



The Stuff of Family Life: How our Homes Reflect our Lives

Michelle Janning

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The Stuff of Family Life, by Michelle Janning, is a fascinating sociological exploration of what material goods say about people and society. Examining both spaces and objects, the book looks at different life stages and the living spaces that people find themselves in. It offers a unique and brilliant perspective that may change the way people view their belongings.

The book looks at the various stages of life, beginning with young adulthood and progressing through dating, marriage, parenting, divorce, and aging, and studies the kinds of spaces people occupy and the material possessions that they fill that space with. Historical trends are examined along with economic and geographic differences to show how what people possess reflects on the time, place, and societal position they occupy.

The book is intelligent. It is also a relatable and entertaining read. In addition to academic studies that she and other sociologists have conducted, Janning draws examples from her own life, and those examples are things that many people will be intimately familiar with. For instance, the author talks about the LEGOs she has stepped on in her living room and what that toy in that place says about her: "First, I am part of a social class that can afford LEGO bricks; second, I adhere to a cultural belief that having them (and perhaps not swearing in front of my child) shows that I am a good parent; and third, my living room intermingles items from both kid and adult worlds."

The Stuff of Family Life is an illuminating, well-researched and remarkable book. The insights it offers afford an opportunity to examine the personal effects every family surrounds themselves with and to perhaps find insight into who they are as individuals, as families, and as members of society.

CATHERINE REED-THURESON (May/June 2017)

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