One potential challenge to the book is the level of writing. That is, the required level of reading for this book appears a bit high for persons with severe bipolar disorder. For this review, we randomly selected a module and analyzed it using a Flesch-Kincaid measure of grade level and reading ease. The introductory paragraph for module #29 had a grade level estimate of 14 and a reading ease level of 45 (0 = *difficult to understand*, 100 = *easy to understand*). While the complexity of the background information could be reduced, it is important to note that the exercises have reading levels that are appropriately tailored to the readers with bipolar disorder.

Issues related to spirituality were not a prominent feature of the book. While the exercises allow for issues of spirituality to emerge, a service provider without this awareness and prompting may not address this important issue in the recovery process. Clinicians would benefit from additional resources on successful implementation of this program, as there will always be unique challenges to implementing new services and adapting them for different environments. A free online supplement to this book that highlights different user experiences in different settings, as well as a discussion forum, would be ideal.

Overall, service providers working with persons with bipolar disorder will undoubtedly find this book a key resource. The format of the book and strong empirical base make it an excellent resource for practitioners. Given that social workers represent the largest body of mental health service providers, this book would be a key resource for the mental health curriculum in MSW programs.

Pryor, J.
The International Handbook of Stepfamilies: Policy and Practice in Legal, Research, and Clinical Environments Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008. 611 pp. $95.00 (hardbound). ISBN 978-0-470-11458-2

Reviewed by: Suo Deng, *University of Georgia*

In the past half century, not only in the United States but also in many other Western and non-Western societies, we have witnessed significant changes in the meanings of marriage, parenting, and what a family looks like. In this regard, stepfamilies as a newly configured, complicated, and multifamily system have emerged and attracted attention from both researchers and social work practitioners. It is currently estimated that one third of children in the United States will have some life experience as being members of a stepfamily (Teachman & Tedrow, 2008). Over time, we have come to realize that stepfamilies have become integrated and normalized into the mainstream conceptualization of North American "families" (Levin & Sussman, 1997). Research on theories, methods, service models, as well as legal issues related to stepfamilies has, by default, shown an irresistible appeal for those of us working directly with these families in the helping professions.

The International Handbook of Stepfamilies by Pryor (2008) is an impressive collection of timely research studies and reviews about stepfamilies. The editor has selected highly regarded scholars, well known in their respective fields and from a worldwide stage including the likes of social demographers, sociologists, psychologists, clinicians, legal scholars, and communication researchers. This book presents three main overarching themes. First of all, stepfamily research is directed toward scholarly inquiry about the social manifestations of life inside and outside of stepfamilies. Second, the book addresses the global context of stepfamilies, including the demographic, cultural, and the historical development of stepfamilies in different global regions. Thus, the groundwork is laid for potential comparative scholarship. Finally, the book elucidates the generic and variant aspects of stepfamily life as a viable structure of both having and being in a family.

The handbook is organized into four subsections including: (a) the international, demographic, and cultural contexts of stepfamilies, (b) dynamics within stepfamily households, (c) influences and relationships beyond the household, and (d) clinical and legal issues for stepfamilies. The editor then presents a continuous overview of these impressive readings and identifies some key questions to think about in the final chapter.

Subsection I presents a global, cultural, and demographic context of stepfamilies. It sets the stage for the landscape of stepfamily issues in a global context. Chapter 2 by Claxton-Oldfield reviews the ever changing culturally related stereotypes of stepfamilies in Western society. In chapter 4, Nozawa notes that although there is no translational counterpart for the English word "stepfamily" in the Japanese language and culture, increased rates of divorce and remarriage recently made stepfamilies a societal problem, which parallels many other Western countries. The author mainly attributes the difficulties of Japanese stepfamilies to "institutional incompleteness" or inadequacies when considering that the standard and culturally rooted intact family model has been more completely infused into most social institutions such as the educational system. Coltrane, Gutierrez, and Parke, in chapter 5, highlight several apparent differences between Mexican American and Euro-American families, which focus the lens of this issue on yet another cultural aspect of stepfamilies, that being stepfathering (an often forgotten component of such families). These three chapters remind us of the importance of taking into account culture and history when trying to understand the meanings, nuances, definitions, and perceptions of stepfamilies. As such, demographical data collected from several countries, including, respectively, the United States, France, and Japan, show the evidence of the worldwide prevalence of this new form of a family configuration and its pivotal implications in the past several decades.

