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Article

# Socially Haunted? Exploring Young People's Views on Education and Marginalization

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the views of a group of young men aged 16–18, studying towards a Level 1 diploma in music in the North East area of England. It uses the conceptualization of “social haunting” to focus our discussions about how Level 1 learners articulated their experiences in the context of their learning journeys and perceived marginalization. The research took place at a large Further Education (FE) college and included a series of five “research encounters” with the group of Level 1 learners. These encounters included a range of activities, resulting in a variety of data being collected, including several activity worksheets, structured and unstructured focus group interviews, and questionnaires. This paper focusses on the outcomes of a single research activity that focused on exploring the topic of marginalization. We present a discussion on social haunting as one of the emerging findings from this research encounter, outlining how the reality of the social and cultural legacy of the UK's industrial past can shape today's youth and their futures. We will talk about the young men's views of marginalization, their school-to-work transitions, the formation of masculinity in post-industrial communities and the role of Further Education in it. The paper concludes by discussing some insights for practice and future research.

**Keywords:** young people; youth; social haunting; working class; mining communities; Further Education; marginalization

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## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the concept of “social haunting” in the context of broader doctoral research [1] that explored the motivations and aspirations of young people studying in a Level 1 programme in a Further Education (FE) college in the North East region of England. The underpinning research included a series of five “research encounters” spread over two academic years with a group of 15 Level 1 learners. This paper focusses on a single research encounter, which concentrated on exploring the topic of marginalization. It did this by utilizing statistics and data relating to young people in North East England to generate and facilitate discussion on how they viewed their current position and future life chances. For the purposes of this paper, being marginalized is described as being disenfranchised from the material benefits of wider society [2], and/or living on the margins of those in the centre of power [3]. It is the sense that a person does not belong, nor is a valued member of a society or community, is perhaps unable to make a valuable contribution, and lacks access to opportunities open to others. In contrast, education is often seen as a route “out” of marginalization but can also have a marginalizing effect [4]. It can be seen as having a “transformative” effect—i.e., upward social mobility and increased earnings—on the lives of those who have the ability and/or resources to fully engage and progress within it [5]. However, marginalization within education can happen to any young person perceived as “inferior” to the dominant group [6]. For young people considered “low attaining”, this marginalization can translate to being assigned loosely vocational “busy work” [7], physically separated from other young people, and housed away from the main population of learners [8]. The broader implications of socioeconomic status, disadvantage and marginalization are wide-reaching: prison inmates are twenty-five times more likely to come from deprived communities [9] and young people from the most deprived areas of the UK are three times

less likely to access Higher Education [10]. In addition, young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) are five times more likely than their peers to become involved in the youth justice system [11].

During the analysis of the data from this research encounter, it became clear that the young people were experiencing a form of what Avery Gordon [12] would describe as a “Social Haunting” — that the reality of the social and cultural legacy of the UK’s industrial past was perceived to be shaping the futures of the young people. In the context of this paper, social haunting refers to how a history of conflict and social violence affects communities, where community members feel the continued presence of the past in current and future thinking.

In this paper, we will first contextualize the North East region of England, briefly outlining it geographically before discussing its industrial past and the lasting effects of rapid deindustrialization in the late 20th century. This is followed by an outline of post-16 education in England. The following section defines Gordon’s [12] epistemology of social haunting, before describing how it has been used to understand the experiences of deindustrialization in the United Kingdom. This is followed by an overview of the research design and methods. It will firstly describe the participatory research approach taken, followed by an overview of the participants, the data collection methods, and methods of data analysis. We then provide results from our primary research, which provide evidence of the young people’s perceptions of marginalization, employment, and education. The discussion section firstly draws upon Gordon’s epistemology of social haunting to explore the results beyond the topic of marginalization before considering how masculinities are formed within post-industrial communities. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the key findings, before calling for more research into social haunting to understand how social hauntings might occur and how they might affect the way young people engage with education and navigate the transition between school and work.

### *1.1. North East England*

The North East of England is the smallest of the nine English regions in both area and population. It borders Scotland to the north, Cumbria to the east, and North Yorkshire to the south. The majority of the population in the region is centred around three major rivers: the Tyne, the Wear, and the Tees [13]. The rest of the region remains sparsely populated. An area of 405 square miles (1049 km<sup>2</sup>) of the northern part of the region bordering Scotland is earmarked as a national park and has an approximate population of just 2000 people [14]. During the late 20th century, the region experienced massive deindustrialization and economic decline, and has since struggled to recover [15].

