



The eternal battle with an organized house

Description

“If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, then what are we to think of an empty desk?” A quote often attributed to Albert Einstein.

If your house is a reflection of your brain, mine, I would say, is chaotic, cosy and always a work in progress. But I like the question about the empty desk. Why do we automatically assume that tidy and empty are good, while cluttered and messy are bad? Maybe an empty desk has downsides too. Or maybe neither tells the whole story. Is a messy house something to overcome?

It has been a struggle for me to keep my house (back in the day, my room) organized and tidy. I was notorious as a child for the mess in my room. It was like a landscape with areas where you could not walk, or a minefield you could say, so you entered with care and moved around the piles with finesse.

And in that chaos I had a system that made sense. The problem was, that system only made sense to me. So other people would come in and step on top of the piles, or worse, move stuff around. That would mess up my whole system and cause a short circuit in my brain, which then made me shut down to cope.

There is a quote that perfectly describes my thinking at the time: *“Don’t clean up the mess. I know exactly where everything is.”* Obviously this did not really work for me. Looking back now, I wonder if the mess was also telling something. Maybe I didn’t just need to be told to clean up my room, maybe I needed some help figuring out how to organize things in a way that worked for my brain. Or maybe there was something else I needed. I don’t know. There wasn’t a lot of awareness around these things when I grew up. A messy child was mostly just a messy child. Probably pretty normal for my generation.

In my twenties this continued. By that time, I had become pretty good at shutting myself down to the chaos around me. I could clean and organize perfectly well, that was never really the problem. Every now and then I would have a massive clean-up session and everything would look great. But I had never found a way to make keeping things organized part of my everyday habits. So slowly the chaos would return, correction, organized chaos, until the next massive clean-up.

And every time it did, it probably confirmed what I already believed about myself: I am just a messy person.

Fast forward to the past ten years. This whole concept started to interest me because it had become such a topic in my life. I felt “not good enough” at keeping a household. It was a constant struggle to keep things tidy, I was embarrassed about it really, and I was always apologizing for the mess, even when there was hardly any mess at all.

And, also very intriguing, there were always a few people in my life commenting on it. And these people were usually the worst at keeping things tidy themselves! It was like I attracted that somehow with my energy.

Somewhere along the way, being messy had become part of how I saw myself. But more importantly, it was something I was ashamed of. I wasn’t just thinking “my house is messy”. I was thinking there was something about me that wasn’t good enough..

What I realized though was, if I believe this about myself, won’t I keep finding proof that it’s true? And maybe other people will pick up on that too. If I stop believing it, will the rest follow? Let’s try this out. It seems worth it.

Now a good question is: what will my new mental image around this be? Because I am also not particularly attracted to a clinically clean, sterile environment. I don’t want to become a neat freak either.

So how do I want to be? Or better, who am I now in my newly invented mental image? First, I want to thank the messy house phenomenon for the good things it has brought me and for how it has served me. A little Marie Kondo ritual, before letting go of the parts I no longer need.

I think it has made me very capable of functioning under all sorts of circumstances. In extreme chaos, I keep standing. And interestingly, there is actually some research showing that messy environments can have advantages too. One study found that people in a messy environment came up with more creative ideas and were more likely to choose something new over something conventional.

I think they are right. Creativity, being open to new things, being able to function in chaos. I am happy to keep those parts. What I am ready to let go of is the shame around it. The idea that being messy means I am somehow not good enough.

Going forward, this is my new mental image: I am clean. I take care of my home and my things. I am organized enough. Clean matters to me. I like things to feel fresh and cared for. That is different from everything having to be perfectly tidy. My house can be a little messy and look lived in. I actually like that. But underneath it there is a system. Things have a place and I know where to find them. And if something is dirty or out of place, it doesn’t say anything about me. I can simply clean it or put it back.

My house is very “gezellig” (an untranslatable Dutch word), personal and has amazing positive energy. I treat my stuff with care and I am not afraid to throw things out that “no longer spark joy” (thank you again, Marie Kondo). I am happy with my organization and it doesn’t cost me a lot of energy to keep it this way. I don’t freak out when something is out of place. A little mess

doesnâ€™t mean I am not organized.

Oh, and my clothing closets are a whole different level of organization. Everything has its place, perfectly folded and beautifully arranged. Marie Kondo herself would be impressed.
Ok, that one is still a mission.

Hello new mental image!

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WHY DOES A MESSY HOUSE
FEEL LIKE A PERSONAL FAILURE?

