



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" is a lightheartedly put together personal journey through her experience with blending families and the ramifications of children, partners, and exes involved in her new life. Through anecdotes of her day to day, Eckler walks us through the conflicts of priority, unconscious bias, and jealousy that slowly buds and takes to evolve before the blending even begins. She also includes outsider conversations of friends who have been or are in blended families, and the daunting perspective of in-laws, all who seem to be in unanimous agreement: blended families are not as homogeneous as we are led to believe.

The well known phrase "blood is thicker than water," which is meant to emphasize the importance of blood relations over friendships, is a common saying in many household circles, and Eckler finds this still holding true when it comes to blending families. As she eloquently puts, "many say you need to make your partner a priority when you are in a blended family. Other "experts" say that kids should always be the priority. So which fucking is it?" (p. 209). Through a journey of introspection, Eckler navigates the parallels between her need to prioritize her only

daughter, and her boyfriend who insists on prioritizing the new additions to the family instead. The “hi/bye fight,” as she calls it, is a recurring example, and is reflected in both herself and her boyfriend’s children. It occurs when a member of the family enters or leaves the house, and the occupants that witness this do not acknowledge the presence or disappearance. When the girls confide to their father that the reverse happened, Eckler responds with disagreement. She does not believe it was as big of a deal as they were making it out to be. And when Eckler mentions she experiences this with her boyfriend’s children, she uses it as reasoning to why she may not have said hello to them that day. Eckler even seems to mock it by trying to be as cheery as possible when they enter or leave the home, which ends up sounding inauthentic. They begin to think they are not each other’s priorities, or that they do not care, and that can quickly bloom into larger issues.

When you juggle priorities, or find that they have been compromised, it will almost always lead to jealousy on one side of the party, and blended families are far from an exception. For Eckler, this happened to manifest itself through the jealousy of a friend who broke up and managed to unblend, and her own daughter, who felt slighted during a pizza night. The type of jealousy caused by her friend was another byproduct of prioritization. She explains why by stating: “I am also, frankly, envious that my friend no longer has to deal with arguments over money, the division of chores, logistics, managing expectations, how his kids treated her, how he treated her, how their kids treated each other, how she treated her partner, and how each day brought on something new to argue about” (p. 137). It was not the process of unblending itself that Eckler envied, but rather the absence of struggles and worry she was experiencing in her family. In a similar vein, sibling

jealousy is not specifically a blended family issue, but it can be easily triggered when there are new children in the home that your own child had not grown up with. Eckler's daughter feeling sad and upset when the two girls make fun of her pizza, and her questioning her mother if she did a good job is a type of sibling jealousy that could get worse if Eckler's priority was not already putting her daughter first.

Bias, or what some may refer to as favouritism- unconscious or not, is something that exists within any family even if those involved do not speak up about it. "It is not a lesser love. But it is a different one" (p. 87) and these biases do not only affect the parents. In this book, Eckler goes on to explain how a rough confrontation with her mother-in-law reveals an upsetting and hard to swallow truth: sometimes, you eventually stop trying. To elaborate, during a family dinner, talking about the grandchildren and her mother-in-law made a comment that "it is just not the same" (p. 75). This sparked a protective outburst from Eckler only to later reflect and realize that the mother-in-law was right- even if Eckler did not want to acknowledge it at first. Regardless of how you love, you do not love two people in the exact same way- which can unfortunately lead to resentment on both sides.

Despite the unfortunate but necessary airing out of priority, jealousy, and bias, Eckler also regularly focuses on the theme of self love through the lens of her own self aware narration. As we near the end of her story, Eckler sheds light on depression naps, isolation and couples therapy as she tries to navigate why blending has only gotten worse with time. While it can be seen as unhealthy, her insistence on having her own space showed that she was not willing to compromise her own comfort anymore like she had in the past. The journey and eventual failure of couples

therapy helped Eckler find that her boyfriend was no longer the man she had fallen in love with, and that she had perhaps blended too quickly. She goes on to reflect and lament on the relationship and subsequent ‘what-ifs,’ along with understanding that they will not ever be completely unblended, and with time, may even become friends again.

Personally, I found this book to be well received, if however, a rather harsh outlook on the concept of blended families. It almost acts as a discourager, if it was not for the reflection at the end of the book. This is due to my own bias as a member of a blended family myself, but I have to admire the dedication to the “Uncomfortable Truth of Blending Families” section of the book’s title. I would have enjoyed hearing more positives about her experience, but as the title suggests, that was not the point of her story. Reading this book made me realize that there are more struggles and expectations than blended families let on, even my own- which has a much more positive timeline. I thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the self aware honesty that Eckler brought to the pages.

Eckler’s method of reaching out to the reader in a relaxed, intimate level as if speaking with a friend rather than leaning into statistical evidence is a nice and much needed touch when it comes to the sensitive subject of family. She is engaging and enthusiastic to share the so-called darker side of blended families, which many have hidden under the rug. Her intended audience, which seems to be mainly adults already in or are interested in the process of blending families, will find this first-person insight on what to look out for- and possibly avoid going forward- particularly well developed. I recommend this to anyone who is working in a field with children involved as well, such as sociology, social work, psychology, anthropology, and other humanities

studies as they might have blended families. It is important to acknowledge the possibility of troubles they may be exposed to at home, and be equipped to deal with them accordingly.