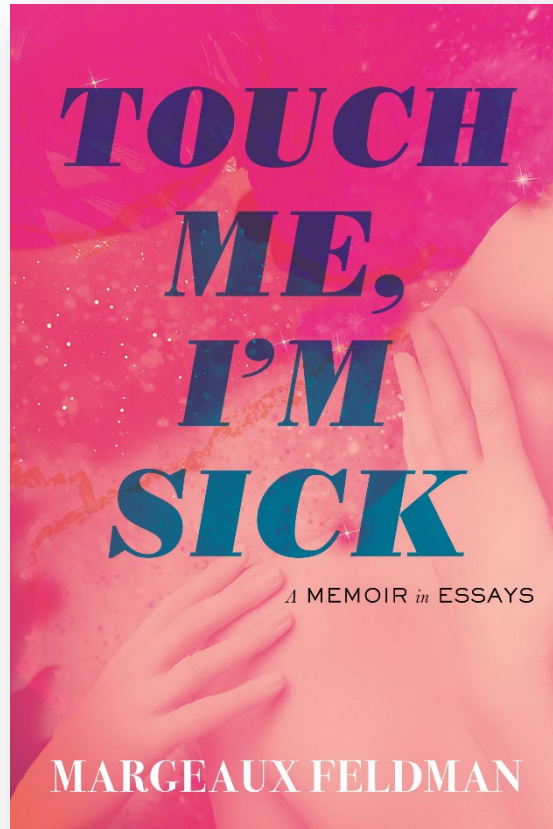


***Touch Me, I'm Sick: A Memoir in Essays***  
**by Margeaux Feldman**

Readers' Guide Discussion Questions



“The body, it turns out, always knows before the mind is able to reckon.”  
—*from the Prelude (2)*

**Synopsis**

In a world where trauma often manifests as chronic illness and women, girls, and femmes and their desires are seen as sick, nonbinary writer, artist, educator, and Instagram creator Margeaux Feldman provides road maps for embracing queer modes of care, or “hysterical intimacies,” which reject the notion that those who have been labeled sick are broken. Through this deeply intimate memoir that combines personal narrative, cultural criticism, manifesto, and autotheory, Feldman recounts their traumas—caregiving for their sick father, losing their mother, surviving sexual abuse, and grappling with their own chronic illness—rethinking the ways we seek healing and intimacy.

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## **For Discussion**

### ***Prelude***

Margeaux writes, “The body, it turns out, always knows before the mind is able to reckon.” How do Margeaux’s eczema and Dora’s cough disrupt Freudian understandings of trauma and illness?

### ***Touch Me, I’m Sick***

For many women and femmes, sexual assault is riddled with shame, stigma, and blame. Although Dora and Margeaux experienced sexual assault nearly a century apart, both experienced a loss of speech. Why might silence be used as a coping mechanism, and what does it say about how trauma is gendered and pathologized?

Margeaux addresses the ways in which touch has made them sick. How has your perception of sickness and disease changed upon reading this chapter?

What are Margeaux’s central critiques of the medical industrial complex?

What does it mean to embrace the hysteric? What are “hysterical intimacies”?

Margeaux raises the final question: “What might happen if we moved toward the call of *touch me, I’m sick*?” After reading the chapter, what might this look like, and how does it resonate with your own lived experience?

### ***Ambivalent Desires, Ugly Sex***

How does Margeaux define ugliness? What’s their distinction between bad sex and ugly sex?

What role does the feminist movement play in shaping societal conceptions of “good” sex?

How does ambivalence defy binary understandings of ourselves and our desires? How can we use ambivalence as a road map for pleasure?

### ***Hysteria’s Ghosts***

Margeaux, talking about “bathtub selfies,” writes, “As we sit alone in our bathtubs, we’re all bathing together. There’s something so beautifully queer and intimate about this.” How does Margeaux frame the act of taking a selfie in relation to others? How do they define a “sickness selfie”?

How do socioeconomic disparities contribute to the social perception of hysteria and trauma, especially for women?

How do baths, both in relation to autonomy and human connection, aid Margeaux in their healing? What power does water have?

### ***Femme4Femme Intimacy***

Is pleasure, sexual or otherwise, a privilege? How do social expectations and aspects of your identity inform your answer?

What are the different “parts” Margeaux uses to contextualize their life? Does this method of understanding trauma resonate with you?

What is “Femme4Femme intimacy”? How does this directly link to the idea of “femme temporality”? How has your understanding of these concepts changed after reading this chapter?

### ***Soft Magic***

What is the “magic” that Margeaux refers to throughout the chapter? What instances of magic did they showcase, and how might this magic manifest in your life?

Margeaux states that “[s]oftness is a political positioning that rejects the hardness and grittiness of neoliberalism.” How does Margeaux frame softness in relation to society and healing?

What is “soft magic”? How can we use soft magic to navigate the world?

### ***Queer Wounds; or What We Owe Each Other***

Margeaux states that we “are never fully sovereign if we choose to be in relation with others.” How do they define sovereignty, or how do they not? How is sovereignty framed within the context of the queer community?

How does individualistic thinking inform the way boundaries are weaponized? What are the consequences of this way of thinking?

How do trauma and harm manifest in a larger societal context? How does shame play into the exacerbation of these manifestations?

Margeaux says time is cyclical, not linear. How does this idea permeate throughout the book? In what ways do they show that healing, in tandem with time, is cyclical?

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## About the Author

Margeaux Feldman (they/them) is a writer, a public educator, and an artist. They hold an MFA in creative writing from CalArts and a PhD in English literature and sexual diversity studies from the University of Toronto. Their essays have been published in the *Sonora Review*, *GUTS: A Canadian Feminist Magazine*, *PRISM*, *Rabble*, *The Ex-Puritan*, and more. They are also the creator of Softcore Trauma, an online community where they share memes and writing that testify to their experiences living with trauma and chronic illness. They currently live in Los Angeles with their two elderly cats. You can learn more about them on their website, [www.margeauxfeldman.com](http://www.margeauxfeldman.com), and read new writing in their newsletter, *CARESCAPES*.