



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MESERON THERAPY AND HARMONY RESTORATION THERAPY

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ABSTRACT

Psychotherapy has been proven effective for the management of psychological disturbances. Indigenous psychotherapies, with which a client can identify, are often more effective than foreign ones. African perspectives of psychotherapy are scanty. This is a comparative analysis of two psychotherapies of Nigerian origin which are Awaritefe's Meseron and Ebigbo's Harmony Restoration Therapies. 'Meseron,' an Urhobo (Nigerian) word denoting "I reject it" stresses the synergy of thoughts, words and actions. Meseron therapy (MT) is rooted in the Nigerian belief in the power of spoken words, its potency meanings and consequences; culminating in rejecting the negatives and accepting the positives. It aims at removing undesirable conditions, changing concept and values, exploring resources, self-growth, insight, emotional reorganization and change of habits. Harmony Restoration Therapy (HRT) is based on the Igbo (Nigerian) cultural belief that to be in good health, one must be in harmony with one's environment. HRT believes that the world is cosmocentric and tripartite consisting of the endocosmos, the mesocosmos and the exocosmos, which represent the various relationships an individual entertains and his/her level of harmony or disharmony. A comparative appraisal of MT and HRT shows that despite having several similarities, major differences abound in their theories of human nature, aetiology of psychopathology, psychotherapeutic orientation, therapeutic techniques and emphasis on the locus of control. This study recommends that further studies on the subject matter as well as the use of these psychotherapies among Africans should be imbibed in Clinical Psychology practice.

Keywords: Meseron Therapy, Harmony Restoration Therapy, Indigenous psychotherapies, Comparative Analysis of psychotherapies

INTRODUCTION

Psychotherapy refers to the use of scientifically validated and reliable psychological procedures in the treatment of mental health problems. Psychologists help people live longer, healthier, happier and more productive lives (APA, 2017). Since the 1970s much research has been carried out in the field of psychotherapy in Africa (Madu 2013). Psychologists in Africa, like those of other continents, have developed psychotherapies to cater to the mental needs of their people. African psychotherapy is devoted to the study of psychological healing systems indigenous to the traditional communities of Africa (Nwoye, 2010). This form of psychotherapy is culture centred; embedded in the client's way of life with full cognisance of the dynamism of culture (Madu, 2015). This paper, therefore, takes a cursory look into two culture-centered psychotherapies namely Meseron therapy and Harmony Restoration Therapy.

MESERON THERAPY

Meseron therapy is a psychological treatment approach developed in Nigeria by Alfred in 1995 (Awaritefe, 1995; Awaritefe, 1997; Awaritefe, 2004; Ofovwe, 2005). The term 'Meseron' is derived from the Urhobo language (the language of the Urhobo people of Delta State, Nigeria) which means "I reject/refuse it." Its origin derives from the Nigerian belief in the power of spoken words. The power of spoken words are its potency, meanings and consequences; therefore leading to the rejection of the negatives while accepting the positives. Meseron therapy is seen as a form of cognitive therapy as its technique reflects a cognitive orientation and requires a mental restructuring for the client (Awaritefe and Ofovwe, 2007). It is also considered as a motivational theory because it affirms the need for man to strive for a desirable goal using his inherent potentials and attributes.

According to Awaritefe (1995), Meseron therapy affirms that:

1. Negative thoughts can be altered and made positive. Negative thoughts are at the root of most problems.
2. Covert actions must be engaged in at the level of thought to correct an unpleasant situation.
3. Overt actions must be in use in form of words and deeds.

Meseron therapy is founded in the 'I can' philosophy; man must not accept defeat but rise above challenges as a striving creature. It asserts that striving takes place at three levels of thoughts, words and actions. Cognitive techniques of Meseron therapy include the replacement of self-defeatist statements with relevant and appropriate statements.

