**This is the accepted version of the article published as:**

Ashton, Daniel and Gowland-Pryde, Ronda (2019) ‘Arts audience segmentation: data, profiles, segments and biographies’, *Cultural Trends* (doi: 10.1080/09548963.2019.1617938)

**Arts audience segmentation: data, profiles, segments and biographies**

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**Abstract**

This article critically examines how segmentation is used to identify, understand and engage arts audiences. Policy reports and academic publications are reviewed to establish the priorities of arts policymakers and practitioners for understanding arts audiences and their continued focus on audience data and segmentation. This article then makes two contributions. Firstly, critical perspectives on the use of data for audience profiling are applied to arts audience segmentation. Secondly, research using biographical methods is introduced as a new approach for critically evaluating arts audience segmentation. This research, employing biographical methods, shows the exploration and negotiation of audience identity positions. This article takes these insights to critically examine the implications of how profiles and segments are used to define and understand audiences for the arts. The conclusion addresses the implications of segmentation in terms of the design and communication of cultural experiences, the complexities of aligning audiences’ identities with segments, and the seeming inevitability of exclusion. This article will be of relevance in the scholarly study of arts audiences and for arts and cultural organisations and policymakers in reflecting on the implications of quantitative and qualitative approaches in designing and undertaking audience research.

**Keywords**

Arts audiences; Audience segmentation; audience profiling;; Biographical research; Research methods; Exclusion.

**Introduction**

Within the context of publicly funded art, there is wide interest in exploring who is engaging, how and why. Steps to develop a new strategy for Arts Council England (ACE) for 2020–2030 have put the emphasis on celebrating diverse forms of culture and creativity, and ensuring wide benefit and engagement (ACE, 2018a). For ACE-funded organisations this includes working closely with communities in relation to their needs and interests (ACE, 2018a). Another dimension to understanding audiences can be seen through ACE’s Sector Support Organisation funding for The Audience Agency to develop the use of audience data and population information (Torreggiani, 2018). Working across these two related dimensions – organisations engaging with communities to understand their needs and the use of data to understand audience types – this article examines the methods and approaches for understanding and engaging with audiences.

Part one uses existing policy reports and academic publications to review and evaluate priorities for understanding arts audiences. Part two focuses on arts audience segmentation and the ways it is used to identify, understand and engage arts audiences. This critical examination reviews the changing role and status of arts audience segmentation and applies critical perspectives on the use of data for audience profiling. Part three engages with these critical interventions and presents biographical research as a new approach for critically evaluating the implications of arts audience segmentation. Specifically, this research with ‘young people who have offended’ participating in Arts Award programmes highlights the complexities and multiplicities of identity. Through our reflections on biographical research, we argue that audience segmentation both describes and constructs audiences, and that there are significant implications for this regarding who is excluded from prevailing approaches to identifying and engaging with audiences. Part four sets out the implications for this in terms of: the design and communication of cultural experiences (i.e. programmes and events); the complexities of aligning audiences’ identities with segments; and the seemingly inevitable exclusions that come with audience segmentation.

**Part One: Understanding arts audiences**

In their introduction to *The Audience Experience,* Radbourne, Glow and Johnson (2013) review research reports from a range of international arts industry and funding bodies and identify the emphasis placed on building audiences and engaging audiences. A similar direction is described by Foreman-Wernet and Dervin (2017, p. 49) as the “turn to the audience” and they summarise the underpinning aim for organisations to better understand and serve audiences. Foreman-Wernet and Dervin (2017) also highlight the contextual nature of arts experiences and note that arts audiences are too complex to understand through attendance numbers or demographics. In the UK, the Understanding Everyday Participation (UEP) project has made prominent interventions in addressing how cultural participation is understood (Miles and Gibson, 2016). By focusing on participation beyond and alongside state-funded arts and culture, this project examines everyday and ordinary culture through empirical research into “situated participation”. Referring to the *Taking Part* survey, Miles and Gibson (2016, p. 152) argue that quantitative methods based on the survey reduce culture to measurable indicators that reinforce particular ways of “seeing” participation (see also, Taylor, 2016). This point closely connects with the critical arguments we develop in this article on segmentation. A similar point around “complex and interconnected cultural ecology” is made by Walmsley (2018, p. 286) as he reflects on findings generated through a “deep hanging out” method. As Walmsley (2018) summarises, a diverse range of methods have been employed to gain insights into how audiences value their arts experiences (see Walmsley, 2013; Pitts and Gross, 2016). These studies examining qualitative and quantitative methods provide critical reflections on the practical priority to build and understand arts audiences. This article proposes that the investigation of audiences and audience building can be productively examined through the critical analysis of how audiences are profiled and segmented.

