



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 an intimate account of the author's blended family experience. The author details the issues that arise once her family becomes blended, including the redefinition of expectations, feelings of underappreciation, disappointment and lack of communication. Both Eckler and her partner rush into a new relationship without properly discussing the logistics of a blended family. Consequently, the author struggles with her expectations regarding her partner, his children, and extended family. Ultimately, the relationship deteriorates, and Eckler is no longer able to make "blended splendid" (p. 55). Eckler's personal account reaches beyond herself to the common conflicts of blended family dynamics and how individuals integrate into one. The book contains an excellent combination of Eckler's first-hand account and the accounts of her friends who share the blended family experience.

Eckler begins her journey looking for a one-night stand. She doesn't expect anything more and finds herself completely struck when love blossoms. The author details her romance as passionate, fresh and fantastic. The excitement and thrill of a new relationship progresses rapidly as Eckler confesses that she and her boyfriend "are busy being blissfully, deliriously, disgustingly happy" (p. 23). However, Eckler's relationship causes her to ignore important signs and communication. The deteriorating relationship of the author's friend acts as a piece of fore-

shadowing for Eckler. While the author states, “I have a gut suspicion that blending households has resulted in a slight change of status in their relationship” (p. 23), she is nevertheless blind to this warning, rather viewing it as an indication that her relationship is very successful.

Furthermore, Eckler, while clouded by rose-coloured glasses, rushes into further stages of her relationship, neglecting important discussions integral to the survival of their future blended family. The author reflects that “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 disciplining each other’s children or if the ugly leather chair he is so attached to would be left better on the side of the road” (p. 29). The author and her partner's lack of judgment and foresight inevitably lead to arguments, resentment and family discourse.

Further into the book, Eckler denotes the first large crack in the foundation of her relationship with the “hi/bye fight” (p. 52). Eckler encompasses the conflicting notions of respect and integration in blended family structures with the hi/bye fight. The fight ensues when her boyfriend's daughters feel disrespected when they come home after spending time at their mother's place and were not greeted by Eckler. The author apologized to the girls; however, this ignited a discussion and reflection on the respect she receives from her boyfriend's daughters. Eckler started to argue with her boyfriend over whether she or his daughters should say hello first when entering the home and bye when leaving. Eckler's boyfriend insisted she needs to be the bigger person as the adult; however, the author contends that the responsibility lies solely on her. Eckler references this fight numerous times throughout the book, noting that it was a debate that plagued the length of their relationship. Moreover, the hi/bye fight unravelled the nature of respect within a blended family dynamic. Eckler states, “when you’re in a blended household and two out of the four children aren’t biologically your own, respect isn’t automatic. It has to be earned” (p. 54), thus marking the significance behind something seemingly inconsequential. Additionally, Eckler mentions that the fight may have spurred resentment from her boyfriend's

children as they may have never really felt at home in her house. Her boyfriend's daughters spent fifty percent of the time at their mother's and, upon returning to Eckler's home, may have felt estranged. Eckler notes that the hi/bye fight, although frivolous, "resulted in the rose-coloured glasses officially coming off" (p. 57). The significance of these words is in the relationships newly formed and how each individual now fits into each other's lives.

Additionally, Eckler questions how or if the lives of her and her new blended family will ever be fully integrated. She struggles with the idea that the love one parent shares with their child will never truly be felt by the stepchildren. Eckler lashes out at her boyfriend's grandmother for insinuating her daughter can only be loved by her biological family. Moreover, she grapples with the lack of photos of her and her daughter in the room of her boyfriend's daughters, another indication that there will always be a certain degree of separation between the families. There will never be a pure blend. Eckler eventually comes to terms with the fact that, "It's not the same when they're not your own" (p. 61). Understanding the role that she plays in the life of her boyfriend's daughters and that she, her boyfriend, and their families will always have a form of conditional love.

However, over the years of trying to maintain her blended family, Eckler begins to suffer from depression. Perpetual feelings of disappointment as expectations are crushed and blame is placed on Eckler, lead to chronic anxiety surrounding her family. The means by which she feels attachment are weakened as each relationship is burdened by guilt and blame, this surmounts to Eckler feeling isolated and subsequently isolating herself. Eckler relates her experience to others, stating:

In fact, it's a pretty typical characteristic of blenders. Some people become hidiers immediately after blending houses. Some of us become hidiers after years of trying to fit in and attempting to lower our expectations and finding we can't. So, we hide, because it seems like the easiest option, and maybe our only option to not feel disappointed again. (p. 139).

The author struggles to contend with her depression and turns to abusing anxiety medications as a way of coping. Eckler continues her solitude and avoidance as the anxieties of facing her blended family overwhelm her, clear signs that her relationship is nearing its end.

Sadly, Eckler's relationship does not stand the test of time, as, after years of deterioration, she realizes that she no longer loves her boyfriend. A pivotal moment takes place when Eckler's daughter is admitted to the hospital, and her boyfriend does not show the same concern she does. This instance, surmounted by their previous relationship discourse, essentially drives Eckler to end things. However, the end of her blended family sparks the beginning of a new life with her daughter and son, marked by their shared laughter at the kitchen table. The author reflects on her blended life and poses the question as to whether she would do it again, remarking that she would need some time and a lot of communication but would ultimately blend in the future. Eckler notes that she will learn from her mistakes, adjust expectations, discuss everything, and know what awaits. However, this contemplation takes a back burner as Eckler enjoys her newfound freedom and the start of her new blended unblended contentment.

"Blissfully Blended Bullshit" puts a magnifying glass on blended family dynamics and relationship intricacies. Eckler is immersive and conversational with her lighthearted and casual tone. Furthermore, she ensures that while her perspective is personal and thus biased, she portrays herself and others as complex and well-rounded people. The author subjects herself and her life experience to the scrutiny of others while relaying sage advice through stories of her naivete, emotions, and reactions. Additionally, the author intersperses her autobiographical account with tales from others struggling with the nuances of a blended family. Limitations exist in that all information, while primary sources of a blended family experience, may have biased or a lack of information. There is no quantitative research involved, marking this book purely academic in its sociological lens. Lastly, the academic audience for this book would be Sociology

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and Psychology scholars interested in gathering first-hand knowledge of blended family dynamics and experience or engaging in a specific case study.