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Cultural Politics and Affective Mobilisation: Joy and Exclusion within Momentum

This paper explores the affective and cultural dynamics of Momentum, a left-wing movement formed to support Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party. Drawing on affect theory, particularly Ahmed's (2010) concept of affect as "what sticks," it examines how Momentum fostered a collective identity rooted in joy, vitality, and cultural expression. Through interviews and participant observation, the research highlights how Momentum's aesthetic politics—manifested in music, vernacular humour, and sartorial choices—mobilised activists and created a sense of belonging. However, these same affective experiences also contributed to exclusion. Female activists reported instances of sexism within social spaces, while neurodivergent members faced barriers to participation in Momentum's spontaneous and informal cultural practices. The paper argues that while affective mobilisation can create solidarity and energise movements, it also risks reinforcing structures of exclusion and inequality. This study provides insights into the interplay between emotion, politics, and exclusion in contemporary left-wing activism by situating Momentum within broader debates on affect, leftist identity, and social movement cultures. Ultimately, the paper contends that affective politics are not inherently inclusive or emancipatory but must be critically examined for their capacity to unite and alienate

Keywords: Affect and Social Movements, Political Identity, Momentum and Corbynism, Cultural Politics, Gender and Exclusion

Introduction

This article seeks to unpack the cultural and social politics of Momentum, an organisation founded to support the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn MP. My focus here is how cultural and social practises in Momentum helped shape embodied performances and the identities of activists involved in Momentum. I examine the role of affect and affective relations in collective identity formation, drawing on Ahmed's (2010) conceptualisation of affect as 'what sticks' and Dean and Maiguashca's (2018) exploration of affect in political practices. I propose that Momentum distinguished itself from other left-wing organisations by creating a culture of joy, vitality and self-expression. Members showcased this through their unique attire, blend of cultural expression with radical politics, and use of irony and vernacular humour, fostering a strong sense of belonging to a youthful and vibrant movement. . Despite this collective and affective joy, some female and disabled activists reported instances of exclusion from social events and unwelcome sexual attention in supposedly

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feminist spaces. This research enriches academic understanding of the British left, 'Corbynism' and underscores the value of affect in comprehending social movement cultures, identities, and internal dynamics.

This paper proposes a theoretical framework for exploring affect in leftist politics and argues that Momentum presents a novel and worthwhile fieldsite for exploring that topic. The present research investigates the role of affective dynamics, cultural expressions, and collective identity formation within Momentum, focusing on how emotions shape inclusion and exclusion, particularly regarding gender and disability.

I distill this aim into two research questions:

1. How do affect and cultural practices within Momentum shape collective identity and political engagement?
2. How do moments of collective joy in Momentum contribute to its members' mobilisation and alienation?

Social movement cultures: affect and identity

Extensive research has examined the relationship between social movements and culture (Gamson, 1992, Williams, 2004, Swidler, 2013, Johnston 1995). As Avruch (1998) explains, culture is socially distributed across populations and deeply internalised. Its affective elements often motivated action when certain schemas or images resonate strongly (p.18).Culture plays a role in creating collective identities within movements, as Gamson (1991) – among others – highlights. Cultures, especially subcultures and dissident cultures, often sit in a complex relationship with mainstream and dominant cultures, as Hall (1993) notes, and such cultures may exist in protracted conflict. As a result, cultural discourses – including those around identity – may blend elements of the dissident and the dominant. Melucci (1995, 1996) contends that social movements serve as arena for symbolic struggle. In movements, actors challenge dominant cultural codes and generate new meanings. Emotional investment is critical for defining a collective identity, helping individuals feel part of a unified group, thus ' There is no cognition without feeling and no meaning without emotion' (Melucci, 1996, p.71).

The 'affective turn' (Clough, 2007) in social sciences has opened new avenues for studying society, including movements. Fine (2014) defines affect as the 'physiological experience of emotion,' and 'feeling' is the 'interpretation of those physiological experiences' (p. 9). Building on Fine's (2014) distinction, this article defines emotions as interpreting physiological affective states, shaped by cultural and individual frameworks. In contrast, affect refers to pre-cognitive, bodily intensities and feelings bridge these experiences and their social interpretation Affect plays a crucial role in shaping identity and feelings of belonging; it is '…what sticks, or what sustains and preserves the connections between ideas, values and objects' (Ahmed, 2010, p29). Affect can shape bodily actions, restrict them, and trigger changes in individuals and those nearby, often before conscious interpretation occurs. Everyone experiences affect to varying degrees, with cultural events, gatherings and practises serving as key moments for its transmission. Brennan(2004) refers to the 'transmission of affect,' whereby 'the 'atmosphere' or the environment literally gets

