



# Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the Cross-Cultural Context: An Extension of the Standard Paradigm from Individual to Country/Culture Level—A Brief Introduction into a New Research Line

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## Abstract

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the golden standard for personalized evidence-based psychological interventions. The standard unit of analysis in CBT is the individual and/or small groups (e.g., couples, families, organizations). In a seminal book, Beck (Prisoners of Hate: The cognitive basis of anger, hostility, and violence, Harper Collins, New York, 2000) argued that the standard CBT paradigm should be extended to approach large societal problems (e.g., terrorism/violence). However, in this extension, most of the time, the unit of analysis is still the individual, but immersed in larger societal networks. In this article, we propose a major extension of the standard CBT paradigm in the cross-cultural context, using countries/cultures as units of analysis. In an era of globalization, when countries interact more and more with each other, and immigration has become a major world issue, such an extension can have an important practical and theoretical impact.

**Keywords** CBT · Dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs · Individual versus country level of analysis · Paradigm extension

## The Problem

In a globalized world, the countries/cultures come more and more into interaction with one another and immigration has become a major world issue. Some countries/cultures could hold perceived national images/views about themselves that are largely different from their actual national images and/or from the images shared/

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accepted by other countries/cultures. In this complex interplay between self-perceived national image, actual national image, and national image as perceived by other interacting countries, many conflicts and miscommunications may arise, some of them potentially impacting the maintenance of peace and collaboration among countries/cultures and the immigration process (e.g., the integration of the immigrants). While the perception of the *Other* (i.e., country or political entity), with its potential implications, has been extensively studied in both psychology (e.g., social and cultural approaches, for instance Sears et al. 2003) and political sciences (e.g., politics and international relations, for instance Carlsnaes et al. 2013), the perception of the *Self* (i.e., the perception one country/culture holds of itself), and more particularly, the distortions in this perception have received less attention.

## A Potential Solution

In this article, we argue that such cognitive distortions/discrepancies (e.g., perceived national image vs. actual national image) could be conceptualized as a form of dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs at countries/cultures level and thus, they could be subject to prevention and change based on the cognitive-behavioral therapy/CBT paradigm. Therefore, in this brief article, we propose an innovative extension of the standard CBT paradigm (sCBT) in a cross-cultural context, namely extending the CBT paradigm from individuals, as units of analysis, to countries/cultures, as units of analysis (cCBT).

## Standard CBT (sCBT)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is the golden standard regarding personalized evidence-based psychological interventions for: (1) human development; (2) health promotion and prevention of psychological problems; and (3) treatment of psychological problems (see David et al. 2010).

Simply said, according to CBT (Beck 1979; Ellis 1994), our emotional and behavioral responses are not generated by life events, but by how we process these life events. If we process life events by dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs, then we experience dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive behaviors. If we process life events by functional cognitions/rational beliefs, then we experience functional emotions and adaptive behaviors. While dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs have no logical, empirical, and/or pragmatic support, functional cognitions/rational beliefs have logical, empirical, and/or pragmatic support (for more details see David et al. 2010).

Based on Beck's model (1995), at the core of personality there are beliefs organized as schemas, which, in their negative form are related to *unlovability* (e.g., I am bad) and/or *helplessness* (e.g., I am weak). These negative beliefs are further appraised by a set of intermediate cognitions, related sequentially to each other (from 1 to 3): (1) evaluations (e.g., It is awful being weak); (2) positive (e.g., If I get their respect, then I am strong) and negative assumptions (e.g., If

I do not get their respect then I am weak); and (3) rules (e.g., I have to get their respect). In more specific situations (e.g., expressing a point of view in front of an important audience), these intermediate cognitions can be further expressed in negative automatic thoughts (e.g., They will not respect me), thus generating specific emotions (e.g., anxiety) and behaviors (e.g., submissive behavior). However, sometimes the positive assumptions and the rules are so strong that the individual is aware only of the positive automatic thoughts (e.g., I am respected and therefore I am good), thus generating a compensatory mechanism expressed emotionally (e.g., functional emotions) and behaviorally (e.g., rigid rule-accepting behavior), even if core beliefs are still negative. However, unless targeting these cognitions by CBT, there is always the risk of decompensating for the individual, since, when confronted with unexpected and/or uncontrollable negative events, negative assumptions and rules will surface (i.e., instead of positive, compensatory ones) (Beck 1995). On the other hand, if the core beliefs are positive/functional, then the whole process leads to functional emotions and adaptive behaviors. For instance, if one holds realistic core beliefs (e.g., I am neither weak nor very strong, I have both strengths and weaknesses), then we expect for the intermediate beliefs to be also more flexible (e.g., I wish I were stronger, but it is not awful; I will try to get their respect, but not at all costs). Consequently, in specific stressful situations, the individual would have functional automatic thoughts and functional emotions (e.g., concern, but not anxiety) and behaviors (e.g., assertive behavior). In both examples, if we think in terms of countries and their leaders and how they could relate functionally or dysfunctionally to the idea of weakness, we can envision country-level consequences (e.g., responding too forcefully to minor threats).

