

Realist Evaluation & Realist Synthesis

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Presentation I

Basic Ideas of Realist Evaluation

Key principles of realist evaluation

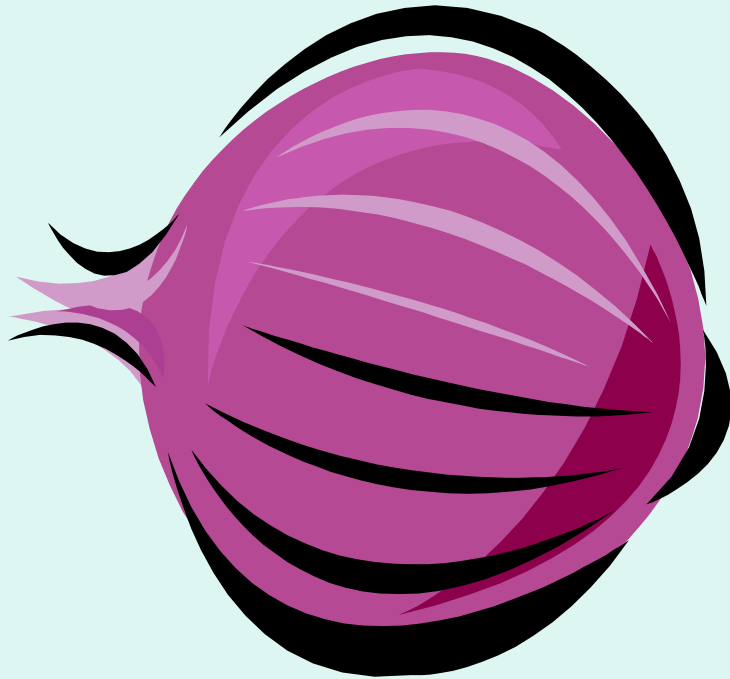
The nature of programmes:

- *Programmes are ‘embedded’*
- *Programmes are ‘active’.*
- *Programmes are ‘theories’*

Principal research tasks:

- *Hypothesise the key mechanisms (M)*
- *Hypothesise the key contexts (C)*
- *Explain the outcome pattern (O)*

**Programmes are 'embedded'.
They are always inserted into pre-existing
social situations**



**Educational initiatives
operate at different
levels:**

- Ideas
- Individuals
- Institution
- Infrastructure

Programmes are theories

A 'role model' programme
theory

also known as

'Dishy-David-Beckham-theory'

Interviewer: But do you think the fact that these good-looking blokes are footballers has any effect on girls' attitude to playing football?

Girl: No, I think it has more effect on them *watching* football, well not the football - the guys (general laughter and agreement)'.



Programmes are 'active'

They are 'active' in the sense that their intended effects work *through* the reasoning and volition of their subjects.

Even 'mechanical' interventions like the free distribution of smoke alarms depend on the subject's ideas. Alarms sometimes work but also end up:

