

Method Mix, Technical Hex, Theory Fix.

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*Mixed Method Evaluation:
from synthesis to policy*

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In brief:

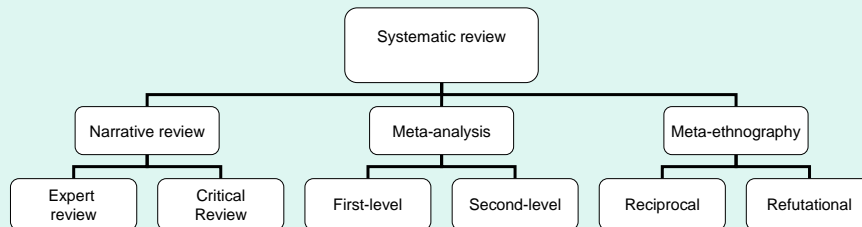
'**Method mix**' is the holy-grail – finding a way to combine qualitative and quantitative data/analysis in evaluative research.

'**Technical hex**' – is the attempt to do so by way of the development of new *methods* of analysis. These technical solutions are magic spells, which end up as witchcraft rather than wisdom

'**Theory fix**' is rainbow's end – the solution to mixed method analysis. Any decent theory in social science will refer to process *and* outcomes. Any decent theory will combine agency *and* structure in explaining uniformities. In order to articulate, test and refine a decent theory, a researcher with thus *have to* call upon 'qual' and 'quant' evidence (and, for that matter, 'comparative', 'historical', 'administrative' and 'narrative' data).

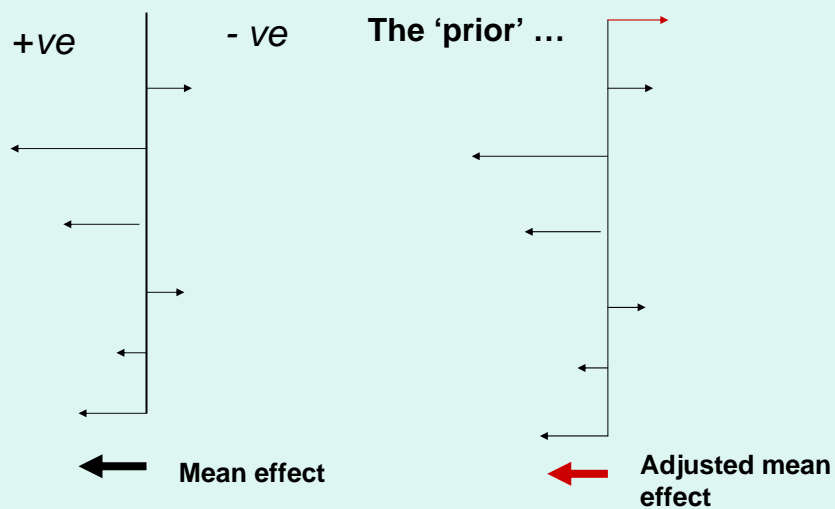
 **Interrogating theory is the path to methodological pluralism.**

Research synthesis: the family tree



Method mix (the holy grail of research synthesis) – find a method to encompass and analyse primary materials of all types to a formalised, predetermined strategy

Technical Hex 1 – Transform ‘qual’ into quant’ (or vice-versa): e.g. Bayesian Synthesis



Technical Hex 2 – Create parallel tools for treating ‘qual’ and ‘quant’: e.g critical appraisal

- Meta-analysis uses a hierarchy of evidence with randomised, double-blinded trials as the gold standard
- Attempts to create equivalent quality checklists for appraising qualitative evidence end up with ‘gazetteers’ that are a) boundless, b) abstract, c) imperceptible, d) composite, e) permissive *and* d) goal-free.

Spencer et al (2003) Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A Framework for Assessing Research Evidence

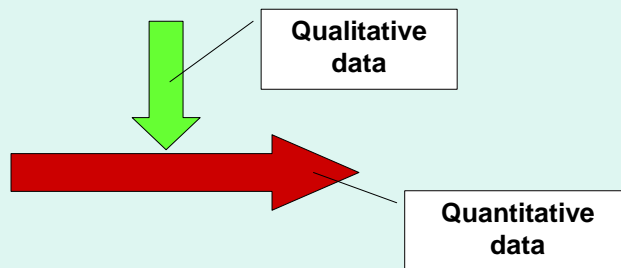


- **8 major facets** on : ‘findings’, ‘sample’, ‘data collection’, ‘analysis’, ‘reporting’, ‘reflexivity and neutrality’, ‘ethics’ and ‘auditability’.
- Each facet then subdivided (e.g in considering the quality of ‘findings’ the reviewer has to gauge ‘credibility’, ‘knowledge extension’, ‘delivery on objectives’, ‘wider inferences’ and the ‘basis of evaluative appraisal’) The checklist thus grows to **18 major ‘appraisal questions’**.
- For each appraisal questions there are then ‘quality indicators’, usually running to *4 to 5 per indicator*.
- This leaves us with a final set of **75 indicators** with which to judge the quality of qualitative research.

