive environments are more beneficial to HSPs and act as a buffer to overstimulation, whereas chaotic environments intensify it (Carroll et al., 2025). Rogers's emphasis on creating an emotionally safe and accepting climate through the therapeutic presence relationship aligns directly with the needs of the HSP (Geller & Graziani, 2024). Therefore, in counselling, the quality of the relational presence, slow and attuned, can itself become a regulatory resource for HSP clients.

Theme 4: Emotional and Perceptual Amplification

The fourth and final theme captured the vivid, multilayered nature of the emotional and sensory experience of HSPs. Participants consistently reported experiencing emotions, physical sensations, and environmental stimuli with an intensity that exceeded what they perceived others experienced (Roxburgh, 2023). These accounts reflected both the depth and overwhelm that can accompany heightened perceptual processing. At the same time, many participants described profound moments of joy, awe, meaning, and emotional richness that they connected to creativity, intuition, and spiritual connection (Bas et al., 2021; Friedrich & Lomas, 2024). This reflects both the strengths and

vulnerabilities of living with a highly responsive internal frame of reference, as Rogers (1959) called it. In person-centred terms, emotional and perceptual amplification can be understood as another natural mode of functioning of the organismic valuing process; the innate capacity of all humans to recognize which experiences, relationships, and actions enhance their well-being and which diminish it (Rogers, 1961). However, when social contexts impose conditions of worth (Rogers, 1959) onto HSPs that demand restraint, roughness, or emotional neutrality, this same attunement may become a source of self-doubt and overwhelm. Therefore, these reactions can be viewed as congruent organismic responses to environments that exceed their processing capability, rather than a vulnerability.

Neurobiological research provided further explanation of this theme. Studies showed that individuals high in SPS exhibit stronger activation in brain areas related to awareness, depth of processing, emotional reactivity, and sensory integration (Acevedo et al., 2018; Greven et al., 2019, 2025; Lionetti et al., 2018). These findings reinforced participants' descriptions of vivid, embodied reactions to emotional and environmental stimuli. The volume of the experience is simply higher, and without adequate pacing and therapeutic support, this can lead to emotional flooding, anxiety, or shutdown. From a reflexive standpoint, I recognize elements of this in my own experience. During a psychoeducational assessment, my processing speed appeared lower than expected which the psychologist initially considered within an ADHD framework. However, I also entered the assessment while carrying substantial cognitive and physiological load from academic burnout and overstimulation within the testing environment. My slower responses felt less like a deficit and more like an example of how sensitive systems can become overwhelmed when multiple internal and external demands converge.

This theme also highlights the dynamic, context-dependent nature of sensory and emotional amplification. The same sensitivity that enriches the inner life can quickly become overwhelming, depending on the relational and environmental context. This pattern echoes the environmental

sensitivity and vantage sensitivity research, which suggested that both negative and positive contexts more deeply shape individuals high in SPS (Davies et al., 2021; Pluess, 2017). Rogers's view that the therapeutic relationship can serve as a facilitating environment aligns directly with this principle (Geller & Graziani, 2024). From a counselling standpoint, as discussed in the previous theme, a safe, accepting, and attuned therapeutic climate can provide clients with a gateway to growth rather than a source of overwhelm. Additionally, therapists have an ethical obligation to learn about the characteristics of HSPs to be clinically competent and to avoid the potential for false diagnoses, which aligns with the psychological professional codes (CAP, 2023; CPA, 2017).

In summary, across all four themes, the synthesis revealed a clear picture of what it means to live as an HSP. It is an existence that is shaped by deep attunement, porous boundaries, vivid emotional and perceptual experiences, and an ongoing struggle to make sense of sensitivity within environments that misunderstand it. Empathic resonance and hyper-attunement emerged as natural capacities rather than learned skills, rooted in a highly responsive internal frame of reference. At the same time, participants described identity wounds shaped by stigma, misunderstanding, and conditions of worth imposed by families, workplaces, and cultural norms that value emotional restraint over depth. For many, self-care and pacing were not luxuries but essential forms of regulation that allowed them to function in a world not designed for such perceptual openness. Finally, emotional and perceptual amplification illustrated the dual nature of sensitivity. It is a source of profound richness and sight, but also a vulnerability to overwhelm when environments exceed their processing capacity.