Keaney’s (2008) discussion of arts audience data reveals that there are several sources of information, with their respective strengths and limitations, and several ways to combine these sources in revealing ways. Specifically, Keaney (2008) draws out the need for a rich and nuanced engagement with audience data. Reflecting on the Nesta (2013) *Counting What Counts* report, Moore (2016, p. 106) sets out the “thick data” ethnographic approach to explore how arts organisations use audience data. Moore (2016) addresses how data can be used to provide insights into audience behaviours and help with decision-making for programming and marketing. In this report and the subsequent reflections, we find an important link between data and understanding audiences. This approach has implications for how arts organisations develop programmes and communicate with audiences. Indeed, Morris and Tillcock (2018) suggest that “the collection and interpretation of audience data has become an integral element of many arts organisations workload.” In turn, the more recent Nesta (2017, p. 19) report, *Digital Culture 2017*, suggests that “the majority of arts and cultural organisations still do not use data for important purposes such as understanding their audiences better through data analysis and profiling.” Whilst the importance of data for understanding and profiling audiences is established, there remains a considerable way to go with uptake and the development of associated skills. A number of organisations provide materials to support arts and cultural organisations in understanding and building audiences (see for example *Arts Professional*, n.d.; Vitale, n.d.). Given the steps to develop and roll out new programmes, for example by the Audience Agency (Torreggiani, 2018), this is an important area for analysis. Likewise, there is much for critical scholarship to explore around the use and implications of using data to understand audiences. Noting this tipping point around the potential and promise of using audience data, this article presents the first critical examination of arts audience segmentation and profiling that engages with contemporary debates around the politics of data-driven audience profiling.

This examination unfolds in two stages. In part two we review current approaches to arts audience segmentation and critically examine these through scholarship on data and the politics of profiling. The limitations and tensions raised through this analysis of audience segmentation and profiling are then pursued in part three. Specifically, we set out biographical research as a new approach for critically evaluating the tensions and implications of arts audience segmentation.

**Part Two: Arts audience segmentation**

Segmenting art audiences

Arts audience segmentation has been defined by Nielsen, McQueen and Nielsen (1974) in relation to performing arts audiences as a systematic method connecting art forms with people's characteristics and preferences. Wiggins (2004) reviews a number of audience development models which focus on consumer segmentation as way to increase audience participation. As Wiggins (2004) explores, there can be a range of motivations and priorities for arts and cultural organisation to engage in audience development, including their founding mission (and mission statement), in response to cultural policy agendas around diversification and access, and as a way to increase income. Writing more recently with reference to global economic conditions, Kolhede and Gomez-Arias (2016) connect arts audience segmentation with the need to generate new revenue sources. Specifically, they refer to “a market-oriented strategy” and the “development of financially viable marketing programs that will differentially meet the expectations of each targeted group” (Kolhede and Gomez-Arias, 2016, p. 89). The focus on economically significant visitors strikes a chord with Kemp and Martin-Poole’s (2016) account of consumer segments and the importance of reaching new consumer segments in relation to diminishing and ageing audiences. Kolhede and Gomez-Arias (2016) also identify the controversies with market-oriented strategies, including issues of artistic integrity, limited offerings, and the emphasis on star performers (see also Foreman-Wernet and Dervin, 2017). On this note, we stress that audience segmentation is not a stable or uncontested area of practice.

Arts audience segmentation is a field of continual exploration and development, with scholars refining and reconceptualising extant models. Models range from those focused on understanding current audiences to those which focus on segmenting non-audience members into likely participants (Wiggins 2004). For example, Wiggins (2004) examines the RAND model (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001) which focuses on hard-to-reach or unlikely arts audiences. Of particular importance for our discussion is Wiggins’ (2004) critique that audience targeting strategies for specific segments may also be encountered by other segments with different reactions and responses. Here we begin to see the potential tension between the creation of segments and the intentions of strategic communications, and how audiences react and respond. More recently, Pelletier (2017) focuses on “arts consumers exhibiting dissonant cultural profiles” to examine tensions in how audiences are positioned and reveals the large range of factors which may impact upon participation. Continual revisions and developments highlight the dynamic nature of arts audiences and how they may be understood, but also the more overarching challenge with arts audience segmentation as an approach. Nevertheless, as noted regarding Nesta’s *Counting What Counts*, the generation and use of data for audience profiling and segmentation continues to gather pace.