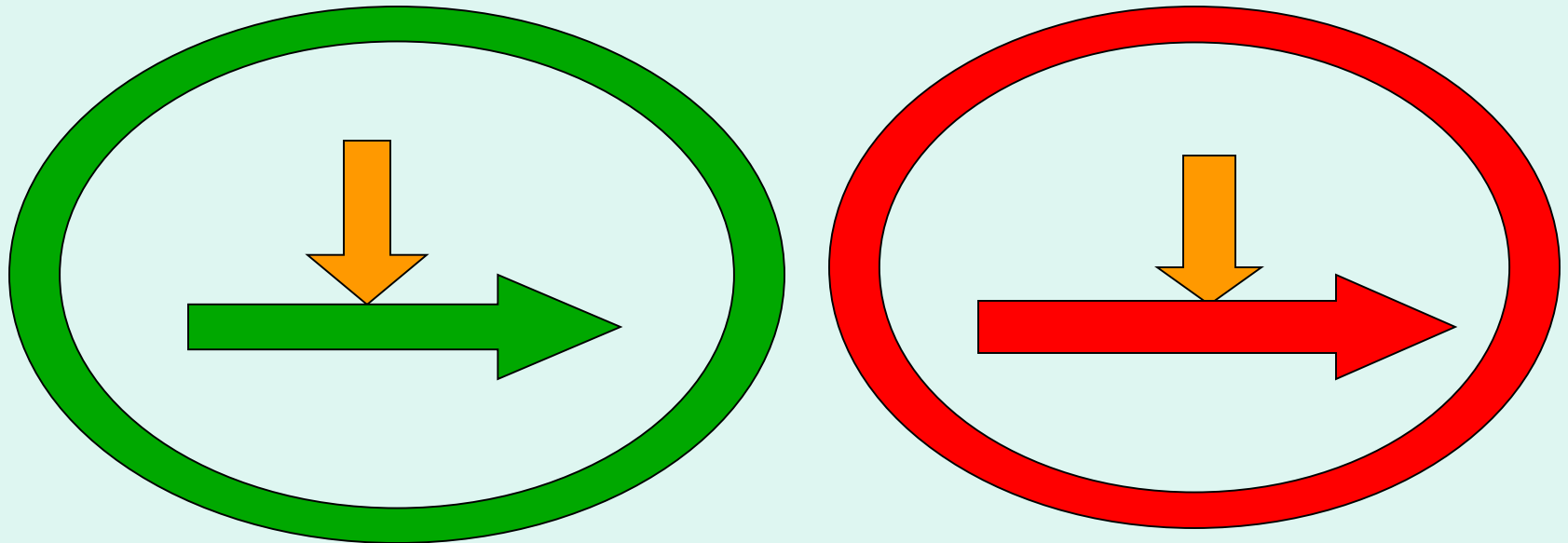


- not installed (can't be bothered)
- removed (always going off)
- battery flat (too fiddly to change)
- battery 'walks' (to Walkman or TV remote)

Realist Evaluation: Mechanisms, Contexts and Outcomes

Don't ask 'what works?'

Rather, investigate: 'what works for whom in what circumstances?'



The same programme mechanism will have
different outcomes in different contexts

Example: Prisoner Education

A Practitioner Theory

“ The men who are more likely to be changed are best described as ‘mediocre’. You shouldn’t look for high-flyers. They’re likely to come from a deprived background with a poor and maybe non-existent school record. They will be mediocre criminals too. They’ll have gone on from petty crime, street crime to drugs or armed robbery or something. Then when they come onto the program, they’re mediocre or worse. They just survive the first semester but gradually they build up getting C’s and B’s. So by the end, they’ve actually come a long, long way. And that’s what changes ‘em. It’s not so much a case of ‘rehabilitation’ as ‘habilitation’.”

Hypothesise key generative mechanisms

The process of how subjects interpret and act upon the intervention

stratagem is known as the programme 'mechanism'

Programme - prisoner education (PE)

(M₁) PE might provide qualifications to allow ex-inmates to compete for jobs

(M₂) PE might boost confidence and provide social skills to reduce aggressive outbursts in ex-cons

(M₃) PE might increase cognitive skills and allow ex-prisoners to reason through their difficulties

(M₄) PE might increase presentational and reasoning skills enabling them to become clever criminals

(M₅) PE might provide shelter from violent prison culture for more vulnerable prisoners

M₆, M₇, M₈, etc. etc.



Hypothesise the key contexts

‘Contexts’ are the set of surrounding conditions that favour or hinder the programme mechanisms

Prisoner Education - for ‘whom’ and in ‘what circumstances’

(C₁) Prior experience - poverty, drugs, violence etc.

(C₂) Prior education

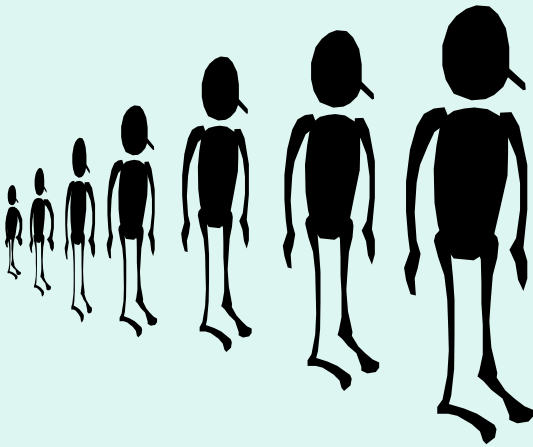
(C₃) Prior criminal activities

(C₄) Prison culture

(C₅) Neighbourhood and locality culture

(C₆) Economic structure

C₇, C₈, C₉ etc. etc.



Explain the outcome pattern

Programme outcomes are always complex. M & C theories are tested by examining outcomes for different sub-groups of subjects

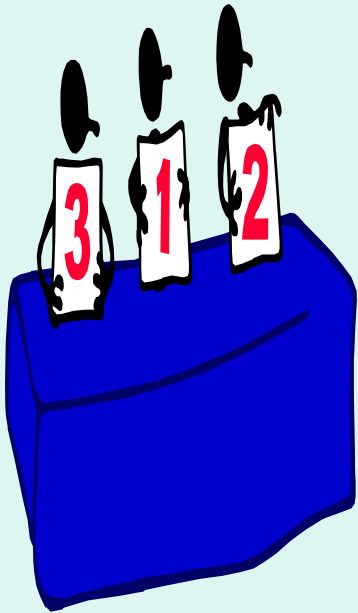
Who benefited most?

