



# Schopenhauer's Porcupines: Intimacy And Its Dilemmas: Five Stories Of Psychotherapy

By Deborah Luepnitz

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Each generation of therapists can boast of only a few writers like Deborah Luepnitz, whose sympathy and wit shine through a fine, luminous prose. In Schopenhauer's Porcupines she recounts five true stories from her practice, stories of patients who range from the super-rich to the homeless and who grapple with panic attacks, psychosomatic illness, marital despair, and sexual recklessness. Intimate, original, and triumphantly funny, Schopenhauer's Porcupines goes further than any other book in unveiling the secrets of "how talking helps."

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Throughout its history, psychological theory has contended that at least part of what can make maintaining intimate relationships so difficult is the conflict between feeling aggressive and loving toward the same person. Luepnitz, a psychotherapist and author of *The Family Interpreted*, finds a metaphor for this problem of intimacy in Schopenhauer's porcupine dilemma a story of how porcupines in winter must struggle between the desire to seek warmth from closeness with each other and the pain they feel from one another's quills as they become too close. Drawing from the writings of Winnicott, Lacan and Freud, along with case studies, Luepnitz not only provides insight into the practice of a wide range of psychotherapeutic treatments (such as couples therapy, family therapy and supportive psychotherapy), but also shows how psychotherapy can help people balance their conflicting feelings of love and hate via discourse and reflection. Written for a general audience, this book is enjoyable to read and nicely describes the treatment of a variety of patients, from an 11-year-old girl struggling to control stress-induced diabetes to a homeless woman dealing with poverty and a history of abusive relationships. Although such anecdotes cannot "prove" the validity of psychotherapeutic methods, Luepnitz's book does give those who may be curious or skeptical about "talk therapies" the opportunity to consider whether psychotherapy is right for them.

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#### From Library Journal

Clinical psychologist Luepnitz (*The Family Interpreted*) practices psychotherapy and teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. A family therapist with Freudian roots but without his authoritarianism, she writes effectively for both lay and professional readers. "The therapy boat is made for rocking," she says, showing how the therapist tries to create balance and assure safety on the rocky ride, despite her own uncertainty about what will happen next. The title metaphor, quoted by Freud, alludes to the prickliness of being close, and Luepnitz offers five illustrative stories of her own, which concern a couple, a family, and three individuals. Comfortably open, Luepnitz writes with humor and humility, adding glimpses of intellectual mentors like Winnicott, Lacan, and Rank and deftly addressing big themes that involve Don Juan and Oedipus. Luepnitz reveals patient and therapist as partners on the pilgrimage toward intimacy. An exemplary casebook, this can be recommended for all libraries, along with a recent view from the other side: *Tales from the Couch: Writers on Therapy*, edited by Jason Schinder. E. James Lieberman, George Washington Univ., Sch. of Medicine, Washington, DC

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#### From Booklist

The title says something about individual and family therapist Luepnitz's sense of humor and her wish to appeal to a broad audience. In the first case she reports, well-educated, artistic Daphne and her truckdriver husband, Karl, argue--supposedly--about having a second child; Luepnitz describes the changing stages of their relationship with refreshing candor, as if they were persons and not merely patients. Judith Kaplan, an 11-year-old diabetic, is Luepnitz's second subject, and her case shows the value of family sessions; Luepnitz's engaging ability to tell a joke on herself surfaces when she, a Catholic, offers to shake hands with Judith's father, an orthodox rabbi. The remaining stories tell of a self-contained Don Juan with commitment problems to himself as well as his girlfriends, an African American woman professor, and a single mother and her child, two of Luepnitz's earliest patients. Luepnitz loves her work, writes clearly, and, especially when she discusses, directly or indirectly, her techniques, produces an engaging and informative book for patients, therapists, and those who enjoy well-told stories. *William Beatty*

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