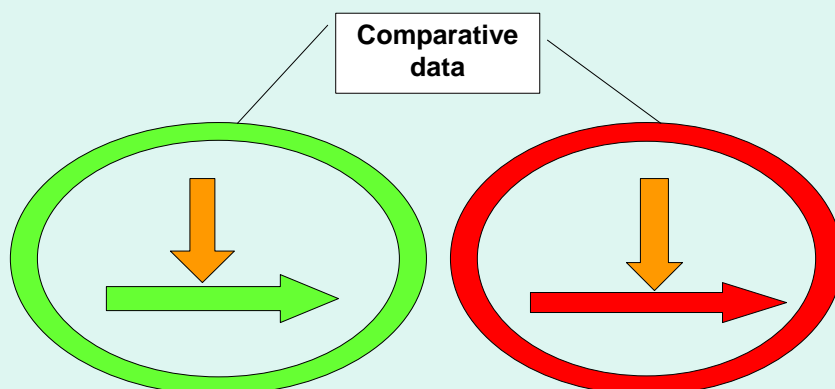
Theory fix

Basic thesis: The theory under interrogation will have different facets. Testing and refining that theory will inform the researcher about the requisite types of data (and incidentally about quality thresholds for that data)

Theory one – these processes lead to these outcomes



Theory two - the same process will have different outcomes in different contexts



'Realist synthesis' in a slide

KEY METAPHOR

- Unit of analysis is the *programme theory*
- Primary data is inspected for what it reveals about the *programme theory*
- Purpose of the review is to test and refine *programme theory*

TECHNICAL SEQUENCE

- **Question selection** as 'theory elicitation'
- **Searching** as 'theoretical sampling'
- **Quality appraisal** by 'theory testing potential'
- **Data extraction** as 'confrontation of theory with evidence'
- **Synthesis** as 'theory refinement'
- **Dissemination** as production of 'middle-range theory'.

Megan's Law: what is the nature of the evidence base?

- Mass of public commentary
- Legal and constitutional material
- Public administration reports
- Surveys of public opinion
- Case studies of public meetings
- Simulations of offender profiles
- Studies of corrections response
- Depth interviews with ex-offenders
- Content analysis of media reportage
- ONE quasi-experimental study



Megan's Law - Programme Theory



Study 1: did the law effect recidivism? A quasi-experimental trial

Pre-intervention sample → sex recidivism 22%

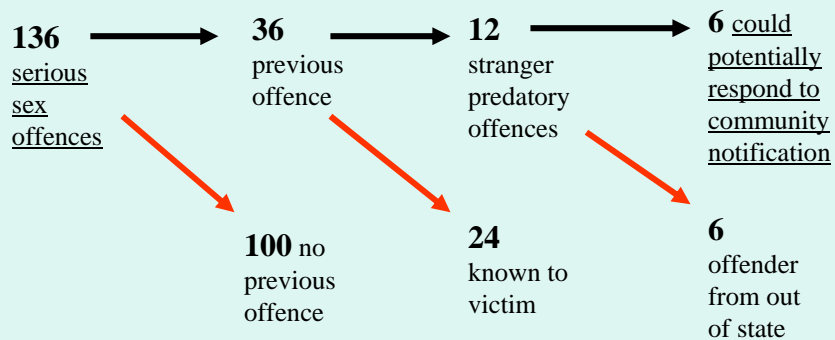
Post-intervention sample → sex recidivism 19%

Pre-intervention sample → arrest slow

Post-intervention sample → arrest significantly quicker

Schram & Milloy

Study 2 - where does notification reach? a 'prospective simulation'



Petrosino & Petrosino

Study 3: How did practitioners respond? Selected answers to open-ended questions

"The Law is an unfunded mandate"

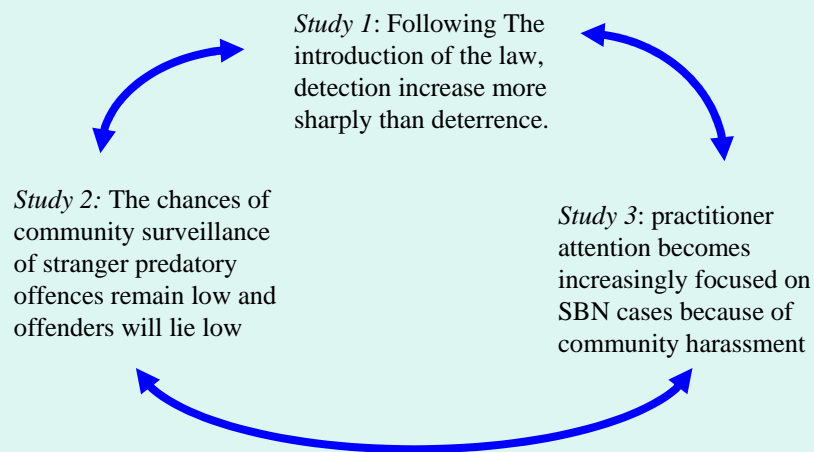
"Management doesn't understand the huge number of collateral contacts necessary for a sex offender caseload: family of defendant, victim's family, D.A., clinician, employer and so on"

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

Zevitz and Farkas

"Caseloads are high, given the inordinate amount of time required in sex-offence supervision. Despite these heavy demands, agents and unit supervisors were found to be well trained and strongly motivated. The quality of supervision is high and the public is being well served by these professionals. No better evidence of this can be found in the very low recidivism rates for SBN cases."

Revised theory – unintended consequence



Quality assessment – also driven by theory and measured against inferences made

- *Study one* – only a ‘matched’ comparison, therefore effect size problematic – but comparison of different types of effect more robust.
- *Study two* – no published standards – but ‘severe notification loss’ inference safe.
- *Study three* – ‘good news’ story angle suspect but changing workload and attention inference warranted.

Conclusion

- DATA NEVER SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES
- COMBINATIONS OF DATA ARE EVEN MORE CONFUSING
- LET (middle-range) THEORY DO THE TALKING