To understand the contemporary arts audience segmentation landscape the following focuses on the four main segmentation approaches used within the arts in the UK: *Mosaic* (Experian), *Arts Audiences: Insights* (ACE), *Culture Segments* (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre), and *Audience Spectrum* (Audience Agency). The following section sets out the claims made by each for their value, establishes some of the common features and limitations, and outlines the associated iterations and refinements in arts audience segmentation more broadly. Whilst our focus is on the UK, arts audience segmentation is commonly employed worldwide. Indeed, global reach is evident with some of the organisations being covered below. Namely Morris Hargreaves McIntyre focus on segmentation in China through a report with the British Council (2014) and segmentation in Australia with a report for the Australia Council for the Arts (2017). The following is not intended as an evaluation of the different models, as we see for example with Wiggins’ (2004) response to the RAND model. Whilst the minutia of these models is important, our main aim is to offer an overarching critique of the aims and operation of these models in light of the politics of profiling and other forms of audience research.

*Mosaic*

Experian’s *Mosaic* is introduced as the “consumer classification solution for consistent cross-channel marketing” (Experian, n.d.). Through the term “solution”, this definition of *Mosaic* sets out the idea that classification is a problem. The *Mosaic* response emphasizes the “individual.” *Mosaic* works with trends, such as “boomerang generations”, “mid-life singles”, and “retired people”, which are used to group individuals and then connect with them as a defined mass. Experian’s *Mosaic* offers 15 colour and letter coded broad classifications, ranging from “A - City Prosperity” to “O - Rental Hubs”, further broken down to 62 classifications; for example within “A - City Prosperity” there are four categories (A1-A4). Whilst offering 62 classifications, there has been recognition for some time of the limitation of fitting arts audiences into existing socio-demographic descriptions (Maitland, 2010). In response, several other segmentation approaches have been developed that focus specifically on the arts.

*Arts Audiences: Insights*

Partly in recognition of this issue of generality, in 2008 ACE first published *Arts Audiences: Insights* – a segmentation approach focusing on engagement with the arts. When establishing the relevance of arts audience segmentation, the *Arts Audiences: Insights* report emphasizes that “not all people are the same, or share the same attitudes, opinions and motivations about the arts” (ACE, 2011, p. 4). Here we can see the familiar emphasis on segmentation, but with a specific focus on arts audiences. Specifically, this approach uses three colour-coded groups based around engagement: highly engaged, some engagement, and not currently engaged. Similar to *Mosaic*, there are groups within segments. Examples for *Arts Audiences: Insights* include “Urban Eclectic Arts” and “Limited Means, Nothing Fancy.” Whilst ACE made steps to develop an arts-specific audience segmentation approach, several other approaches have come into wider usage.

*Culture Segments*

As a private consultancy company, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre might be closer to Experian than ACE. However, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (n.d.) focus on charity, heritage and culture with their offering, *Culture Segments*, which they describe as “the international standard segmentation system for arts, culture and heritage organisations”. In common with the above approaches, there is an emphasis on audience diversity. *Culture Segments* addresses this challenge head on by describing segmentation as a “pragmatic solution” and a way of “clustering individual audience members into manageable groups.” Moreover, they address the limitations of past approaches to segmentation and set out that *Culture Segments* “works for cultural audiences because it is based on audiences’ cultural values and beliefs.” In contrast to the above approaches, *Culture Segments* does not have tiers of segmentation. Instead, it offers eight segments that focus less on the defining individuals, such as the “Metro High Flyers” of *Mosaic* and “Bedroom DJs” of *Arts Audiences: Insights*, and more on dispositions and relationships, such as “essence”, “stimulation” and “affirmation.” Nevertheless, the common ground and intention is to position arts audiences within segments.