Improved rehabilitation by age

17-21	22-25	26-30	31-35	36over
1st	4th	5th	2nd	3rd

Improved rehabilitation by prior education

Grade 10	Grade11	Grade 12	Post-Secondary
2nd	1st	3rd	4th



Presentation 2

Basic Ideas of Realist Synthesis

Contrasting views of 'systematic reviews'

Meta-analysis perspective

- Programmes have effects
- Evaluation measures effect sizes
- Systematic review seeks mean effect

The realist understanding

- Programmes are theories
- Evaluation is theory-testing
- Systematic review is theory-synthesis

Example I: Naming & Shaming

Examples of Public Disclosure Initiatives

- **Megan's Law & sex offender registration**
- **Outing prostitute's johns**
- **School league tables**
- **Inspection and special measures for 'failing schools'**
- **Hospital and surgeon report cards**
- **Pub-watch bans and exclusions**
- **Local press adverts for poll tax non-payment and council rent arrears**
- **Beach cleanliness standards and kite marking**



Realist Synthesis: Naming & Shaming

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Public notification – basic theory

- i) Identification:** in which the performance or behaviour in question is observed and then classified, measured, rated, ranked, verified, etc.
- ii) Naming:** in which information on, and the identity of, the failing or deviant party is disclosed, publicized, disseminated, notified, published, broadcast, registered etc.
- iii) Public sanction:** in which the broader community acts on the disclosure in order to shame, reprimand, reproach, censure, control, influence, supervise the named party.
- iv) Recipient response:** in which behavioural change follows the sanction, with the subjects being shamed, regretful, penitent, contrite, restrained, re-integrated etc.

NAMED



BUT WHO IS SHAMED?

- Poll-tax protesters named in the local newspapers
- Sex offenders under community notification
- Under-performing schools identified in league tables
- Motor manufacturers named in the Car Theft Index

Poll-tax protesters named in the local newspapers



Poll tax non-payment – there were a great many sanctions imposed: fines, wage arrest, court appearances etc. Protesters thus ignored or even celebrated disclosure of their names in the local press. *Policy abandoned.*

Sex offenders under community notification

*Notified Sex Offenders are resentful or scared by public attention. One key result is non-compliance with registration and displacement to other localities. *Re-offence rates remain static.**



Under-performing schools identified in league tables

- *Schools* respond to league table positions tactically - increasing resources to marginal candidates (middle grades) and excluding/ not entering hopeless ones (lowest grades). *Grades improve.*



Motor manufacturers named in the Car Theft Index

*Car manufacturers – are embarrassed by adverse publicity and loss of reputation (and downturn in sales) - respond with genuine improvements in vehicle security. *Car crime goes down.**



Is there a theory to accommodate these differences in outcome?

<i>Attitude toward membership</i>	<i>Eligible for membership</i>	<i>Ineligible for membership</i>
Aspire to belong	Candidate for membership	Marginal Man
Indifferent to affiliation	Potential member	Detached non-member
Motivated not to belong	Autonomous non-member	Antagonistic non-member

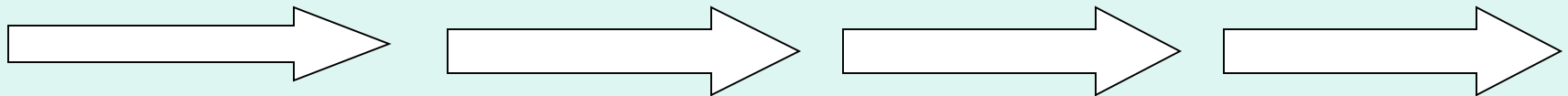
Merton's Typology of aspirations to group membership of eligibles and non-eligibles

The theory under further refinement

For N&S to 'work' the following configuration should be in place:

- the named party should be an 'aspirational insider'
- the shaming mechanism should be dovetailed with other mechanism (market sanctions)
- the disclosure should carry intense (but controllable) media interest
- the disclosed data should unambiguous both in allocating blame and in suggested remedial action
- the disclosing authority should have had exemplary watchdog credentials, which are operated benignly

Example II. Megan's Law - Programme Theory



STEP ONE

Problem Identification

Identify high-risk
released sex
offenders and
create valid and
reliable registers

STEP TWO

Public disclosure

Issue bulletins,
press releases,
call meeting to
identify released
offenders to
their community

