The position of identity – and the lifestyle issues and identity politics associated with it – is one that is topologically complex. The space of identity is a heterogeneous, folded, paradoxical and crumpled space in which a distinct singular position is not possible. (Hetherington, 1998, p. 23)

all the stuff I’ve picked myself, even if I haven’t meant it to represent me, it does ’cos I’ve picked everything that’s in it, so it does say something about your character, if you know what I mean? (Charlotte, 18 years old)

As one of the first spaces that many young people can call their own and are able to exert any kind of control over, bedrooms can be important ‘representative’ spaces for them and are representative in a number of different ways. For example, as I argued in the previous chapter, a young person’s use of their bedroom can represent their relationship with other family members within the home and the internal dynamics and politics of the household as well as their relationship with friends, peers and partners. Their bedrooms can represent their perceptions of the public sphere as well as their uses of it and they can also represent other aspects of young people’s everyday lives too, for example, their hobbies and interests, their consumption practices and even their production practices (Kearney, 2007).

In Chapter 1, I considered a number of the major critiques made of the CCCS’ work on youth cultures and subcultures. One of those critiques made by Miles (2000) was in reference to the CCCS’ tendency to focus solely upon the symbolic elements of subcultures and the
consumption of related goods, rather than considering in any substantial way what those goods meant to young subcultural members. Miles asks what exactly the consumer goods that represented specific subcultures actually meant to those consuming them as part of their individual biographies as well as their collective subcultural identities. In critiquing this approach, Miles proposes that the concept of the ‘youth stylist’ provides an alternative way through which to make sense of young people’s consumption practices in contemporary youth cultures and as part of reflexive youth lifestyles and identities (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006). In conceptualising this, he asks what the goods that young people choose to consume mean to them, in what context and how they ‘styled’ into their fluid, interchangeable lifestyles.

In his book Governing the Soul (1999), Rose states that young people as prime consumers living out multiple lifestyles are particularly susceptible to an ever-changing, consumer market within which their supposed individual consumer ‘choice’ is legitimised. However, this legitimisation process is bounded, not only by the context of the home and family, but also, Rose argues, by the media (an aspect that I explore in more detail in Chapter 5) as well as by advertising. Given the neoliberal context of the ‘relentless pressure to consume’, Strickland (2002, p. 7) argues that this type of bounded choice makes it very difficult for young people to have complete control over many aspects of their lives, including social and cultural ones.

Despite this context of compromised choice and the constant pressure to consume, as I will argue in this chapter, the private space of young people’s bedroom enables their occupiers to assume the role of ‘young stylists’ and at times to ‘press the pause button’ on this consumption and to ‘anchor’ or ‘cement’ at least some elements of their identity that form part of their emerging adult biographies. This cementing, I would like to suggest, is achieved through the materiality of their bedrooms, while ownership of objects and other personal goods often found in the bedrooms enables them to legitimate their individual cultural identities, as well as their more communal ones. In a world of instability and uncertainty, I would argue, their bedrooms can offer them a physical space in which their cultural identities may be considered more stable and permanent, and over which they can in some ways exert more control than in other, public, youth cultural contexts.

This is particularly pertinent within a youth cultural context of social media in which young people find themselves in a continual process of identity ‘tracking’ in their use of social networking sites such as Facebook, embedded into which is the obligatory ‘updating’ of their