Pre-deindustrialization, the largest industry in the region was deep coal mining, and this provided significant employment; in the mid-1960s there were 234 collieries in County Durham alone [16]. By the 1980s, the industry was in decline. Imported coal from places like the United States, Australia, and South Africa was around 14% cheaper than coal extracted from British coalfields [17]. This was due in part to the then Thatcher-led Conservative government’s monetarist policies, which caused high interest rates and an overvalued currency. This meant that British products were expensive in comparison to imported goods [18]. In addition, the industry had received heavy subsidies from the government as the selling price of British coal only covered around 83% of the production costs [17]. A change in government policy led to a reduction in these subsidies, causing an acceleration of job losses in an already struggling industry [19]. This led to a nationwide miners’ strike, which ran from 1984 to 1985. In the decade following, there was a systematic closure of collieries, and by 1994, only 16 remained nationally [20]. Of these 16, only 1 was in the North East: Ellington. Known locally as the “Big E”, Ellington closed in 2005 but had once boasted of holding the record for excavating the quickest one million tonnes of coal [21]. Physical evidence of collieries and mines has largely been eliminated from the region, with Byrne and Doyle [22] (p. 166) suggesting there is more remaining evidence of Roman occupation in the region than there is of the “largest single source of employment” of the 20th century.

Previous post-war government policies, centred around maximizing coal production, had blocked new heavy manufacturing industries in coal-producing areas, leading to whole communities being economically reliant on coal production [23]. For the North East, the rapid closure of collieries in the late 20th century left the region with significant long-term unemployment, a dependency on government-funded benefits, and one of the slowest-growing economies in the country [15,19]. Some communities are yet to fully recover, and there continues to be significant pockets of deprivation in the North East region. Areas in South East Northumberland, County Durham, Redcar and Cleveland, and Middlesbrough house some of the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the entire country [24,25].

For young people in the region, the lasting effects of deindustrialization have left their transition from school to employment unclear. As the school-to-work transitions of the region had largely been centred around heavy industry and manufacturing, many young people would have followed their parents into industries such as fishing, shipbuilding, or mining [26]. While fishing does still exist in the region, tight regulations make the industry “economically hazardous” and no longer a provider of regular and reliable income [27]. Shipbuilding is all but gone on Tyneside, with the collapse of the Swans shipyard in 1993 signalling the beginning of the end [28]. While there is evidence to suggest that post-16 options for young people country-wide are unclear [29–31], this appears compounded in the North East. The region has been described as a youth unemployment “hotspot” [32], where young people are more likely to drop out of education at age 16 than anywhere else in the country [33]. The experience of those considered NEET is complex and shaped by multiple interlinked and changing influences, individual characteristics, and their immediate and wider social context [34]. Whilst the average NEET rate among 16–25-year-olds in the UK was slightly lower in 2021 than the average European NEET rate [35], the North East region of England bucks this trend. In real-world terms, this translates to a regional NEET rate that has been the highest in the country in all but six years since the turn of the millennium, and it has consistently been the highest since 2014 [36].

### *1.2. Post-16 Education in England*

Within England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are currently nine levels of qualification. Levels 1–3 are delivered within colleges and are classified as Further Education (FE) [37]—not to be mistaken for Higher Education (HE), which is typically undergraduate and postgraduate work undertaken at a university. The entry point of mainstream education in England, that is, the lowest level of mainstream qualification, is Entry Level. This has three additional sub-levels, E1, E2, and E3. E3 is the most difficult. Most qualifications at this level are very broad and focus primarily on developing functional skills in English, math, and generic skills for life. While some vocational courses do exist at this level, these tend not to be offered by most providers [38]. Level 1 qualifications are equivalent to GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) grades 3, 2, and 1—the lowest three GCSE grading outcomes awarded are graded 1–9, with 9 being the highest. Both Entry Level and Level 1 qualifications are offered as diplomas, certificates, and awards. Criticisms of both suggest that programmes at these levels fail to properly align with the requirement for entry into work, leading to a “churn” between low-pay, low-skill, insecure employment, benefits, and other similar-level educational programmes [7,39,40]. The other two educational levels offered as FE are Level 2 and Level 3. Level 2 qualifications align with the higher end of the GCSE grades, 4–9. Level 3 qualifications are the highest level of qualification considered to be Further Education. Examples of these qualifications include AS and A Levels, access to HE programmes, awards, diplomas, certificates, and NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) [37]. Levels 4–8 are considered Higher Education and cover courses such as undergraduate, master's, and doctorate degree programmes. While these have typically been delivered in a HE institution, a significant number of FE colleges have widened the scope of the qualifications they offer in recent years. This has led to the delivery of HE in FE institutions becoming fairly commonplace, with many FE colleges now being granted awarding powers for undergraduate programmes [41–43]. Within England, there is a requirement for all young people to remain in some form of education until at least their 18th birthday. This was raised from 16 for those completing their GCSE exams in the summer of 2014 [44]. There is criticism

that raising the age of participation has led to a “mushrooming” of provision at Entry Level, Level 1, and Level 2 [31], and on average around 10% of each yearly cohort of school leavers— young people aged 16—progress onto Level 1 programmes [7].

Evidence from existing literature outlines that Level 1 learners are commonly described as existing on the margins [31,45,46], suffering from marginalization [47], and are enrolled onto courses having a marginal positioning [48]. Within Further Education providers, there is often an established “pecking order”, with Level 1 learners situated firmly at the bottom, and seen as less important than young people studying at higher levels [49] (p. 4). Positioned at the “...bottom of the educational hierarchy...” [7] (p. 366), young people on Level 1 programmes often have a pejorative stigma attached to them and are excluded “by design” [48] (p. 7). Learners on these programmes are precluded from employment due to a “warehousing” [50] in programmes that do not stretch or push them [48], treat them like “second class citizens” [48] (p. 9), and subject them to a form of ghettoization [7,48,51].

