



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

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Rebecca Eckler's book, "Blissfully Blended Bullshit," is a personal narrative that illustrates the sociological struggles of a blended family while seamlessly combining honesty with humour. In this narrative, Eckler formulates a compellingly honest and humbling reading experience through her validation of difficult psychological and sociological concepts regarding the combining of families. Such concepts outline the different expectations individuals have when blending households, and the emotional rollercoaster that is the creation of a new family. Through the addition of Eckler's friendly personality, the book successfully combines powerful emotions with humour, avoiding a dry and nagging tone. Eckler brings in different perspectives throughout the book, giving a glimpse of reality of an otherwise idealized topic. The book is logically ordered into chapters, each consisting of personable stories that fully encapsulate the balancing of a blended family.

Within a blended family, Eckler explains there will constantly be inequality amongst its members. As Eckler describes, with the unity of different families, there comes into question the idea of equality. The author admits that "My brain has been working overtime, ever since we blended, to make sure everyone feels equal to us and each other" (p. 99). Throughout the book, Eckler uses multiple examples of children within the blended family feeling unequal or overlooked. In one specific example, Eckler uses the term "Dad guilt" (p. 192), to describe a

situation where a spouse feels guilty for the lack of presence within their children's life. This feeling will "...literally eat [them] alive" (p. 192), as there is the need to "...make up for lost time" (p. 192), which Eckler sees as an unfair division of time, and money, spent between biological and bonus children. In comparison to children, there is also a feeling of inequality surrounding the adults. Eckler feels as though there is a lack of appreciation for her role within the family, a concept that is reiterated throughout the book (p. 140). Furthermore, between the spouses, there is an obvious wage inequality, which is consistently underlying different issues within the family such as house or grocery bills.

In addition, Eckler admits there are "different kids of love" (p. 158) when it comes to relationships inside blended households. There will be different types of love depending on roles within the family. Of course, one's biological child will love them differently than how they would love that person's significant other. In a personal experience, the author recalls seeing a phone lock screen of her spouse with just their biological children and "... can't help but wonder if he picked the picture with his biological children because they hold the most special place in his heart" (p. 88). Eckler uses a personal altercation to illustrate this concept, after an argument with an elder, Eckler comes to the realization that "love isn't equal when it comes to the family you gain along the way while blending" (p. 78). Although blending indicates becoming a new family, that love for one another will not be automatic. Even so, when that emotion does start to develop, "It's not the same kind of love when they're not your own" (p. 84). Eckler adds that although she does love her bonus children, she does not love them like a true mother, a critical distinction within a blended family dynamic. Eckler brings in different opinions from close friends to allow for more normality surrounding the concept. Her friends admit "they were treated differently by non-

biological family members” (p. 77). Eckler, at the end of the book, reaffirms this case as she describes, “Blood, in this case, is thicker than water. And reflecting, it always was as we blended families” (p. 267), a powerful quote that further illustrates the narrative of difference within a blended family.

Similarly, Eckler admits that it is a consistent battle to ensure everyone within the blended family feels considered. As demonstrated in the book, the extended family category within a blended family is more complex than realized. Eckler refers to ensuring that the bonus children’s biological parents are both consistently within the picture, even though there is no immediate relationship, the concept of ensuring a healthy relationship within a new family is key. For example, when the author discovered her pregnancy, “[her] ex... needs to know about this huge life development” (p. 34). Within a blended family, there is never a simple solution, because there are too many people and emotions to consider when making decisions. In another example, Eckler recalls wanted to go to her bonus daughter’s prom, however, the author “feels uncomfortable with going” (p. 196) given her tense relationship with her spouses’ ex. Eckler uses this example to illustrate the complexity within a blended family situation, because although there might be the ultimate desire to be there for bonus children, there must be boundaries set so that the biological parents are at the forefront. At the end of the book, Eckler shares the experience of her separating from her spouse. In an emotional and honest testament, Eckler admits “How could I have not seen how all this fighting has affected our kids?” (p. 251) When the effort to consider everyone involved is missed and the focus shifts to individualized thoughts, it can be a dangerous concept within a blended family, as there are many people’s emotions to take into account.

Furthermore, Eckler exposes that the concept of being satisfied within a blended family is

difficult to achieve, and sometimes does not last. Beginning in later chapters of the book, Eckler begins to allude to a state of depression due to people being unable to reach certain standards. For example, Eckler describes a situation on Mother's Day where children "failed to acknowledge" her (p. 168). Similarly, the author uses quotes such as "...taken advantage of" (p. 141), and "feeling let down" (p. 174), to fully encapsulate the feeling of neglect. Eckler uses another example of a bonus child's prom to illustrate the feelings of disappointment and disregard. Eckler "[is] more exhausted from the expectation" (p. 197), which in turn leaves negative emotions such as feeling "discarded" (p. 197), and "forgotten" (p. 197). The author's vulnerability in this section appeals to the audience, allowing for the audience's emotions around expectations within a blended family to feel validated and honest. Furthermore, Eckler describes that "There are no words to describe the depth of my disappointment" (p. 243) after a hospitalization issue with her daughter and her spouse showed a lack of care, a pivotal point in the book. At this point, Eckler describes there are "too many expectations never met" (p. 248), a deep and emotional phrase that strikes home on many different levels and can be attributed to many sections of one's life. It is at this point, where there is a key distinction drawn by Eckler, that encourages the audience to expose their emotions regarding blending a family and allow for that to be the guiding voice in decisions moving forward.

Eckler's personable approach to this book will allow for families of all situations to feel connected and validated. The seamless blend of humour and honesty through her sharing of personal experience will allow the audience to be fully invested within the book. Eckler illustrates both the downfalls and positives of being within a blended family, and truthfully shares that although it can start out positive, it is a "rollercoaster of emotions" (p. 40).

Eckler's focus is to share a personable experience of struggle within a blended family

situation, however, her multiple experiences she shares throughout the book allow for the sociological and psychological frameworks to be capable of relating to multiple life experiences. Her dry humour and honesty allow for it to be easily accessible and relatable to any academic audience including social workers, sociologists and psychologists. This book can be related to more than just blended families, it can apply to any relationships in life. I appreciate the fact Eckler was able to share her experiences so openly, it allowed for the book to feel like a conversation, very open and truthful. Furthermore, I think the ability for Eckler to share that if something makes you unhappy, it's okay to let it go. I found "Blissfully Blended" a great read as it balanced honesty with humour to develop an informative publication. I would recommend to anyone within a difficult family or relationship situation, or to those who simply want to learn more about family dynamics.