By a large variety of psychological techniques (e.g., problem solving, cognitive restructuring, behavioral modification, emotive/metaphorical intervention), the aim of CBT is to change dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs into functional cognitions/rational beliefs in order to change dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive behaviors into functional emotions and adaptive behaviors, thus enhancing the quality of life and the social functioning (e.g., autonomy) of individuals (see Beck 1995; DiGiuseppe et al. 2013). Also, changing core beliefs (i.e., not only automatic thoughts)—by helping the individual perceive himself/herself in a more realistic way, thus processing future negative events in a more realistic fashion too (Beck 1995)—is a major goal of CBT since this promotes a deeper change.

The CBT model was tested for various classes of cognitions and has received extensive experimental support (see David et al. 2010 for a review). However, the unit of analysis in standard CBT is the individual and/or individuals in the context of small groups (e.g., couples, families, and organizations) and therefore we do not know how it could be used at country/culture level. Moreover, we argue that a key component of the model has been less investigated, not only at country/culture level, but also at individual level, namely the cognitive discrepancy between actual and compensated image about oneself (e.g., positive vs. negative beliefs) and therefore such a research program is fundamental.

## From Standard CBT (sCBT) to Country/Culture Level Extended CBT (cCBT)

In a seminal book—*Prisoners of Hate: The cognitive basis of anger, hostility, and violence*—, Beck (2000) argued that CBT can be used to understand large societal problems. Thus, this is a nice extension of standard CBT from individual and group problems to large society problems (e.g., terrorism/violence). However, the unit of analysis in this approach is still mostly the individual, but seen as part of larger societal networks.

Although, Beck (2000) anticipated and briefly discussed the need for immersing the cognitive-behavioral approach in a cultural and cross-cultural framework, there is not yet a clear program in this direction because we miss the specifications of such a framework (e.g., concepts/methods). Building on Beck's model and its application to large societal problems, we further extend the CBT model from individual to country/culture level. Also, Beck focused particularly on the perception of the *Other* and the *Other's* actions (e.g., They threatened us), while internal representation of the *Self* seems equally important. Surely, when perceiving the *Other* and the *Self* (individual or country/society) many cognitive distortions may play a part (e.g., the egocentric perspective, the tendency of perceiving oneself as the victim, whose legitimate claims have been disregarded).

In this article, we introduce and conceptualize a new type of distortion operating at country-level, namely the discrepancy between the true characteristics of a people (e.g., in terms of the Big Five model) and the projection, the constructed image that people has of those characteristics. Also, while Beck (2000) described how individual-level processes could be used in explaining inter-group behavior, we aim to address country/society-level perceptions of the *Self* (i.e., self as a country, culture, society as a whole) and what impact distortions in perceptions of the *Self* may have in international relations.

### The General Framework of cCBT

Previous accounts in political psychology and foreign affairs have extensively emphasized the role played by the image of the *Self* and the *Other* in political decisions. For instance, as early as 1956, Boulding (1956), in his theory of national images, stated that the central part of the image one country has of itself as well as of other countries consists of the perceived hostility and friendliness and the perceived weakness and strength. Additional dimensions are sophistication and democracy, with potential influences on foreign policy decisions (Cottam 1994; Herrmann 1985). The perception of the *Other* often shows in the form of stereotypes (Herrmann 2003), templates that organize and retrieve information in a coherent manner, “filling in the blanks” when information is missing and guiding political decisions (e.g., the activation of the enemy stereotypes triggers the perception of the *Other* as inherently bad, with faulty intentions even when its action would indicate otherwise).