### 1.3. *Social Haunting*

In this paper, we concur with Avery Gordon’s notion of social haunting in which it “registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past” [12] (p. xvi). A social haunting occurs due to abusive systems of power and past traumatic social events; the “...supposedly over and done with...” [52] (p. 2) make themselves known in everyday life and inform the present due to the “...harm inflicted or the loss sustained...” [52] (p. 2). Attaching themselves to the events and places that produced them, social ghosts demand attention by causing a set of disturbed feelings that cannot be put away [12]. Gordon’s epistemology of social haunting is a pragmatic way of understanding these ghosts. She suggests that social life is much more complex than many of those who study it usually grant, and that social sciences offer few tools for understanding social ghosts. The epistemology of social haunting then, is born from the “...need to be able to describe, analyze and bring to life...” [12] (p. 22) the ghostly aspects of social life, and the need to write “... with the ghosts any haunting inevitably throws up” [12] (p. 7). It is a way of recognizing and working *with* the ghosts of historical social violence that inform the present lives of a society, producing an unresolved “...something to be done...” [12] (p. xvi). Gordon suggests that in order to study social life, and indeed to do so well, it is important to recognize that ghosts are “... a part of our social world, and understanding it is essential to grasping the nature of our society and for changing it” [12] (p. 27).

Within the United Kingdom, Gordon’s epistemology of social haunting has largely been used to explore the lasting effects of deindustrialization in former mining communities. This includes investigation of sites in the north of England such as South Yorkshire and Derbyshire [53–56], as well as evidence from the South Wales coalfields [57]. These communities, broadly speaking, share many similarities with our earlier description of the North East and deindustrialized communities UK-wide, and can be compared unfavourably against national averages in areas such as health, welfare dependency, educational attainment, and employment rates [58]. Both McNicol [55] and Stubbs [56] describe communities that have registered the loss of a way of life. Aligning with Gordon’s notion of “something to be done” [12] (p. xvi), they describe the need to “do something” [55] (p. 55) about physical and perceived barriers that cause a feeling of “othering” for those affected by deindustrialization, as their world and the “newer” world of the postmodern city appear, to them, disconnected. For many people still living in (or with connections to) former mining communities, the ghosts activated by the miners’ strike will not rest [59]. They grieve the loss of community, which was set on a “downward spiral” [56] (p. 51) through the widespread demoralization left in the wake of the closure of mines that were viewed as the linchpins that bonded communities as well as regulating and promoting positive behaviours. This legacy is often mirrored across many deindustrialized communities, where “...a moment of rupture, whereby old cultures, traditions and social systems became obsolete...” [56] (p. 51), and “regeneration”—which often arrived too late—means low-pay, low-status, insecure jobs working “flexible” contracts in areas such as warehousing and distribution, retail, customer service, and hospitality [56,57,60].

For younger generations coming of age in deindustrialized communities, the haunting presents itself differently to those who experienced the social violence of deindustrialization first-hand. Counter to earlier generations, who registered a personal loss, the younger generation registers a loss of opportunity, leaving their post-16 school-to-work transitions unclear and uncertain. Unlike the working-class youth of previous generations, such as the “lads” in Willis’ [61] work, or Fallow [62] and his friends, growing up in Blackhall Colliery, school is no longer the “conveyer belt” [62] (p. 50) into employment it once was. Both Bright [53,54] and Robinson [1] outline teenage young people who are experiencing “a kind of haunting” [53] (p. 144), in the wake of the closure of the mines. The young people in these communities share a clear sense of struggle, and a lingering residual pain that manifests itself in frustration at their situation. They are clear that the miners’ strike—and in some cases former Prime Minister Thatcher herself—is the source of their current struggles, and they feel excluded from employment [1,53,54]. For those hoping to achieve their aspirations, there is a recognition that this could mean becoming “someone different”, rejecting the familiar and risking becoming othered within their own communities [63–65]. It is not just teenage young people that feel the effects of a haunting, though. The youngest in society appear similarly affected, and while they might not yet understand the cause, some primary-age (4–11) children appear to be embodying the legacy of industry through a shared “pit humour”, a resistance to authority, and a mistrust and othering of anyone considered an “outsider” within their community [66,67].

## 2. Research Design and Methods

### 2.1. A Participatory Approach

The overarching epistemological approach to this research activity was an ethos of researching *with* and not *on* the participants. This research was undertaken with Level 1 learners, and those studying at this level are often viewed as a stigmatized and oppressed group of individuals, institutionally constrained, and on the margins of education [31,45–47]. In addition, they can be seen as a powerless minority, whose voices go unheard, or are excluded, further exacerbating and entrenching their marginalization [68,69]. From an ethical—and indeed moral—perspective, it was important to form an epistemological approach to research that valorised and prioritized the voices of the participants—to work in a way that respected the participants and treated them fairly [70]. Researching with the participants and not on them was a way of achieving this and encouraged participants to engage in the research in a way that went beyond simply being “sampled” [71]. It was a way of ensuring that the participants were encouraged to exercise their power [72] and speak for themselves, in their own words. Speaking on their behalf, or removing their voice altogether, felt unethical and illegitimate [73]. While the participants could never truly be free from influence and paradigmatic choices [74,75], researching with the participants and not on them was an acknowledgement of those influences and an attempt to reduce the possibility of speaking for them [76].