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into the individual' (p.1). The transmission of affect can be positive – the excitement of a gig – or negative – the fear of a panicked crowd - though these shifts can often be subtle and intertwined. Affect can make us feel closer to those around us or detached from them. Negri recounts feeling joy and connection during direct action, describing how wearing a balaclava evokes the 'warmth of the workers and proletarian community' and how acts of destruction symbolise his connection to the working class (Negri, 1978). Negri's quote demonstrates the connection between collective and individual identities; his thrill and delight at the 'warmth of the workers' sits alongside his 'sign of connections' to that community. It shows the importance of cultural symbols and affect in constructing identity (wearing a balaclava is an important affective symbol) and what presumably marks Negri as part of the 'proletarian community'. Burke (1984) argues that identity reflects our fundamental social, political and historical circumstances, with the 'so-called 'I'…merely a unique combination of partially conflicting 'corporate we's' (p.264). Identities are formed partly through social and cultural practises when individuals realise their 'interests are joined' with other group members (Burke, 1969).

Affect influences identity formation, but its impacts occur in ambiguous spaces. Its utility lies in acknowledging that identical affects can yield varied outcomes. Negri experiences thrill and delight at the site of a confrontational expression of politics, but we cannot ignore the fact that the comrade next to him on the barricade might be scared witless. As Brennan (2004) notes, 'affect is not received or registered in a vacuum'. While it may strengthen identity and connection for one person, it may cause confusion, destablisation or disconnection for another: affects, 'mark[s] a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters…but also *non-belonging*' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, p1).

Affect plays a crucial role in social movements, shaping the emotional experiences of activists and the collective dynamics of political actions. Feelings such as anger, sadness and hope can mobilise individuals and inculcate emotional ties and shared purpose in movements (Jasper, 1998). Scholars recognise that movements often use affective activations, like protest chants, to energise participants and forge emotional bonds with the movements broader goals (Gould, 2013). To examine the affective in politics is to explore:

> The ways in which feelings, emotions, and bodily sensations manifest themselves through political practices, in ways that […] shore up or disrupt established ways of thinking and practising politics.
>
> (Dean and Maiguashca, 2018, p398).

Affective politics are by no means the sole prevail of the political left. A rich literature exists on affective right and far-right politics (Ahmed, 2010; Zemblyas, 2021). Sauer (2020) suggests that affects in right-wing social movements function a "power structure between people, and thus a means for governing people" (Sauer, 2020, p.31). For instance, euphoria can emerge in far-right contexts, reinforcing solidarity within exclusionary and often nationalistic imaginaries. Affective mobilisation in the far right – "promise new forms of solidarity when 'traditional' forms of solidarity…are eroding…promising hope and empathy only within groups of 'similar people'" (Sauer, 2020, p.33). A complete examination of affects and far-right movements is beyond the scope of the present paper; however, it is worth

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acknowledging that leftist movements share an analogous process of developing 'new' affective solidarities that counter or challenge dominant solidarities . What distinguishes right affects from left affects isthe "'retrotopian' dimensions of [the] right-wing counterpublic" and the goal of returning to "pre-feminist, androcentric, patriarchic, or heteronormative…forms of social organisation" (Schleusener et al. 2020, p194). Conversely, left counterpublics generally envision a social order and set of subjectivities that reject the politics of nostalgia and orientate themselves towards what Bauman calls "the not-yet unborn and so inexistent future" (Schleusener et al., 2020, p5). While left social movements often reproduce the identities and discourses of the world they claim to reject, the goal remains a renewal through rejecting the past instead of a rightist return to it.

This paper uses affect theory to explore how emotions shape culture and identity within left social movements. Building on Ahmed's idea of affect as "what sticks" and Dean and Maigauscha's understanding of affect in politics, I examine how emotions circulate and connect activists to ideas and values. Additional insights from Brennan (2004) on the 'transmission of affect' and Williams (1977) on 'structures of feeling' are used to explore the interaction between cultural practices and identity in Momentum. This framework highlights how affective experiences – just as joy and solidarity – are embodied and transmitted, influencing feelings of belonging or alienation in movements.