With regards to the perception of the *Other*, for example, it seems that perceiving the *Other* as an entity (entitativity) leads to polarization of viewing it as either an enemy or an ally and manipulating entitativity (e.g., by portraying an image of unity, like representing the European Union, for instance, only by showing its external borders) also has the same effect (Castano et al. 2003). Also, distorted perceptions of the *Other* and their intentions are a primary source of conflict between countries/political entities. For instance, perceiving a country as threatening depends on representing the country's intentions (hostility versus friendliness) and capacity of inflicting harm (strength versus weakness), such perceptions being often distorted by emotional beliefs, incomplete information, institutional dynamics, and cultural trends (Gross Stein 2013). That is, either the perceiver is biased in interpreting threat-related information and/or, on purpose or not, the transmitter sends threat signals. For example, deceptive signaling, such as deliberately overestimating one's country's military power, significantly increases other actors' threat perception (Jervis 2002). In addition, political leaders and policy experts have the tendency to exaggerate threat (Tversky and Kahneman 1983; Koehler 1996), due to fallacious probabilistic reasoning, heuristics, risk aversion or framing effects.

However, as the influence of distorted cognition about other countries or political entities on foreign policy is widely acknowledged (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1986; Kim and Bueno de Mesquita 1995), most accounts are retrospective and theoretical (e.g., explaining how mixed signaling and distorted communication may have led to the war in Iraq in 2003), often lacking direct empirical evidence. When such empirical evidence exists, the unit of analysis is, in many cases, the individual or small group. For instance, showing that people tend to polarize their opinion about another country according to certain factors (e.g., entitativity) is very important, but it is difficult to infer how such processes would take place at societal level. Additionally, while investigating the role of societal *Self* and *Other* images in politics is highly relevant, it is uncertain to what extent the *distortion* of such images plays a role. That is, we could assume that a society holding distorted, unrealistic images of itself and other countries (i.e., as opposed to more accurate, realistic accounts) would make poorer decisions and have a lower level of well-being, but this possibility has so far remained uninvestigated. Last but not least, previous theoretical accounts have focused more on the perception of the *Other* (either accurate or distorted), with a lesser emphasis on the perception of the *Self*, and, particularly, on the possible distortions in societies' perceived images of themselves, and how these distortions may affect international relations and internal well-being.

In this sense, in a seminal article published in *Science*, Terraciano et al. (2005) showed that, based on an analysis of 48 countries/cultures, there is a discrepancy between the perceived national character and the actual national character, using the Big Five model of personality (i.e., classifying individual personalities according to five dimensions: Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Agreeableness, as described by Costa and McCrae) as a framework for understanding the psychological profile of the analyzed countries/cultures. Realo et al. (2009) analyzed seven countries/cultures and argued that actual and projected national character may be in some cases moderately related and Robins et al. (2005) showed that perception of changes in projected character has some correspondence with changes

in actual character. In any way, in such studies one can find a cognitive discrepancy between projected and actual character at country/culture level, be it absolute (e.g., a mathematical difference between projected and actual character) and/or relative (e.g., projected and actual character do not correlate with one another).

David (2015), based on the CBT model, argued that such cognitive discrepancies could be conceptualized as forms of dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs at countries/cultures level. Indeed, if there is a cognitive discrepancy between the perceived national image (e.g., perceived agreeability) and the actual national image (e.g., agreeability as measured by psychological tests), the perceived image (e.g., perceived agreeability) has no empirical and/or logical support and thus, it can be seen as a form of dysfunctional cognition/irrational belief at country/culture level. In short, such a cognitive discrepancy does not have logical, empirical and/or pragmatic support, thus fitting the criteria for dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs at countries/cultures level.

The study of cognitive discrepancies has an important role in psychology, covering several major lines of research, more or less related to one another, chief among are: (1) real versus ideal self (e.g., self-discrepancy theory—Rogers 1951; Higgins 1999); (2) cognitions versus behaviors and cognitions versus cognitions (e.g., cognitive dissonance—Festinger 1957); and (3) hopes versus expectations (e.g., Montgomery et al. 2003).

