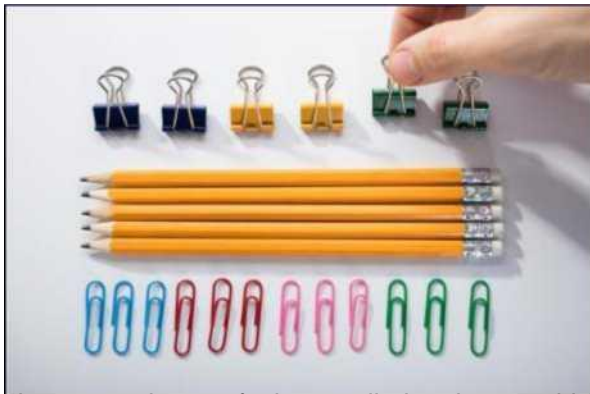




Are you sure that you have OCD? Or you're just a neat freak?

by Che Nooryohana Zulkifli



Have you ever been caught up in a situation where you were trying to clean or clear the clutter in your house or office more frequently than others that someone came to you and said you have OCD?

Well, if it's a 'yes', then you're not alone, but there are many features that actually distinguish between being a person with OCD and just a neat-freak or a perfectionist. So, which is a disorder and which is a lifestyle?

Let's start with the definition of OCD. According to Colon-Rivera and Howland (2020) from American Psychiatric Association, **obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** is a disorder in which people experience recurrent, unwelcome thoughts, ideas, or obsessive feelings

that cause them to feel compelled to do something again and over again. Hand washing, checking on objects, and cleaning are examples of repetitive behaviours that can significantly disrupt a person's everyday tasks and social interactions. They don't seem content upon completion of a task, and they want to redo it no matter how good it feels or looks.

People with OCD usually consume a lot of time worrying about what they have done before because they hardly get that 'enough' feeling. They become obsessed with every little thing they do, and they can come to an unrealistic point in performing an activity.

The first part of this disorder is being obsessive with a thought. For example, people with OCD are typically obsessed with every little thing's precision, symmetry and order. They tend to frequently organise their belongings according to their sorts and sizes to make them appear neat and tidy. The difference is that they can't take the concept of these items moving and being misaligned, even by a fraction of an inch! As a result, this type of thought consumes people from within, causing tension and diverting them from other pursuits.

The second part of OCD is related to compulsions. These people, for instance, have a strong urge to bathe, brush their teeth, and wash their hands repeatedly, hindering them from embracing a normal lifestyle. They have an insatiable desire to do everything more than once, and most of the time, repetitively. In fact, these repetitive acts might make it difficult for a person to do everyday tasks since they are constantly worried that something is missing and insufficient.

People who value perfection or excessive neatness and cleanliness, on the other hand, do not experience anxiety or mental anguish in performing their regular duties. It's all about making themselves happy with such a lifestyle rather than becoming more worried! Fuller (2016) explained that people who love living in a spotless home and not having to worry about germs lingering around them are unlikely to have any disorder. Only certified professionals could diagnose this disorder, and the act of simply labelling neat people with OCD should not go around in our society. OCD usually takes centre stage when people start to develop stress and cause panic attacks when they don't do certain acts according to their ritualised routine. In other words, they are unable to embrace flexibility in their lives and have an unusual approach to cleanliness, order, safety, and symmetry.

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Thus, if you celebrate neatness and order in your life, you have nothing to be concerned about as long as it does not interfere with your daily routine. Some of us may enjoy sorting our clothes into the same colour, size, and kind in our closets for better organisation, but this is a far cry from having OCD. For example, if you ever feel the need to double-check whether you've turned off your iron before leaving the house, you may always do so once and resolve it. However, people with OCD feel compelled to check on it again and again until it disrupts their time management and stresses them out. One thing to remember, being a perfectionist is a personality attribute that should not cause any disruption in one's relationship, marriage, or lifestyle (How perfectionism drastically differs from OCD, n.d).

To avoid mislabelling, let us be more cautious in our use of this term. It not only requires a clinical diagnosis, but it also has the potential to inflict a lot more stigma in today's society.

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