

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-65112-7 - Treatment Matching in Alcoholism
Edited by Thomas F. Babor and Frances K. Del Boca
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TREATMENT MATCHING IN ALCOHOLISM

Is alcoholism a treatable illness? Do different treatments work better for some alcoholics than for others? Is Alcoholics Anonymous the best road to recovery for alcoholics? Questions such as these formed the background to the research described in this ground-breaking book.

Project MATCH was a large-scale treatment evaluation study established by the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to determine whether the treatment of alcoholism could be improved by matching different types of alcoholics with the most appropriate kinds of treatment. This book, edited by two of the principal investigators, is the first comprehensive report of Project MATCH, the largest treatment study ever conducted with alcoholics. It describes the rationale, methods, results, and implications of the study, and presents new findings about how treatment works, for whom it is most effective, and who does best in different kinds of treatment. It also offers some of the first scientific evidence of the effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The audience for this book is broad, including researchers, clinicians, and policy makers in the field of alcoholism and addiction.

THOMAS F. BABOR is Professor and Chairman in the Department of Community Medicine and Health Care, University of Connecticut School of Medicine, where he was the scientific director of the Alcohol Research Center. He was principal investigator of the coordinating Center of Project MATCH, as well as of several other multicenter clinical trials of treatment for alcohol and drug abuse.

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Series Editor
Professor Griffith Edwards
National Addiction Centre
Institute of Psychiatry, London

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THOMAS F. BABOR

University of Connecticut School of Medicine

and

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This book is dedicated to the people who made Project MATCH possible:

1726 research participants, 159 research personnel, 81 therapists, 14 therapy personnel, 8 collaborating investigators who were not members of the Project MATCH Research Group, 5 members of the Data Safety and Monitoring Board, 4 NIAAA support staff, 3 consultants, 2 editors' spouses

and Norma.

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Note from Series Editor

The International Research Monographs in the Addictions (IRMA) was set up by Cambridge University Press with a closely defined intention. We aim to offer authors the opportunity for book-length statements on their work and methodologies, an invitation to develop ideas in greater detail than can ever be done in any sequence of separate papers, the chance to act as their own critics, and an invitation to scan the horizons. To readers of this series we want to offer scholarly material of a high standard which is strictly refereed and well presented. IRMA asks its authors to address the policy and treatment worlds. We fuss about these monographs being readable and hope that they are good to hold in the hand. I believe that Thomas Babor, Frances Del Boca and their colleagues have produced a text which absolutely fulfils the founding intentions.

MATCH is near-contemporary research although it already has about it the glow of a classic, and a place booked in history. As Babor and Del Boca say in their preface, a book like this can compel its own logic in the process of its writing – ‘the reader for the first time will be able to grasp not only what we learned about treatment matching, but also what we learned about the limits of clinical science.’ That kind of writing is a wonderfully creative act, an affirmation of scientific integrity, and constitutes a true service to the field.

GRIFFITH EDWARDS

Preface

Some of the most contentious ideological debates in the history of addiction science were conducted during the 1960s and 1970s over clinical questions like the following. Is alcoholism a disease? Can a person, once becoming an alcoholic, ever drink moderately again? Is Alcoholics Anonymous the best road to recovery for all alcoholics? No clinical study of therapeutic interventions could escape the sensitivities and sensibilities of the different constituency groups that became part of the burgeoning field of addiction treatment. Many academics were skeptical about the conventional wisdom of the disease concept of alcoholism, and recovering persons learned to distrust academics who presented evidence that problem drinkers could learn to drink moderately.

In many respects, Project MATCH is a product of these divergent views of the reality that is alcoholism treatment. But, by the 1990s, when the Project MATCH Research Group was formed, American academics were recognizing the need to formulate more precise research questions and to test them with the new clinical trial methodologies that were contributing so much to the advancement of clinical practice in medicine and psychiatry. In this case, the research question concerned whether treatment effectiveness could be improved substantially by matching different types of alcoholics with the most appropriate kinds of treatment. The Project MATCH Research Group was assembled by the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in the hope that a large-scale treatment evaluation study would accomplish for the field of alcoholism research what clinical epidemiology had done for medicine. The participating investigators were selected on the strength of their grant proposals. Each proposal described the investigator's approach to treatment matching research, as well as his or her past accomplishments in this area.

However, unlike the funding of smaller and less ambitious research

grants, the monies provided for Project MATCH did not require the investigators to specify in advance a final research plan to study treatment matching. It was assumed that once the investigators and their research teams were selected, the process of defining the research questions and designing the study would be entrusted to the group, rather than to a few expert consultants or to the institute staff themselves.