From a person-centred perspective, these themes collectively reflect the function of a finely tuned organismic valuing process. HSPs perceive, feel, and process experience with greater depth because their internal boundaries are more permeable, as research has named transliminality and boundary thinness. This permeability is not a flaw, but rather an orientation toward a world that facilitates intuition, empathy, creativity, and deep connection. In many ways, this porousness allows

HSPs to remain connected to all that is, in other words, the broader, interconnected fabric of all of life. As a result of this connectedness, they are more connected to emotional undercurrents, relational dynamics, and subtle sensory cues that others may overlook. It can be thought of as the ability to read the secret pages of life that often remain hidden from view. My personal interpretation, informed by thematic patterns, is that this transliminality is at the heart of sensitivity, making HSPs who they are. It explains why they intuitively absorb atmospheres, why they feel truths before others speak them, and why they experience life in ways that are not always understandable to others.

This source of permeability becomes a great source of pain when met with misunderstanding. When others interpret HSPs' depth as overreaction, emotional fragility, or irrationality, they impose conditions of worth that pressure sensitive individuals to disconnect from their natural way of being. This creates incongruence. Much of the distress described by participants can be traced not to sensitivity itself, but to the environments that dismiss, shame or pathologize it. In this sense, the suffering of HSPs is less a product of their trait and more a reflection of the cultural misattunement around them. This is why adopting a person-centred and neurodiversity-affirming approach in counselling is imperative. To quote Rogers (1951) himself,

> The primary point of importance here is the attitude held by the counsellor toward the worth and significance of the individual. How do we look upon others? Do we see each person as having worth and dignity in his own right? (p. 20)

Applied Practices

By recognizing sensitivity as a natural orientation, rather than a deviation, it naturally calls for a therapeutic practice that nurtures, rather than restricts, the HSP’s way of being. The themes of the synthesis point toward what HSPs need the most. This includes environments that protect their openness, relationships that honour their depth, and tools that help them regulate without losing the richness of their perception. When counselling can reflect these needs, sensitivity becomes a source of

coherence, meaning, and connection. When it does not, HSPs fall into further incongruence, shame spirals, and exhaustion. The following section offers a structured applied framework that brings these insights into practice, translating the synthesis into a model that clinicians can use to support highly sensitive clients.

GENTLE Framework

In response to the gaps identified in both the literature and current counselling practices, this capstone proposes the GENTLE Framework (see Table 5). It is a person-centred, neurodiversity-affirming practice model that is specifically designed to support HSPs. This framework is developed directly from the thematic synthesis and translates the lived experiences of HSPs into a structured but flexible set of therapeutic principles. Rather than imposing a prescriptive technique, this model offers clinicians a relational and conceptual orientation that honours depth, protects openness, and supports the client's natural organismic valuing process.

Each component of the GENTLE framework is grounded in the four themes identified in Chapter 2. Empathic resonance and boundary challenges inform the model's emphasis on grounded presence and emotional differentiation. Identity wounds shaped by stigma and conditions of worth are addressed through practices that reinforce unconditional positive regard, narrative reclamation, and authentic self-expression. The theme of self-care and pacing is reflected in the principles that prioritize nervous system regulation, environmental fit, and the creation of sustainable rhythms. Finally, emotional and perceptual amplification guides the framework's focus on titration, somatic awareness, and cultivation of environments that allow depth without tipping into overwhelm. The GENTLE framework is not intended to be used as a rigid protocol that requires following it in a sequential step-by-step manner, but rather as an adaptable exploration that supports therapists in meeting HSP clients where they are. The following section summarizes each component of the framework and illustrates how its principles translate the thematic findings.

Table 5

GENTLE Framework Components and Descriptions

Letter	Component	Description
G	Grounding & gentle pacing	Practices that stabilize the nervous system, support embodied awareness, and help clients modulate emotional and sensory input before it becomes overwhelming.
E	Emotional regulation & empathic boundaries	Skills that foster early recognition of emotional activation, strengthen self–other differentiation, and maintain relational boundaries without diminishing empathy.
N	Normalizing neurodiverse sensory processing	Psychoeducation that frames sensitivity as legitimate neurobiological variation rather than pathology, validating clients' sensory thresholds and needs.
T	Trait reframing & identity integration	Narrative and meaning-making work that helps clients reinterpret sensitivity as a coherent and valued aspect of identity, reducing internalized stigma and fostering congruence.
L	Lifestyle structuring	Developing daily rhythms and habits aligned with energetic capacity, restorative practices, and sensory pacing to promote long-term wellbeing.
E	Environmental fit & empowered communication	Supporting clients to shape environments and relationships that honour sensitivity, using clear communication and self-advocacy to reduce overwhelm and enhance connection.