Contextualising Momentum in the British Left

Momentum has resisted easy categorisation as a political entity within the complex landscape of the British left – and general politics. Media discourse from 2015-2019 compared it to the far-left Militant Tendency of the 1980s (Shaw, 2015; Hattersley, 2019), though Momentum distanced itself from parts of the radical left like the SWPIts membership, peaking at 42,000 in 2018, was diverse, including trade unionists, environmental activists, and younger members part of a left-wing 'youthquake' (Sloam and Henn, 2019). Momentum's hybrid nature has been conceptualised in various ways: as a 'hybrid movement faction' (Dennis, 2020), a 'satellite campaign' (Dommett and Temple, 2018), or a 'party within a party' (Dennis, 2020). This paper argues that Momentum served as a 'centre of gravity' for the British left from 2015-2019, a period of heightened energy and activity among left-wing activists. While it remains tied to Labour, Momentum promotes grassroots campaigns, blending traditional party activism with a social movement identity. This adaptability has allowed it to survive and transform amid Labour's internal struggles, positioning itself as a more flexible and responsive organisation (McDowell-Naylor, 2019).

Momentum began as the 'Jeremy4Labour' Facebook page in mid-2015, supporting Jeremy Corbyn's leadership bid and signalling a shift to the left for the Labour Party. Initially a rallying platform, it soon became a mass movement for progressive change after Corbyn's victory (Wintour, 2015). At the time, the British left was fractured and relatively small. As Kelly (2018) notes, there were 22 left-wing parties, mainly Trotskyist, in 2016. The largest, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), had around 5,000 members but was mired in controversy

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over the 'Comrade Delta' scandal in 2013 when it mishandled sexual assault allegations (Binh, 2013; Penny, 2013; Seymour, 2013).

The extent to which Labour itself was 'left-wing' in the mid-2010s is debated (Smith and Spear, 1992; Kogan and Kogan, 2018; Callaghan, 2024). Labour housed factions such as the Socialist Campaign Group and the soft-left Compass group (Gilbert, 2017a), but Momentum stood apart, acting as a Labour faction and a social movement. It sought to balance involvement with the Labour Party while maintaining independence: supportive but not controlled by it (Wintour, 2015). Despite being new, Momentum quickly became influential within Labour. It dominated Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) for several years, influencing MP selection and party discipline (Smith, 2016). In the 2017 General Election, Momentum's activists and viral social media campaigns were pivotal in Labour's success in its target seats, depriving the Conservatives of a majority (Elgot, 2018). Momentum's digital content, viewed by over 12.7 million Facebook users, was significant in online political campaigning (Eaton, 2019). Its ads targeted British citizens for whom English was not the first language. They mocked Conservative leaders like Boris Johnson, making the social media battle as important as the electoral contest (Volpicelli, 2019).

After Corbyn's resignation in 2020, Momentum adapted, launching the 'Eviction Resistance' campaign alongside tenant organisations and developing training for socialist local councillors and trade unionists (Fisher, 2020; Momentum, 2021). It played a role in the 'Enough is Enough' campaign against the cost-of-living crisis and 'Labour for Labour,' advocating for socialist policies (Momentum, 2022a). As March and Mudde (2005) suggest, social movements like Momentum can mutate in response to crises. Post-Corbyn, it shifted focus from backing Corbyn's Labour to supporting broader socialist transformation, acknowledging that such support was not deeply rooted in Labour or the country (Momentum, 2021). Since 2020, Labour under Sir Keir Starmer has taken steps to reduce the influence of its left, including expelling left-wing members and factions, actions referred to by some as a 'purge' (Floyd, 2023). Despite this, Momentum has maintained a membership of around 20,000 and avoided being directly affected by these purges.

Momentum's rise and evolution are significant not just for its political influence within Labour but for how it sought to break away from the traditional, often patriarchal structures of the "old left" in Britain. Panitch & Leys (2020), suggest a degree of convergence and continuities between Momentum and the New Left of the 1960-80s; Basset (2019) suggests that Momentum is a "moderate" mutation of the New Left. However, Piazzo (2024) notes that Momentum was shaped by New Left veterans and a youthful generation of newer activists who came from anti-austerity and liberation social movements. He argues that this younger generation promoted a reconfiguration of Labour Party politics to the left, and a critical approach to the tactics and practises of the New Left. Thus, Momentum embraced affective politics, blending joyful cultural celebration with radical activism. This emotional engagement, facilitated by social media, viral content, and grassroots events, fostered a sense of community transcending traditional political mobilisation. My research shows that Momentum merged political action with cultural expression, creating a space that challenged the hierarchical, male-dominated norms of then while striving to surpass the efforts of the New Left (Waugh, 2023; Waugh, 2024). Its

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rallies, humour-driven online content, and local activism created a vibrant alternative where emotional and political identity were intertwined. This departure from the bureaucratic, staid approach of Labour's mainstream opened new possibilities for left-wing activism. For scholars, studying Momentum offers crucial insights into the role of emotions in politics. Even as its direct influence within Labour has diminished, Momentum's affective strategies teach how political movements can harness emotion and culture to foster solidarity, reshape political engagement, and challenge entrenched power dynamics.

