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## From Self-Construals to Prejudice Towards Immigrants: The Mediating Roles of Perceived Symbolic Threat and Outgroup Indispensability

Inês Marques Mendes

Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Dr. Ana Rita Taborda Monteiro Guerra, Integrated Researcher  
ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September, 2024





CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS  
E HUMANAS

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Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

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*For you, who with a hand on my shoulder, a warm embrace, or a distant wave, turned my  
world into a better place. Always with you.*



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## **Resumo**

As atitudes em relação aos imigrantes podem influenciar a aceitação dos mesmos, as suas vidas, e o grau de apoio a políticas de imigração, sendo importante compreender os mecanismos subjacentes que moldam estas atitudes. O presente estudo investigou os efeitos da manipulação de self-construals independentes vs. interdependentes no preconceito em relação a imigrantes brasileiros (i.e., atitudes face aos imigrantes brasileiros e distância social). Adicionalmente, explorou também se estes efeitos ocorreram através de percepções de indispensabilidade do exogrupo e ameaça simbólica. 125 participantes portugueses foram distribuídos aleatoriamente por uma de três condições experimentais: self-construal independente vs. self-construal interdependente vs. controlo. Os resultados indicaram que a ativação dos self-construals independente e interdependente não foi bem-sucedida, sendo que a manipulação não demonstrou impactos significativos na maioria das variáveis dependentes. Deste modo, foram realizadas análises exploratórias, que contrariamente à maioria da investigação anterior, revelaram que a percepção de indispensabilidade da identidade esteve relacionada com mais atitudes negativas face aos imigrantes, sendo que este efeito ocorreu através de um aumento das percepções de ameaça simbólica.



## **Abstract**

Attitudes towards immigrants within the majority society may influence their acceptance, life outcomes, as well as the degree of support for immigration policies, highlighting the importance of understanding the underlying mechanisms that shape these attitudes. The present study investigated the effects of priming independent vs interdependent self-construals on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants (i.e., attitudes towards immigrants and social distance). Furthermore, it also explored if these effects occurred via perceptions of outgroup indispensability and symbolic threat. 125 Portuguese participants were randomly allocated to one of three experimental conditions: independent self-construal vs. interdependent self-construal vs. control. The results indicated a failure to prime the independent and interdependent self-construals, with the manipulation showing no significant impact on most of the outcome measures.

Exploratory analyses were conducted, showing that, contrary to most previous research, perceived identity indispensability was related to more negative attitudes towards immigrants, and this effect occurred via increased perceptions of symbolic threat.



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## Introduction

In 2020, the estimated number of international migrants worldwide reached 281 million, (International Organization for Migration, 2022) thus, stating that migration and immigration-related issues are key features of the 21st century is not an exaggeration (Esses et al., 2010).

A common challenge that accompanies immigration is the prejudice within the majority, non-immigrant population. Given that the attitudes of majority society members can affect immigrants' acceptance, life outcomes, as well as the degree of support for immigration policies (Esses, 2021), it is of critical importance to understand the underlying factors that contribute to the development of these attitudes.

The determinants of prejudice towards immigrants are complex and operate on multiple levels. While social psychology has mostly focused on intergroup-level factors, such as intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), intergroup anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1996), and intergroup competition (Esses et al., 1998), prior research also indicates that individual-level factors (e.g., levels of education, political conservatism) contribute to negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (Davidov et al., 2020). However, it remains unclear if individual-level processes, such as self-construals also affect these negative attitudes.

Self-construals refer to how individuals define and perceive themselves in relation to others (Shao et al., 2018), and research shows that they have an impact on cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions (e.g., Utz, 2004; Gardner et al., 1999; Shao et al., 2018; Han & Humphreys, 2016). Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed two distinct self-construals that refer to how individuals define and perceive themselves in relation to others (Shao et al., 2018): the independent self-construal and the interdependent self-construal. To the best of our knowledge, self-construals have not been investigated as predictors of prejudice towards immigrants. However, previous studies indicate that interdependent self-construals are associated with less positive intergroup outcomes (Tawa & Montoya, 2018). Therefore, given the potential importance of self-construals in affecting intergroup outcomes in the context of immigration, it is relevant to investigate their potential impact, as well as the underlying mechanisms through which they may shape these outcomes.

Past research has shown that a major cause of prejudice consists of perceptions of threat (Stephan et al., 2008). These perceptions can be categorized into realistic threats - concerning the ingroup's resources, well-being, or power (Rios et al., 2018), or symbolic threats -



concerning the ingroup's cultural way of life (Stephan et al., 2008, as cited in., Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016). Symbolic threat is anticipated to be more influential when members of an ingroup perceive their cultural values and characteristics to be distinct from those of an outgroup (Zárate et al., 2004, as cited in., Makashvili et al., 2018). Thus, considering the contribution of self-construals for the distinction between ingroups and outgroups (Heine, 2010), the present study focused on perceptions of symbolic threat as an underlying mechanism.