Grounding and gentle pacing respond directly to the theme of emotional and perceptual amplification and the overwhelm that results, as described in the synthesis. Because many HSPs process in a deep, layered, and somatic manner, they require more time to integrate emotional material and more nervous system support to remain regulated. Within a person-centred frame, gentle pacing honours the client's organismic valuing process by allowing experiences to unfold on a timeline that feels personally manageable. Clinicians can use grounding practices, such as breathwork, sensory and somatic awareness, or visualizations, to help clients anchor themselves when emotions or sensations

intensify. Nature or the use of animals could also be implemented, because research shows that HSPs have a natural affinity towards them (Setti et al., 2022). These approaches help protect the clients from sensory overload and signal that therapy is a place where depth is allowed without urgency. Gentle pacing affirms that HSPs do not need to match the speed of a world that overwhelms them; instead, therapy meets them at a pace their nervous system asks for. Additionally, the length of the therapy sessions may need to be adjusted. Some highly sensitive clients require shorter durations, whereas others may need more time to achieve adequate nervous system relaxation.

Emotional regulation and empathic boundaries address the first theme's findings around emotional absorption, hyper-attunement, and transliminality. Because HSPs often feel other people's emotions vividly as their own, a central therapeutic task could be helping clients differentiate their internal emotions from the emotional fields around them. Drawing upon Rogers (1957) as-if quality of empathy, clients would learn how to sense emotions without becoming them. Regulation work in this context is not about suppressing intensity but more about learning to develop clarity and containment, so the depth remains grounded and manageable. Strengthening empathic boundaries supports clients in maintaining connection, which is their superpower, but without losing their centre. A therapist may use tools such as reflective dialogue, somatic tracking, and the normalization of emotional permeability. The therapeutic relationship itself is a powerful tool in helping HSPs form a clearer sense of where they end, and others begin. Establishing this boundary clarity is foundational for their long-term well-being.

Normalizing neurodiverse sensory processing counters the shame, stigma, and conditions of worth that emerged in the identity and meaning-making theme. HSPs often internalize messages, to a greater extent than others, that their depth is excessive or that their sensory limits reflect personal weakness. A neurodiversity-affirming stance reframes these traits as natural variations in human perception rather than deficits to be corrected (Marschall, 2025). When adopting this stance, Marschall (2025) suggests that therapy could involve providing support for the stress already affecting the client, a

safe space to voice frustrations and foster authenticity, and practical coping strategies. Person-centred therapy, again, is uniquely suited to this task because it positions the client's internal experience as valid and trustworthy (Freire & Di Malta, 2024). Normalization can involve educating clients about SPS, validating their perceptual responsiveness, and challenging cultural narratives that pathologize emotion or sensitivity. Ultimately, it is about meeting your client where they are and helping them build the foundation for greater congruence and a more empowered identity.

Trait reframing and identity integration respond to the second theme of the synthesis that explores shame, misattunement, and the developmental journey toward authenticity. Many HSPs carry inherited stories of too-muchness that have led them to split off from their true selves. This component of the framework helps clients shift these narratives into ones that reflect their lived experience rather than social judgment. From a person-centred perspective, identity integration occurs when clients come into congruence with their organismic valuing process (Cornelius-White, 2024). Reframing involves naming sensitivity as a legitimate trait, exploring its strengths and vulnerabilities, and situating it within a larger cultural and relational context. A clinician can use the person-centred basic conditions of the therapeutic relationship, like empathic attunement and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957), to assist HSPs in reclaiming sensitivity as part of their authentic identity.

