



Eckler, Rebecca. (2019). Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truth of Blending Families. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

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Rebecca Eckler's book, "Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truths of Blending Families," is an informed and deeply personal retelling of Eckler's experience blending her and her boyfriend's families together, narrated with both positive and negative aspects. The book goes into detail about the unexpected impacts that blending has on people outside of the two families, the troubles that arise regarding the division of attention between family members, and the inevitable financial difficulties. Every moment of Eckler's experience in blending families is neatly organized into chapters, from the moment that Eckler met her boyfriend and the merging of families began, to the harsh contemplating of ending things. This book acts as a "how-to" / "how-not-to" guide for any families about to embark on the journey of merging families, and therefore it is a book especially recommended to anyone in a blended family. Because Eckler offers examples of people that feel the same way as her in different situations, this book confesses feelings that most family members are too shy to disclose, and therefore it would be a great learning experience for both adults and older children apart of any family. Eckler's intended academic audience includes sociologists or psychologists involved in family studies, as well as social workers and family support workers.

Eckler uses a postmodern theoretical approach in her book as she consistently reminds

readers throughout the chapters how many changes come with blending families. She also notes how blended families, divorced families, or single-parent families are becoming more typical than nuclear families; family becomes what one makes it. Regarding the changes that come with merging families, Eckler notes that while her and her biological daughter need to get used to three new people moving into their house, those three new people—Eckler’s boyfriend and his two biological daughters—need to adapt to an entirely new environment in a different part of town. There are also more people involved in blending families who are forgotten about. Firstly, it is easy to forget that the exes of the new couple become affected by the blending, not only because their ex is changing their lives, but because their children’s lives become affected. Eckler recounts the emotional moment where she told her ex that she was pregnant with her new boyfriend’s child and that her boyfriend was moving in with her. While Eckler is no longer with her ex, they still care for each other, and she did not want him to feel as if he was being forgotten.

In addition to ex-spouses being impacted by blending families, grandparents are also greatly affected as they are not only getting a new son- or daughter-in-law, but they may be getting new grandchildren too. Eckler is hit with this realization harshly at supper one day when her new mother-in-law expresses her excitement for the new baby that will be her grandchild, yet forgets that Eckler’s biological daughter is already her grandchild. Discussing the difference between the children that are biologically her son’s and the one that isn’t, the grandmother explains, “It’s not the same when they’re not your own” (p. 74). This quote becomes a difficult concept to deal with since the author believes that all the children should be loved the same, and yet knows deep down that she, too, loves her biological children more than her stepchildren. Later on, when Eckler’s

mother expresses that she does not feel the same love for Eckler's stepchildren, Eckler wonders if they are the only ones brave enough to tell the truth. This moment between the two sets of grandparents illustrates one of the limitations in the book. Eckler was acting slightly hypocritical because when it was her mother-in-law making the comments about the children, Eckler took it to heart and got offended. Though when it was her own mother who spoke on the same subject with the same opinion, Eckler listened and realized she agreed.

The issue of grandparents not loving all of the children the same leads into the issue of Eckler and her boyfriend not *treating* all of the children the same. Eckler's friend believes, "The hardest part of blending . . . is for sure treating all the children the same" (p. 78). The uncertainty of how to treat certain kids, specifically those who are nonbiological, then leads to problems of the smallest proportion that hold feelings of the largest. The first fight in Eckler's blended family was the hi/bye fight. Coming into the house one day, Eckler didn't say hi to her stepdaughters which hurt their feelings even though Eckler didn't realize she hadn't greeted them in the first place. This led to a family-wide argument about who should say hi to whom first. In a family where everyone grew up together and there were no recent additional members, hi/bye would not be an issue because if the mother, for example, were to not say hi, the children would assume she had had a hard day, and not that she was purposely avoiding salutations to spite them.

Debating how to treat the children prompts an unsmooth division of attention between family members, causing some members to feel left out or excluded. When Eckler's boyfriend had a screensaver of his three biological children, missing only his stepdaughter, Eckler became angry at the picture's exclusion. Eckler notes, "Behind the closed door of a blended family, there's a high

probability that feelings do get hurt over something as silly to the outside world as being left out of a screensaver” (p .88). Again, in a nonblended family, one might dislike being left out of a screensaver, but it would not cause them to question who they are in the family and whether or not they receive the same amount of attention and love as everyone else.

For Eckler, the division of household chores and household finances were not necessary, or appealing, topics to discuss prior to blending households. The serious topics did not match the level of excitement of moving houses, and so they were instead brushed away with the plan to “figure it out later” (p .44). While there was no formally divided budget planned out, Eckler explains how both her and her boyfriend knew that “[grocery shopping was] his way of chipping in, while living without paying rent or the mortgage or property taxes or the gardener of the internet or cable bill” (p. 144). Although the informal arrangement was pleasant at the beginning of the relationship, Eckler soon felt that her boyfriend did not offer enough appreciation for the fees she handled, and her expectations that he would begin to pitch in more money were not met. In addition, Eckler felt that her boyfriend did not take his one household job of grocery shopping as seriously when his two biological daughters were with their mother and not in the house. The feelings of unappreciation began to build up so that the resentment began to overshadow *any* moments of appreciation (p. 150).

Because Eckler’s book was written from her own standpoint with such personal passion, readers are only being given one side of the journey that is blending families. While the main difficulties would remain consistent throughout the other family members as well, such as agreeing biological love is less complex than step-love, there are moments where Eckler almost vents to

readers as if to get them to side with her. An example of this is when Eckler's stepdaughter takes her to go dress shopping instead of taking her biological mom. Eckler notes how excited she was, but when she found out that her stepdaughter was taking pictures of the dresses in the change room to send to her mother, Eckler became upset. Eckler then wondered what the point of her presence was. This should not have been a crucial moment for Eckler as a stepmom, but rather a crucial moment for the daughter as a stepdaughter. It is important to understand her dilemma in that she wants Eckler to be included in the important moment and yet does not want her own mother entirely excluded.

The purpose of "Blissfully Blended Bullshit" is to offer a resource where Eckler can share her "account of the hard truths [and] the less-than-ideal realities" (p. 14) of blending families. Her experience to blending was eye-opening as she was not prepared for how big of an adjustment it was, and therefore, in order for other families to succeed with a possible higher rate of success, it is important to look into what it would mean to blend families. It is important to look at the difficult truth, not the exciting allusions. There is much to consider, from issues as small as who says hi to whom in the family to issues as big as deciding whether two families are fit to live together in the first place. While blending families is still a tremendous change, Eckler's book can help others understand it.