As the process unfolded, it became clear that the Project MATCH Research Group would not always speak with one voice. The differences among the investigators were often dramatic, and most had a specific bias about how to study matching and which questions to investigate. Indeed, when the group was first assembled, they resembled the Seven Blind Men of Hindustan, each speaking with conviction about the matching phenomena they had discovered through their own limited explorations.

What is remarkable about the process of this investigation is the extent to which the desire to find the right answer, rather than the need to prove that one idea was superior to another, eventually emerged as the *raison d'être* for Project MATCH. If skepticism is the hallmark of good science, then it is what both attracted the investigators to the project and kept them honest in its implementation. To come to grips with matching theory, it was necessary to grapple with scientific methodology, establish rigorous rules of evidence, and take into consideration the plight of the millions of people whose lives are ruined by alcohol misuse. All of this entered into the intellectual process of planning, executing, and interpreting the results of the study. If it matters whether there is such a thing as truth, whether honest inquiry is possible, and whether there is a real difference between knowledge and ideology, then we feel that Project MATCH has succeeded admirably, both in style and in substance.

In editing this book, we have done our best to avoid academic jargon and unnecessary technical language. We have tried to speak to clinicians as well as research scientists by bringing together the full range of findings that have emerged out of a decade of work on the project. The findings of Project MATCH were released sequentially in over a hundred scientific publications and presentations; initial impressions of the study were often based on small parts of the project instead of on the total picture. Unlike the first outcome paper that was published in 1997 (Project MATCH Research Group, 1997a), the cumulative corpus of findings tells a far more complex story about alcoholism treatment and how it works. We feel that only after all the articles have been published is it possible to gain a broader perspective on what we found and what it means. To that end, we

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have assembled within this volume a complete description of the origins of the trial as well as its design, implementation, and results. Part I describes the background to the study, giving particular attention to the technology for evaluating different kinds of psychotherapy and the types of clients most likely to respond to them. Part II presents the findings, some of which are being reported for the first time (see especially Chapters 9, 10, and 11). Finally, Part III describes the study's conclusions and implications.

How we got to this point is told only in part in the pages of this book. It was in 1998 that an epiphany of sorts occurred when representatives of the Project MATCH Research Group were asked to present a comprehensive summary of the findings at a 2-day symposium in Leeds, England (Ashton, 1999). Instead of the 1-hour or 2-hour format that we had been accustomed to use in the past, the Leeds conference allowed the investigators to tell their story in numbers, words, anecdotes, and intuitions, and it permitted the audience of clinicians and researchers to 'Meet the Matchmakers' on their own terms. The results of that meeting convinced us that the best format for describing what we did and what we found was not the narrowly focused journal article, but rather the compelling logic of a book like this one. By weaving together disparate findings from all facets of this ambitious project, we believe that the reader for the first time will be able to grasp not only what we learned about treatment matching, but also what we learned about the limits of clinical science. Despite the international interest in Project MATCH, a key feature of its design and execution is that it came out of a scientific and clinical context that was distinctly American. How this context influenced the study's research questions, experimental methods, and scientific conclusions is an intriguing question that is taken up at the end of this book.

We would be remiss if we did not attempt at least a partial acknowledgment of the many people who contributed to Project MATCH over a 10-year period. NIAAA deserves credit for its decision to move alcoholism treatment research into the realm of multisite clinical trials. We are especially indebted to Dr Enoch Gordis, Director of NIAAA, for his support of Project MATCH, and to Dr Richard K. Fuller of NIAAA for his invaluable guidance over the course of the project. The contributions of the individual investigators who comprise the Project MATCH Research Group cannot be overstated; each chapter in this volume represents the collective efforts of this entire group. The credit for an endeavor of this magnitude must also be shared with the very large number of co-investigators, statistical consultants, project coordinators, research assistants,

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therapists, and collaborating treatment facilities who bore the day-to-day responsibility of making the project work. Finally, we acknowledge the thoughtful oversight provided by the project's Data Monitoring Board, and the editorial work done by Norma Carbonari for the Publication Committee. The names of all those who contributed to Project MATCH in these capacities appear in the appendix to this book.

On a more personal level, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of a handful of individuals who contributed to the preparation of this volume. These include Deborah Talamini, who, with the assistance of Katherine Hedgspeth and Dominique Morisano, managed the production of the book; Dr Robert Stout, who prepared the figures depicting the study's primary results; and the core research staff of the Coordinating Center, Bonnie McRee, Cynthia Mohr, and Janice Vendetti. We also appreciate the guidance and wisdom of Griffith Edwards.

On behalf of the Project MATCH Research Group, we hope that this book will serve as a tribute to the pursuit of scientific knowledge about the nature and treatment of alcoholism.

THOMAS F. BABOR
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