It is beyond the scope of this article to review the thousands of studies stemming from these lines of research (see e.g., Hardin and Larsen 2014; Montgomery et al. 2003; Vaidis 2014). However, basically all these lines of research argue that, at individual level, such discrepancies are accompanied by emotional and behavioral problems and low well-being (e.g., Pavot et al. 1997) and that people are strongly motivated to reduce the discrepancy. For example, Lynch et al. (2009) investigated the discrepancy between ideal and actual self (based on the Big Five Model of personality traits) and found that the higher the discrepancy, the lower the well-being, and that actual self was closer to the ideal for more autonomous individuals; this relationship held in three different countries: China, Russia, and USA. However, such discrepancy (“ideal” vs. “actual” beliefs) would not fit this conceptualization as dysfunctional cognition/irrational beliefs, as in the case of “projected” (e.g., how we think we are) versus “actual” (e.g., how we are) beliefs, and the unit of analysis in the aforementioned study was not the country, but the individuals (e.g., the country was used as a moderator for individual analyses).

The cognitive discrepancy between actual and projected national image can fit well one or more of the above mentioned lines of research, if we extend the theory from individual to country/culture level. However, as mentioned above, we think that the cognitive discrepancy between projected national image and actual national image can be best conceptualized as a form of cognitive discrepancy, namely a distorted belief at a country/culture level, in the framework of CBT, based on the following arguments:

- Distorted beliefs are defined in CBT as beliefs that are not logical, not empirically supported, and not functional, thus reflecting a discrepancy between what we believe about things and how things really are, typically as exaggerating real-

ity. The cognitive discrepancy between an actual and a projected national image would perfectly fit such a definition.

- In the CBT stress-diathesis model, distorted beliefs are associated with dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive behaviors, while functional cognitions/rational beliefs are associated with functional emotions and adaptive behaviors. It would be important to find out if this is also the case at country/culture level.
- CBT is one of the golden standards in the current evidence-based clinical/psychotherapy field, being the most researched form of psychotherapy. Therefore, an extension of CBT's conceptualization from individual to country/culture level may also extend the CBT-based psychological interventions from individual to societal level.

However, before proposing such an extension in detail, we should briefly understand the current context of cultural analyses.

### **The General Scientific Context of cCBT**

Three grand models seem to influence the field of cultural analysis at country/culture level, explaining differences between countries/cultures in terms of values and personality traits: (1) the model of cultural dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010); (2) the human values model (Schwartz 2012); and (3) cultural map of the world (Inglehart and Welzel 2010).

Again, it is beyond the scope of our article to review the thousands of articles published in these research traditions. However, as a general conclusion impacting our proposal, we note that although very influential, most research derived from these models is descriptive and/or predictive, and less focused on proposing causal explanatory models. Indeed, they are not focused on causal models to understand functional emotions and adaptive behaviors at individual and/or country/culture level, but on describing and predicting complex relationships between psychological (e.g., personality traits), cultural (e.g., collectivism/individualism), and socio-economic (e.g., Human Development Index) variables. When they target emotions and behaviors, they are typically focused on global concepts like well-being/quality of life and human functioning, mainly in a descriptive/predictive logic, often ignoring more specific analyses (e.g., functional vs. dysfunctional emotions; adaptive vs. maladaptive behaviors).

CBT is a well-articulated model that could well cover the gap in the field, targeting both global and specific emotions and behaviors, in a model which has descriptive, predictive and explanatory power, thus nicely complementing the existing models in the field.

### **The Specific Model of cCBT: Conceptual Development**

Expanding Beck's model (1995) from individual to country/culture level, one can envision the following steps (see also Beck 2000).

Projected national images refer to beliefs organized as schemas, which, in their negative form, are related to worthiness (e.g., we are an unworthy nation) and/or helplessness (e.g., we are a weak nation). These negative beliefs can be further appraised by a set of intermediate cognitions, related to each other (from 1 to 3): (1) evaluation (e.g., it is awful being weak); (2) positive (e.g., if we get the respect of other nations, then we are a strong nation) and negative assumptions (e.g., if we do not get the respect of other nations, we are a weak nation); and (3) rules (e.g., we must get the respect of other nations). These intermediate cognitions can be further expressed in negative automatic thoughts (e.g., they will not respect us), thus generating specific culture-related emotions (e.g., anxiety) and culture-related behaviors (e.g., submissive behavior). However, sometimes, the positive assumptions and the rules are so strong that one can be aware only of the positive automatic thoughts (e.g., we are respected and therefore we are a strong nation), thus generating a compensatory mechanism expressed emotionally (e.g., functional emotions) and behaviorally (e.g., rigid rule-accepting behavior) at country/cultural level. However, societies, like individuals, would face the risk of decompensation when facing significant negative events. On the other hand, if the core beliefs are positive, then the whole process leads to functional emotions and adaptive behaviors.