Operationally, researching with, not on, took two forms within the wider doctoral [1] research. The first way was to encourage the participants to select their own pseudonyms. This could be a name that they felt represented them well and they would be happy to be known as in the published findings. Examples of these chosen names include Zane, El Chapo, Dobbie, Lil Skies, and Kirk. It was hoped that this would encourage a level of ownership over the research and help them view themselves as the valued co-creators that they were. The participants were given some basic guidelines but were otherwise free to select any name they wished. The guidelines were: (1) The name should not feature their real name, either fully, or in part. (2) The name should not be constructed from explicit words. (3) The name must not be deemed derogatory to others, in relation to the nine protected characteristics of the UK Equality Act 2010 [77]. This approach is something that had previously worked well for Atkins [45], who had utilized the approach in her research with a group of Level 1 learners. A similar strategy had also worked well for Willis [61], with the working-class schoolboys in his research expressing their wishes to be collectively known as “the lads”.

The second way of researching with, not on, was the way in which the research activities were undertaken. The research activities were largely self-directed by the participants, with the researcher undertaking the role of moderator. This ensured the outcomes of the data collection activities were negotiated and agreed upon by the young people themselves in a form of “collective sense making” [78]. Removing the researcher's voice, and influence, from the discussion felt like a good way of getting a detailed viewpoint from the participants and uncovering an insider perspective that might otherwise have been ignored or missed [79].

## 2.2. *The Participants*

A total of 11 young people aged 16–18 took part in this research encounter. All of the participants identified as male—this was coincidental and not by design—and were enrolled into a Level 1 qualification in music. As this research encounter formed part of a wider research project, all the participants had been recruited previously at an earlier research encounter. At the earlier encounter, they were provided with a detailed explanation of the research, what was expected of them, and—more importantly—what they could expect in return from the researcher. They were encouraged to ask questions about the research and possible research outcomes. A large amount of time was dedicated to this activity as there was an existing power relationship between the young people and the researcher leading the activities; that of student/teacher. Informed consent needed to be reached in an unconstrained way [80], and there was a concern that the existing relationship would mean consent forms would be signed as a matter of procedure rather than through informed choice [81]. However, young people are capable of forming their own views, should be allowed to express them [70,82], and are able to consent to doing so [83]. Based on this, we decided that consent could be given, but would be a continual process, requiring periodic checking for negative cues [83,84]. At the beginning of this research encounter, a recap of the project aims and outcomes was provided, along with an opportunity to ask any questions and decide not to take part if they did not wish to.

## 2.3. *Data Collection*

The area for investigation at this research encounter was the topic of marginalization. The main aim was to explore if the young people taking part in the research felt marginalized, and if so, what did they feel was causing their marginalization. We felt that simply asking them if they felt marginalized would be somewhat leading, and at no point was the word marginalized or marginalization used during the data collection activities. The approach to the data collection activities was to use a series of statements relating to young people in the North East of England. It was felt that these would be a good way of prompting and generating discussion, conversation, and debate without explicitly mentioning marginalization. These statements were the following:

- Parts of the North East are identified as “youth unemployment hotspots”, 1 in 8 young people are unemployed—twice the national average.
- In the North East, young people from poorer backgrounds are more likely to drop out of Education at age 16 than anywhere else in England.
- The North East has the highest rate of young people aged 16–24, in England, who are not in employment, education or training.
- Educational attainment of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and deprived areas, in the North East, can be around 2 years behind those from wealthier families, upon leaving school aged 16.
- Young people from poorer backgrounds score, on average, 33% less in standardized testing at age 16 than those from wealthier backgrounds.

These statements were formed from existing datasets and literature and included information about the attainment gap in the region [85], employment statistics [86], regional and national NEET (not in education, employment, or training) rates [87], and educational drop-out rates linked to socioeconomic status [33]. In addition, there was a discussion on the school leaving age; this was raised from 16 to 18, for those completing year 11 from 2014 onwards [44].

Data collection at this encounter was split across two activities. The first activity was participant-led focus groups. The participants were asked to form two self-selected groups, and within those groups, they would discuss the 5 statements relating to young people in the North East of England. These statements were projected onto a wall and each statement was changed at 5 min intervals. There was no guidance on how the groups should respond, and other than changing the statements over and reminding participants of timing, there was no researcher input or interaction. The discussions of both groups were filmed using small cameras. We felt it was important to utilize cameras, as it would be easier to help identify who was contributing what, and when, particularly when multiple people spoke at once [88].

The second data collection activity was a whole-group, less structured, discussion to address the same statements they had been discussing in their two sub-groups. We felt it was meaningful to work in this way, to remove influence and encourage the direction of discussion to be led by the participants [78]. In addition to the previous 5 statements, there were an additional three elements—2 questions and 1 statement—for the group to respond to:

- Do you think the leaving age of education should be 18?
- What does it feel like to study at Level 1?
- There are no jobs for young people.

