



„The new power of cleaning“

The IKW study on the psychology of home care

An in-depth psychological, representative study carried out by rheingold salon for IKW – the German Cosmetic, Toiletry, Perfumery and Detergent Association

Cleaning seems to be among the most straightforward matters on this planet. It needs to be done in every household, so that everyone has an attitude to it. Regarding the topic of “cleaning”, many advisors like to explain to us how to make home cleaning fast and easy – because cleaning is often considered a necessary evil.

This recent study on the topic of “cleaning” combines an in-depth psychological investigation with a representative statistical survey.

Already back in 1996 the IKW published a study on the topic of “cleaning”. That study identified, inter alia, four different cleaning types and their shares in society. 20 years later the new study examines whether the then results are still valid, what has changed when it comes to “cleaning” (if anything), and which cleaning types exist today in Germany.

Beside the analysis of the changes in cleaning that have occurred over the course of time, the new study focuses on the psychological motives and attitudes vis-à-vis home care in Germany. How strongly do societal changes determine our everyday life, and how do these changes impact our position on cleaning?

Quite a lot has changed in 20 years. The results from the in-depth psychological study show what cleaning can mean to modern people. Beyond the necessary process, psychologically

cleaning is seen as a means of coping with the ever stronger demands of daily life and of counteracting a feeling of powerlessness and excessive stress. Cleaning has gained a new importance.

1. "The new power of cleaning"

Those who clean remove dirt and dust from surfaces and restore order within their own four walls. What seems to be on the surface a necessary evil for getting our homes back in shape and for preserving the joy – and the value – of our furniture is much more when we take a closer look: Cleaning has an effect that goes beyond the mere activity.

- Retreating to one's own home

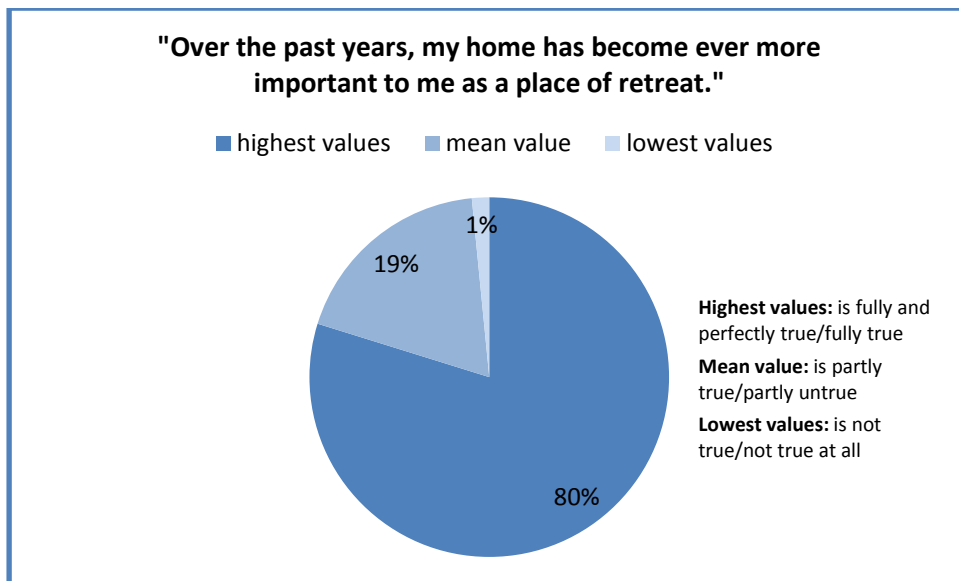
Germany has developed well, compared with its neighbours in Europe. In economic terms, many people seem to be better off than they were for a long while. Globalisation, the temptations of social networks and modern technology hold out the promise of many possibilities. Multi-optionality is the catchword of our time – i.e. we have more options to develop than ever before in both our private and professional sphere. Travel, leisure offers, new forms of labour. Are we living in a "near-paradise"?

It's not as simple as that – because such multi-optionality puts an immense pressure on the individual. The multitude of possibilities, which is further intensified by social media channels, constantly gives us the feeling of missing out on something. Just staying at home does not appear to be an option.