*Audience Spectrum*

*Audience Spectrum*, by The Audience Agency (n.d. a), “segments the whole UK population by their attitudes towards culture, and by what they like to see and do.” In terms of segments and profiles, there are 10 different Audience Spectrum profiles that can be used for arts and cultural organisations to understand who lives in a local area, what current audiences are like, and what can be done to build new ones. This approach has come to prominence, for example with references within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) *Culture is Digital* report. The ten Pen Portraits include “Metroculturals”, “Dormitory Dependables”, and “Facebook Families.” Within each profile, there are a number of top level headings, including: Overview, Interests, Location, Preferences, and How to Engage. Some of these pages then offer a further level of detail. For example, from “Preferences”: creative participation, lifestyle, community involvement, giving, influences, location, lifestage, digital habits, and diversity in segments. Of particular note with *Audience Spectrum* is the cross-referencing with *Mosaic* and *Arts Audience: Insights*. For example, the best segment match for “Metroculturals” is identified in *Arts Audiences: Insights* as “Urban Arts Eclectic” and in *Mosaic 2014* as “City Prosperity.” From this, we can see the distinctive nuances of each segmentation system, but also that this broad approach to segmentation is well-established.

The four approaches above all help to define and establish how segmentation is used. Specifically, we see the increasing importance placed on addressing the subtleties and nuances of arts audiences. This direction is most obvious with the *Arts Audiences: Insights* approach and the continued direction of ACE to work with art-specific audience segments (Arts Professional, n.d.). This is further explained by distinguishing *Arts Audiences: Insights* from *Mosaic* and the way it uses socio-demographic characteristics to form segments. Whilst the focus is to present evermore refined profiles and segments, in the following we raise questions around the very process and practice of profiling.

Data, demographics and the politics of profiling

The following draws on wider debates around audience data and profiling to reflect on the changes and challenges to arts audience segmentation. In 2014, Trendwatching used the concept of “post-demographics” to capture the ambiguities of consumer identities and behaviours in relation to neo-liberal ideas of freedom and flexibility:

People – of all ages and in all markets – are constructing their own identities more freely than ever. As a result, consumption patterns are no longer defined by ‘traditional’ demographic segments such as age, gender, location, income, family status and more.

We have seen from our above analysis that arts audience segmentation approaches have also sought to refine how audiences are conceptualized, moving away from demographic data to take account of “people’s artistic lives” (ACE, 2011), “cultural values and beliefs” (Morris Hargreaves and McIntyre, n.d.) and “attitudes towards culture” (Audience Agency, n.d. a). The concept of post-demographics can be used to highlight the limitations of audience profiling using traditional demographic groups and support the steps that profiling organisations are taking to develop more personalised and granular accounts.

A different understanding of post-demographics comes from Rogers (2009), who focuses on data in social networking platforms and questions of how profiling is performed. Rogers’ (2009) focus on social media covers similar ground to Trendwatching in moving from demographics of race, ethnicity, age, income, educational level and class to tastes and interests. The concept of post-demographics resonates around how arts activity is translated into data, for example with the *Taking Part* survey, and how this data is translated into segments which may then inform how arts and cultural organisations develop programmes and communicate with audiences. More significantly for the line of critical inquiry we are developing, Rogers’ account of post-demographics raises questions that extend beyond identifying a shift from traditional demographics to increased personalisation and taste, to look at how the political implications of how profiling is performed. It is here that we make the important and distinctive step to critically examine arts audience segmentation in terms of the politics of data and profiling.

Looking at the *how* of audience profiling reflects the earlier discussion in relation to Moore (2016) and “data stories.” Across the four models reviewed above, we argue that there is a practical agenda to create consumer segments that has political implications. Elmer’s (2004) *Profiling Machines* includes a historical account of technologies of consumer profiling and helps to open up the tensions in how audiences are identified and positioned. Elmer (2004, p. 9) describes profiling as an “instrumental and economic process” that involves the “ongoing distribution and cataloguing of information about the desires, habits and locations of individuals and groups.” Elmer (2004, p. 134) suggests that “to profile is to attempt to account for the unknown – our inability to adequately capture, contain, or regulate and govern behaviour, thought, language, and action.” In emphasizing the political nature of profiling, Elmer (2004, p. 136) argues that profiles are “embedded with cultural and social values” and that related to this are “potential discriminatory applications.” This is a theme also addressed by Skeggs and Yuill (2016) in their research on Facebook and the ways in which decisions which individuate users also serve to dividuate – notably around the value of specific user profiles for advertising. When it comes to examining practices of profiling and the creation of consumer segments, Rogers’ (2009) critique is particularly important for raising issues of absence and the “other.” In discussing early database profiling practices, Rogers (2009, p. 30) suggests that “in a cultural theory sense, the database became the site to derive the other.” For our discussion, the position of the “other” within arts audience segmentation is both a practical and political concern. What absences and exclusions are generated in the creation of arts audience segments?