Lifestyle structuring arises from the theme of self-care, regulation, and pacing. Because the thematic synthesis revealed that sensitivity affects how HSPs work, rest, connect, and recover, therapy should address these issues. It can be done through the exploration of environmental fit, how the external world interacts with the client's innate rhythms and needs. This theme uncovered that HSPs thrive in quiet, nature-filled, slower contexts and struggle in fast, noisy, and emotionally intense environments. This component supports clients in first recognizing that they have these needs but then designing daily routines that honour their nervous system requirements. This can include planning recovery or solitary time, modifying sensory inputs, restructuring work demands, and identifying

environments that nourish rather than deplete them. One of the phrases that I found myself repeating the most often to my HSP clients is “it’s time to stop trying to fit into the world and time to start making the world fit for you.” From a person-centred standpoint, helping clients shape their surroundings to align with their organismic valuing process is not avoidance; it is congruence. It also aligns with quantitative research on the concept of vantage sensitivity (Carroll et al., 2025; de Villiers et al., 2018; Pluess & Belsky, 2013). Therapists can also model environmental fit by designing their own offices that are supportive of HSPs. For example, therapists can ensure low sensory stimulation, offer quieter waiting areas, and provide practical considerations like easy parking and flexible scheduling.

Environmental fit and empowered communication are the final components of the GENTLE framework and are directly related to lifestyle structuring. This factor integrates the relational and systemic implications highlighted across all themes. HSPs need supportive environments to thrive, yet many live in contexts that misunderstand and minimize their traits. Therefore, this final component helps client advocate for their needs in relationships, workplaces, and communities, fostering communication that is both compassionate and clear. Empowered communication is grounded in congruence, and it asks clients to speak from their true selves rather than from a place of internalized shame or self-protection. The tasks of therapy could include helping clients articulate accurate boundaries, request sensory accommodations, negotiate relational expectations, and express needs without guilt. In person-centred terms, this strengthens the client’s internal locus of evaluation and allows them to participate in relationships as their whole, authentic selves. After all, research shows that when environments and sensitivity align, HSP clients can flourish (Carroll et al., 2025).

Reflections on Personal Learning

Engaging in the capstone project has profoundly shifted my understanding of sensitivity, both personally and professionally. When I began this work, I believed sensitivity might have been shaped primarily by trauma or adverse early experiences. Through the literature, the thematic synthesis, and my

own exploration, I am now convinced that sensitivity is a heritable trait that only becomes problematic within misattuned societal contexts. I gained a much deeper understanding of the HSP experience, including its perceptual, emotional, and somatic dimensions. Additionally, I found myself reflecting on my own positionality as a White, female counsellor who belongs to the demographic in which SPS is most frequently studied. I questioned whether pursuing this topic risked reinforcing a predominantly White scholarly agenda. This reflection prompted me to consider how intersectionality shapes the experience of sensitivity, including how race, gender, culture and class influence whether sensitivity is viewed as a strength, a liability, or rendered invisible.

This project clarified my orientation toward person-centred therapy in a way that felt both surprising and affirming. I now understand why I dismissed the approach earlier in my schooling, not because it lacked credibility, but because it mirrored the way I naturally show up in the therapy room. It was already my way of being, and I underestimated the theoretical depth behind it. I also developed new awareness of how I use my own emotional and energetic responses to guide intuitive clinical decisions. As I grow into my professional identity, I feel less guilt about advocating for the conditions I need to do ethical, effective work. For example, in a recent job interview, it felt important to state clearly that I am “not your standard CBT [cognitive behaviour therapy] therapist” and that my strengths lie in depth, attunement, and relational presence. The descriptions of exhaustion in the synthesis resonated strongly with my own experiences of end of day depletion, prompting me to rethink how I structure my workday and build in rest as I transition into a new role.

My understanding of SPS also shifted in unexpected ways as I engaged more deeply with the literature and developed a more nuanced view of sensitivity. At the same time, I continually returned to an intuition, one that was my original idea for this capstone. It was the sense that the core of sensitivity has something to do with porous, energetic boundaries. Research on transliminality and boundary thinness validated my suspicions and helped to articulate what I had long sensed but lacked the

language for. Additionally, I was surprised by how meaningful it was for participants to identify as HSP, and for many, discovering the trait created a sense of coherence they had never had before. This was not part of my own journey, likely because I grew up in a family where everyone's quirks were accepted. This contrast helped me appreciate the identity aspect the trait holds for others, particularly those who grew up in invalidating contexts.

Throughout this project, I felt persistent tension between the beliefs of how I am supposed to practice as a therapist and how I naturally practice. Government and hospital-based systems tend to favour short-term, goal-oriented approaches, yet these frameworks often mismatch the needs of HSP clients and my own needs as an HSP therapist. I also experienced tension around the issue of advocacy. I believe HSPs deserve sensory accommodations, yet many workplaces and educational systems require a formal diagnosis to recognize these needs. This places me in an uncomfortable position of knowing sensitivity is not pathological while navigating systems that only validate needs when pathology is present. This tension evoked my own incongruence and highlighted the limitations of current mental health structures.