We hoped that through these additional three elements, we could allow for an insight into their perceptions towards education, their current position within the educational system, and their views on the employment landscape in the region. We also felt this might encourage contributions that might generate discussions related to marginalization without directly using the terms marginalized or marginalization. This activity was captured using a video camera, with an audio recorder as a back-up.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

The video footage from both activities was loaded into NVivo, and written transcripts were created. These were done verbatim, albeit with the exclusion of non-lexical utterances. These transcripts were then re-loaded into NVivo as text documents. The data from both focus groups and the group discussion were combined into a single pool of data and analysed together. It was felt that as the activities addressed largely the same statements, this was appropriate. First-cycle coding was done using a “theoretical thematic analysis” approach [78]. This was done utilizing the four concepts of marginalization, outlined by Messiou [89]:

*“when a child is experiencing some kind of marginalization and is recognized by almost everyone including himself/herself; when a child is feeling that he/she is experiencing marginalization, whereas most of the others do not recognize this; when a child is found in what appears to be marginalized situations but does not feel it, or does not view it as marginalization; and finally when a child is experiencing marginalization but does not admit it”.* [89] (pp. 1312–1313)

A second cycle of coding was done using “pattern coding” [90], which allowed for an identification of patterns such as environment or context. A third cycle of coding also took place. As with the first cycle, this was done using “theoretical thematic analysis” [78], utilizing Bourdieu’s [91] forms of capital (economic, cultural, social) as a framework to help understand if any of the marginal positions identified related to specific forms of capital.

### 3. Results

Utilizing Messiou’s [89] four concepts of marginalization as a framework for analysis unearthed some interesting results. Nearly all the evidence of marginalization that emerged through the discussions fit into one of two categories: (1) Marginal situations recognized by everyone, including themselves. (2) Marginal situations, but the individual does not recognize it or feel it. Where the young people described themselves in marginal positions, it was almost always recognized as such by themselves and each other. However, while they recognized situations and scenarios where marginalization occurred, they did not directly use the word marginalized.

### 3.1. Marginalization, Employment, and Education

Discussions about marginal situations recognized by everyone, including themselves, centred around job opportunities for young people and past experiences of education. Several members of the group described the North East as lacking suitable jobs for young people. They felt that while there did seem to be jobs, there appeared to be more job seekers than vacancies. They outlined that for young people in their position, their options were limited to “*just minimum wage jobs*” (Zane), such as cleaner, or joining the army—there has been criticism of armed forces recruitment policies that specifically target working-class youth, listing Newcastle, Sunderland, and Middlesbrough as primary recruitment targets [92,93]. One of the young men, El Chapo, outlined his frustrations at the difficulty of getting a job. He had applied to work in a warehouse, packing produce for a large internet retailer. Despite going through the recruitment process, he had been knocked back due to his age and a lack of institutionalized cultural capital in the form of the “correct” qualifications to work near heavy goods vehicles.

Discussions around marginalization and the links to past educational experiences were mostly centred around their perceived “worth” by the school in relation to how they learned. Several of the young people describe being marginalized because the school did not see them as academically gifted, or because they learned differently to others. They describe being side-lined, how they “*didn’t have any support*” (Dobbie), that the school did not “*have high expectations [of those] who learn differently*” (El Chapo), and that they were “*separated into different rooms*” (Lil Skies) from the rest of their class during some lessons. The second type of marginalization, where marginalization occurred but the young people did not recognize it as such, centred around economic and social capital. While they saw others as having a potential economic and social advantage, they did not see themselves as at a deficit. Instead, the group were vocal about how people from “rich” backgrounds lacked motivation, having become reliant on their parents paying for everything. They saw their marginal position as having a potentially catalysing effect, and that “*being poor, you seem to get a bit smarter, like streetwise*” (Kirk).

While the group of young people did not see themselves as at a deficit, they did, however, see the North East area as at a deficit in comparison to the rest of the country. The group saw the region as lacking in opportunities, employment, and education. They perceived a clear “gap” between the North East and other areas of the country, particularly “down south”—although where exactly the South started was a fairly contested issue. It became clear through their contributions that the group of young people felt very strongly that their current position was a direct result of the rapid deindustrialization in the late 20th century. The group appeared to be socially haunted by the over-and-done-with making itself known [12,52]. When discussing a lack of opportunities for young people, one young man exclaimed loudly and explicitly “*BLAME IT ON THATCHER!!!!*” (Lars). All the young people recognized the historical job opportunities in the region such as coal mining and shipbuilding were no longer available, and that this continued to impact their life chances in the present day. When asked if those types of jobs were open to them now, the answer was simple:

“*Nahhh, cos of Maggie Thatcher!*” (El Chapo)

“*Do you think what happened in the 1980s is still impacting you guys now*” (Researcher)

“*Yep.*” (Zane)

“*Yes!*” (El Chapo)

“*Ayeee.*” (Kirk)