In the following section, we continue our examination of arts audience segmentation through the approaches, observations and findings of biographical research. This is an approach that, echoing Walmsley’s call (2018) in relation to “deep hanging out”, emphasizes “thinking with” and “discovery.” We address how in putting the focus on understanding *with* audiences, biographical methods can provoke critical reflections and interventions on the idea and operation of arts audience segmentation.

**Part Three: Biographical research with (arts) audiences**

Having introduced and reviewed some of widely-used arts audience segmentation strategies, part three turns to the practice and experiences of one of the article’s authors working with ‘young people who have offended.’ This existing research (Gowland-Pryde, 2017) focuses on the exploration of biographical research methods. This article presents an original contribution by developing this research as a new approach to critically evaluating the implications of arts audience segmentation. We argue that the biographical methods employed with ‘young people who have offended’ get to the very issue of how marketing and metrics sit uncomfortably with the complexities of identity and people’s changing relationships with the arts.

Biographical research

The following section focuses on a biographical study which sought to examine the impact that a gallery-supported Arts Award programme has on ‘young people who have offended’ (Gowland-Pryde, 2017). Arts Award (n.d.) is a range of qualifications that supports anyone aged 5–25 “to grow as artists and arts leaders, inspiring them to connect with and take part in the wider arts world through taking challenges in an art form – from fashion to digital art, pottery to poetry.” The study took place over a five-year period and involved a small sample of six young people, all of whom were considered as high priority repeat offenders, three of whom participated on the intensive Summer Arts College between 2007 and 2012 and three of whom took part in a nine-month weekly Arts Award programme in 2012. Whilst the sample was small, it was reflective of the small percentage of those considered as ‘high priority repeat young offenders’ within the youth offending system at any one time. Alongside this, data collated from the young people was combined with semi-structured interviews with youth offending service senior staff, workers, and artist-educators. Data from interviews were also supported by post-session reflective logs. Data was triangulated and analysis was aligned with the Arts Award criterion and Matarasso’s (1997) six-point areas of Social Impact Assessment.

The research developed an understanding of the multi layered complexities of ‘young people who have offended’ – a purposeful choice of wording that uses the past tense in order to address issues of self-fulfilling prophecy and support the development of self (Stephenson and Allen, 2012). Similarly, the research findings acknowledged that the process of desistance is equally complex, affected by factors such as the life cycle, environment, family, society and moments of life crises (Bocock, 1974), along with the interventions that can support this process – in this case, an Arts Award programme. A biographical research approach was developed to gain an in-depth, personalised understanding of how participants experienced and potentially benefited from comparative programmes (intensive Summer Arts Colleges and a weekly Arts Award programme over nine months) – both during and after. The emphasis in biographical research on personalised understandings could be seen to match with a similar overall aim with segmentation models. In turn, the significant difference lies in segmentation using data about individuals to extrapolate ‘defined masses’ compared to biographical research generating insights with individuals.

Dillon framework

In the development of this biographical research methodological framework, questions of memory recall and ethical sensitivity of gaining personal insights from participants were paramount. The Dillon Framework was established to provide a thematic, yet semi-structured, responsive approach to exploring individual experiences and impacts of young people on Arts Award programmes. In his autobiographical memoir, *In the Dark Room*, curator, writer and art critic, Brian Dillon (2005), explores the facilitation of memory in his journey in autobiographical writing. Specifically, Dillon uncovers his experiences through four key themes (or relics of memory) – house, things, bodies and photographs – all generated by theoretical concepts and writing on memory in areas such as Sociology, Psychology and Semiotics. Revisiting Dillon’s themes, this biographical research developed the following themes – buildings/places, objects/things, people and photographs/artworks. These themes were used as reference points for the methodology, data collection and analysis, embedded in session observations, artist-educator reflective logs and semi-structured interviews with young people, artist-educators and support workers involved in the programmes. Through the use of the Dillon Framework, aligned with the Arts Award assessment criterion and Matarasso’s (1997) six-point areas of social impact assessment, the research aimed to gain an in-depth insight into how participants experienced the programmes on an individual basis and how it had impacted on them in their daily lives intrinsically and extrinsically. It is this shared focus on making sense of experiences that we suggest makes for a revealing comparison between audience segmentation and biographical research.