Methods

The empirical data in this article is drawn from my doctoral research project into masculinities and sexual politics in radical social movements in the UK. I conducted twenty-seven semi-structured interviews with current and former members of Momentum. Participants were recruited by snowball sampling, initially from contacts in three branches of Momentum in which I have had personal involvement, and via Momentum mailing lists. I sought to sample participants from a range of social demographics within Momentum; ages ranged from 21 to 63, with an average age of 27. Four participants were people of colour, 12 defined as lesbian, gay or bisexual, and three identified as non-binary or gender nonconforming. Six disclosed lived experiences of neurodiversity.

Interviews followed a biographical/narrative framework (Wengraf, 2001), which focused on participants' experience of being active in Momentum and their insight into the movement's sexual politics. It also asked them to reflect on the formations of their own identities. Due to the restrictions of lockdown rules, all interviews took place via Zoom; as restrictions eased, I could attend Momentum meetings and observe the group on protest marches and other events. I attended approximately thirty in-person events over six months in 2021-22. Observations were utilised to guide the interpretation of the interviews and reflect upon my sensations as I took part in meetings, events and rallies.

My involvement in Momentum provided an intimate vantage point to explore how affect circulates and attaches itself to individuals and movements. Ahmed's (2010, p.29) understanding of affect as 'what sticks, or what sustains…the connections between ideas, values and objects' was beneficial in understanding how study participants' identities were affectively shaped. For example, participants described how moments of collective joy fostered a sense of belonging that kept them engaged with the movement, even in times of political setbacks. As a Momentum member, this affective sustaining in the face of hardship was something I experienced as an 'scholar activist', with my positionality granting me a "discursive closeness" (Egeberg Holmgren, 2011, p367) to my participants and their understandings of emotions, culture and politics. However, while Ahmed's definition is powerful on the abstract level of social movement analysis, it has limitations when applied to the embodied experiences shared by participants. In interviews, individuals often described their involvement in Momentum not in abstract terms but through physical and emotional sensations—excitement at a packed meeting, frustration in internal Labour disputes, or a sense of empowerment through collective action. These embodied accounts provide insight into how affect *sticks* to activists' personal experiences, adding depth to the broader political context in which these emotions circulate.

A revolution with dancing? Cultural practises in Momentum

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Dancing was not a topic I had anticipated in my interviews. One participant described the draw of Momentum to him as follows:

> *There's that quote about revolutions and dancing, and that was the thing about Momentum, especially in 2017, 2016, the early days. There was this cultural excitement, this buzz in the air. When you went to a Momentum event, you weren't just going to a Trot[skyist] meeting. There was music, dancing, comedy. They got you in with the good music, then hit you with the politics when you were already having fun.* (P.1)

The image painted here is that cultural performance was how Momentum brought members and supporters together – dancing and politics might not be natural bedfellows, but they linked together through enjoyment. The 'fun' does not stop when politics enters the space. Momentum's culture emphasised collective joy, presenting socialism as a vision of the radical and utopian possibilities within that shared happiness. Segal (2017) argues that collective action fosters radical happiness, strengthening bonds among participants and connecting them to the wider world. Experiences of dancing, singing, laughing and celebrating are deeply tied to the collective joy found in resisting an order that perpetuates misery. Fun and collective joy are essential concepts to consider in understanding constructions of the self: culture and cultural practices can predict affective responses (Markus and Kitayama, 1994); often, who we are can depend on how we feel (Ashton-James et al., 2009), and 'one's behaviour, cognitions, and self-constructs – at any given point in time depends on the fundamental interplay between affect and culture' (p345). Drawing on Ahmed (2004), affect plays a role in creating a sense of collective identity, as emotions '*do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachment' (p28). Momentum often explicitly blended political education and cultural expression. Several of my participants recounted direct or second-hand experiences of a Momentum fringe event at the Labour Party's 2017 conference, where a three-hour-long political education morphed into a rave dance party (Anon, 2017).

