



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

Reviewed by: Maggie Ehalt, MacEwan University

Rebecca Eckler's autobiography "Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truths of Blending Families" is a first-hand account of the triumphs and failures of a modern-day blended family, bringing to light what the author says is currently missing from information on how to deal with a blended family. While being able to recognize her faults upon reflection, Eckler paints a vivid picture of the intricacies and difficulties that arise when blended families come together. As the reader is taken out of their current environment and materialized into Eckler's carefully crafted relationship timeline, they are given an all-access pass to her and her partner's journey as they blend households, add another baby to the equation and attempt to navigate their new roles with the children, exes, in-laws and each other. In this lighthearted yet sometimes gut-wrenching memoir, Eckler speaks from personal experience while contrasting and comparing her situation with those of friends, family and acquaintances in blended and non-blended families. With each chapter representing a different period in her relationship, this book focuses on a centralized theme of the truth of living in a blended family. Eckler is not afraid to uncover the dark truths that most people in this situation would be uncomfortable disclosing, making the book an informational piece for mature readers.

As Eckler reflects on her failed attempt to make blended splendid, she focuses on what led to the downfall of her relationship with her partner. Eckler saw the world through rose-colored glasses as she experienced a whirlwind romance. Her idealized relationship and quick decision to combine two separate households resulted from the “honeymoon phase.” During this phase, as Eckler describes, you are so in love that you become blind to your partner's red flags. Being overcome with love and admiration for her partner, the couple combines their separate family units. Failing to discuss the foundational expectations of their impending cohabitation, they throw caution to the wind and move into her current home, where she and her biological daughter reside. However, the author quickly realizes that she is in over her head when she has a near panic attack as the moving van pulls into her driveway.

One main contention between the couple was monetary and the division of money towards the household. A common theme within the book is to act now and deal with it later, which comes back to haunt the author as she expresses her regrets during the reflections at the book's end. Although the couple chose to move into Eckler's house, which she could afford, she was always hopeful her partner would step up and equally contribute to the household as he was a full-time resident. These expectations led to resentment on behalf of Eckler as she felt their financial situation was unfair and most of the fiscal responsibility was put on her. Even with the advice of her lawyer and a cohabitation agreement sitting in her closet, she didn't want to do anything to cause turmoil in their still-fresh relationship. As the author reflects on her decisions and what she would do in case she decides to become part of a blended family again, she states, “I will not repeat the same mistakes. I will know to temper my expectations. I will know what to expect. I will make

sure we discuss everything” (p. 270). Eckler’s ability to be vulnerable and transparent is one of the book’s greatest strengths, as she provides relatable insight and sets realistic goals for the future.

Looking back on her experience, Eckler wonders if their family ever blended. Although they had come together and even created new life during their relationship, there always seemed to be a division between the two families. The author and her daughter would take separate vacations and have their code language, while her partner and his two daughters would spend days at the mall without the others and take up the entire couch during movie night. While living under the same roof, they maintained separate intimate relationships with their biological family members. The author recalls how during even family photos, her daughter was to the outside of her, and his daughters were to his outside. Literally and figuratively showing the divide in their household.

The author heavily discusses the theme of unequal love and bias as she comes to the realization that love isn’t the same when it comes to blended families. Unlike the typical nuclear family, love and biases toward children are formed before the family cohabitates. Therefore, these predetermined opinions and loyalties are brought into the new family dynamic. The perceived favouritism on behalf of her partner that sends the author off the deep end is quite frustrating as a reader when the author sees no wrong in her favouritism and bias towards her daughter. Placing constant judgement on her “bonus daughters’ behaviour in public, interests, and behaviour at home.

As a personal account of her experience with blending and un-blending a family, the book may be construed as shortsighted. Although you would expect the general experiences to be the

same for all parties, the reader is left wondering if all being told is an accurate depiction of what happened. The author even states that “there are always three sides to every story. His truth. Her truth. And the real truth” (p. 185). Although the author's blunt and often vulgar narrative style provides a refreshing and honest look into modern-day family conflicts, the author unwillingly becomes unlikeable. Contradicting herself and often does and says things that make her seem quite hypocritical. As readers, we also question if she ever wanted to be in a blended family, because from the beginning to the end of the experience she is very resistant to change.

With the author's intended audience not only those reading for pleasure but also an academic audience such as sociologists, psychologists, students and others involved in family studies, her abrasive tell-all narrative comes up short. While often making herself out to be the victim, her narrative becomes more of a sob story than a deeper look into the truth of blending families. Because of her desire to not be silenced and lay everything out for the world, the book comes across as a drama-filled reality series rather than a well-rounded look into a blended family's inner workings and struggles. Throughout the book, Eckler truly does unpack “the ugly truth of blending families” (p. 1), unapologetically telling her side of the story. However, this attitude undermines her credibility.

With many prominent themes in this autobiography, such as family and relationship conflict, biases and favoritism, the author creates a page-turning read which is relatable and informative for those beginning, living, and ending blended families. For her audience reading this book for pleasure, Eckler hits the mark. The story flows, and you feel transported into her world, experiencing triumphs and downfalls alongside her. However, from an academic standpoint, it

misses the mark. No human is perfect, but in this case, the author, who, in my opinion, is trying to receive sympathy for her hardships, exposes herself as a significant contributor to the downfall of her blending attempt.

With its shortcomings, Eckler's book still provides valuable information for those looking to understand the upheaval faced when blending families. This book provides insight into what should be considered when choosing to cohabit and provides comfort and potential direction for readers of all families experiencing conflict. This book can act as a roadmap for those looking to form a blended family and will hopefully result in happier and more successful family unions.