Additionally, there is a considerable lack of research addressing individuals' attitudes regarding the perceived contributions that immigrants make to society, and thus, the present study also addressed perceptions of outgroup indispensability as an underlying mechanism. Indeed, findings show that perceiving an outgroup (e.g., immigrants) as being indispensable for either the functioning of the society or in defining national identity, reflects a more positive view of the immigrants, which can lead to more positive attitudes towards them (Mepham & Verkuyten, 2017).

In the Portuguese context, the potential contribution of self-construals for explaining prejudice towards immigrants may be especially relevant. Indeed, Portugal, like other countries, has seen an increase in the foreign population (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras, 2023), and although various ethnic groups comprise the immigrant population in the country (Neto, 2009), the Brazilian nationality remains the main foreign community living in Portugal (SEF, 2023). In addition, Brazilian immigrants report experiencing discrimination based on prejudice about immigration or about being an immigrant in Portugal (Costa, 2021), making it important to comprehend the factors that contribute to these negative attitudes towards this group of immigrants, in hopes to prevent and reduce its negative outcomes.

Therefore, the present study will add to the literature by examining the impact of self-construals (independent vs interdependent) on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants in the context of Portugal, and if this effect can be explained by perceptions of symbolic threat and outgroup indispensability.

## CHAPTER 1

# Literature Review

### 1.1. Self-Construals and Prejudice Towards Immigrants

The self-construal theory, initially proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991), is based on the fundamental assumption that individuals vary in the way they define and perceive themselves in relation to others (Shao et al., 2018). This theory postulated two distinct schemas that hold a broad array of psychological implications: the independent self-construal and the interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Accordingly, when the schema for self is independent from others, individuals primarily attune themselves to their own thoughts, feelings, goals, and actions. Whereas, when the schema for self is interdependent with others, individuals' main referent is other people's thoughts, feelings and actions (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

Individuals with an independent self-construal are driven by a desire for autonomy, and thus seek to differentiate themselves from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, as cited in Cross et al., 2011). By contrast, an interdependent self-construal posits that the self includes others (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Therefore, individuals with a strong interdependent self-construal seek to connect with others (Cross et al., 2011), to be similar to others, and to sustain harmonious relationships within social contexts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, as cited in Shao et al., 2018). A considerable amount of research on self-construals has primarily examined differences between Western (independent) and Eastern (interdependent) cultures (Haberstroh et al., 2002) and showed that in Western cultures there is an emphasis on certain cultural values such as autonomy, uniqueness, and personal rights which may foster a perception of the self as independent from others (i.e., independent self-construal) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994, as cited in., Krieg & Xu, 2018). Conversely, Eastern societies prioritize cultural values that enhance the creation and maintenance of social harmony and behaviors that foster acceptance by others, promoting a sense of interdependent self-construal (Krieg & Xu, 2018). In addition, these perceptions of the self, shaped by the cultural values of each society are reflected in differences in cognition, emotion and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Despite this, every individual 's sense of self includes elements of both independence and interdependence, each to different degrees (A. Fiske et al., 1998; Greenfield, 2009; Triandis, 1995, as cited in., Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Furthermore, these schemas are sensitive to the

cultural context, which tends to foster the development of one self-construal over the other more strongly (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989, as cited in., Cross et al., 2011). Consistently with Culture-as-situated-cognition theory (Oyserman, 2016), while an individual's culture may predominantly influence which self-construal is chronically accessible, self-construals may adjust in response to situational accessibility (Gardner et al., 1999), such as through the use of priming techniques (Cross et al., 2011). Indeed, various priming studies that manipulated self-construals have demonstrated several implications of these individual level factors in cooperation (Utz, 2004), social judgments and values (Gardner et al., 1999), creativity (Shao et al., 2018), brain activity (Han & Humphreys, 2016), among other cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions.

Research also shows that self-construals are related to the distinction between one's ingroup and outgroup. According to Markus and Kitayama (2010), individuals with an independent self-construal can easily transition between their ingroup and outgroup, whereas those with an interdependent self-construal tend to maintain a clear distinction between these groups, which often results in different behaviors towards members of each group. Indeed, even though to our knowledge self-construals have not been examined as possible predictors of prejudice towards immigrants, previous studies indicate that interdependent self-construals are associated with less positive intergroup outcomes. For instance, Duclos and Barasch (2014) manipulated the self-construals of American and Chinese participants before assessing their prosocial tendencies toward tornado survivors from either the same race or a different race. These authors found that the individuals primed with the independent self-construal displayed similar tendencies toward helping both ingroup and outgroup victims. Conversely, the individuals primed with the interdependent self-construal displayed a higher tendency toward helping ingroup victims, compared to outgroup victims. Similarly, in a study by Wang and colleagues (2015), participants primed with an interdependent self-construal, presented a stronger neural activity indicating higher empathy when observing racial ingroup members (vs. racial outgroup members) experiencing pain, while this ingroup bias in neural responses was eliminated when the individuals were primed with an independent self-construal.

