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The significance of public spaces, both offline and online, for the development of young people’s identities rightly has been the subject of extensive research and writing. Arguably, however, the increasing complexity of young identities, alongside the diffusion of individual-oriented communication and networking technologies, is rendering different forms of private space of ever-greater importance. This paper explores the significance of private space as a focal point for identity and a communicative base, beginning with the established physical environment of the teenage bedroom and going on to discuss the more recent establishment by young people of personal territory on social networking sites. I suggest that, in spite of the potential number of fellow interactants, MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, LiveJournal and other such sites are commonly experienced by their participants as a personal form of social space which bears comparison to the bedroom. I go on to explore the potential significance of such virtual territory to complex developing identities and, in particular, to the related process of constructing a narrative of self and mapping one’s place in the world.

Paul Hodkinson is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Surrey. His research interests focus on the role of commerce, media and new technologies in the formation of young people’s lifestyles and identities. He is author of Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture (Berg 2002) and co-editor of Youth Cultures: Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes (Routledge 2007). He has also published a variety of articles and chapters focused upon young people’s uses of online communications technologies and upon the methodological implications of studying groups of young people as an ‘insider researcher’. Paul is co-convenor of the British Sociological Association Youth Study Group.