

# Home sweet messy home: How do consumers cope with disorder at home?

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From hanging up our coats to organizing our bookshelves and kitchen cupboards, some people keep their homes tidy and others seem to live in complete chaos. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, understanding how we organize our homes can help us cope with contradictions and disruptions occurring in our daily lives.

"Tidying a home is an activity that goes beyond moving objects from one place to another or putting them in specific places. Rather, it is a process of building a meaningful domestic environment. Through their tidying activities, people define symbolic borders and guides that constrain their daily activities and interactions," write authors Delphine Dion (Sorbonne Business School), Ouidade Sabri (Paris-Est University), and Valérie Guillard (University of Paris Dauphine).

To understand how tidiness practices are developed, participants were asked to take photos of both organized and unorganized areas in their homes. While looking at the photos in the lab, the authors asked specific questions in order to find out when that person could or couldn't tolerate a mess.

Results showed that people create tidiness rules using classification systems that help them deal with the objects that keep coming into and moving around their homes. The authors found that while some people use a one-level classification system (all toys go in one box), others use second- and even third-level sub categories (like toys go in their own box, or sets of like toys go in another box).

To cope with disruptions to their classification systems, people react by either modifying the rules or tolerating the transgressions. Being aware of these rules and coping mechanisms can help us better deal with adversity.

"Understanding everyday tidiness practices helps us understand how consumers negotiate social norms regarding tidiness to cope with their daily constraints and opportunities. It enables us to understand the idea of 'home sweet messy home,' that is, how consumers can live in a messy [home](#) without feeling any anxiety about it," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Delphine Dion, Ouidade Sabri, and Valérie Guillard. "Home Sweet Messy Home: Managing Symbolic Pollution." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2014.

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