However, according to Yuki and Takemura (2014), in collectivistic cultures, which are usually associated with the interdependent self-construal while individualistic cultures are associated with the independent self-construal (Cross et al., 2011), the basis of intergroup discrimination is not the previously mentioned ingroup-outgroup distinction, but on their motivation to maintain harmonious and reciprocal relationships within their ingroup.

Nevertheless, considering the few studies that examined the impact of self-construals on intergroup outcomes, most showed the detrimental impact of interdependent self-construals, thus suggesting that the interdependent self-construal may be associated with prejudice towards outgroups. Based on these findings, we proposed that self-construals of majority society members impact prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants living in Portugal. Specifically, we hypothesized that priming individual's independent self-construals, which have been related to a less pronounced ingroup-outgroup distinction (Markus & Kitayama, 2010) triggers lower levels of prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants, compared to priming individuals' interdependent self-construals which has been associated with a sharper distinction, and a neutral, unrelated, control condition (H1).

## **1.2. Self-Construals and Prejudice Towards Immigrants: Underlying Mechanisms**

To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the causal relationship predicted between self-construals and prejudice, we explored the underlying mechanisms through which self-construals may affect prejudice towards immigrants. We focused on two well-known factors that account for attitudes towards immigrants: perceived symbolic threat and perceived outgroup indispensability.

### **1.2.1. Perceived Symbolic Threat**

Perceived intergroup threats constitute a vital indicator of the quality of intergroup relations within culturally diverse societies (Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016). Over the past several decades, a considerable number of scholars and researchers have proposed that fear and perceived threats play a crucial role in fostering prejudice towards outgroups, particularly immigrants (Stephan et al., 2005).

Intergroup Threat Theory, developed by Stephan and colleagues (2015), posits that perceived threats from outgroups can be classified into two categories: realistic threats, which are concerned with potential risks to the ingroup's power, resources, or welfare, and symbolic threats, which pertain to perceived threats to the ingroup's values, identity, or cultural way of life (Rios et al., 2018). Moreover, the theory addresses perceived threats, as opposed to actual threats (Stephan et al., 2009 as cited in., Makashvili et al., 2018) and differentiates realistic and symbolic threats at both the group level and the individual level (Rios et al., 2018). In the current study we exclusively focused on symbolic group threat. Symbolic threat is expected to

be more influential when members of an ingroup perceive their cultural values and characteristics as distinct from those of an outgroup (Zárate et al., 2004, as cited in., Makashvili, et al., 2018). However, Portugal and Brazil share several cultural similarities, including a common official language, due to their lasting historical connections. Nevertheless, these shared similarities may also weaken intergroup boundaries, which in turn could be perceived as a threat to the majority's identity (Guimond et al., 2010; Thomsen et al., 2008), as cited in., Verkuyten, 2024), a key component of symbolic threat.

In the case of symbolic threat, the primary concern revolves around differences between groups in terms of moral values, norms, standards, beliefs, and attitudes (Stephan et al., 1999) and the mere perception of these differences can generate feelings of symbolic threat (Stephan et al., 2015 as cited in., Rios, 2022). Research has consistently shown the importance of symbolic threat for the upsurge of negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2018; Scheepers, Gijssberts, and Coenders 2002, as cited in., Davidov et al., 2020). For instance, a study conducted by Stephan and colleagues (1998), showed that perceived symbolic threat predicted prejudice towards Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. Moreover, research by Bouman and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that distant symbolic threats lead to more intolerance towards local outgroups (i.e., immigrants) linked to the distant outgroup, showing a carry-over effect of this type of threat, and going beyond the insights offered in previous studies.

Besides examining the impact of perceived threat on intergroup relations, according to Stephan and colleagues (2008), the Intergroup Threat Theory also delineates four domains of antecedents of threat: intergroup relations (e.g., see Cornielle et al., 2001 for the effect of the relative size of an outgroup compared to the ingroup on perceptions of threat), individual difference variables (see Esses et al., 1998 for an analysis of social dominance orientation as an antecedent of threat), situational factors (e.g., see Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006 for a meta-analysis on the impact of intergroup contact on feelings of threat), and dimensions of cultural difference.

The theory also posits that a key cultural variable influencing perceived threat is the dimension of individualism versus collectivism (Triandis, 1995, as cited in Stephan et al., 2008). Hence, drawing on the previously discussed relationships between this dimension and self-construals, individuals from collectivistic cultures, due to their focus on group memberships, may be especially prone to perceiving threats from outgroups (Stephan et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals with an independent self-construal tend to perceive a less

pronounced distinction between ingroup and outgroup members, which is expected to be associated with a lower perception of symbolic threat. Therefore, we proposed that individuals' self-construals impact prejudice towards immigrants via perceived symbolic threat. Such that priming the independent self-construal (vs. interdependent and control) triggers a lower perception of symbolic threat, and this in turn relates to less prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants (H2).