Limitations and benefits of the Dillon framework

The Dillon framework provides a useful creative and responsive approach to ordering memory whilst focusing on specific and nuanced areas of individual experience and therefore impact. Whilst there are some limitations as a biographical, thematic approach, in that is potentially time intensive and open to multiple interpretations, when triangulated with the experiences of others (for example, programme artists, youth offending service workers) however, it not only successfully acts as a catalyst to stimulate memory but serves as an underlying typology for data collection and analysis. Identified as ritual actions of the main parts of the Arts Award and its processes, the programme was conceived as a type of ‘rite of passage’ (Turner, 1969). Dillon’s relics or ‘fragments of memory’, offered a new way of conceptualising these ritualistic components that aimed to support positive change in young people. The Dillon Framework highlights how audience development can seek to understand how audiences meaningfully engage with arts and culture and how arts and cultural organisations understand their cultural relevance in terms of quality. Aligned with Matarasso’s Social Impact Assessment and Arts Council England’s Quality Principles (Sharp and Lee, 2015), the Dillon Framework offers the potential for greater insight into audience experience – a need identified by Arts Council England’s (2018b) Impact and Insight resource, currently available for National Portfolio Organisations from funding levels two and above.

Experiences of young people

The following section highlights this deeper insight into how audiences engage with some of the key experiences of young people as they developed new identities as a result of the Arts Award programmes. The quotes used from direct interviews with participants have been anonymised incorporating different names (Gowland-Pryde, 2017). It is the negotiations and translations around identity that we argue are crucial for questioning the segmentation approach to arts audiences.

Findings generated through biographical research were analysed to understand the transition from the liminal, negative space of ‘young offender’ to young ‘artist/creative’. Individual experiences demonstrated how these perceptions and transitions progressed as they participated in a gallery-supported Arts Award programme – for example, being able to develop personal arts projects resulting in public showings/exhibitions of work and roles as curators of exhibitions including their own as well as others. In terms of identity and career development, some of the young people progressed on to higher levels of the Arts Award as well as gaining traineeships and/or full time jobs in the creative industries. This is indicated by Lee when talking about the artworks and exhibition he had curated with his programme peers:

It’s something I’ve never done before. It’s sort of a new experience ... and people are going to look at it [his artwork/exhibition in a gallery] rather than it being ... or you done it and it’s on the internet and no one ever looks at it sort of thing. Somebody’s actually going to look at it.

Furthermore, these experiences supported young people to de-stereotype perceptions about ‘young offenders’ outside in the community through public exhibitions. Similarly, within the family home where relationships were fragmented this was also challenged, as they became considered more positively with new roles as the designated family photographer/artist. This was also reflected in the development of more positive interactions with youth offending workers who took part in the programmes. For those young people that experienced poor mental health, being an artist provided respite from being within the stressful environment of being in the youth justice system. Through artistic means, it also enabled participants to feel better equipped to articulate their difficult personal circumstances and experiences such as mental illness, identified as contributing risk factors of offending behaviour. Molly, a weekly Arts Award programme participant, highlighted this when talking about how being creative enabled her to communicate and reflect on her experience of psychosis. Moreover, she felt that this was a career path that she could develop and work with other young people in similar circumstances:

I would love to do something with art ... I would like to do this with people, because I've seen how it’s made me feel, to show ‘em I was like you we're ... it's made me feel better as a person.

The biographical research generated understanding into how young people acknowledged that the development, support and growth of their artistic/creative skills were long-lasting and had become embedded within their life course narratives as significant moments (Denzin, 1998), moving away from the self-fulfilling prophecy of a ‘young offender’, and thereby supporting the process of desistance and positive transformation.

These narratives highlight how young people had moved from the societal, punitive label of ‘young offender’ to ‘young artist’. Furthermore, they show shifting, interchangeable identity positions, as young people in the youth justice system can simultaneously also be looked after, care leavers, have caring responsibilities, be homeless, victims of exploitation, experience poor mental health, diagnosed with learning limitations. These, and other life factors, were negotiated, re-negotiated and reflected upon as part of their creative journeys as a result of the Arts Award programmes.