Writing this capstone has been an emotional rollercoaster. Attempting to write while completing my practicum was not feasible, and I eventually made the difficult decision to focus on writing after my internship ended. Even then, I found I could write no more than three to four hours a day. I ended up applying the principles from this synthesis to myself by writing in the morning before environmental demands intensified, taking breaks, and regulating at the end of the day by exercising so I could emotionally present for my children when they returned from school. Even though I have reflected on my sensitivity at length over the years, reading participants' descriptions, especially their lifelong feelings of feeling defective and chronically misunderstood, touched my heart in unexpected ways. I realized that although I do feel my sensitivity is one of my greatest gifts, I still do feel like it is a curse at times. Additionally, I even noticed that my writing style softened over the course of this

capstone, as if the project itself invited a gentler way of expressing ideas.

Completing this capstone has reinforced my desire to continue working with HSPs and to create opportunities for connection, such as HSP meet-up groups. During my practicum, many clients expressed a longing to meet others like themselves, often believing they were rare or nonexistent in our northern rural community. I also want to educate other clinicians about the prevalence of HSPs and challenge the default assumption that every presentation of overwhelm, or emotional intensity requires a clinical diagnosis. The neurodiversity-affirming literature resonated strongly with me, and I recognized many of my own traits reflected in it. As a result, I have committed to reducing my own masking. This work has expanded my identity as a clinician and strengthened my commitment to creating spaces where sensitivity is understood and valued. I am proud of the body of work this capstone has produced and believe it contributes meaningfully to the field, even if that contribution begins with my own advocacy. Through writing, dialogue with peers, and the relational process of exploring these themes, I have witnessed increased awareness and curiosity within those around me. This, in itself, feels like a small but important impact. This project has strengthened my critical thinking, theoretical integration, and commitment to neurodiversity-affirming practice as well.

My curiosity has continued to grow during this project. I am even more interested in how HSPs experience trauma and the overlap between SPS and ADHD, especially given the current diagnostic trends. I am curious about integrating the Mindful Self-Compassion Program (Germer & Neff, 2019) with HSP work, and I am increasingly drawn to understanding HSPs in romantic relationships as I consider specializing in couple's therapy. Additionally, I am intrigued by the potential benefits and pitfalls of psychedelic-assisted therapy for HSPs, given their depth and perceptual openness.

This process reaffirmed my constructivist philosophy, a perspective strongly supported by the environmental sensitivity literature. People experience distress primarily in relation to the environments they inhabit, not because their traits are inherently problematic. If no one labelled you as wrong, you

would not have learned to view yourself through that lens. This realization strengthened my belief that counselling must honour individual differences and contextualize distress rather than pathologize it.

Finally, I was struck by how seamlessly person-centred values dovetailed with the experiences of HSPs. It was both surprising and delightful to consider that Carl Rogers himself may have been highly sensitive, given the depth and nuance in which he wrote about empathy and the internal experience. Although debates in the field continue about whether SPS belongs under the neurodiversity umbrella, I resonated strongly with the neurodiversity-affirming lens and feel there is benefit from drawing upon it when working with HSPs. As someone with both a learning disability-related neurodivergence and high sensitivity, I found the framework deeply validating.

Conclusions for Capstone

In closing, this capstone brought together research, clinical theory, and personal reflection to explore the lived experiences of highly sensitive adults and the implications for counselling practice. The thematic synthesis highlighted that sensitivity is not a defect and something to be fixed, but rather a meaningful, natural way of being that carries both depth and vulnerability, depending on the environment. Through a person-centred and neurodiversity-affirming lens, this project offered the GENTLE framework as a compassionate and practical approach to working with HSP clients. The hope is that it is used as a clinical compass that honours perceptual openness, protects emotional depth, and supports regulation without pathologizing sensitivity. Engaging in this process deepened my understanding of SPS, clarified by clinical identity, and reinforced the importance of relational attunement and contextual responsiveness in therapeutic work. Ultimately, this project affirmed my belief that sensitivity thrives not when we attempt to change it, but when we create spaces where it is finally understood, respected, and allowed to belong.

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