Momentum activated its members through mass rallies, picket lines, door-knocking in marginal seats, and engagement within popular culture. Notable affective moments (Dean, 2020) occurred at cultural events, notably Corbyn's rapturous reception at the 2017 Glastonbury Festival. The unofficial anthem of the Corbyn project (an often-discordant chant of 'Oh-Jeremy-Cor-byn!') was itself a pastiche of the song *Seven Nation Army* by the White Stripes, intrinsically linking the radical possibilities of Corbyn's Labour Party to a shared cultural reference point. Momentum's cultural elements, including music, chants, and millennial vernacular, distinguished it and 'Corbynism' from both the political and radical left establishments. A participant from Manchester Momentum described it this way:

> *With Momentum it was spontaneous, and it felt, it felt real. Also…the cultural stuff made me realise that I wasn't alone, like, you know, like Stormzy was a comrade, like Architects are comrades*[1].

[1] Stormzy – born Michael Owuo Jr. – is a British grime artist and political activist known for his vocal support for Jeremy Corbyn, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire. Architects is a

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Most of the study participants described their engagement with Momentum as '*exciting*,' and '*energising*'; one told me that it made her feel '*alive, really alive*,' as part of a crowd who watched Jeremy Corbyn speak at a Momentum organised event before the 2017 General Election. The cultural side of Momentum and Corbynism offered a more genuine sense of cultural engagement than that seen in other radical left-wing groups – it 'felt real' compared to more jilted efforts at weaving music and politics together. The involvement of cultural celebrities lent legitimacy and opened possibilities for causes that might have seemed fringe or subaltern before Corybn's leadership.. Herein, it could be contended that the engagement of cultural celebrities in Momentum's cultural framework did not dilute the 'underdog and populist quality' (Bassett and Gilbert, 2021, p173), as celebrity power is not derived from institutional or state social power, but from a sense of social influence derived from public attention (Meyer, 1995). The social power of those celebrities who immersed themselves in Momentum added to the compelling nature of its culture.

'There's someone who looks like me,' aesthetic politics and embodied performances in Momentum

'Embodied performance' is defined by Dean and Maiguascha as the 'aesthetic dimension of politics' – that is, the 'verbal, sartorial, and bodily norms' of political groups, movements and cultures (Dean & Maiguascha, 2019, p396). Juris reminds us that 'performances are constitutive; of meanings, identities, images, feelings and even bodies' (Juris, 2015, p227). Gilbert argued that the vibrancy and joy of the culture around Momentum and Corbyn – which he dubs 'Acid Corbynism' after Fisher's sadly incomplete work on 'Acid Communism'[2] – linked together radical politics, cultural forms, and the performance of a kind of collective joy (Gilbert, 2017b). Acid Corbynism and the cultural forces around Momentum offered a 'glimpse of post-capitalist collectively in the moments of soundtracked togetherness that we achieve on the dancefloor' (Phull and Stronge, 2017, no pagination).

The performance of the possible within Momentum's culture was another feature noted by study participants, and a different picture of the more austere aesthetics and comportment of other radical left groups was painted. A Momentum member from Cambridge described what she perceived to be an '*activist uniform'* worn by many men among radical leftists as '*big overcoats, big boots, old t-shirts,'* or '*knackered jumpers, like old professor clothes*'. Another participant from Leeds agreed with this description and stated that while there was never any pressure to dress in a particular way, he felt that members of his group took the view that '*politics is serious, so we need to dress kind of serious*' with the seriousness here coming with connotations of intellectualism, or militaristic garb. A further Manchester participant contrasted his Labour branch and UCU branch – where members were '*not particularly worried about their own personal aesthetics. They, like you know, wear a T-shirt from a rally 20 years ago, old jeans and stuff'* – to Momentum,

British metalcore band whose music is characterised by lyrics critiquing society from a leftist stance. The band supports radical green and animal rights political movements, as well as being vocally anti-capitalist and anti-monarchy.

