



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

Reviewed by: Julia Hitchings, MacEwan University

Rebecca Eckler's book, "Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truths of Blending Families," is a witty and engaging review of what it is like to blend families. Eckler dives deep into the retelling of her own story and her experiences when attempting to blend her and her boyfriend's families and provides both positive and negative aspects of the experience, which allows the reader to fully understand her whirlwind of emotions throughout the process. The way she captures readers' attention through the retelling of her experiences is truly refreshing and includes all the unexpected dilemmas one faces during the experience of blending families. Eckler discusses all the hard truths within the blending of families and its effects on others outside of one's own family. She explains the impact of blending families on the children, the in-laws, the exes, and even the ex-in-laws, which is often forgotten about. She also includes the experiences and advice provided to her by friends who also went through the same difficulties of blending their own families.

Although the whole situation of blending families is messy, Eckler organizes her experiences chronologically to engage readers and bring them along her journey. Throughout the book, Eckler brings light to all the harsh truths that come with blending families, and the book can be seen as a type of guide for individuals who are wading the waters of blending families. I would

highly recommend this book to those who are in a blended family because it lets others know that they are not alone and that many issues within family life should be normalized. Throughout the book, Eckler provides examples of others who have also encountered her experiences and provided her with advice, showing that these issues are more common than not. This book confesses feelings that many individuals are too shy to disclose for fear of what others might think; therefore, this book would be an excellent read for anyone in a family, whether blended or not. The intended academic audience of Eckler's book includes psychologists and sociologists involved with studies of the family, as well as family support workers and social workers, because this book provides real insight into family matters that most would be too scared to tell.

Eckler's use of a postmodern theoretical approach allows her to remind her readers throughout the book that there are a vast number of changes to be encountered during the process of blending families. Eckler also explains how single-parent, divorced, and blended families are becoming increasingly more common than nuclear families and that a family is essentially what one makes it to be. Eckler also explains within the book that blending families can affect people more significantly than others. She notes that new people will be moving into her house and that she and her daughter will have to adapt to it. At the same time, Eckler's boyfriend and his two daughters are forced to adjust to a completely new environment. It should be noted that the exes of the new couple are also adversely affected because not only is their ex changing their life, but they are also affecting the life of their child(ren). In the book, Eckler discloses the moment she told her ex that she and her new boyfriend were moving in together and that they were expecting a baby. Although she was no longer dating her ex, she still felt the need to tell him that he was not

being forgotten because he was still a big part of her life, and they still cared significantly for one another.

Another aspect usually forgotten about is how grandparents are affected by the blending of families. Grandparents not only have to get used to their new son-in-law or daughter-in-law but are also forced to adapt to the idea that they have a new grandchild or grandchildren. Eckler discusses her encounter with this harsh truth when she recounts a dinner with her new mother-in-law, who expresses her excitement about the new baby and the addition of a new grandchild. During the discussion of the topic, Eckler comments on how her mother-in-law forgets that her biological daughter is also one of her grandchildren. Eckler's mother-in-law continues by stating that when it comes to grandchildren,"" it's not the same when they're not your own"" (p. 74). This quote becomes a very controversial topic in the book because Eckler believes that all the children should be treated equally. However, later in the discussion, Eckler's mother chimes in and expresses that she also does not feel the same love for her step-grandchildren. At this moment, Eckler recognizes that she also loves her biological children more than she loves her stepdaughters. This moment can be seen as a drawback in the book because of Eckler believing that her mother-in-law's comment is condescending. However, when her mother commented on the same subject with the same opinion, she listened and realized she agreed that there would always be inequality amongst its members.

When it comes to blending a family, treating members equally is a very large issue. In fact, one of Eckler's friends believes that "the hardest part of blending... is for sure treating all the children the same" (p. 78). Within the book, Eckler even admits that "[m]y brain has been working

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overtime, ever since we blended, to make sure everyone feels equal to us and each other” (p. 99). There are multiple instances throughout the book where Eckler describes children within the blended family as feeling unequal or overlooked. The “hi/bye” fight is a great example of this. Although Eckler constantly tried to make everyone feel equal within the household, she came in the door one day and forgot to say hello to her stepdaughters. In a nuclear family, it is likely that something as simple as forgetting to say “hi” when walking in the door would never be a problem. However, it led to a family-wide disagreement because Eckler’s stepdaughters felt overlooked.

Another aspect of unequalness within a blended family can be seen when Eckler looked at her boyfriend’s screensaver to find that the photograph on display only contained his three biological children. Since the only child missing from the picture was Eckler’s daughter, she became outraged. This scenario brings rise to the issue that it may not only be the children feeling unequal but so do the adults due to the treatment of their children. For instance, Eckler’s boyfriend may view her daughter as less important than his offspring, which would provide reasoning for excluding Eckler’s daughter in the photograph. Furthermore, Eckler’s emotional reaction to this exclusion may result from her feelings of unequalness since her biological daughter is being treated differently from those who are biologically related to her boyfriend.

Eckler also comments on how she feels a lack of appreciation for her role within their blended family, which is likely due to the lack of division of the household chores and finances. At first, Eckler believed that serious topics could be “[figured] out later” (p. 44) because the discussion of serious topics would take away from the excitement of moving in together. However, once the so-called “honeymoon” phase was over, Eckler felt underappreciated for the fees she took

on and was unhappy that her boyfriend never helped pitch in towards their living expenses other than groceries.

One significant issue I found within the book was how it was very one-sided. Although this view is used very well to help readers sympathize with the writer and the experiences she has gone through, it makes it so we cannot see the whole picture and are forced to take Eckler's side on all the issues presented within the book. A well-known saying is that there are two sides to every story. However, because there are moments within the book where Eckler is strongly opinionated, it seems as though she vents to her readers to get them to agree with her viewpoint on various issues.

The purpose of "Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truths of Blending Families" is to provide a resource for people to turn to if they are wondering what to expect through the process of blending families and acts as a way for Eckler to share the "less-than-ideal realities" (p. 14) with others. Her book was incredibly eye-opening, providing an insider's perspective on the challenges of blending families and discussing issues one would not usually think about until being forced to dive into the realities themselves. "Blissfully Blended Bullshit" can be used as a guide on how to successfully blend families or for real insight into family matters. This book shows that there is much to consider before diving into the process of blending families and helps people understand the ins and outs of what to expect.