“*See, cos if Margaret Thatcher never happened, we’d still be down the mines and like, in the shipyards. We’d have a straight away job. Cos back then, you didn’t really need a CV [...]. Like, you learn from your father. Or something like that. And you’d have done that. You follow your Da and it carries on.*” (El Chapo)

“*My grandad said he left school on the Friday and started working in the pit on Monday. He got one weekend off and that was it. That was his job.*” (Kirk)

“*So do you guys feel like you’re still feeling the effect of those closing down?*” (Researcher)

“*Yes!*” (El Chapo)

"Yeah!" (Zane)

"Aye!" (Kirk)

While the group clearly pinpointed what they saw as the cause of their social haunting, the effects seemingly went beyond employment opportunities. It also appeared to be manifesting itself as young people in the region having negative attitudes towards education. In part, this attitude was around the perceived lack of options, even if you did achieve the grades you had hoped for. One of the participants, Lil Skies, discussed a friend of his who had achieved all the grades they wanted, but had later given up on their ambitions. He described his friend, saying he *"doesn't do anything now"*, before outlining that he sees lots of young people in the region take similar routes. Another prominent feeling towards education was the view that many young people in the region *"reject education"* (Joe) because they want to *"get working quicker"* (Kirk) and see this as a route towards a *"better life and a better job"* (Zane). Perhaps as an attitude inherited from those who experienced mass unemployment in the late 20th century, the group outlined that those from the region *"aren't really bothered [about education] if they're focussed on paycheques, [...] they're more focussed on the money coming in [to the family home]"* (Joe). During this discussion, several of the young people outlined they would readily leave education, should the offer of a job come along.

Overall, the young people were largely clear about the marginalization they saw and felt. They identified the cause of their perceived issues, and the impact it was still having in the present day. However, they appeared bound to a historic regional narrative that prioritized a rapid transition from school to employment, discussing how getting into employment as soon as possible was the best route to having a "better" life. While they were quick to be critical of the past, they also appeared to be replaying and embodying the values of a past, which while over-with, was not done-with.

### 3.2. Forms of Capital and Marginalization

The analysis of data from this encounter utilizing Bourdieu's [91] forms of capital returned results which touch broadly on all three (economic, social, cultural) forms. However, the findings relating to cultural capital were situated firmly in the institutional form (i.e., formal qualifications), with the embodied (knowledges and skills) and objectified (possessions) forms not featuring in the participant's discussions. Interestingly, this institutionalized form of cultural capital was the only area where the participants saw themselves as individuals in a deficit position to other young people. The conversations centred around social and economic capital revealed that the participants saw others as being at an advantage, but they never used a language of deficit to discuss their own positions in relation to these forms of capital.

Focusing on the institutionalized form of cultural capital, the group were largely aware of the limiting factors a lack of "good" qualifications can have on the long-term life chances of young people. Both El Chapo and Lil Skies described situations in which they had been precluded from employment due to lacking the "correct" qualifications. Sympathizing with their situation, Joe outlined that without "good" grades, young people leaving school were *"pretty much screwed"* and that there was real pressure on young people to succeed. El Chapo outlined how he definitely felt *"under pressure"*, but that for him the pressure was from the school rather than his family, who never "pushed" him to go. Many in the group were critical of their educational experience in the North East and felt that the region lacked the ability to deliver high quality education. Zane was particularly vocal about this and felt other areas of the country, particularly "down south", were better able to facilitate learning:

*"They've got better education, facilities, better learning environment. Compared to us up here that have hardly nothing. Like, people who get the best grades [in the North East], are the ones who're doing it on their own and without help from teachers. Revising on their own and without any tutors or anything like that."* (Zane)

As previously outlined, the young people focused on others having "extra" in the areas of social and economic capital, rather than outlining themselves as lacking or deficient. Evidence of this can be seen in El Chapo's outline of the economic differences of the North and South of the country. He

was quite clear that in any country there will always be an economic pull towards the capital city, and that this largely explained any economic differences between the two regions:

*“AYE, SEE, BUT THE LINE THOUGH! The North and South divide. So, it means the North has always got less money than the south.”* (El Chapo)

*“Why do you think that is?”* (Researcher)

*“Cos it’s the capital. And the capital has always got money. See..... What’s the capital of China?”* (El Chapo)

*“Beijing?”* (Researcher)

*“Aye, if you go there, then there’s loads of money in there. But if you go out into the country, there’s no money.”* (El Chapo)

The view of others as having an advantage also factored into discussions that included examples of social capital. El Chapo, Zane, Lars, and Kirk all believed that having “good” social connections was crucial. Both Kirk and Lil Skies outlined situations in their lives when others appeared to be treated favourably to them because of their social connections. Lil Skies discussed how another student in his school was prioritized in sports classes because their mother owned a gym. He outlined that the school and individual staff were utilizing the gym for free, and so gave the student preferential treatment and additional support in return. Kirk outlined a friend of his who had managed to obtain a job through a social connection on Facebook. He expressed his frustrations about his friend’s apparent cluelessness at the processes of applying and interviewing for jobs, and that despite his best efforts, he was not managing to secure employment himself:

