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What Causes People to Not Clean Their House The Role of Mental Health and Personality by Kendra Cherry, MEd

Do you ever dream of living in the perfectly clean and organized rooms of a home décor catalog? Or would you rather spend your time in a home cluttered with objects, souvenirs, books, art, and items that make up your daily life? Both of these questions are another way to ask: what causes someone to not clean their house?

For some people, a tidy home can be soothing, an orderly retreat in an often disorderly world. For others, such environments can be sterile, bland, and uninspiring. Some people feel anxious in a cluttered room,¹ while others feel they're most creative amid the chaos.

Organization is big business these days. From books to seminars to organizational systems, everyone seems to want to find some way to perfectly arrange every aspect of their lives.

Messiness has long been viewed as something of a character flaw or a sign of laziness. Cleanliness and organization are presented as the ideal—both a sign of and path to success. But what about those that are a little bit messier or more cluttered? What does a messy living space say about you?

Mental Health Issues That Can Cause Someone to Not Clean Their House

Having a messy home might be the result of a lot of factors. If you don't clean your house, it might mean you are busy and have little time to clean and organize. It might be a sign that you have too much stuff. Or it might be the result of having young kids in the house who are usually not motivated to clean up after themselves.

But if your home is just habitually messy, does it say anything about the state of your mental health? In some instances, the state of your room might be linked to a psychiatric condition.

People with obsessive-compulsive disorder, for example, may become so preoccupied with keeping things germ-free or symmetrical that they spend excessive amounts of time sterilizing or organizing their living space.

In other instances, people hoard items to the point that they cannot part with even the most seemingly trivial objects, like old newspapers or plastic containers, without experiencing anxiety. The sheer number of items can be extremely difficult to organize and can interfere with one's ability to move around the living space.

Mental Health Implications

A messy home can be a sign of deeper mental health issues if:

- Having a messy home is a new phenomenon
- Living with the mess is something that actually bothers you
- Being messy signifies something deeper going on

Sign of Depression

If you are typically neat and organized, suddenly not caring about a messy living space might be a sign that something is going on in your life. For example, messiness can sometimes be a sign of depression. Depressed people often feel too fatigued or hopeless to keep up with the routine of household tasks.

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Depression can also make it harder to stay focused and have the energy to straighten up a room. If you struggle to stay on task, it can be hard to devote the time and attention needed to keep things tidy.

So while you might notice that a room is messy and have intentions to clean it up, finding the concentration and energy levels needed to do the task can feel difficult or even impossible.

If you suspect that your messy home might be a sign of problems in your life or a result of depression, don't be afraid to reach out. Talk about what is going on with your healthcare provider or consult a mental health professional to get specific advice for your situation. A counselor, therapist, or healthcare practitioner can help you get to the bottom of what's going on and assist you in coming up with a plan of action to address the problem.

Sign of Feeling Overwhelmed

If you are frustrated, angry, or overwhelmed by the clutter and disarray, then it's a clear sign that something needs to be addressed. Sometimes a mess might be frustrating.

Figuring out where to start and how to tackle the problem can seem overwhelming. This might mean prioritizing certain areas, learning new organizational tactics, or getting other household members to help with the cleanup.

Sign of Your Preferences

Is your messiness habitual? Some people simply do not place a high priority on having everything clean, organized, and in its place. In this case, messiness is simply a normal state of affairs. If the house is cluttered and it's just fine with you, then it's probably more a sign of your personality and preferences.

How Personality Can Cause Someone to Not Clean Their House

So what makes tidy and messy people different? Are some people just born with personalities that prefer order while others thrive on chaos? While some might suggest that a cluttered home is a sign of a cluttered mind, those who prefer this type of environment are not necessarily disorganized.

In some cases, a person's desk might look like a jumbled mess, strewn with papers, envelopes, and files. Yet, they always seem to know exactly where each and every item is when they need it. Some of the most creative and productive people seem to thrive in this type of environment.

The famed psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud was once attributed as saying, "Don't clean up the mess. I know exactly where everything is." If having a perfectly neat and tidy room is what inspires you and helps you feel productive and creative, it might mean that you have what is known as a Type A personality. People with this personality type tend to be perfectionists. Having everything in its place helps fulfill their need for order and control.

But if you tend to be more laid back in your approach to housework and tidying up, having a messy house suggests that you have more of a Type B personality. People with this personality type are more relaxed than their Type A counterparts. Rather than focusing on achieving perfection, they are more attracted to ideas, experiences, and creativity.