Meseron Therapy and Behaviour Change

Awaritefe (2009) purports that Meseron approach neither upholds unrealistic optimism nor fosters denial or flight from reality. Hence clients must be encouraged to take positive actions to change their undesirable situation. These are some of the stances of Meseron approach in achieving a change in behaviour:

1. The motivation of the client to strive: From the Meseron standpoint, man is a striving creature. Man does not just strive but does so to achieve a purpose. Client should be encouraged not to give up on self, to understand that nothing good comes easily. Once one identifies an "undesirable" that is causing psychological disturbances, one should not give up in striving to change it.
2. A Client is in charge of own fate: Clients should be made to understand that one determines what happens in one's life. The conditions a client faces are those one allowed, and can be changed if there is the will power to do so.
3. Man as a striving creature has his ultimate goal ennoblement: According to Meseron Therapy, there are three stages of ennoblement: (a) ennoblement of self, (b) ennoblement of others (human beings), and (c) ennoblement of the environment.

In ennoblement of self, the therapist works on the self-carriage and self-opinion of the client. Clients can be requested to carry out activities such as accepting responsibility for an assignment in a group. These will strengthen one's ego thereby emphasizing one's importance. It also promotes the spirit of "I can", to help one see self as noble. In assisting the client to ennoblement others, the client is helped to make efforts to see the good in others and exhibit positive behaviours and remain positive-minded about self even in the heat of undesirable actions of others. The ennoblement of the environment is the highest level of ennoblement. Here, the clients are encouraged to impact one's environment positively.

Psychological Instruments for Striving

MT proposes that man is empowered with appropriate psychological instruments for striving, which develop in given socio-cultural and physical environments. With these aids, man can alter himself and his environment.

Prominent among them are the following:

- a. **Perceptive Capacity:** This enables man to be aware of his situation or environment.

- b. **Appraisal Mechanism:** This leads to an appreciation of the congruence or incongruence of his striving and his goal.
- c. **Operational Facilities:** These are man's thoughts, words, and actions. When used positively, they help man to overcome.

HARMONY RESTORATION THERAPY

Harmony restoration therapy is an existential-phenomenological theory of health and illness. The therapy is founded by Ebigbo (1995) and borne out of the African concept of ill-health. The basic tenet of the Harmony Restoration therapy is the Igbo proverb, 'he that is in harmony with his world does not fall sick'.

A major characteristic of the African culture is the belief in supernatural and ancestral worship, with a strong emphasis of animism and religious beliefs (Lambo 1959) as cited by Ebigbo, Elekwachi, Eze, Nweze and Innocent (2013). Ebigbo (1995) asserts that in Africa, the human mind, body and society interact to produce health or ill health. Africa is largely cosmocentric therefore both physical and mental illnesses originate from various external sources. Africa's cosmocentricity is tripartite consisting of three personality layers which constitute the unconscious African mind. The African personality consists of the following elements:

1. **Endocosmos:** The relationship between the individual and himself. It is the biopsychological aspect of the individual. It embodies intrapersonal dialogues, the traditional concept of self, the core of an individual's personality, self-concept, self-esteem and so on.
2. **Mesocosmos:** This embodies the relationship between the individual and significant others in his environment. It includes the interpersonal dialogues, dimensions of the animate and inanimate beings that he maintains the relationship as well as the individual's relationship with significant other and non-significant others in the environment.
3. **Exocosmos:** This is concerned with the relationship between the individual and his God or gods. It represents the individual's value for ancestorship, ancestral spirits, God and gods, creation, religion, culture, morals, philosophy, myths, occupation and so on.

The cosmogram is the diagrammatic representation of the various relationships an individual entertains and their levels of harmony or disharmony.