### **1.2.2. Perceived Outgroup Indispensability**

Beyond perceived threat, we also focused on perceived outgroup indispensability, given that there is a notable lack of research addressing individuals' attitudes regarding the perceived contributions that immigrants make to society (Mepham & Verkuyten, 2017). Ng Tseung-Wong and Verkuyten (2010), initially proposed the concept of indispensability as the perception that a group (e.g., immigrants) constitutes an essential component in defining a superordinate group (Guerra et al., 2016). According to Guerra and collaborators (2015), previous research on indispensability primarily addressed identity indispensability (i.e., perceiving minority groups as essential to a common inclusive identity). In addition, these authors proposed an additional form of indispensability which represents the perceived instrumental value of a group's contribution to achieving a desirable superordinate outcome, i.e., functional indispensability.

Although both identity and functional indispensability are positively correlated, immigrants can be perceived as indispensable to the economy of a society without necessarily being perceived as indispensable to its' national identity (Mepham & Verkuyten, 2017). According to Guerra and colleagues (2015), different immigrant groups may be perceived as indispensable for distinct reasons, which are influenced by their functional contributions or historical connections with the majority society. Indeed, these authors demonstrated in their study that the participants (i.e., Native Portuguese individuals) distinguished between different immigrant groups (Ukrainian vs. African vs. Brazilian) in assessing their identity and functional indispensability. For example, they showed that these individuals exhibited stronger perceptions of identity indispensability towards African and Brazilian immigrants, compared to Ukrainian immigrants, emphasizing the importance of a shared colonial past and enduring historical relations between the groups.

To our knowledge, the relationship between self-construals and perceived outgroup indispensability has not been explored. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the previously mentioned relationship between self-construals and ingroup-outgroup

differentiation. Considering that individuals with an independent self-construal perceive themselves as more capable of transitioning between an ingroup and outgroup (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), they may also be more likely to perceive an outgroup as more indispensable for the national identity and functioning of the society, comparing to individuals with an interdependent self-construal.

Finally, several studies have demonstrated that perceived outgroup indispensability is associated with less negative intergroup outcomes and a more favorable assessment of minorities (e.g., immigrants), fostering more positive attitudes towards them (e.g., Mepham & Verkuyten, 2017; Guerra et al., 2016; Verkuyten et al., 2014 as cited in., Guerra et al., 2015). Indeed, in Guerra and colleagues (2015), the greater native Portuguese perceived Brazilian immigrants as being indispensable either to the functioning of the society, or the national identity, the lower the degree of social distance they preferred to maintain from these immigrants. Hence, we proposed that individuals' self-construals impact prejudice towards immigrants via perceived outgroup indispensability. Such that priming the independent self-construal (vs. interdependent and control) triggers a higher perception of identity and functional indispensability, and this in turn relates to a lower endorsement of prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants (H3).

### **1.3. Brazilian immigration in Portugal**

According to recent reports, the Brazilian nationality remains the main foreign community living in Portugal (SEF, 2023). In fact, the migration history between Portugal and Brazil has been extensive and diverse, encompassing several waves throughout time (Fernandes et al., 2021). The first wave was characterized by skilled Brazilian migrants, that contributed to the modernization of Portuguese society and economy from the 1970s to the 1990s. This was followed by a second wave, beginning in the late 1990s, that was characterized by a substantially larger number of migrants with diverse social backgrounds. Finally, the third and fourth waves were characterized by larger increases in the number of immigrants and a greater diversity of backgrounds. Even though research suggest that Brazilian immigrants gradually integrated into Portuguese society, various obstacles have been identified (Padilla, 2005). Indeed, Brazilian immigrants report experiencing discrimination due to prejudice associated with immigration or with being an immigrant in Portugal (Costa, 2021). In addition, although Portugal and Brazil share a common official language, linguistic prejudice is also present in various contexts within Portuguese society (e.g., Ribeiro et al., 2021)

## **1.4. The Present Study**

The main goal of the current study was to examine the impact of self-construals on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants in Portugal. Specifically, we examined the effects of priming individuals' self-construals (independent vs. interdependent vs. control) on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants, perceived outgroup indispensability, and perceived symbolic threat. Furthermore, we examined whether the effect of self-construals on prejudice occurred via perceived outgroup indispensability and symbolic threat.

Drawing on the previous research discussed in the literature review, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Priming individual's independent self-construals, which are related to a less pronounced ingroup-outgroup distinction, triggers lower levels of prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants, compared to priming individuals' interdependent self-construals which foster a sharper distinction, and a neutral, unrelated, control condition.

H2: Perceptions of symbolic threat mediate the effect of priming self-construals on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants. Such that priming the independent self-construal (vs. interdependent and control) triggers a lower perception of symbolic threat, and this in turn relates to less prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants.

H3: Perceptions of outgroup indispensability mediate the effect of priming self-construals on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants. Such that priming the independent self-construal (vs. interdependent and control) triggers a higher perception of identity and functional indispensability, and this in turn relates to a lower endorsement of prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants.





## CHAPTER 2

# Methods

### 2.1. Design

The present study used a single-factor between-subject design and participants were randomly allocated to one of three experimental conditions, corresponding to three levels of the independent variable: a control vs. independent self-construal vs. interdependent self-construal.