Advantages of Messiness

And there is research that supports the idea that messiness also has an upside. Kathleen Vohs, Ph.D., and her fellow researchers did a series of experiments on the psychology of messiness. They found that while working in an orderly space encouraged behaviors such as generosity and healthy eating, working in a messy environment actually led to greater creativity.

So while orderliness might be an aspirational quality, research has also shown that there are some advantages to being messy. If

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you tend to have a messy room, here are some possible advantages backed by psychology research.

Heightened Creativity

The researchers believed that doing work in a clean and tidy space activates social norms encouraging people to do what is expected of them. Working in a messy space, on the other hand, relaxes that need and allows people to break free of social norms and expectations.

In the study, participants were placed in either clean or messy rooms and then asked to complete a task that involved finding new uses for ping-pong balls. The participants in the messy room condition were rated by impartial judges as coming up with more creative and innovative ideas than those who were in the clean-room condition.

Such findings may have implications when designing workspaces, particularly for professions that require a great deal of innovation and creativity. Employers might be encouraged to allow their workers to design and create workspaces that are more highly personalized, even if that means they might be less tidy.

Obviously, as the researchers explain, this doesn't necessarily mean that everyone who is exposed to a messy environment will become more creative.

Some people tend to work better in highly organized spaces, while others work better in less organized environments. Personality and preferences are things that come into play in such situations.

Forcing a person who prefers a tidy space to work in a disorderly environment, for example, might actually result in less creativity and lower productivity. And jobs that are focused on efficiency and fast decision-making might be better geared toward tidy workspaces, while those that hinge on creativity might be better suited to less tidy spaces.

Excited to Try New Things

According to Vohs, one study found that subjects in a messy room were capable of solving brain teasers more quickly than those seated in an organized room. The scientist Albert Einstein, famous for his genius and creative thinking, was known for having a messy desk.

"If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, then what are we to think of an empty desk?" he once asked in response to comments on his workspace.

In another experiment by Vohs and her colleagues, participants were randomly assigned to either a messy or tidy room. They were then given a smoothie menu and told they were taking part in a consumer-choice study. They were told to select one of three smoothie options: a health, wellness, or vitamin boost.

Half of the menus referenced the health boost option as "classic." The other half of the menus described it as "new." The results revealed that people in the tidy room condition were almost twice as likely to choose the health boost option when it was labeled "classic." Those in the messy room were nearly twice as likely to choose the health boost when it was described as "new."

The results suggest that people in neat and tidy environments are more likely to stick with the conventional, while people in messier environments are more likely to prefer novelty.

While minimalism might be trendy, it might also be crushing your creativity. If keeping a tidy desk or room is causing you more stress than the mess itself, try relaxing for a while, live with the mess a little, and see if it helps open up your creative abilities.

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Disadvantages of Messiness

Of course, habitual messiness also has its downsides. A messy space can make it harder to find things when they are needed, and in professional settings, it might result in missed deadlines or losing important documents. But there are other possible downsides.

Tend to be Less Charitable

In another one of Vohs' experiments, participants were asked to fill out questionnaires in a room. For some of the participants, the room was very clean and organized. For other subjects, they completed the questionnaire in a very messy, disorganized space.

As they left the room, participants were offered a few choices. First, they were asked if they wanted to donate money to a charity. The participants who spent time in a well-organized room were more willing to contribute their own money to charity than those who had spent time in a messy room.

Make Less Healthy Choices

After the charity question, participants were offered a snack: either an apple or a candy bar. Participants who had been in an organized room were more likely to make good health choices. Instead of choosing a candy bar, they selected an apple. Meanwhile, those who had been in the messier room were more likely to choose the candy bar. These findings suggest that if you are trying to improve your health, you might want to start by cleaning and organizing your space.

A Word From Verywell

Both order and disorder can be found in abundance in nature and in our self-created environments. Sometimes people tend to be messy in one setting and more orderly in others.

As research on the topic suggests, each state has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. In order to determine what a messy living space might say about you, start by considering why the space tends to be disorderly, including your own habits, preferences, and state of mind.

If you function fine in a messy room, then don't let trends pressure you into pursuing a more organized or minimalistic lifestyle. However, if the messiness is something that causes you stress or if you suspect it might be a symptom of an underlying psychological problem, consider steps you can take to address the issue.



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<https://www.verywellmind.com/psychology-of-a-messy-room-4171244>