The biographical research discussed in this article highlights the need for arts organisations to gain a more in-depth, personalised understanding of audiences through collaboration and the development of relationships that ultimately generates the potential for meaningful, impactful experiences for both audiences and organisations. By understanding how people experience the arts there is the most potential for organisations to meaningfully extend their audience reach. In doing so, to echo Walmsley’s (2018) research, organisations can gain a more in-depth and richer perspective on how audiences *feel* and engage with arts and culture.

This research highlights the particular problems to audience research which uses and fundamentally relies on survey data and audience segments. For Moore (2016, p. 107), without data there is a “temptation for arts organisations to explain the strategies and decisions made in terms of a mixture of intuition and experience.” The related implications of intuition-led decision-making concern control and power (Moore, 2016). The availability of data as the “starting point for an informed reading” (Moore, 2016, p. 109) is then an instructive way to see the how audience data is enfolded and negotiated within and by arts organisations. Audience data joins alongside other resources and experiences for understanding audiences, rather than having the sole explanatory power. That said, issues remain around the *who* and *why* of data collection and how data collected and interpreted at different stages informs the understanding of arts audiences. The narrowing of audience profiles operates to categorise and compartmentalise how people may and/or do experience arts and culture. In doing so, it makes assumptions on need and participation based on a ‘type’ without consideration for the complexities of identity and moreover, identities. The Dillon Framework provides a tool for understanding how audiences can and do engage and the impacts of engagement at both individual and wider societal level. In comparison with segmentation models and profiles, this is more robust and reflective for organisations as well as their audiences. In the following section we reflect on how the Dillon Framework biographical method opens up the tensions and challenges with arts audience segmentation.

**Part Four: Have you ever met a metrocultural? Segmentation and biographical research**

In this final part, we discuss the implications of connecting segmentation and biographical research. We set out three issues and challenges that emerge from our analysis of the methods and findings from biographical research with ‘young people who have offended’ and discuss our engagement with critical accounts of audience data, demographics and profiling: design, transition, and exclusion.

Designing and communicating cultural experiences

In developing programmes and communicating with audiences, segmentation approaches and models form part of the repertoire of resources used by arts and cultural organisations. The audience segments are performative in the sense that, as Law (2000, p. 2) puts it in relation to stories, “they make a difference.” With arts audience segmentation, there is a cyclical and iterative process around understanding audiences’ preferences and how this understanding is used to respond to and shape those preferences. In other words, do perceived cultural experiences and preferencescreate the basis for understanding audience groups and their engagement with cultural experiences, and do they then shape the development, design, communication and marketing of actual cultural experiences?

One clear answer for this comes from the *Culture is Digital*  report which states that “free national online tools such as the Audience Agency’s Audience Finder enable cultural organisations to understand, compare and apply audience insight so that they can create with audiences in mind” (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018, p. 25). The Audience Agency website also includes resources which explicitly show how organisations use the Pen Portraits as part of their audience development, marketing campaigns and programme development (Audience Agency, n.d. b). The idea of creating content with “audiences in mind” is not new, but here we argue that arts and cultural organisations need to be alert to the kinds of data and profiles which are increasingly part of this process – especially in terms of conceptualising the arts audience as a consumer addressed through marketing techniques. Returning to the issue of the “other” from part two in relation to our discussion in part three, we query the focus on financially viable programmes linked to specific audience segments; will there always be the “other” whose (non-)segment status sees them fall outside of the reach and view of the targeted letter and bespoke mailshot?

Transition

A related issue is how to take account of multiple identity positions. We have shown that many of the currently employed arts audience segmentation approaches strive for greater nuance and subtlety. In doing so, there is a sense of moving away from abstract and imagined audiences to ever more detailed and refined accounts. With this trajectory then, is there a way to take account of identities across different segments? Related to this, what is at stake as individuals move between categories? In analysing the biographical research with ‘young people who have offended’, it was clear that labels and categories had a performative impact on the stories told and that could be told. The ability to negotiate identity positions was hugely important. With arts audience segmentation, there is a blindspot around the movement between segments. With the focus on identifying segments and engaging with them, there is a consequence that the potential movement *between* segments is overlooked. In this respect, audience profiling and segmentation seems to be more about quick and fleeting glimpses, when for arts organisations to understand their audiences requires depth and length of engagement.