### 2.2. Participants

Sample size was previously determined using a power analysis conducted with MedPower (Kenny, 2017). Based on previous research, it was estimated medium size effects (0.39) of the two mediator variables on the outcome variable (paths b). Considering the lack of previous research examining the effect of self-construals on the mediators and outcome variables, small size effects (0.14) were conservatively estimated. Results showed that for the present study, a minimum of 397 participants was required to get a power of 0.8.

We used convenience sampling and participants were recruited via social media (i.e., *Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp*) and personal contacts of the investigator. The study was conducted online using Qualtrics. Inclusion criteria for participation were having Portuguese nationality and being older than 18 years old. 293 individuals participated in the study, however, considering the goal of the research, participants were screened for double nationality, and were not included in the statistical analysis ( $n=20$ ). Additionally, we excluded 24 participants who failed the attention checks, one participant that provided inappropriate responses, and 123 for having incomplete surveys (i.e., did not reply to the sociodemographic questions, were not exposed to the manipulation, or did not reply to any of the items). The final sample included 125 participants (39 in the control condition, 46 in the independent condition, 40 in the interdependent condition) and was underpowered according to the a priori power analysis conducted. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 73 years old (see Table 3.2.). The majority of participants identified as female, completed a bachelor's degree, were employed, stated that they are coping on present income, indicated that they perceive themselves as a White Person / White Portuguese / of European origin, and as politically centered (see Table 2.1 for complete demographics).

**Table 2.1.***Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants*

	Total		Control		Independent Self- Construal		Interdependent Self-Construal	
	<i>N</i> = 125		<i>n</i> = 39		<i>n</i> = 46		<i>n</i> = 40	
Gender								
Female	95	76 %	31	79.5 %	31	67.4 %	33	82.5 %
Male	30	24 %	8	20.5 %	15	32.6 %	7	17.5 %
Other	0	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %
I prefer not to answer this question.	0	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %
Education								
Elementary school	3	2.4 %	2	5.1 %	1	2.2 %		
High school	49	39.2 %	13	33.3 %	22	47.8 %	14	35 %
Bachelor's degree	56	44.8 %	15	38.5 %	18	39.1 %	23	57.5 %
Master's degree/PhD	17	13.6 %	9	23.1 %	5	10.9 %	3	7.5 %
I do not know.	0	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %
Employment status								
Student	19	15.2 %	8	20.5 %	5	10.9 %	6	15 %
Unemployed	5	4 %	1	2.6 %	2	4.3 %	2	5 %
Employed	86	68.8 %	25	64.1 %	32	69.6 %	29	72.5 %
Retired	11	8.8 %	3	7.7 %	6	13 %	2	5 %
Other	4	3.2 %	2	5.1 %	1	2.2 %	1	2.5 %
Satisfaction with current Income								
Comfortable	26	20.8 %	9	23.1 %	8	17.4 %	9	22.5 %
Enough to Survive	66	52.8 %	20	51.3 %	25	54.3 %	21	52.5 %
Difficult	30	24 %	9	23.1 %	11	23.9 %	10	25 %
Very Difficult	3	2.4 %	1	2.6 %	2	4.3 %		
Perceived ethnic origin								
White person/white Portuguese/of European origin	120	96 %	36	92.3 %	46	100.0 %	38	95 %
Black person / Black Portuguese / of African descent / of African origin	1	.8 %	1	2.6 %	0	0%	0	0%
Asian person / Portuguese of Asian origin / of Asian origin	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Romani person / Romani Portuguese / Roma / of Romani origin	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other	1	.8 %	1	2.6 %	0	0 %	0	0 %
Mixed origin	3	2.4 %	1	2.6 %	0	0 %	2	5 %
Political Orientation								
1 – Left	8	6.5 %	4	10.5 %	2	4.3 %	2	5.1 %
2	9	7.3 %	3	7.9 %	2	4.3 %	4	10.3 %
3	28	22.8 %	7	18.4 %	13	28.3 %	8	20.5 %
4	40	32.5 %	12	31.6 %	17	37 %	11	28.2 %

5	24	19.5 %	7	18.4 %	6	13 %	11	28.2 %
6	8	6.5 %	2	5.3 %	3	6.5 %	3	7.7 %
7 – Right	6	4.9 %	3	7.9 %	3	6.5 %	0	0 %

## 2.3. Procedure

All materials were approved by the ISCTE Ethics Council (47/2024). All materials were presented in Portuguese and both the manipulation, and all measures used in the survey were translated from English to Portuguese. First, participants provided their informed consent and answered to sociodemographic questions. Next, informed about the importance of being in a calm environment with minimal distractions while participating in the study, they were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions: independent self-construal vs. interdependent self-construal vs. control condition.

After reading one of the three manipulation materials, participants filled in a survey that included all the measures of interest in a randomized order: perceived outgroup indispensability (Guerra et al., 2016), perceived symbolic threat (Stephan et al., 1999), prejudice towards immigrants (Makashvili et al., 2018; Stephan et al., 1999), and a manipulation check (D'amico & Scrima, 2016). In addition, two attention checks were present throughout the survey: “Please do not respond to this item. Do not select any answer on a scale of 1 to 7. This question is used to detect random answers.”. In the end, participants were debriefed and thanked for having participated in the study (see full materials in Appendix A-M).