[2] Mark Fisher's unfinished *Acid Communism* explored the radical potential of collective joy and consciousness-raising to imagine a post-capitalist future. Drawing on 1960s countercultural movements, Fisher argued that neoliberalism has stifled our ability to envision alternative futures

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which had a much more diverse sartorial expression. For him, this contributed to the inclusive atmosphere he found in the organisations and the signifying elements of dress:

> *…there's someone who looks like me, cares about what I care about, fashion, and their regime. It was nice because the people involved cared about things, but it didn't feel like the movement had been their entire life.* (P.3)

Not only did Momentum members not adhere to a strict understanding of an 'activist uniform' but they also indicated a different affective relationship to politics. The more diversely and vibrantly dressed Momentum members signalled a difference from a militant concept of activism as work by suggesting that 'the people involved cared about things' but without the movement being 'their entire life.' In short, Momentum succeeded in creating a dissident culture for movement participants. This culture centred around expressions of collective joy, a blurring of the boundaries between political education and organising, and cultural activities such as dancing, music, gigs and comedy. That culture marked out the organisation as what Pickard calls the 'political awakening for many young people' (Pickard, 2018, p132), However, my research suggests that Momentum's culture's collective joy and optimism did not extend to every area of life.

A kinder, gentler politics? Divergent affects and exclusion

Several participants reported a sense of being at odds with the collective identity in Momentum rather than a part of it. This is hardly unusual; various socio-cultural influences produce conceptions of the self, and differing cultural contexts provide different schemes (or frameworks) for forming one's sense of who one is and whether one is a 'good' person in that context. Thus, 'two people, even those in similar socio-cultural circumstances…are unlikely to feel exactly the same way in a given set of circumstances' (Markus and Kitayama, 1994, p92). These moments of conflict latch onto experiences of social space and attend to the micropolitics of gender, sexuality, and disability.

Indeed, some participants related that they did not engage in the music, comedy, dancing and drinking that characterised much of Momentum's habitus. Age played some small role in this; the average age of study participants was twenty-seven, putting a majority into the 'millennial' generation; some of my participants outside of this age range reported that they might have '*the odd pint'* with other members after a meeting, but generally did not engage in the social side of politics due to family commitments, or because – to quote one – '*I don't want to be that old man following around a bunch of twenty-five-year-olds*.' Declining social events due to family time commitments appear mundane. Yet, a conflict between time for family and time for joyful politics in a culture orientated towards radical possibilities merits further discussion. This demonstrates how affective politics vary with life stages. Family commitments, for example, create time and space constraints, limit emotional resources, and restrict participation in collective culture. In addition Activists with disabilities, particularly those who were neurodivergent, noted that spontaneous social interactions posed significant challenges:

> *Music is a big part of my life; I go to gigs when I can, but when I know I'm going, I can prepare. I have my headphones, and it is music on my terms…and if it just happens, if suddenly we go from a meeting into a loud event, or the meeting* is *a gig, I have to remove myself (P.5, neurodivergent activist, Leeds Momentum)*

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The use of noise-cancelling headphones by neurodivergent people to navigate and mitigate concerts has been noted in various contexts (Quinn and Barton, 2024). However, when the boundaries between politics and fun are not rigid, an activist might not have such assistive objects to hand. A participant from Cambridge Momentum shared his struggle with the social life's inaccessibility, '*so if we went out, I would…get anxious because it would be too loud, I wouldn't be able to get out ……so I would… fade into the background and go home.'* This is not to say that Momentum consciously set out to exclude activists with disabilities; in my observations, I noted that Momentum set out to book meeting spaces with step-free access andhearing aid loops. However, these measures seemed to conceptualise disability as a physical impairment first and foremost rather than as a psychosocial phenomenon whereby members of a marginalised group experience social isolation because of self-exclusion from social spaces (Jose et al., 2016).

Sexism was also evidence in Momentum's social spaces. Several women activists reported experiencing unwanted sexual comments and occasional physical contact from male Momentum members. Alcohol appeared to correlate with these experiences . Responses to these unwanted behaviours ranged from resignation to resentment. One female activist said '*It happens everywhere, so why should it be different here?*' Another echoed, 'Y*ou expect better, or you want to believe in better, but better just doesn't happen. The same men who went to all the meetings and talked about how feminist they are are the ones who find any excuse to touch you' (*P.9, female activist, Manchester Momentum.) Left-wing movements and parties have a troubling history of sexism, including instances of sexual violence against women and girls (Clement, 1985, Seymour, 2013d, Downes et al., 2016, Downes, 2017, FRFI, 2017). Additionally, female left activists have documented bullying, harassment, or simply a refusal by left-wing men to confront the dynamics and practice of patriarchal power (Rowbotham, 2015; Penny, 2013).