At the same time, we cannot get rid of the feeling that we are living in highly uncertain times. The world as it looks today seems to have become a brutal place. People appear to have changed even in their contacts with each other. One's own home is becoming much more important.

Humans want a secure place of retreat, a familiar and comfy environment where they can feel safe and have control at least over part of their lives.

"My house is my personal place of retreat from stress, job and being directed by others; this place exists only for the family."



With this retreat into our homes, also the activities connected with our own "cave" once more increasingly gain in importance.

This applies for both men and women. Contrary to the role pattern of the post-war years, today at least one third of men feel that they have more responsibility when it comes to "cleaning".

"When I have cleaned and my wife comes home, she is glad that no work is left for her. She can do whatever she enjoys."

- The longing for what is familiar

Cleaning helps people counteract a diffuse and uneasy feeling of strangeness.

Complexity and a lack of solid structures are characteristic of today's society. Many impressions seem strange and partly even threatening – the longing for a private space, for "familiarity" is strong. This is reflected in everyday life, also when doing the cleaning.

"It is important to me to feel comfortable – when I come home and also when I had guests."

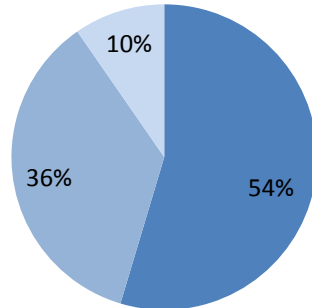
Dirt brought into our homes by guests and also our own residues, which have become "alienated" to us, are removed rigorously – in order to restore the familiar environment.

- The need for control

Cleaning eases burdens. In our multi-optional world we quickly lose overview and feel overstrained. The focus on cleaning helps us leave behind the excessive strain and the perceived mental chaos of daily life.

"Creating order in my own home gives me the feeling of having a better grasp on other tasks of daily life too."

■ highest values ■ mean value ■ lowest values



Highest values: is fully and perfectly true/fully true
Mean value: is partly true/partly untrue
Lowest values: is not true/not true at all

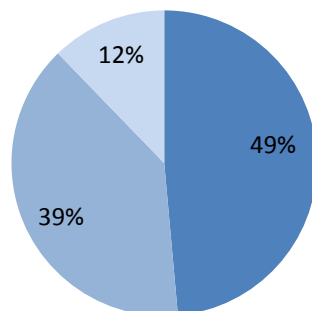
Thus, cleaning fulfils three clear longings and wishes of people:

- The wish to retreat to the private sphere
- The wish for reliability and structure
- The wish for control

A new power of cleaning rises.

"I create order and I clean; this makes me the dominant person in our/my household."

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2. “A glance back: A short history of cleanness – from a life task to new appreciation”

What is the standing of cleaning in our society? How have society and its attitude towards cleaning developed since the 1950s? A glance back:

- 1950s/1960s – Housewife, Mr Clean and the German economic miracle

The post-war years were characterised by reconstruction and restitution. During that timespan until long into the 1960s, cleaning was clearly defined as a woman’s job. The role distribution between men and women was more or less chiselled in stone. The husband was the provider of the family and brought home the money; the wife took care of household and children.

A clean home was the yardstick of all things. A dirty home was unacceptable and viewed as a sign of a careless housewife.

- 1970s/1980s – The “aftermath” of the 1968 revolution and the liberation from old orders

Inflexible structures, the Vietnam War, a rigid sexual morality and the reluctance to deal with the Nazi past – in the 1960s thousands of students went on the streets. Goals were the liberation from old orders and strict doctrines. Many people began to experiment in their lives and to search for new forms of living. Individuality and freedom became the new catchwords.

Cleaning turned into a minor matter and even underwent a reversal: A home was allowed to be untidy and dirty – that was seen as an expression of freedom.

- The 1990s – Beginning of the digital revolution and a footloose mobile life

“Everything’s possible” might have been the catch phrase of that period. The growth optimism was immense; Individual and societal boundaries did not seem to exist any longer – the near-ideal life. Everything should be free and as flexibly adaptable as possible. The own person – with self-determination – was to the fore.