Subsection II addresses further the dynamics existing within stepfamily households. In this regard, the multiple and ubiquitous aspects of social interactions in stepfamilies are described and emphasized. Stepfamily dynamics include, but are not necessarily limited to interpartner relationships, parent–child interactions, sibling relationships, as well as their respective interactions. Applying a qualitative approach to collect data in the United Kingdom, Robertson, in chapter 6, presents the diversity of stepfathers' experiences that have been seriously neglected in extant literature. Building on this notion, but switching the gender, Smith, in chapter 7, signifies the frequent and often pivotal mediation role of stepmothers between their partners and children. It is apparent that stepmothers, as women, are also a potential vulnerable population in such families in terms of their own previously failed relationships, child rearing practices, and mental health problems. Sibling relationships are reviewed in chapter 8 by Baham, Weimer, Braver, and Fabricius, who propose a conceptual model to examine the quality of this type of relationship in blended families. In chapter 9 by Cartwright and also chapter 11 by Shelton, Walters, and Gordon, the impact of parenting styles and interparental relationships on child well-being are stressed. These authors (in these two related chapters) reveal how children's experiences of parental conflicts and the reorganization of family structures affect their psychological adaptation in both their first families and then their respective stepfamilies. Chapter 10 by Eeden-Moorefield and Pasley and chapter 12 by Snoeckx, Dehertogh, and Mortelmans highlight the issues of interpartner marital stability and gender labor division. Finally, in chapter 13, the conclusion of this subsection, Afifi states the importance of considering the stepfamily as a social unit for purpose of analysis and emphasizes the multifaceted and intimate nature of stepfamily relationships.

Subsection III focuses on the important efforts that have been made to understand relationship dynamics beyond the walls of stepfamily households. In chapter 14, the authors tend to position and consider stepfamilies within rather flexible social networks. As such, the relationship meanings and boundary issues of stepfamilies are defined by these multiple membership ties, instead of by single households. Nonresident parents are the focus of attention in chapters 15 and 16. Pryor in chapter 15 investigates the contact and involvement of nonresident parents in stepfamilies, especially their roles and influences on the lives of their children. Subsequently, in chapter 16, Coleman, Troilo, and Jamison explore the diversity of stepmother familial roles, including their different experiences as residential and nonresidential mothers in stepfamily households. Moreover, relationships between stepgrandparents and stepchildren are scrutinized more extensively in chapter 17. The examination of the influences and relationships beyond their actual households brings readers to a broader but more relevant understanding of the immediate environment of stepfamilies.

The final subsection IV addresses both clinical and legal issues for stepfamilies all over the world. The three chapters in this subsection focus attention to tried and true clinical intervention models targeting successful stepfamily therapy. Papernow, in chapter 18, describes unique challenges implicit in the stepfamily architecture. The author highlights the developmental life cycle of stepfamilies and presents helpful techniques to facilitate the navigation of unique stepfamily problems. Chapter 19 by Whitton, Nicholson, and Markman presents well-designed evaluations of relevant programs in the stepfamily field of study. Chapter 20 then examines more empirical evidence about clinical and preventive interventions for stepfamilies. The institutional environment of stepfamilies, particularly legal systems, is stressed both in chapter 21 by Atkin and chapter 22 by Malia. In these two chapters, the complexities, nuances, paradoxes, limitations, and difficulties of laws related to stepfamilies are highlighted appropriately in both New Zealand and the United States. Although these two countries are indeed vastly different, the "wraparound" legal issues frame the realities of not only how we have come to view stepfamilies but also how we have come to work with them.

Stylistically, this book is well organized and covers most of the important aspects of stepfamilies ranging from individual and dyad relationships, to family dynamics within and beyond stepfamily household, and the much broader policy context. It reads as an invaluable research handbook or comprehensive source book. The editor collected and edited chapters from different theoretical and methodological aspects, which provides readers with various insightful observations, quantitative and qualitative data, as well as comparative analyses on the worldwide stepfamily phenomenon. Finally, the book, laced with discussions of conceptual frameworks, practice suggestions, and clinical models, provides a practical and useful guide for helping practitioners in assessing and treating such stepfamilies.

However, a few weaknesses of this book should be mentioned. First, although the title of the book connotes that it is an "international handbook of stepfamilies," except for one Japanese study, most of the demographic data and discussions in this book derive from the Western context, especially the United States. More diverse and culturally related studies on stepfamily life are needed in the future edition. For example, the inclusion of an additional chapter or two from the Eastern hemisphere about the reconfiguration of families and especially stepfamilies after the devastating earthquakes in China and tsunami in Indonesia would add breadth to the book's global perspective. Second, inconsistent definitions of the term stepfamily were noted in the book. Although it may be beneficial to tolerate a fluid definition for stepfamily research, as noted by Pryor in the final chapter, the various and inconsistent definitions may lead to some confusion of terminology, which then may hinder the development of research and practice.

