



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

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In this refreshingly humorous and honest book, Rebecca Eckler provides readers with all the unpredictable ‘bullshit’ that comes with blending families. After being a single mom for years, Rebecca is now navigating her life with a new boyfriend, his two daughters, his dog and eventually, after a reverse vasectomy, a new baby. Once her blended family is all under one roof, she is hit with the harsh reality of being a blended family “Blending is harder than I ever could have imagined” (p. 178). She soon realizes that it is difficult not only for those living under the same roof but also for extended family members, learning about the different kinds of love one has for a biological family member and a blended family member. This book reflects Rebecca’s personal experience in a blended family, exploring her role as a girlfriend and as the mother of her daughter, new baby son, and two stepdaughters or, as she refers to them, bonus children. She has to learn how to share a space that was once hers and her daughters with four new people and adjust to new expectations of her. Rebecca examines the critical challenges that impact the functioning of her relationship and family dynamic, from finances and different parenting techniques to feeling unwanted and excluded. She also touches on minor disagreements such as phone screensavers, meal planning, and household chores. Rebecca discovers she is not alone in these issues, hearing from her friends and acquaintances throughout the book, who experience severe and trivial matters

within their blended families. From these candid conversations, it appears most blended families experience fights and situations that cannot be applied to the traditional nuclear family.

The book depicts how blending affects one's mental health. Rebecca discusses the beginning signs of her worsening mental health, starting with hiding in her bedroom or car whenever she wanted to avoid her blended family. Over the course of her relationship, she continuously re-evaluates her happiness and what is causing the lack of joy, discovering that lowering expectations and compromising are crucial components in blended families. Rebecca and her boyfriend try couples counselling, acknowledging that seeking help and unbiased opinions is okay while also realizing professional services are not accessible to all as it comes with a substantial cost. However, this could not prevent the collapse of her relationship, recounting that she knew the exact moment she fell out of love with her partner, "October thirtieth is the night I clock out of my blended family. I'm simply done with the bullshit. It's not blissful anymore. It never will be blissful again" (p. 240). Even after this moment of clarity, she remained with her boyfriend for two years, hoping she would find forgiveness, only to build up more resentment. Rebecca soon discovers a new type of heartbreak when un-blending "You're un-blending, which takes even more of an emotional toll than a regular breakup, because you're not just breaking up with your partner. You're breaking up with a number of people. While you make think blending is hard, and it is, un-blending seems even more painful" (p. 134). Rebecca highlights how, for some families, it is better for the parents to be divorced rather than together fighting all the time, as she and her boyfriend fell into a routine of doing. While there are successful blended families, Rebecca's was not one of them. Throughout her journey, she shares every emotion that comes with

the blending process, including lust, dedication, loyalty, heartbreak, and disappointment.

A theme explored throughout the book is Rebecca's bleak and narrow-minded outlook on blended families. "Boyfriend and I are now part of that cringeworthy statistic. We are part of the sixty-six percent of blended families who have broken up. We have followed in the footsteps of the friends who set us up" (p. 249). Although refreshingly honest, the book provides a one-sided story of a blended family, only briefly looking at how blending affected others in the household. This book would provide no comfort or advice to those just entering a blended family; however, for those un-blending, the book could provide a source of laughter and a sense that you are not going through uncommon situations and feelings alone. The book only clarifies the complicated reality behind blending families. As a reader from a traditional nuclear family, Rebecca's book has convinced me to avoid blending at all costs, as the risk seems far greater than the reward.

Another repeated theme throughout the book was the emphasis on the difficulties of becoming a blended family as opposed to the numerous benefits. I found some chapters to be repetitive, with the issue of money or her feeling invaluable compared to her bonus children would emerge, only for her boyfriend to lack empathy and be unable to see things from her perspective. Rebecca's multiple conversations with her friends in blended families almost always highlight the consequences of having a blended family rather than the positives. Even the conversation she has with her one friend from a successful blended family turns out to be a disappointment when finding out her friend is estranged from her blended family following the death of her biological mother. When Rebecca is not reflecting on the 'bullshit' of blended families, she romanticizes the life she once had as a single parent. Rebecca was often hypocritical in many situations and issues between

her and her boyfriend. When Rebecca's bonus daughter had prom, her bonus daughter felt being in that setting with her biological parents and Rebecca would be awkward, promptly hurting Rebecca's feelings, "I think, too, Boyfriend wants to have a nice evening celebrating, and if I'm not there, he won't have to worry about how I'm feeling and can put all his focus on his daughter. Still, I inwardly wish he would have had my back. To me, it's bullshit that he doesn't" (pp. 196-197). Meanwhile, she states that she does not invite her boyfriend to many of her daughters' events, "I don't always invite Boyfriend to come along, because it makes me uncomfortable. I think it would make Rowan's dad feel uncomfortable too, and I'm still very loyal to him and care what he thinks" (p. 201).

Overall, this book does not embellish the realities of being in a blended family and does not leave one feeling hopeful for their own blended family future. Rebecca focuses on the unforeseen problems that could arise when combining two families and all the unexpected people it would affect, touching on serious subjects in an unfiltered, funny way. Rather than dealing with a theoretical or scientific approach, this book is all established on personal anecdotal experiences. The academic audience could include professionals such as social workers, psychologists, sociologists, youth care workers, and nearly any career under the social science umbrella. These professions could benefit from understanding family dynamics and the unique experiences blended families endure. Written as a lighthearted, easy read, the targeted audience, as previously mentioned, would be those experiencing divorce, un-blending, and re-marriage. With many faults of others and few of Rebecca's, providing additional perspectives on the day-to-day issues inside a blended family would improve the overall experience of the book. In conclusion, I would recom-

mend this book to those looking for validation and to escape the ‘bullshit’ of one’s own family; I would not recommend this book to those seeking support or advice on how to ease the blending process.