

---

## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

---

Kingwell, M. (2000). *Better Living: In pursuit of happiness from Plato to Prozac*. New York, NY: Crown Publishing. ISBN 0609605356. Hardcover, 432 pages (July 5, 2000)

---

*Reviewed by:* Tom Strong, University of Northern British Columbia

Mark Kingwell is a Generation X'er who seems to be showing up everywhere as our pre-eminent cultural critic (Examples: Harpers, Saturday Night, CBC). He is an associate professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto and is seen by many as heir apparent to the role Marshall McLuhan played a generation ago. In "Better living" Kingwell takes us on a personal and philosophical romp inspired by a student's request that he define happiness. His meandering answer to this question is a lot of fun and serves as a profitable invitation to reflect on one of counselling's most daunting goals and questions: what makes us happy?

Kingwell takes us on a personal quest for happiness that has many familiar stops. Kingwell is not another neurotic Woody Allen though he brings his personal life in full view as we read about his stay at a therapy retreat, his experiences on Prozac and St. John's Wort, and the capacities of media, technology, and consumer goods to make him happy. The journey is relentlessly skeptical and, at times, hilarious. He also combines his grasp of philosophical history with his postmodern sensibilities in answering this question of happiness. He takes a satirical poke at the DSM-IV, reviewing an article in the 1992 *Journal of Medical Ethics* entitled: "A proposal to classify happiness as a psychiatric disorder." Still, Kingwell is particularly interested in the role that ideas have played in shaping our understandings and experience of happiness. And, he pulls these ideas from philosophers as much as he does from TV ads, movies, and bestselling books.

At worst, such ideas fetishize our sense of happiness. Philosophers have explored the concept of happiness in some ways Kingwell considers instructive; he particularly likes Aristotle's concept of eudaimonistic happiness (a satisfaction with one's character and actions). But, Kingwell's primary focus of concern is our consumer culture that promises happiness. Ultimately, he locates his view of happiness in virtuous character and action. The happiness made possible by consumption and technological advances is unfulfilling; too much junk food for the soul, in Kingwell's estimation.

So, why should a book like this matter to practicing counsellors? Happiness, or its apparent absence in our clients' lives, guarantees us a clientele. But, how do we make sense of happiness, and formulate plans together with clients to attain it, when our concepts of it are, as Kingwell suggests, culturally "manufactured"? This book prompts consideration of what we undertake to do as we counsel. If happiness is a target to which we orient our collaborative efforts in counselling, it is a moving target and one that may hold cultural meanings that miss the mark for our clients. In this era when we are increasingly invited to reflect upon what we take for granted,

there is much to "unpack" when discussing happiness in counselling. This book, while fun to read, puts the myriad ways society (including our profession) has promised happiness under a magnifying glass, asking us to reflect beyond our next purchase or symptom-relieving substance, to answer the question Kingwell only partially answers. Besides, Kingwell has a knack for holding up our cultural mirror for us; something he does with wit, irreverence and many causes for further reflection that will keep me going for some time.

---

Weiser, J. (1999). *PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the secrets of personal snapshots and family albums*. Vancouver: PhotoTherapy Centre. ISBN: 0-9685619-0-X. 379 Pages.

---

*Reviewed by:* Keith A. Kawa, University of Ottawa

In *PhotoTherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*, Judith Weiser provides a comprehensive and practical guide regarding this creative approach to therapy.

The author, a registered art therapist and licensed psychologist, is currently the training coordinator and director of the PhotoTherapy Centre in Vancouver, Canada. She has been a therapist and PhotoTherapy trainer for over twenty years, and has given numerous lectures, workshops, and courses across North America, Great Britain, and Europe. Weiser is also a professional photographer whose work has been displayed in many photographic publications and gallery exhibits.

The first two chapters of the book introduce PhotoTherapy, provide rationale for its use as a therapeutic tool, and offer a brief look at each of the five techniques that may be employed by the therapist. The remainder of the book explores the specifics of PhotoTherapy, and provides information, illustrations, and suggestions about each technique and how they may be incorporated into the counselling realm.

More specifically, Chapter Three introduces photo-projective techniques, which involve the process of deriving meaning from any photograph that is viewed. Chapter Four deals with self-portraits, which are photos taken *of* the client, *by* the client. This technique serves to increase the self-awareness and self-esteem of the client. Photos of the client that have been taken by others are the topic of Chapter Five, and instruction is given regarding the use of client photos as reference points to gather more information regarding their life and feelings. Chapter Six examines photos taken or collected by the client, as their selection of photographs may indicate what types of images they value. This can also assist the therapist in determining starting points for therapy. Album and photo-biographical snapshots are covered in Chapter Seven, where the focus of the photographs is on the client's experience of family and community. The material presented in the book is summarized well in Chapter Eight, and is followed by a comprehensive list of References and Recommended Readings.