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# Messy bedrooms: issues for parents of teenagers

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy  
in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work  
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## Errata

Page 21- MSD is Ministry of Social Development.

Page 22 -Larson, R. (1995). Secrets in the bedroom: Adolescents, private use of the media. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. 24, 5, 535 – 550.

Page 31-Macdonald, K., Lambie, I., Simmonds, L., Latta, N. (1999). *Raising teenagers a guide for parents*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Page 33- Seigel & Hartzell (2003)

Page 41-The Families Commission is separate to the Ministry of Social Development.

## Abstract

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The messy teenage bedroom is a phenomenon that touches a chord with many parents. This thesis reveals how parents interpret their responses to a typical family experience, the messy teenage bedroom and how they view the role of parenting a teenager. The research is conducted within the environment of everyday families and considers how the role of parent of teens is located in society.

A qualitative methodology is employed to explore parents' reality through eight individual in-depth semi-structured interviews. A focus group of teenagers provided an insight to the teen perspective of the parental response to the messy teenage bedroom.

The messy bedroom emerged as an unresearched topic though it is a familiar experience in Western cultures. Discussion about the messy teenage bedroom is most often located in popular literature and websites. The research revealed issues particular to parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The teenage bedroom has changed from a place to sleep to a space where teenagers live, play, and socialise. The teen bedroom is seen as a place for the teen to display and experiment with their identity. It was found that many teens have more 'gear' than their parents, many value neatness less than their parents, and that messiness has a style factor.

Themes emerging from the research show that several factors are involved in the degree to which the messy teenage bedroom troubles parents. These are: firstly clarity in defining what they are doing as a parent. Secondly, how the parent interprets the messy bedroom as evidence of future behaviour, and thirdly, as evidence of how well one is doing as a parent. The thesis addresses issues of power and control in the parent/teen relationship, such as the shifting of the power balance as the teenager develops to adulthood.

The thesis raises questions about the way parents acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes about the 'job' of parenting teenagers. The research revealed the following key issues. Knowledge of parenting teens is mainly learnt from one's own parents. The acquisition of parenting knowledge seems haphazard and parenting teenagers is seen as different to

parenting younger children. Parents feel a lack of support and recognition for their parenting work.

Minimal recognition is accorded to parents in policy making. Parents want more recognition and support from the wider community. Support for parents of teenagers tends to be provided when families are struggling rather than supporting parents to maintain and develop strong relationships before they are in difficulty. Parents want to do their job well but are not always clear about how they can do this. In the context of the increased attention parenting of teens is currently receiving this thesis makes a timely contribution.

Recommendations are made from this study for more research on the everyday parenting of teens and the provision of more recognition, education and support for parents of teens.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Illustration 1: The messy bedroom