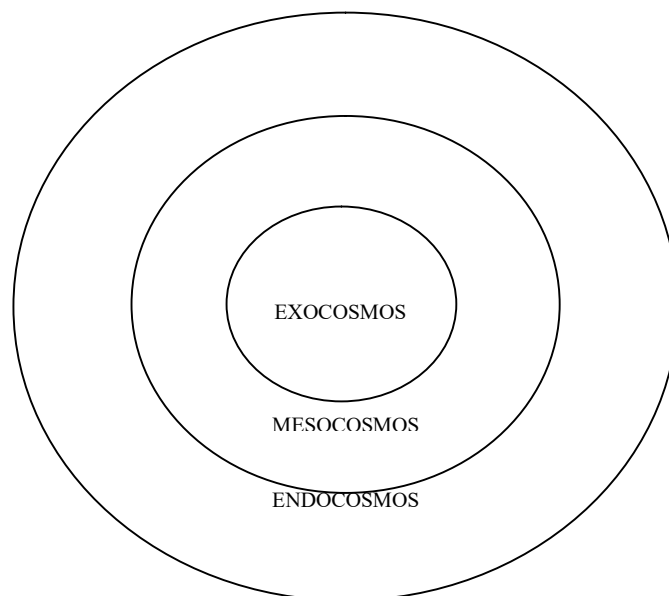
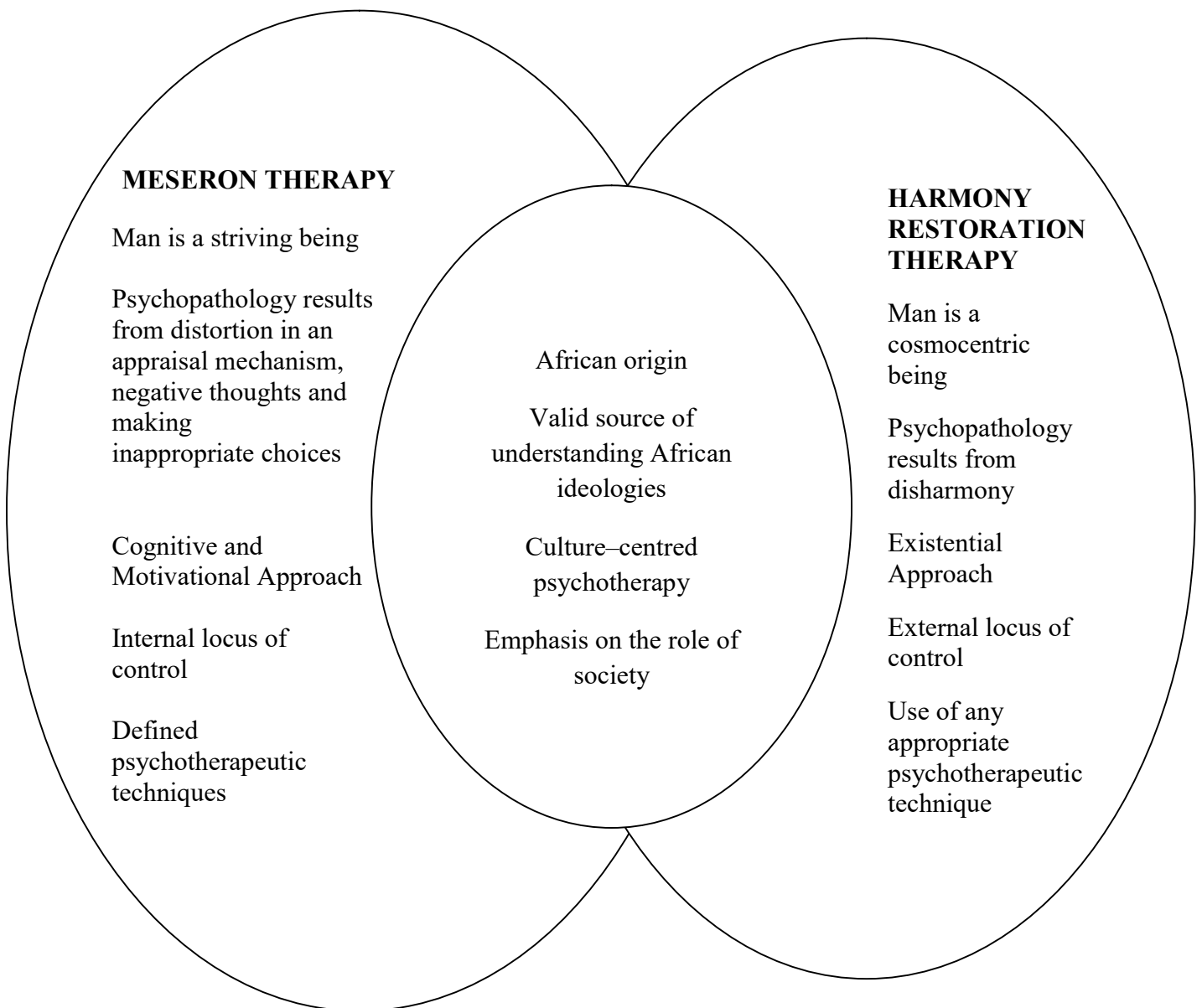