Exclusion

The above two points question the implications of how arts audience segmentation operates. Our final point is more far reaching, looking at what might be seen as an in-built challenge – exclusion. Set against the volume of segments, there will always be absences. The most notable absence based around the research this article has presented concerns ‘young people who have offended.’ The larger point quickly follows on the further exclusions and absences from these widely-used segmentation strategies. Our concern here is not to add more segments that then provide fuller coverage. Given that the significance of arts audience segmentation is to establish common patterns and experiences, it would seem contradictory to go about creating an ever-growing multiplicity of segments. Instead, we foreground the kinds of relationships, experiences and interactions developed through biographical research – a method without labels, categories, profiles and segments that offers different and greater possibilities for understanding audiences.

We would hasten to add that this does not mean that ‘other’ audiences are not currently identified and engaged with by organisations. Indeed, diverse audiences are engaged with by arts organisations through specific programmes. Rather, in segmentation terms, there is a large category of ‘other’: those who are audiences but might not be recognised as such within the approaches and models of arts audience segmentation. To the ‘marketing orientation’ discussed by Kemp and Martin Poole (2016) and the ‘target groups’ discussed by Kolhede and Gomez-Arias (2016), we raise the questions of *if* and *how* the ‘other’ is valued.

**Conclusions**

Connecting with the priorities for arts and cultural organisations to understand, engage with and build audiences, this article has critically examined arts audience segmentation. Having introduced four leading arts audience segmentations approaches, this article has engaged with several commentaries and critiques around the use of data to draw out the political and social implications of profiling and segmenting. Developing this, the differing approaches of biographical research and arts audience segmentation were brought together. Through analyzing the findings and methods from biographical research with ‘young people who have offended’, the article identified three challenges and considerations for arts audience segmentation. Firstly, the design and communication of cultural experiences for specific segments. Secondly, the possibilities for arts segmentation to understand changing identities. Thirdly, exclusion as an integral and unavoidable result of segmentation.

This article is not suggesting that the biographical methods explored in the article simply replace survey data translated into segments and profiles. On an immediate and practical point, as Gilmore, Glow and Johnson (2017, p. 290) note in relation to audience evaluation, dialogic methods can be much more resource-intensive than survey methods. Employing the biographical method set out above would not be achievable, or perhaps even desirable, on the same scale through which survey methods and segmentation approaches operate. Rather, our final contention is to examine what is at stake in bringing together ‘qualitative’ and the ‘quantitative’ research methods – a move proposed widely across arts and cultural policy (see Gilmore, Glow and Johnson, 2017 for discussion of this). There is a general sense in which combining methods will allow organisations to develop a more rounded picture of audiences. The quantitative providing the ‘big picture’ and the qualitative providing the ‘in depth’ – with all this marrying up.

In turn, our account and analysis of biographical research presents three areas of examination, reflection and intervention in relation to arts audience segmentation as a way to understand audiences. The biographical research we explore in this article would not be deployed to marry up in a harmonious way to present a fuller account of arts audiences, but rather to highlight the continued complexities in conceiving of arts audiences. We pose a scenario in which the insights from qualitative data, such as biographical methods, can unsettle the assumptions and highlight the tensions within how quantitative data is put to work, namely, in creating segments. ACE’s (2018) Impact and Insight Toolkit places value on the personal experiences of audiences. The Dillon Framework biographical research approach connects well with this priority, emphasizing research with audiences to understand their engagements and experiences. Access and widespread benefit continue to grow as priorities, and we argue that the use of data and tools for measuring and constructing audiences must align with these priorities. The issues of identity negotiation and category exclusions identified in this article from research with ‘young people who have offended’ reveal the tensions and challenges with arts audience segmentation. The consequence of our analysis for policymakers and arts and cultural organisations is to caution against simply combining quantitative and qualitative data. Ongoing investments in arts audience data gathering and segmentation must attend to the politics of profiling. Our exploration of biographical methods in relation to audience segmentation raises for debate the issues of how segmentation models and audience profiles impact on who cultural experiences are designed for, how identity positions and transitions are recognised, and how audiences might be excluded.

Finally, whilst we can say that segmentation “makes a difference” (Law, 2000) through the politics of profiling (Elmer, 2004; Rogers; 2009; Skeggs and Yuill, 2016), for now we cannot comment on the power of such segmentation nor gauge if those positioned within them are aware of their profiling and labelling and what it might mean to them. As Kennedy (2014) argues in her discussion of the everyday experiences of datafication, scholarship about data-in-society must address people’s thoughts and feelings about data-producing processes. From this article then, we set a future challenge to examine the lived implications of arts audience segmentation.

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