## 2.4. Materials and Measures

### 2.4.1. Demographics

Participants indicated their age, gender categorization, level of education, employment status, satisfaction with present income, perceived ethnic origin and political orientation (see Appendix B for the Portuguese versions). Additionally, to determine if they met the criteria to participate in the study, they also indicated their nationality and country of birth (see Table 3.2. for descriptive statistics).

### 2.4.2. Manipulation of Self-Construals

We used an adaptation of the similar/different prime technique to manipulate participant's self-construals. This technique was introduced by Trafimow and colleagues (1991) and included different instructions for the independent and the interdependent conditions. The participants assigned to the independent self-construal condition were instructed to: "For the next two minutes, please think and write about what makes you different from your family and friends. What do you expect yourself to do?", whereas the participants assigned to the interdependent self-construal condition were instructed to: "For the next two minutes, please think and write about what you have in common with your family and friends. What do they expect you to do?" (see Appendix C-D for the Portuguese versions).

Previous studies with this priming technique did not have a control condition. However, the lack of control conditions makes it more difficult to understand the direction of the effects (Cross et al., 2011). Thus, we included a control condition similar to the other conditions but where Participants were instructed to think of a neutral, unrelated topic: "For the next two minutes, please think about your favorite color and write five objects that are the same color, and five objects that are a different color" (see Appendix E for the Portuguese version).

It is important to mention that given the variety of different priming techniques in the literature, the similar/different prime technique seemed to be the most appropriate for the current research, as a meta-analysis by Oyserman and Lee (2008) demonstrated that this priming approach had the strongest effects on relationality tasks (Cross et al., 2011).

### **2.4.3. Perceived Symbolic Threat**

Perceived symbolic threat was measured using an adapted version of the Symbolic Threat scale developed by Stephan and collaborators (1999). Participants indicated, on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) their agreement with seven items (e.g., "Immigration from Brazil is undermining Portuguese culture."; "Brazilian immigrants should not have to accept Portuguese ways." ;see full scale in Appendix F). When required, the items were reverse-scored to capture the participants' perceptions of symbolic threat (i.e., items 3, 5, and 7). We created a composite score, where higher values mean higher levels of perceived symbolic threat ( $\alpha = .704$ ).

### **2.4.4. Perceived Outgroup Indispensability**

Perceived outgroup indispensability was measured using an adapted version of the Identity and Functional Indispensability scale (Guerra et al., 2016), in which participants indicated, on

a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) their agreement with 12 items. The scale was composed of two dimensions (see full scale in Appendix G-H): *Identity Indispensability*, assessed with six items (e.g., “I would have a very different conception of Portugal if Brazilian immigrants were not part of it.”), and *Functional Indispensability*, assessed with six items (e.g., “The economic future of Portugal depends on contributions of Brazilian immigrants.”). We created two composite scores ( $\alpha = .716$ ;  $\alpha = .918$ ), where higher values mean higher levels of perceived identity and functional indispensability.

#### **2.4.5. Prejudice towards Brazilian Immigrants**

To measure prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants, we used two different scales (see full scales in Appendix I-J): Attitudes toward out-groups scale (Stephan et al., 1999) and Social Distance Scale adapted from Makashvili and collaborators (2018). In the adapted version of the Attitudes toward out-groups scale (Stephan et al., 1999), participants indicated to what extent they felt 12 different reactions toward Brazilian immigrants, on a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extreme*). The scale included five evaluative reactions (e.g., disliking and acceptance) and seven emotional reactions (e.g., hostility and admiration). When required, the items were reverse-scored to capture the negativity of the participants’ attitudes (i.e., items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12). We created a composite score, where higher values mean more negative attitudes ( $\alpha = .863$ ).

In the Social Distance Scale, adapted from a study by Makashvili and collaborators (2018), participants indicated, on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) their agreement with 8 items (e.g., “I would marry Brazilian immigrants.”; “I would accept Brazilian immigrants in my country.”). All items were reverse-scored (i.e., items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9”). We created a composite score ( $\alpha = .969$ ), where higher values mean higher levels of perceived social distance (i.e., behavioral component of prejudice).

#### **2.4.6. Manipulation Check**

We used an adapted version of the Short version of Singelis’s (1994) Self-Construal Scale (D’amico & Scrima, 2016). Participants indicated, on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) their agreement with 10 items. The scale was composed of two dimensions (see full scale in Appendix K-L): the first dimension, *Independent dimension*, included five items: e.g., “I do my own thing, regardless of what others think.”; “I’d rather say ‘No’ directly, than risk being misunderstood.”; the second dimension, *Interdependent*

*dimension*, included five items: e.g., “I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in.”; “I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I am not happy with the group.”. We created two composite scores ( $\alpha = .759$ ,  $\alpha = .722$ ), where higher values mean higher levels of independent self-construal and higher levels of interdependent self-construals.