This aspect held sway over cleaning too. Cleaning should require as little time and space in life as possible; it was an obstacle to the flexible, free order. Cleaning was to be done when it fitted in the individual timeframe.

3. And what about today? "Of control freaks, rulers and hedonists – or: What cleaning type are you?"

Today, the above continues to hold true: Cleaning should require as little time and space as possible. Therefore, many households hire a cleaner. Official figures rank between 6-7%; the real number is likely to be much higher. We all have our own, individual ideas about cleanness. All the same, some patterns are discernible.

The IKW study of 1996 distinguished between 4 cleaning personalities while the study of 2016 identified 5 cleaning types by way of qualitative questioning. Next, these types were quantified in an online survey. Following different principles, the 5 cleaning types live the new power of cleaning in very different ways.

▪ „Perfectionists“

Cleanness must be absolute: Perfectionists strive for perfect cleanness. Therefore, all kinds of dirt and dust are removed immediately after they form. Persons of this type clean very frequently by comparison. A state of "uncontrollability" is hard to bear. Perfectionists try to gain control over themselves and their lives by means of perfectionistic cleaning attacks.

"For example, my father-in-law never wipes his shoes properly; over and over again, I need to give him a short telling off."

The principle: regain control.

On the psychological side, it might be difficult for this type to cope with changes and new developments in life. The perceived powerlessness is conquered back some place else: in home care.

This is the most frequent cleaning type: 34% of respondents are "perfectionists". They roughly correspond to the "cleaning madness" type from the 1996 study (35%).

▪ „Concealers“

Achieve as much as possible with as little as possible – this could be the concealers' credo. And have we not all caught ourselves keeping the cleaning effort as low as possible and cleaning especially in those places that others can see?

Obvious disorder or dirt should be eliminated, but more is not really necessary.

"Only what can be seen needs to be clean."

The principle: adapt and fit in.

Beyond cleaning, concealers want to live up to societal requirements and standards, and they simply do not want to attract any negative attention. Here, cleaning is not so much used as an

instrument of power. The important point is to show the outside world: I have a firm grasp on life.

This cleaning type ranks second on the frequency scale: 24% are "concealers". They bear the most similarities with the "ambivalent must-type" of 1996 (17%).

▪ „Rulers“

"L'Etat c'est moi" or: I am the only one who knows what it's all about. According to rulers, their personal "order systems" – and thus their concepts of cleanness – are the only true ones. Nobody cleans better than rulers – even if they do not clean themselves but delegate all work to others. Rulers demonstrate power and control.

"Sometimes I just give the hoover to my children and tell them when the work has to be finished."

The principle: demonstration of power

17% of respondents are the "ruler" cleaning type. They compare best with the "pragmatic type" in the old study (30%).

Psychologically, "rulers" want to prevent others from exerting control. Their sovereignty to delegate cleaning tasks makes their own strength and intensity the only true ones.

▪ „Hedonists“

Calmly towards the goal – or so it seems. Hedonists demonstratively display relaxation in their approach to cleaning. Things do not need to be particularly clean or excessively neat.

"Clean is when white socks do not turn black when walking across the floor."

The principle: self-determination

But what ranges from a relaxed attitude to seeming indifference should not deceive: Paradoxically, persons with this stance demonstrate power by developing their very own "order systems". Regardless of societal norms and constraints "hedonists" determine themselves which things need to be clean and how clean they should be.

15% of respondents are the cleaning type of "hedonists"; they compare best with the "don't like cleaning" type in the 1996 study (19%).

▪ „Controllers“

The secret rulers. Basically, controllers think like rulers. They are the only ones who know when and how cleaning needs to be done. But in contrast to rulers, on the surface they present themselves as servants. They take on all the cleaning work, however, they only do so to be in control "secretly". Controllers keep the power over cleaning and cleanness.

