



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

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The book “Blissfully Blended Bullshit” details the trials and tribulations that go along with blending a family in the 21st century. Eckler describes her own personal journey, as well as the accounts of her many friends that have been in relationships with people who have children from past relationships. As the title hints, the book is a hilarious, but heartfelt tale describing that blending two already formed families is no easy task. Eckler, a divorced mother of one, sets out looking for a casual encounter. This encounter introduces her to her partner who she refers to throughout as “boyfriend”. Boyfriend is a recent divorcee and has two children of his own. The couple meets and falls for one and other quickly and without much consideration for how their lives will blend together. The book follows Eckler, boyfriend and their children on their journey of lust, love, blending, conflict and then sadly un-blending.

The couple’s lust for one and other that is felt mutually early on has the relationship progressing rapidly. Eckler admits, “one-night-stand turned boyfriend and I are busy being blissfully, deliriously, disgustingly happy” (p. 23). The intense feelings the couple has for one another seem to cloud their judgment on all of the considerations that are needed to successfully blend two homes. Eckler and boyfriend appear to believe that everything will fall into place and there is no need to worry about the logistics. Both having never blended two households before,

it becomes apparent that it may be more than they bargained for. At this point in the book the reader is really hoping for a blissfully happy ending for the couple but there are subtle hints that blissfully blending may not work out.

In spite of a lack of experience in this matter, Eckler, boyfriend, their mutual children and the dog combine lives in Eckler's home and Eckler also becomes pregnant. Things go from steamy lust to passionate love and the belief that love will conquer all is still strong, however reality starts to sink in that blending is hard work. Eckler admits, "there was no sitting down and talking about the logistics, no discussion of how it would affect the kids, no dialogue over who would pay for what, no talk of discipling each other's children or if the ugly leather chair he is so attached to would be better left on the side of the road" (p. 29). Later in the book all of the little over-looked details become points of contention. Five relative strangers have become an insta-family. It was not from a lack of caring that Eckler and boyfriend didn't take time to work out the details, it is apparent that both partners care a great deal for each other and their children, but simply were naive and unversed on the process. Even if all of the appropriate discussions took place and the details were worked out, blending is still a complex task.

When Eckler and boyfriend bring their son Holt into the world, Eckler acknowledges that she had the belief sharing a child together would help the families to blend more cohesively. Eckler states "this baby, after all, will free us from potential conflicts about "mine" and "his" because we are going to share a human (p. 44). However, as blissfully happy as they were to have a baby, adding another life to an already complicated equation was not without its challenges. These challenges were not only felt by Eckler and boyfriend, but also by their biological children, exes who they still co-parent with and mutual parents. Eckler had big dreams of being one happy family

but starts to question if people can love non-biological family members the same and this rhetoric seems to be felt by all family members. Eckler admits that she does feel love for her step-children but it's not the same as type of love she has for her biological children, she is more of a friend figure to boyfriend's children. The bond between mother and child is like no other and is hard to recreate with bonus children.

As with many couples, a major source of conflict is finances. Eckler, a successful journalist, living a relatively lavish lifestyle, merged finances with boyfriend, who she thought was just struggling due to a recent divorce, however it turns out they are from different worlds financially. Eckler is the main bread winner who loans boyfriend money, pays most of the bills at home, buys boyfriend expensive gifts and buys a vacation home. This begins to causes major feelings of resentment. Eckler mentions "he doesn't pay rent or chip in for the mortgage or pay the insane property taxes, because he takes care of the groceries. He says it equals out. I don't believe it" (p.133). Eckler's loves boyfriend for who he is and wants to help him get back on his feet but she starts to sense that he is ungrateful, entitled and spoiled. Like many women, Eckler feels underappreciated for all that she does for the family and the hostility builds.

Eckler appears to be struggling with some mental health concerns and goes from being blissfully happy and in love to being more confused and depressed. Eckler begins to take Clonazepam in excess and spends a lot of time alone in her room. Eckler's own mental health struggles are likely due to the slow demise of the relationship. Eckler states "I don't honestly know what to do. I'm not happy and we fight a lot. That being said, I still think about him all the time" (p. 219). In the beginning, Eckler was on a high of Oxytocin but as the relationship flaws sink in, her mood becomes lower and she desperately clings onto hope that things will return to they way

that they were in the beginning. Eckler appears to be in a trauma bond with boyfriend with the constant fighting followed by positive reinforcement that things will change and fantasies of the glory days of their early love.

An admirable quality that Eckler has is that she owns up to her flaws, such as being emotional, depressed, abusing Clonazepam, hiding away and feeling insecure about her position in boyfriend's life. Eckler's strong qualities such as loving fiercely, being a hard worker and putting in a solid effort in the relationship are also seen by the reader. This book is not a one-sided attack on boyfriend who has flaws of his own such, such as never apologizing, continually promising that things would get better but never making changes, not contributing equally financially and viewing Eckler as having mental issues. Boyfriend also has his strengths such as being a good dad, a romantic and fighting for the relationship. The personality flaws cause a lot of conflict but the couple continues on together because they have come so far and put in so much work already and the process of un-blending is chaotic and painful to consider.

The couple puts in a seven-year fight but long before this it becomes apparent that it is not going to workout. Boyfriend goes from charming and sweet to having the reader questioning why she didn't leave sooner. The points of contention become more obvious and feelings for one another change. Eckler and boyfriend become the 66% of blended families that fall apart. The former couple begins the painstaking process of parting ways, dividing assets and seeing a future as un-blended. Although Eckler's love for boyfriend has died, she is still saddened by the break up and the separation of many lives. Eckler's children and boyfriend's children lose touch, Eckler loses touch with boyfriend's children, boyfriend barely says goodbye to Eckler's child and boyfriend becomes very petty about the division of assets showing Eckler his true colours. Aside

from co-parenting Holt, the families have un-blended as if they were never together.

Blending families is a reality for many, so Eckler's book, that is at times hilarious, at times saddening, can be enjoyable and educational for many in a blended family situation. Being in a blended situation myself, I found many aspects relatable. Eckler's book was very honest and real, the people discussed in the book who read it may have some hurt feelings but the honest truths made the book so interesting and heartfelt. Eckler tells the stories of many friends that have tried to blend and it was hard to switch from her stories to friend's stories at times.

This book is well suited for a Sociology course where someone may be interested in seeing a modern twist on the nuclear family, which can be taken by Sociologists, Psychologists or Social Workers. Any profession that works with families and wants an honest account of what many families are going through when they embark on the blending process could benefit from this book.