## CHAPTER 3

# Results

The statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (29). We first conducted One-way Analyses of Variance with orthogonal contrasts to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation. These analyses were also performed to evaluate the effect of the manipulation on the dependent variables (i.e., perceived symbolic threat, perceived identity indispensability, perceived functional indispensability, attitudes towards immigrants, and social distance). Additionally, an exploratory analysis (i.e., bivariate correlations and mediation analysis) was conducted to further examine the relationships between the variables of interest.

### 3.1. Preliminary Analysis – Manipulation Check and Test of Assumptions

To test the effectiveness of the manipulation, we conducted One-way between subject ANOVAs with condition (independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal, control) as the independent variable and the manipulation checks for both independent and interdependent self-construal as the dependent variables. We computed two orthogonal contrasts: C1 independent self-construal vs pooled interdependent self-construal and control condition, C2 interdependent self-construal vs control.

These analyses enabled the comparison of the activation levels of each self-construal (i.e., independent and interdependent) across the different groups. Contrary to our expectations, the main effect of condition on the activation of the independent self-construal was not significant ( $F(2, 109) = 1.62, p = .20$ ) and the contrast analysis revealed that the mean scores in the independent self-construal condition ( $M = 4.85, SD = 1.33$ ), interdependent self-construal condition ( $M = 4.31, SD = 1.53$ ) and the control condition ( $M = 4.75, SD = 1.26$ ) were not significantly different from each other. The analysis regarding the activation levels of the interdependent self-construal showed a significant main effect of the experimental condition ( $F(2, 109) = 3.33, p = .04$ ). Orthogonal contrasts (C1) revealed that, contrary to the predicted, participants in the independent self-construal condition presented a higher activation level of the interdependent self-construal ( $M = 4.21, SD = 1.24$ ) relative to those in both interdependent self-construal ( $M = 3.60, SD = 1.23$ ) and control conditions ( $M = 3.61, SD =$



1.14),  $t(109) = 2.58, p = .01$ . No significant difference was found between the interdependent self-construal condition and the control condition (C2),  $t(109) = -.03, p = .98$ .

Notwithstanding, preliminary analyses were carried out to assess if the assumptions of the present investigation were satisfied. The assumption of independence was verified as all the observations within each group were independent of each other. The assumption of normality was verified according to a Shapiro-Wilk test for the activation levels of the independent self-construal ( $W_{Independent} = .98, p = .45, W_{Interdependent} = .97, p = .40, W_{Control} = .97, p = .41$ ), for the activation levels of the interdependent self-construal ( $W_{Independent} = .98, p = .68, W_{Interdependent} = .97, p = .35, W_{Control} = .96, p = .22$ ), perceived symbolic threat ( $W_{Independent} = .98, p = .64, W_{Interdependent} = .98, p = .79, W_{Control} = .98, p = .60$ ), perceived identity indispensability ( $W_{Independent} = .97, p = .29, W_{Interdependent} = .96, p = .17, W_{Control} = .98, p = .71$ ), perceived functional indispensability ( $W_{Independent} = .96, p = .09, W_{Interdependent} = .97, p = .45, W_{Control} = .97, p = .30$ ), and attitudes towards immigrants ( $W_{Independent} = .95, p = .06, W_{Interdependent} = .98, p = .61, W_{Control} = .98, p = .73$ ). However, despite the fact that this assumption was not met according to the Shapiro-Wilk test for social distance ( $W_{Independent} = .82, p < .001, W_{Interdependent} = .89, p < .001, W_{Control} = .88, p < .01$ ), given the sample size ( $n > 30$ ), the Central Limit Theorem allowed to assume an approximately normal distribution of social distance in the three groups. The assumption of equal variances was verified according to Levene's test for homogeneity of variance for the activation levels of the independent self-construal ( $F(2, 109) = 1.45, p = .24$ ), for the activation levels of the interdependent self-construal ( $F(2, 109) = .31, p = .74$ ), perceived symbolic threat ( $F(2, 115) = .30, p = .74$ ), perceived identity indispensability ( $F(2, 109) = .44, p = .65$ ), perceived functional indispensability ( $F(2, 117) = .82, p = .44$ ), attitudes towards immigrants ( $F(2, 119) = .73, p = .49$ ), and social distance ( $F(2, 116) = 2.58, p = .08$ ).

### **3.2. Main Analysis – Impact of Self-Construals on the Dependent Variables**

Despite the lack of significant effects of the experimental manipulation on the manipulation check, we performed additional One-way Analyses of Variance to examine whether the manipulation produced significant differences in the mean scores of the main dependent variables (i.e., perceived symbolic threat, perceived identity indispensability, perceived functional indispensability, attitudes towards immigrants and social distance) (Table 3.1.). Once again, we computed two orthogonal contrasts: C1 independent self-construal vs pooled

interdependent self-construal and control condition, C2 interdependent self-construal vs control.