*“Well, I’ve done all this and volunteered, and I still can’t get a job. I told him about it and he’s like, “you’ll never get a job!”. And I’ve applied for them, he said “where?”. I said to the shop, and he asked how I did it. He didn’t know! The only way he managed to get a job is because he knew who the person was over Facebook! That’s the only way he managed to get a job.”* (Kirk)

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Social Haunting

As previously discussed, the North East was one of the hardest hit regions of England by the industrial decline of the late 20th century. This has left the region as one of the toughest places to find employment [32], with educational drop-out rates the highest in the country [33], NEET rates consistently above the national average [36], and some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country [94]. When discussing this with the young people who were part of this research, hopeful to hear their insights and perspectives, one of their explanations appeared surprising: Margret Thatcher. Perhaps naively, we had not considered that the impact the Thatcher-led Conservative government (1979–1990) had would still be reverberating so explicitly in the region, and indeed that the young people would be politically aware enough to pinpoint Thatcher as the source of the issue. When discussed with the group, it was clear they still felt the bruises of the historical social violence, in a way Gordon [52] would describe as “social haunting”: a repressed or unresolved social violence, making itself known and demanding the attention of people or a society whose past trauma informs the present. Asked if they still felt the effects of the mines closing down, the group gave a unanimous response in unison, *“Yes!”*, *“Yeah”*, *“Aye!”*.

Young people being socially haunted by the effects of deindustrialization is also present elsewhere in the country. The young people within these communities have a clear sense of struggle, feeling excluded from employment [53]. There is an observation that young people in these communities are reprising the repertoire of their collective past, and that young people, frustrated by their situation, pinpoint the miners’ strike as the source of the problem [54].

While little is known about the long-term effects of social haunting and how it is passed from generation to generation, its effects are clear to see in deindustrialized communities in the UK. Atkins’ [95] work with Level 1 learners includes a contribution from a lecturer at an FE college in an ex-mining community. The lecturer describes fathers who are unhappy if their son appears to be doing

better than them. They follow this by suggesting that some fathers actively discourage education in order to maintain a “status quo in terms of [the] family hierarchy...” [95] (p. 198). North of the border, in Scotland, McGarvey [96] discusses the lasting outcomes of rapid deindustrialization on communities in Glasgow. While McGarvey does not explicitly recognize this as a form of social haunting, the language they use aligns with Gordon’s [52] epistemology of social haunting. In addition, their description mirrors the observations of Bright [53,54], who observed social haunting in ex-mining communities in South Yorkshire—precarious communities, demoralized by rising unemployment, and lack of opportunity:

*“Thousands of families, already struggling to make ends meet, were placed under so much strain that it altered them physically, psychologically and emotionally. What was left of the local economy adapted to supply the community’s mutating demands; off licences, pubs, chip shops, licenced bingo halls, bookmakers and, latterly, drug dealers, provided temporary relief from the grim reality of deindustrialisation.”* [96] (p. 42)

However, not all young people who are experiencing social haunting appear aware of the source. Observing the effects of social haunting within young (ages 3–11) children, Simpson and Simmons [97] note that the young people in their research do not recognize the pit closures as the source of their haunting but appear no less affected. They do not understand the history, but are living in the wake, influenced by it in a way that affects their methods of communication, shared humour, mindset towards education and employment, and an othering of those considered outsiders [66].

While the source of haunting within their communities is recognized by most, it is clear the youngest in society do not yet appear aware of the cause. Referring back to Messiou’s [89] concepts of marginalization, these young people appear to be in a marginalized situation, but do not feel it, nor perhaps do they view it as marginalization. Perhaps in time, they will? Linkon [98] (p. 2) discusses a “half-life” of the effects of deindustrialization, where its influence may wane slowly over time, but remains potent, persistent, and cannot simply be forgotten nor ignored. Perhaps then, over time, the haunting will become what Bourdieu would describe as doxa, the “taken for granted” [99] (p. 169) reality in which the cause of the haunting becomes unquestioned. Will the social violence that ruptured the previous doxic state [100] become unquestioned, taken for granted, recognized as the norm, seen as the way things are [101]? While this is a difficult question to answer while the cause of the haunting is still in living memory, it is clear that the lasting legacy of rapid deindustrialization continues to “...underpin systems, structures and relations of work and leisure...” [66] (p. 140) in the communities that continue to feel the effects of past social violence.

#### 4.2. *The Ghost as a “Social Figure”*

Like hauntings in the paranormal world, it is clear social haunting can present itself in many formats. While this research, and the research of others, primarily focusses on how it presents itself in communities living with the effects of rapid deindustrialization, it is not just about mining and coal. The work of McGarvey [96], Daley [102], and indeed Morrin [100] outlines communities and individuals haunted by a variety of different ghosts, as they come to terms with historical social violence. It shows that social haunting affects a much wider range of the population than that initially identified by Bright [53,54]. We know very little about how the hauntings occur, and the effects on the communities that experience them. It is clear that more research is needed to truly understand the lasting effects of social haunting due to past social violence—particularly how it is experienced and presented in those who have inherited it from previous generations, “...for whom the reality of deindustrialization is often unmediated by compensations of the past” [103] (p. 29). There is currently limited research that explicitly focusses on the effects the inherited haunting is having on young people and if/how it is influencing their learning journey and educational careers. Understanding the haunting, in its many forms, be it underlying and residual, or overtly painful, can be a way of addressing it in a meaningful and pragmatic way.