Does Momentum – for all its affective joy – struggle to move beyond what Chapman and Rutherford identify as a left project 'underpinned by a particular heterosexual masculinity' a politics and culture that is 'almost exclusively male, its language, practices and institutions defined by a masculine perception of the world, and fashioned in man's interests' (1988, p13)? Some evidence exists that Momentum attempted to do this. Training sessions were run by the activist organisation NEON for Momentum activists and branch committee membersfocused on '*creating essentially a safe space for people of different genders, races, ethnicities, ages, and disabilities, as well as facilitating productive meetings and constructive debates and discussions.'* (P.14, Manchester Momentum). The very existence of such training offered to all activists in the branch shows again a means by which Momentum tries to distinguish itself from other radical left organisations and address some of the practical ramifications of what Bakan (2012) calls the 'epistemological dissonance' between socialism and feminism. However, training sessions on inclusive radical politics can only go so far. While some male participants found the sessions helpful to reflect '*…that as a man, I have power'* (P.12, Manchester Momentum), others found that inclusion policies functioned to *exclude*. One participant – who described himself as a 'straight passing' gay man – told me that he was frequently asked to 'sit down' in meetings in favour of allowing women to speak: '*Politics is a very male thing, and it's good to let women have the floor…but as a gay man, I feel like I was being shut down*' (P.24, Manchester Momentum). His embodied performance of his masculinity meant that his experience conformed with what

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Serano (2013) calls the unspoken 'heterosexist assumption' of movement cultures – that is, that if an individual is not visibly 'queer' enough, then they lose the ability to stake a claim within both queer politics or the queer aspects of mainstream politics. This heterosexist assumption can be theorised through Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977). The structures of feeling are not formal rules but form part of a shared emotional and cultural fabric that subtly dictates who is recognised as authentic and who might be sideline as inarticulate and inauthentic. This creates an exclusionary emotional logic within queer politics, where individuals feel alienated or delegitimised based on the affective expectations of visible queerness, which interplays strongly with boundaries of belonging in such movements (Ahmed, 2004).

When do social spaces become movement spaces? Does the pub, the rave, or the comedy club become a movement space if its only patrons are movement activists? Mathieu defines the 'space' of social movements as a universe of practice and meaning that is relatively autonomous from other social microcosms…and within which mobilisations...are linked by various relations of interdependence' (2021, p196); such spaces are governed by 'peculiar logics' and, as Daphi (2014) argues, can be seen as a part of culture as spaces are 'a product of social processes as well as an influence on them' (p171). Such a conceptualisation of space enables thinking about social movement space as something that extends beyond the streets or other commonly cited sites of contention for movements and understand how spaces can be 'one of the ways in which activists collectively make sense of their surroundings' (Daphi, 2014, p.180). Momentum's weaving together of political and cultural spaces would, one assumes, create a phenomenon whereby social spaces adhered to new forms of 'peculiar logics' that fitted with the socialist, anti-racist and feminist ethos of the organisation at large. However, some male activists saw a distinction between the 'political spaces' of meetings, canvassing and protesting and the 'cultural' spaces that activists retreated to after:

> '*…you're just letting your hair down and have a laugh over a beer and be…be, I don't want to say normal, but like normal. Because being an activist isn't like being a normal person always, is it?'* (P.14, Leeds Momentum)

> '*Guys are going to be guys, aren't they? And if there's a fit girl in the pub, then, sure, let's have a go, right? Look, I don't want to say that people forgot themselves when they socialised, like, we're all comrades, but when you're done with the meeting…it's different.' (P.24,* Manchester Momentum)

The quotes here illustrate a delineation of ideas about social movement space. There is a distinction between 'activism' and normality. What is implied is a clear divide between the spaces in which one must be an activist – the meeting, the protest, the canvassing round – and those where one might '*let[ting] one's hair down'* such as the pub. Related to this is the idea that behaviour will change in those spaces – one presumes that it is 'ok' to 'have a go' at a 'fit girl' in the pub, but maybe such behaviour would unacceptable on a picket line. What informs this idea of the 'difference' between movement spaces and 'normal' spaces? What is striking here is the gendered nature of divergent affective dynamics. Note the uncomfortable contrast between male activists seeking to 'have a go' in the pub and female activists expressing resignation or dismay at unwanted attention from men in Momentum. This points to the important, though not necessarily novel, idea that men identifying as

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feminists or being members of feminist organisations does not prevent those same men from acting in ways that shore up, rather than subvert, patriarchy (Sullivan, 2007, Coleman and Bassi, 2011, Craddock, 2019). There is something to be said about masculinities on the left and affect; I have argued else that there are multiple masculinities in left movements, some of which sustain patriarchal power or resignify its mechanisms with a veneer of radical language, and some of which attempt resistance. I have termed these resistant masculinities "inarticulate masculinities"; inarticulate in the sense that the men who try to build a new form of masculinity have an explicit critique of masculinities that reproduce dominant power structures with a leftist edge yet find that they try to articulate an authentically anti-sexist and feminist masculinity is challenging. A problem is named, but a solution stutters (for further details, see Waugh, 2023; Waugh, 2024)