STEP THREE

Sanction Instigation

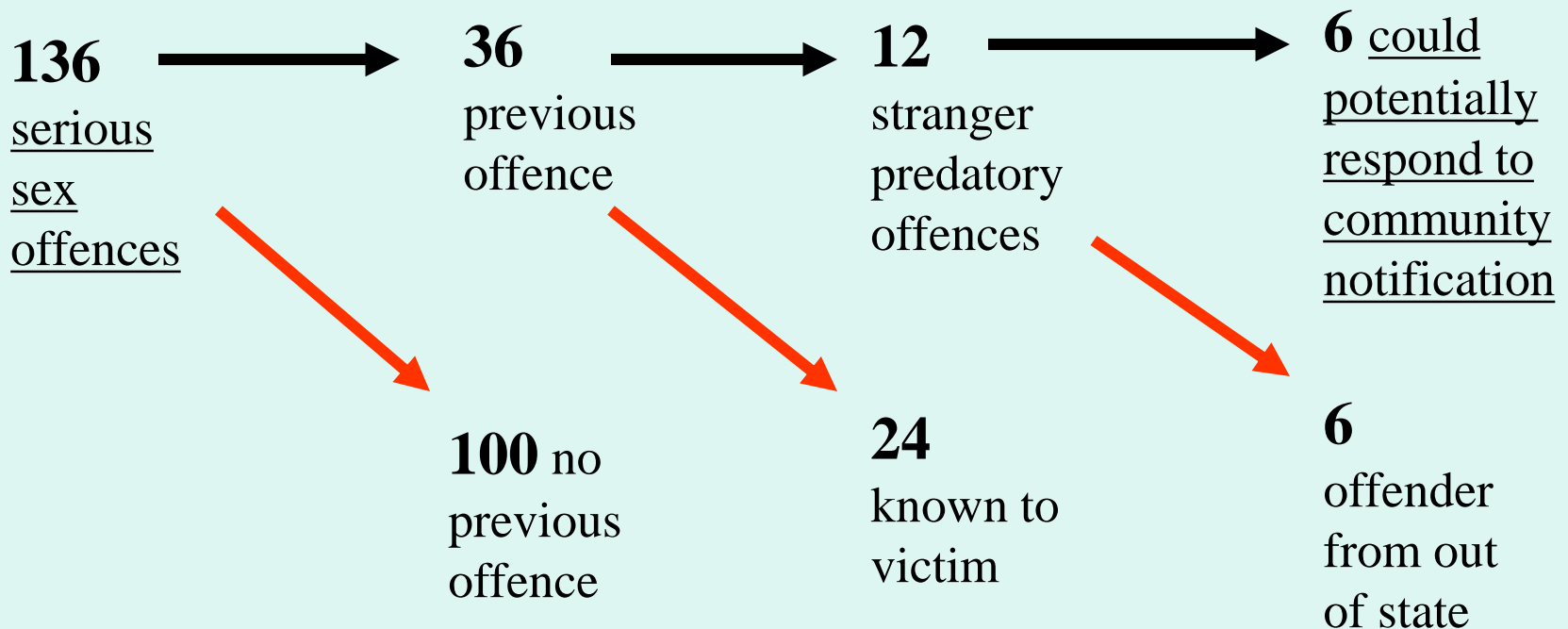
Community
joins with police
and probation to
increase
surveillance of
suspicious
behaviour

STEP FOUR

Offender response

Community
actions shame
offenders and
decrease
opportunity of
further offence

Evidence fragment one: could the law have made a difference? - a 'retrospective simulation'



Evidence fragment two: did the law effect recidivism? A matched trial

Pre-intervention sample → sex recidivism 22%

Post-intervention sample → sex recidivism 19%

Pre-intervention sample → arrest slow

Post-intervention sample → arrest significantly quicker

Evidence fragment three: how did practitioners respond? Office talk

“The Law is an unfunded mandate”

“Special Bulletin Notification added more work to already over-worked agents”

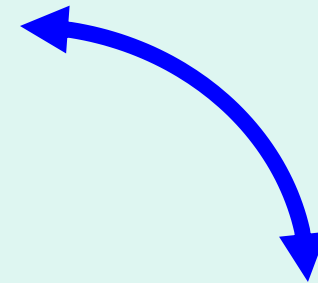
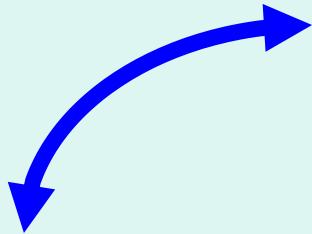
“There is more pressure to baby sit with SBN cases simply because they are SBN cases”

Key findings synthesised

Study 1: Following The introduction of the law, detection increase more sharply than deterrence.

Study 2: The chances of community surveillance of stranger predatory offences remain low and offender may lie low

Study 3: practitioner attention becomes increasingly focused on SBN cases because of community harassment



And Finally

What it feels like to do
realist synthesis ...

**THANK
YOU
FOR
YOUR
ATTENTION**