#### 4.3. *Masculinity and Deindustrialization*

While our work did not set out to explore male experiences of deindustrialization, our participants—albeit by chance—all identified as male, and this warrants some discussion. Linkon [104] suggests that young men growing up in deindustrialized communities not only inherit a loss of employment opportunities but also register a loss of masculine role models. She argues that young men face “significant challenges as they attempt to reconstruct masculinity” [104] (p. 150) in a landscape devoid of the heavy labour and industrial work that informed and defined masculinity for previous generations. For young men coming of age in deindustrialized communities in the United Kingdom, there appears to be a disconnect between the behaviours required for a successful future and the localized acceptable forms of masculinity informed by industrial heritage [64,65]. For many, the traditional working class masculine values of stoicism, risk taking, and toughness [57] associated with heavy industrial work have been channelled into alternative outputs. This appears to be predominantly presenting itself as a portfolio of troubling “laddish” (and somewhat deficit-framed) behaviours such as frequent binge drinking, fighting, drug taking, promiscuity [57,59,60,64,65,105], and the potential for increased involvement in organized criminality [106].

Within the North East of England, the typically masculine industries of mining, shipbuilding, and fishing have been replaced with an expansion of roles in the service sector and hospitality. These roles include waiting tables, administration, bar work, and call centre customer service representative [60,107]. The outcome of this is that the once valorised bodily capital—physical attributes such as strength [108]—required to successfully undertake heavy manual work is no longer prioritized by employers, who instead demand skills in areas such as IT and communication [107]. For the young men who have managed to adapt to these new demands, the focus of their masculinity appears to have been moved away from *production* and towards *consumption*. This is demonstrated in the work of Nayak [60], whose “real” Geordie (a colloquial term for someone from the Tyneside area of North East England) males were keen to demonstrate their masculinity by proving they could “handle themselves” in the arenas of drinking, fighting, and sexual conquests. However, the working-class young men who remained un/underemployed appeared to be pilloried and described homogenously as chavs/charvers—a form of “folk devil” [109] viewed as deviants, outsiders, and scapegoated as the cause of crime and social problems—by those who have managed to modify their habitus to the demands of post-industrial life [60]. These negative connotations are largely rejected by those labelled as such [110], and for many individuals, their cultural tastes in things such as music and fashion that align with the chav/charver label are an embodiment of the subcultural capital required to successfully navigate localized social spaces [111].

For our participants, who are a generation younger than the North East males portrayed in the work of Nayak [60,107], their desire to embody and reproduce the traditional masculine values of heavy industry appears less explicit. While they all registered the significant loss of employment opportunities due to deindustrialization in the 20th century, their frustration appeared more at the loss of opportunity than at the loss of specific “masculine” job roles. At an earlier research encounter [1], we had discussed their imagined futures, and almost all had identified job roles working in the creative industries—predominantly in performance roles such as musician or DJ. Where they did align with the historic regional working-class masculine values was in their desire for rapid entry into employment from school. They saw this as a route to a “better” life, and many of the participants had previously [1] identified being a “breadwinner” and the head of a household as a signifier of successful male adulthood. In many ways, our young male participants were not dissimilar to those in the work of Roberts [112], whose participants challenged the notion that employment away from traditional masculine roles and physical labour “compromised” maleness. Our young men were trying to navigate the requirements for a successful future, while feeling tethered to a shared regional history informed by the social, cultural, and economic legacy of deindustrialization.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper provides a deeper insight into the perceptions and views of Level 1 learners at an FE college in England. Through the research encounters, we were able to explore how these young men talked about their learning journeys, perceived marginalization, and their school-

to-work transitions. Like other researchers have reported, there were few indications that the young people in this research were unhappy with their family socioeconomic background or way of life [113]. They did, however, speak negatively of the North East as a region. We did not explicitly set out to seek their views on the concept of “social haunting”, but this emerged as a key finding. We know that young people’s aspirations for the future are hugely influenced by family-derived habitus and dispositions constructed through early childhood socialization and family backgrounds [113]. However, we had not anticipated how much the reality of the social and cultural legacy of the UK’s industrial past can also shape today’s youth and their futures.

This paper, therefore, contributes to the growing interest in working-class experiences of deindustrialization, and the potential impact on past and present experiences of education, and work. How young people navigate their education journey and what they bring with them is crucial in our education systems—particularly with Level 1 learners and the FE setting—and should not be ignored. Our work was limited by a wholly young male perspective, which offered a particular viewpoint. However, this enabled us to contextualize the formation of masculinity in the post-industrial North East. It will be interesting to explore this with female participants, building on the work of Spence [59]. The outlook for future research in this area is exciting: does the concept of social haunting translate across the education landscape? How is it transmitted and in what form? And is it reproduced intergenerationally? Such questions could help us understand the way young people engage with education, “buy in” to learning, and shape their school-to-work transitions.

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