Examined through the lens of affect theory, scholars such as Brennan (2004) have made a case for the 'transmission of affect' – when the atmosphere of a space can get into a person and, as Caputi points out ', alter[s] both the recipient and the transmitter' (2003, p1). The idea of affect as a contagion that can leap between spaces and bodies is crucial here (Gibbs, 2001). What seems to be disputed in Momentum is whether the movement transmits its socialist, feminist, and anti-racist affects *into* social spaces or whether those spaces transmit more mainstream ideas about relating to socialist, feminist and anti-racist activists. Steinberg (2002) argues that 'cultures of contention' are only partially constructed through deliberate and calculated action. Rather than seeing social movement culture and mainstream culture as 'discrete dominant and dissident spheres,' it needs to be acknowledged that a complex process of give and take plays out between the two; the boundaries between social movement culture and mainstream culture are porous and the interactions between cultures intricate; indeed, dissident cultures (such as those in social movements) can often 'create oppositional discourses by borrowing from the discourses of those they oppose; in protracted conflicts, both dominant and challenging discourses can mix together' (p208). For Hall (1993) any dissident culture cannot be considered except in a dialectical relationship with its dominant culture; while the dissident culture may try to reconfigure and re-signify aspects of the dominant culture (often as a form of resistance to it) 'when one culture gains ascendancy over the other... the subordinate cultures *experiences* itself in terms prescribed by the dominant culture' (Hall and Jefferson, 1993b). Membership of a subculture involves some process of meaning-making, but those meanings may well be subsumed by other 'determining matrix[es] of experience and conditions,' specially, for Hall, those related to the class. Dissident subcultures, in this sense, are always 'subordinate and subordinated' to the dominant culture (1993, p15). Subcultures can see the resignification of cultural values - or their repetition in line with existing regimes of power.

In short, Momentum's emphasis on joy as a mobilisation strategy exemplifies Ahmed's concept of affect binding individuals to collective identities. Affective experiences such as spontaneous raves and comedy shows reinforced senses of political belonging, and of being more '*real*' than other left wing organisations. However, these same joyful spaces also reproduced patriarchal dynamics, and unwanted sexual attention and comments towards female activists. Neurodivergent activists also struggled with spontaneous expressions of collective joy. In short, Momentum's case is significant for affect scholars as it highlights the importances of a nuanced understanding of affective politics, which recognises the capacity for solidarity and exclusion at the same time.

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Concluding remarks

This paper has explored the intersection of affect, cultural expression, and politics within the British left, focusing on Momentum's distinctive approach to political engagement. In addressing the first research question—*How do affect and cultural practices within Momentum shape collective identity and political engagement?*—this study highlights how joyful cultural practices such as rallies, raves, and music fostered a collective identity and energised members. Momentum's blending of cultural and political spaces created an affective environment where activism felt authentic and emotionally resonant, binding individuals to the movement's broader goals through Ahmed's concept of affect as "what sticks."

However, the findings also show that these practices were not universally inclusive. In response to the second research question—*How do moments of collective joy in Momentum contribute to mobilisation and alienation?*—the paper demonstrates that while affective joy encouraged mobilisation for many, it also produced forms of exclusion. Gendered and ableist dynamics in social spaces, coupled with patriarchal norms, limited the inclusivity of these experiences. Neurodivergent activists often struggled with the unstructured and spontaneous nature of Momentum's affective politics, and female activists faced unwanted attention in supposedly feminist spaces.

These findings suggest that while affective politics can nurture solidarity and a sense of belonging, they also risk reinforcing structural exclusions. This paper underscores the importance of a nuanced understanding of affective politics, recognising their dual capacity to unite and alienate. For the sociology of social movements and affect, Momentum provides a critical case study of how affect operates as both a force for connection and a source of tension within political spaces. It is important to acknowledge that right-wing and far-right movements also leverage affective dynamics to foster solidarity and mobilisation. The euphoria observed in nationalist rallies or exclusionary spaces serves as a reminder that affect can sustain political belonging across ideological divides. Future research might explore how these dynamics complicate our understanding of affect as a force for connection and exclusion, regardless of political orientation.

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