Surely, societies differ from individuals in multiple ways. For instance, societies are formed of multiple groups, which may have different and contrasting images of themselves and the other. If, for instance, a large part of society has a distorted image of itself and another part of society has a still distorted image but in the opposite way (e.g., one part of society believes their nation is very strong while another part believes it is very weak), then it would be difficult to describe what image that nation holds of itself. Also, in contrast to individuals, societies do not make decisions and act as a whole, but their political leaders do. Of course, in democratic countries, the political leaders are freely elected by the people, but, as this is generally true, it would be difficult to argue that political decisions and opinions of leaders are supported by or representative for the population of one country/culture as a whole.

Such a conceptualization can spur a whole new research program in the CBT field. For example, referring to the cognitive discrepancy, there are several possibilities (psychological profile at country/culture level): (1) projection of reality is higher than reality (overestimation); (2) projection of reality is lower than reality (underestimation), and (3) projection of reality and reality are close (i.e., realism). We are not aware of any study investigating if such a distortion (i.e., cognitive discrepancy between projected national image and actual national image) would be associated to human functioning and disturbances at a country/culture level, mirroring the interrelations between distorted beliefs and human functioning and adaptation at the individual level. Although Beck (2000) speculated on how the established principles referring to the relationships between cognitions and emotions/behaviors can be applied to the “dark side of humanity”, such as country level destructive behaviors and wars, to date there is no theoretical framework and/or empirical data to comprehensively understand such relationships.

However, country/culture level CBT is not related only to cognitive discrepancy. Indeed, practically, as Beck argued (2000), all concepts of CBT can be aggregated at



country/culture level (e.g., thus generating a national psychological profile based on CBT concepts) and tested using countries/cultures rather than individuals as units of analysis. Indeed, today, in a globalized world, the old concepts of psychology of people and psychology of nations are reenacted, but based on a modern methodology which avoids most of the issues highly criticized in the outdated *Volkepsychology* (i.e., the term was introduced by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the nineteenth century to refer to the scientific study of national character, or what was at that point considered to be “the spirit of the people”; this approach assumes that some characteristics are inherent and mostly unchangeable within a people) (see Cole 1996). For example, Schmitt et al. (2007) proposed a national psychological profile based on a Big Five Model of personality in 56 nations. Using the same Big Five Model of personality, Rentfrow et al. (2013, 2015) proposed regional psychological profiles for USA and Great Britain. Therefore, we believe that the concepts of CBT should be part of this new emerging field. For example, understanding the country/culture and/or the regional distributions of dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs can help us to better relate CBT research with large scale epidemiological studies about mental disorders and/or to understand quality of life and human functioning based on an underlying CBT model.

As preliminary support for such a model/conceptualization, David (2015) found that cognitive discrepancy—conceptualized as a form of dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs—predicted both life satisfaction ( $r = -0.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and autonomy ( $r = 0.39$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ) in 25 countries/cultures (using countries/cultures as units of analysis), namely the higher the discrepancy between perceived and actual national character (i.e., in terms of the Big Five model), the lower the life satisfaction and autonomy at country/culture level, thus showing that such discrepancies serve no pragmatic purpose. The results were further developed and supported (David et al. 2017) in relationship with the Human Development Index/HDI, a summary measure of lifetime expectancy, education, and per capita income (i.e., the higher the discrepancy, the lower the HDI) and the Global Peace Indicator/GPI, which classifies countries according to their level of peacefulness—societal safety and security, ongoing domestic and international conflict, and the degree of militarization—(i.e., the higher the discrepancy, the higher the GPI—high rank means low peacefulness).

### **Implications for a Progressive Research Program in cCBT: New Directions**

Such a research program has key theoretical and practical implications, taking into account the world globalization and large scale interactions among world's countries/cultures/societies.

Indeed, from a theoretical point of view, for example, if a country sees itself in a discrepant way as compared to how it actually is (e.g., overestimation of positive traits), beyond the potential negative consequences of the discrepancy itself on the country's social indicators (e.g., life satisfaction), if another country treats it according to how it actually is rather than according to how it thinks it is, serious international difficulties and animosities can arise. Moreover, the question of whether the CBT model holds not only at individual, but also at country/culture

level has remained completely unanswered. Therefore, studying these mechanisms is fundamental.

