

THE EFFECT OF CLUTTER ON ATTENTION

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Psychology Majors, Katie Kilgore '25 (left) and Rachel Cannistraro '25 (right), present at the Transformative Learning Conference (TLC) in April 2024.

Abstract

Many people encounter clutter daily, whether in their homes or at work, and clutter has been shown to affect attention (Norberg et al., 2023; Woody et al., 2023). The present study investigated the presence and absence of clutter on participant's attention/working memory, and whether it relates personality. A total of 45 participants completed a portion of the Digit Span Subtest (DGS; from the WAIS) to measure attention and working memory. They also completed the neuroticism and conscientiousness dimensions of the Big Five Inventory (BFI). The participants completed these assessments at either a neat or cluttered desk. All conditions of the study were randomly assigned including the presentation order of the DGS and the BFI. Although participants scored slightly better at the neat desk, the difference was not significant, $t(43) = 1.50, p = 0.0708$. After a median split for the neuroticism and conscientiousness scores, a 3-way between-subjects ANOVA revealed no significant differences, $F_s < 33.272, p_s > 0.109$. However, a possible trend to be further investigated includes those who scored high in neuroticism may have scored lower on the DGS when answering at the cluttered desk ($p = 0.109$). Limitations to be addressed in future studies include the fact that the testing environment may have been perceived as cluttered by some participants and the choice of attention/working memory task may have been anxiety producing. ■

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[‡] **Dr. EMLEE C. KOHLER**, Associate Professor of Psychology, received her graduate training in the biological roots of Alzheimer's disease from Bowling Green State University. While maintaining her interest in memory disorders, she has become a psychology generalist due to her wide array of interests. Her past research focused on homing pigeons and the biochemical and neurological mechanisms of aging and Alzheimer's disease. Currently, her research efforts are centered on the scholarship of teaching and learning, specifically the use of manipulatives in teaching and the reading abilities of college-level students.