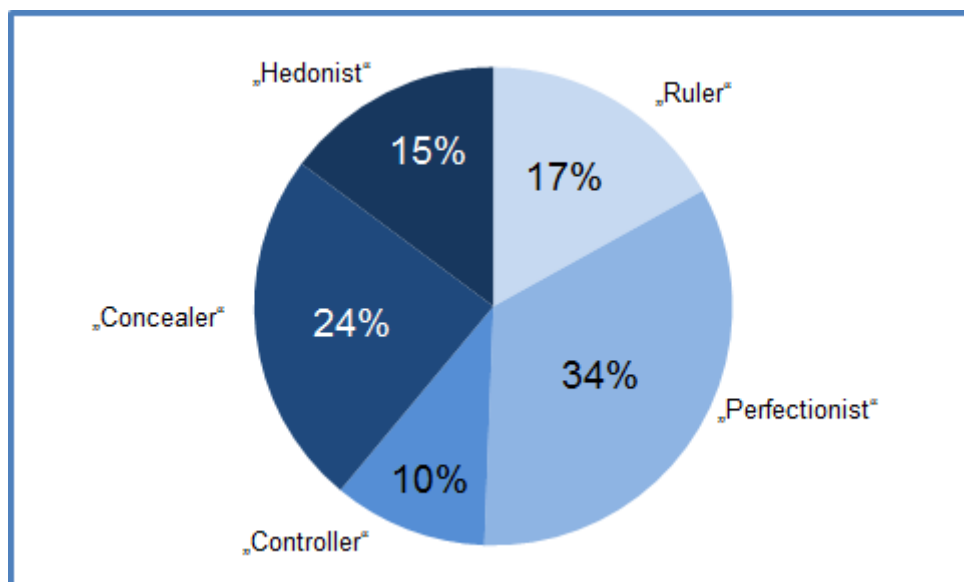
"I know best how to keep order, already through my profession."

The principle: secret control

Controllers are the rarest among the cleaning types. Only 10% of respondents fall in this category. Like "perfectionists", the "controllers" rather correspond to the "cleaning madness" type of 1996 (35%).

In psychological terms, "controllers" have the sole power over cleaning. This is how they shape things freely and act according to their own will. Not having everything under control would be hard to accept for "controllers".

Shares of cleaning types:

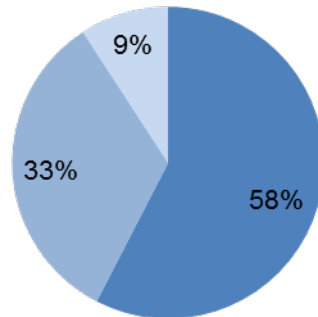


Once categorized, always categorized?

But it is also worth noting that the different types do not always strictly follow one and the same principle. The respondents state that today they have become much more flexible in their cleaning behaviour. For example, it is quite possible that a "hedonist" turns into a "perfectionist". Decisive factors in this context are the individual living and housing conditions and the personal situation.

"Today I have more flexible cleaning times and routines than I had in the past."

■ highest values ■ mean value ■ Niedrigste Werte



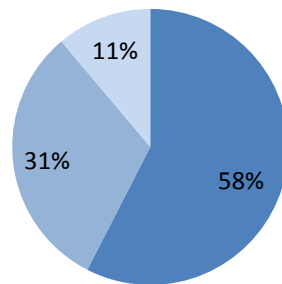
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"For me it is not necessary to have everything spick and span at all times – but occasionally I am overcome by a real cleaning mania!"

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4. Conclusion: "The New Power of Cleaning"

Once the "cleaning project" is completed, a feeling of satisfaction and pride surges up. The clean result of the activity gives the feeling of "having achieved something" which, consequently, opens the way for new things.

Beside this positive effect, the activity of cleaning has a better standing today. In our present time, cleaning is much more than an often cumbersome job; it is also an effective means of coping with our ever more demanding daily lives.

Societal changes have stirred new longings in us:

- The wish to retreat into the private sphere
- The wish to have reliability and structure
- The wish to be in control

Facts about the study:

The findings about the topic "The new power of cleaning" were obtained in neutral, product-independent questioning of respondents. They were not influenced in any way by product-related questions and do not serve for product-related market research.

- Within qualitative questioning, the group discussions and individual in-depth interviews were held in Cologne, Stuttgart and Rostock. In total, there were 36 respondents (40% men and 60% women between 25 and 55 years of age).
- The above was followed by representative, quantitative questioning of nearly 1,000 persons aged 18 and over in an online panel (total n = 993).

This study was carried out by rheingold salon for IKW.



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