Figure 1: COSMOGRAM by Authors (2019)

To the African, health is dependent on harmony between the individual and the world. Harmony restoration therapy assumes that harmony connotes a state of peaceful existence and agreement or a pleasing combination of related things. This implies that “the body in which there is peaceful agreement was hitherto lacking same and also where peaceful combinations of things exist there was none before the existence” (Igbokwe and Chukwuene, 2006). Since we live in a dynamic world, individual’s harmony (health) is often threatened and the African is constantly obliged to maintain and restore harmony (Ebigbo, Obidigbo, Udeoke and Okwariji, 1997). HRT posits that if one is able to maintain peaceful coexistence with the components of his cosmos one experiences harmony and if one is unable to maintain peaceful coexistence with one’s cosmos one experiences disharmony.

Figure 2: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS by Authors (2019)



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MESERON THERAPY AND HARMONY RESTORATION THERAPIES

The two therapies under study are of African origin; Nigeria to be precise. Both therapies are therefore rich and valid sources of understanding African ideologies particularly with regards to relevant values in the treatment of mental distress and maintenance of positive mental health among Africans.

Additionally, MT and HRT therapies fit into the recommended template for culture-centred psychotherapy by Madu (2015) as they both take into cognisance other healing values/beliefs in Africans which comprise of religious/faith healing values of Africans, African traditional healing values as well as western-oriented therapeutic values all in one.

Meseron therapy and Harmony Restoration Therapy point out that society plays a significant role in maintaining mental health. In Meseron therapy, the psychological instruments that enable man to alter himself and his environment are within his society. In Harmony Restoration therapy, an individual who can maintain a peaceful coexistence with the components of his tripartite cosmos which include himself, others, his environment and spiritual authorities' experiences harmony.

The foremost difference that exists between the therapies is their perspectives on the nature of man. Meseron therapy believes that man is a striving being, empowered with appropriate psychological instruments for striving, whose ultimate goal is ennoblement. On the other hand, Harmony Restoration therapy assumes that man is a cosmocentric being who thrives on harmonious relationships. Also, both therapies differ in their aetiology for psychopathology, while Meseron therapy believes that negative thoughts are at the root of psychopathology, Harmony Restoration therapy believes that disharmony at any of the levels of cosmos may result in psychopathology. In HRT therefore, negative thoughts must change to positive thoughts and disharmony must be addressed respectively. Again, another major difference is that Meseron therapy is centred on cognition and motivation of the client while Harmony Restoration therapy is centred in relationships. Hence, Meseron therapy encourages internal locus of control in comparison to Harmony Restoration therapy which places more focus on external locus of control.

Furthermore, both therapies differ on their therapeutic techniques. While Harmony Restoration therapy does not have any therapeutic method of its own, Meseron therapy attempts to explore the client's understanding of the problem(s), connect the relationship between thoughts, words and actions, facilitate the transformation of negative thoughts, help the client speak the words, and engage in constructive measures.

CONCLUSION

This paper looked at two indigenous psychotherapies which are MT and HRT in the areas of human nature, etiology of psychopathology, psychotherapeutic orientation, therapeutic techniques and emphasis on locus of control. Both Meseron therapy and Harmony Restoration therapy have contributed significantly to the practice of psychotherapy in Nigeria. They have both been used in the treatment of psychological disorders and have yielded remarkable results. Hence, it is encouraged that psychologists should further embrace indigenous, culture-centred psychotherapies as a suitable treatment for psychological disorders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Meseron therapists should endeavour to develop a clinical assessment tool that measures 'meseronic' components.
2. The exocosmic component of the Harmony Restoration Therapy should be defined clearly within scientifically measurable bounds.
3. For ease of practicability, step-by-step procedure for the use of both psychotherapies should be made readily available for trained clinical psychologists.

4. More research should be conducted on indigenous therapies.
5. Tertiary institutions should endeavour to educate students on indigenous therapies that exist in Nigeria.
6. Clinical psychologists should continually develop indigenous psychological therapies rather than focusing on adopting foreign therapies only.

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