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

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Rebecca reflects on her personal experience of merging her life as a single mom with her new boyfriend, along with his two daughters, a dog, and a new baby on the way. Once the honeymoon phase has worn off, Rebecca is struck with the realities and challenges of combining lives. “Sure, saying that blending families is “so, so hard,” is not a very interesting description of what happens when blending, but it is so, so true. Blending families is so, so fucking hard!” (p. 159). She discovers the different types of love between biological parents and their children, along with the unspoken sentiments of extended family members and friends. This book follows Rebecca’s journey as she attempts to navigate the new waters of her blended family. Rebecca learns how to share her space, which had once been only hers. She must also adjust to her role as a mother with a new baby and a daughter, as a girlfriend, and as a stepmother of two girls. Rebecca learns to accept the expectations required of her, such as cooking, cleaning and caring for the household. Rebecca gets down to the nitty-gritty issues that impact her family’s overall functioning, such as grocery shopping, meals, and cellphone wallpapers. But she also addresses the much more significant challenges, being different parenting styles, disagreements, money, and equity. Rebecca shares her experience with many of her own friends who are blending their own

families. These conversations revealed that most blended families experience fights that are often not applicable in nuclear families. This book addresses the toll the merging process can have on one's mental health, as they must re-evaluate what they require to be happy or at least become tolerable. Rebecca attempts to normalize couples therapy and seeking help but shares that due to the significant cost attached to receiving support, it isn't an accessible resource to many. Rebecca explores how compromising in blended families is necessary, along with lowering expectations to protect one's feelings. She reflects on how falling out of love can happen just as quickly as falling into love at first sight, or lust in her case. She reveals the demise of her relationship, admitting she knew when she fell out of love. Yet, she wasn't able to cut the ties in her blended family for a long time, causing more internal turmoil. Rebecca shares her experiences with feeling invisible and attempting to forgive, even when she knew it wasn't feasible. The separation process is destructive, with individual ego, lack of respect, and attitude being revealed like never before. This entails a new type of heartbreak as one loses not only a partner but also their bonus children. Rebecca debriefs the stigma associated with making a blended family successful as they have already been through a divorce, not wanting to endure the process once again. But in the end, sometimes separation is healthier for not only the partners but the children as well. Without any hope of the relationship improving, or the ability to forgive, there is nothing left to fight for. While some blended families don't have an end, Rebecca's did. She shares the lust, determination, devotion, heartbreak, anger, and disappointment that occurs throughout the course of her journey.

A theme noted throughout the book was Rebecca's significant focus on the struggles associated with blending, rather than the beauties of it. The entire book is based upon the struggles

of blending families and offers no praise for those who do so successfully. She shares about the big and small arguments that no one had prepared her for before merging. What the experts advise to create a thriving blended family and what actually occurs within the household are two very different perspectives. Blending families has become an epidemic, “sixty-six percent of blended families don’t make it. These are pretty shitty odds. I don’t want to be part of the cringe-worthy statistic. But I also realize that we are far from unique” (p. 130). This book also glorifies the life of a single parent, unbothered by impressing another’s children or creating a new life, with the only needs having to be met are Rebecca’s and her daughter’s. Rebecca reflects on her single life and the freedom that accompanied it. She even goes so far as to reflect on what she valued about her first marriage, that being freedom and money. The book also explores the newfound greed and selfishness between ex-partners once they’ve unblended. Based on what Rebecca has written in her book, there seem to be significantly more letdowns than not.

Another theme that re-occured throughout the book was that Rebecca presents a very closed-minded, pessimistic point of view on blended families. Rebecca highlights her experience throughout the process, giving very little attention to the thoughts and feelings of the other members of the household, besides the beliefs she offers based on her own knowledge. This book doesn’t offer any advice or strategies to make the blending process more bearable, rather it only voices the reality that blending is complicated. Nor does it provide any hope for families in similar situations. Rebecca seems to use this book as an outlet to express her frustrations rather than offering advice for others seeking it. This theme begins with the first sentence of the book, “Where the fuck is my confetti? Where is my celebratory dinner?” (p. 11). Many of her points seemed

hypocritical, assigning blame to the boyfriend or children, but rarely herself. As a reader who has not been raised in a blended family, Rebecca has conveyed my point of view that blending simply isn't worth it. I found each chapter to follow a similar pattern. Her boyfriend or bonus children would do something to upset her, resulting in an argument concerning how she's undervalued in the family. I wasn't shocked by how the book ended, and it didn't have any surprises along the way.

Rebecca prioritized brutal honesty, which is often avoided in books, especially ones about failure. She doesn't sugarcoat the realities, offering reliable input into the dynamics of a blended family. Rebecca presents as an average, middle-class individual who struggles with the same issues that most of society encounters yet often refuses to admit. She explores the jealousy in her thoughts and actions, and on occasions, is also able to admit when she was wrong and reflect on the reasoning behind them. I also respect Rebecca's ability to be so incredibly vulnerable in sharing her story with others. Additionally, Rebecca kept the book very confidential, using no names (besides those of her children), and providing no personal details, to protect the other members in this merging journey from being scrutinized. I can appreciate her intention of creating a book that offers humorous, light-hearted context to address the serious concerns of blending family.

Overall, this book highlights the unexpected challenges associated with merging families. It provides an intimate and unfiltered look into the complex needs related to creating a blended family. There is no scientific or theoretical approach highlighted in this book, rather it is all based on anecdotal experiences. The academic audience that could benefit from Rebecca's book is social workers, child and youth care workers, psychologists, and sociologists as these professions

recognize the family as a dynamic, influential system. The targeted audience for this book would be adults experiencing divorce, re-marriage, un-blending, or combining households. While this book offered some easy reading, the arguments were one-sided. In terms of improvements, I would recommend including the perspectives and experiences of the other members directly involved in the merging process. This would provide a more holistic view, and offer some critique to Rebecca's role in the failure of the relationship. We only know what she has chosen to share with us, unsure if there are additional components that were excluded from the book. To conclude, I would recommend this book for those seeking normality and validation in their merging experience. I would not recommend Rebecca's story to individuals looking for support or strategies to simplify the process.