From a practical point of view, understanding such CBT-based mechanisms at country/culture level can further inspire the use of CBT techniques at country/culture level (see also Beck 2000). Indeed, teaching rational thinking in schools for example, as part of the school curriculum, could help forming future healthy adults, less inclined to violence, for example. Other evidence-based public policies could be elaborated in order to use the CBT techniques (e.g., cognitive restructuring, problem solving) on large scale, targeting already existing large societal problems (e.g., violence). Media and national programs could be thought as part of such evidence-based public policies. Using the CBT techniques in such a framework can change a country/cultures' psychological profile in terms of functional cognitions/rational beliefs versus dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs, impacting functional emotions and adaptive behaviors.

Last but not least, such a framework could have an influence in political sciences as well, since state-level decisions and behaviors are thought to be primarily guided by state interests, informed by perceptions of the *Self* (particularly) and of the *Other* considered to be either unbiased, or biased only in the light of historical and political events. Uncovering the psychological mechanisms of distorted perceptions of the *Self* and the *Other*, considering historical and political events as activating events (A in the ABC model), would further inform this field as well.

## Discussion

In this brief article, we proposed an innovative extension of the standard CBT paradigm, moving its theory/applications from individual to country/culture units. More specifically, we proposed that the discrepancy between the perceived national image and the actual national image should be conceptualized as a form of dysfunctional cognitions/irrational beliefs, thus becoming a problem conceptualized in the CBT paradigm, which could potentially benefit from CBT solutions/interventions.

Preliminary data, based on David (2015) supported this idea by showing that the higher the cognitive discrepancy between perceived and actual national character, the lower the level of life satisfaction and autonomy at country/culture level. Also, the results of David et al. (2017) showed that the higher such cognitive discrepancy, the lower the Human Development Index and the higher the discrepancy, the lower the Global Peace Indicator at the country/culture level.

A whole progressive research program could be planned following this reconceptualization, focused on both (1) theoretical (e.g., by extending the classical concept of CBT to country/culture level, by considering how such discrepancies are related to the major psychological outcomes, typically considered in standard CBT, at country/culture level) and (2) practical (e.g., how to use CBT techniques and strategies to deal with such discrepancies at country/culture level) aspects. Developing such a research program could bridge knowledge from different research fields, like foreign affairs (e.g., national image), social and cultural psychology (e.g., social identity theory, personality theories), psychiatry and epidemiology (e.g., prevalence of

various psychiatric diagnoses in different countries, in relation to the aforementioned discrepancies), and clinical psychology and psychotherapy (e.g., using the CBT framework as a guide in developing targeted interventions) in order to enhance country-level well-being and life satisfaction and promote healthy international relations. Taking into account the major issues that we face in a globalized world, such a research program could be fundamental.

Surely, certain limitations can already be envisioned. For instance, while the Big Five model is widely acknowledged as a universal personality model, transcending language and cultural barriers (e.g., McCrae et al. 2005; Schmitt et al. 2007), we cannot argue that it is entirely culturally unbiased. That is, the Big Five profile obtained in one country (i.e., what, in the framework described in the article would constitute the “real” image of that certain people) could differ from another’s because the Big Five traits may apply differently among countries. For instance, data have found that the Big Five factors do not emerge in smaller, indigenous societies (Gurven et al. 2013). Also, relying on self-report measures of the Big Five model may not provide a truly “objective” measure of character traits, since such data could be driven by the *reference group effect*—the tendency of one individual to compare herself to others within her own culture when self-evaluating personality traits (e.g., Mõttus et al. 2012). However, using self-report measures of the Big Five model is not the only approach; we could think of assessing relevant country-level psychological constructs in others ways as well. Finally, the framework described here for using CBT concepts in describing and modifying country-level self-perceptions is not the only one possible. For instance, one could argue that, due to historical traumatic events (e.g., a series of wars), countries may develop maladaptive schemas in relation to themselves (e.g., we are helpless, ineffective, vulnerable) and other countries (e.g., they are not trustworthy, they will harm us), schemas similar to those potentially leading to personality disorders in individuals, as described by Young et al. (2003). However, all these variations can be integrated in a progressive research program in cCBT and thus the answer will be empirical.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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