In sum, this handbook would be of benefit to a variety of family researchers, clinicians, and social scientists. It has particular relevance for those involved with family social work education, training, and practice. For social work students, this book is a necessary reference to relevant family work courses as it provides theoretical frameworks and practice scenarios on different aspects of stepfamily issues. It will aid students

in their understanding of the complexity of stepfamily context and dynamics worldwide. For social work practitioners, this book signifies an ecosystemic perspective and presents insights into various social, cultural, and policy factors, which affect stepfamily functioning, and its rich empirical research and clinical evidence on stepfamilies could serve as an essential and indispensable tool in conjunction with formulating aspects for evidence-based social work practice with stepfamilies.

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Reviewed by: David Stoesz, *Virginia Commonwealth University*

On November 14, 2005, an emaciated 3-year-old boy opened the door for police who had been called to the apartment of a Native American mother living across Puget Sound from Seattle to find two children, aged 16 months and 6 weeks, dead of dehydration and starvation. In the bedroom, with the dead children was their intoxicated mother and more than 300 empty beer cans. A reconstruction of the tragedy revealed that the mother had feared the release of one of the children's fathers from jail after being incarcerated for raping her and had gone on a multiday drinking binge. Six complaints of abuse and neglect had been filed about mother's failure to care for her children during the previous 3 years, but the response of Child Protective Services (CPS) had been "untimely and ineffective." After substantiating one complaint, CPS assigned the family to Alternative Response Services (ARS), a community-based nonprofit. The subsequent child fatality review noted that ARS "did not identify alcohol abuse, or mental health issues as areas of concern, despite a CPS referral stating the mother had been hospitalized due to binge drinking, and that she had started hearing voices telling her she should kill herself." The final report from ARS noted "All services completed" (Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, 2005, p. 7). The CPS letter to the mother stating that the most recent complaint of abuse and neglect was *un*founded was mailed the day *after* the agency learned of the children's deaths. The denouement of the episode included the firing of a child welfare worker and her supervisor, a renegotiated agreement with ARS providers, the augmentation of state appropriations for CPS, and a wrongful death settlement from state and county government on behalf of the surviving child for $2.5 million (C. Johnston, personal communication, August 12, 2009).

Institutional negligence of similar consequence had afflicted the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) in Washington, D.C., resulting in the agency's placement in receivership under a federal court 20 years ago. The DCFS executive from 2001 to 2004 was Olivia Golden, a graduate of the Kennedy School of Government, who inherited not only a foundering agency but the skepticism of *The Washington Post* as well. Three *Post* reporters had won a Pulitzer Prize for a series on child fatalities in the District, writing that "from 1993 to 2000, 229 children died after they or their families came to the attention of the District's child protection system because of neglect or abuse complaints" (Golden, 2009, p. 5). Golden steered DCFS, hiring a team of managers intent on institutional reform, fending off criticism of the *Post*, establishing rapport with elected officials, and building bridges to a balkanized infrastructure of public institutions. Considering that other public agencies in District of Columbia (DC)—mental health, housing, and education—were also under court supervision or the equivalent because of chronic mismanagement, the task could not have been more daunting. Public services had deteriorated to such an extent that the DC mirrored the "failed states" that were perplexing the State Department internationally.

In presenting "ideas that have been tested in large public child welfare agencies, not just pilot projects" (p. 5), Golden complements her years at DCFS with portraits of Utah and Alabama, large systems that had also failed maltreated children. Much to her credit, Golden acknowledges the sorry state of child welfare, a public institution in which almost 40% of substantiated allegations of abuse and neglect receive no services (p. 56). Indeed, she acknowledges that 1,760 children were estimated to have died as a result of maltreatment in 2007, a substantial increase from 2001. That 75% of such deaths were children younger than 4 adds urgency to the matter (p. 69). Child welfare staff often labor under caseloads that are double what has been recommended (p. 77). The perilous circumstances of many children and underresourced child welfare programs effectively subvert legislation intended to enhance child welfare. For example, efforts to reunify foster children with their biological parents have faltered, falling from 60% in 1998 to 53% in 2006 (p. 102). Equally troubling is the absence of data on the well-being of children in care: "while children are in care, there is little information about the quality of the