The analysis regarding perceived symbolic threat showed a significant main effect of the experimental condition ( $F(2, 115) = 5.01, p = .01$ ). However, contrary to the predicted, orthogonal contrasts (C1) revealed that no significant difference was found between the independent self-construal condition and the pooled interdependent self-construal and control conditions,  $t(115) = -1.61, p = .11$  (see Table 3.1.). Orthogonal contrasts (C2) also revealed that, contrary to the predicted, participants in the interdependent self-construal condition reported lower perceptions of symbolic threat relative to those in the control condition,  $t(115) = -2.74, p = .01$ .

Concerning perceived identity indispensability (see Table 3.1), the analysis revealed that, contrary to the hypothesis, the main effect of condition was not significant ( $F(2, 109) = 1.03, p = .36$ ). Orthogonal contrasts (C1) also showed that the mean scores in the independent self-construal condition were not different from those in the pooled interdependent self-construal and control conditions  $t(109) = .62, p = .54$ , and the latter were not different from each other (C2)  $t(109) = -1.29, p = .20$ . A similar pattern of findings was found for perceived functional indispensability: the main effect of condition was not significant ( $F(2, 117) = .82, p = .45$ ), and there were no differences between the independent self-construal condition and the pooled interdependent and control conditions (C1)  $t(117) = 1.20, p = .23$ , as well as between the interdependent self-construal and control conditions (C2)  $t(117) = .44, p = .66$ .

The analysis regarding attitudes towards immigrants showed a significant main effect of the experimental condition ( $F(2, 119) = 4.39, p = .02$ ). Orthogonal contrasts (C1) revealed that, in line with our expectations, participants in the independent self-construal condition expressed less negative attitudes towards immigrants relative to those in both interdependent self-construal and control conditions,  $t(119) = -2.96, p < .01$  (see Table 3.1.). No significant difference was found between the interdependent self-construal condition and the control condition (C2),  $t(119) = .13, p = .90$ .

Finally, the analysis regarding social distance revealed that, contrary to the hypothesis, the main effect of condition was not significant ( $F(2, 116) = .25, p = .78$ ). Orthogonal contrasts (C1) also showed that the mean scores in the independent self-construal condition were not different from those in the pooled interdependent self-construal and control conditions  $t(116) = .70, p = .49$ , and the latter were not different from each other (C2)  $t(116) = .12, p = .91$ .

**Table 3.1.***Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance of the main dependent variables*

Measure	Control		Independent Self-Construal		Interdependent Self-Construal		<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Perceived symbolic threat	4.23	1.02	3.61	.94	3.59	1.06	5.01**	.08
Perceived identity indispensability	3.15	1.13	3.12	1.13	2.81	1.06	1.03	.02
Perceived functional indispensability	3.02	1.36	3.40	1.45	3.16	1.30	.82	.01
Attitudes towards immigrants	2.82	.98	2.32	.90	2.84	.83	4.39*	.07
Social distance	3.92	2.10	4.25	2.46	3.98	2.21	.25	.004

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### 3.3. Exploratory Analyses – Correlations and an Exploratory Mediation Analysis

Considering the failure to prime the independent and interdependent self-construals and the non-significant impact of the manipulation on most of the outcome measures, we decided to conduct some exploratory analyses to better understand our pattern of findings. Our strategy was two-fold: first we examined correlations between all variables of interest, as well as key demographics (i.e., age, gender, level of education, satisfaction with present income, and political orientation). Based on these findings, we explored a potential alternative mediation model.

Bivariate correlations between the variables were calculated (see Table 3.2.). In general, demographics were not significantly associated with any of the variables of interest. Nevertheless, perceived functional indispensability was weakly correlated with both age ( $> -.10$ ) and level of education ( $> .10$ ). Perceived symbolic threat was also weakly correlated with level of education ( $> -.10$ ), satisfaction with present income ( $> .10$ ), and political

orientation ( $> .10$ ). Contrary to the expected, the self-assessed self-construals did not show significant correlations with any of the dependent variables.

However, some unexpected significant correlations emerged between perceived identity indispensability and both perceived symbolic threat and attitudes towards immigrants. Perceived identity indispensability was positively correlated with perceived symbolic threat and negative attitudes towards immigrants. That is, a higher perception of identity indispensability was related to a higher perception of symbolic threat as well as to more negative attitudes towards immigrants. This positive relation is not consistent with previous research thus we conducted additional correlations to inspect this finding. We examined correlations between each single item of the perceived identity indispensability scale and the outcome variables (see Table 3.3.). There were no significant correlations between the perceived identity indispensability items and social distance. Unexpectedly, items three, five and six of perceived identity indispensability showed a positive correlation with perceived symbolic threat. Additionally, items three, four, five and six were also, contrary to the expected, positively correlated with attitudes towards immigrants. Of particular interest, the coefficients demonstrated that the expected negative correlations between perceived identity indispensability and perceived symbolic threat and attitudes towards immigrants were only observed with the item related to Portugal's history i.e., item two. Possible explanations are discussed in the General Discussion section.

Despite this, it is also relevant to highlight that, in line with previous studies, perceived symbolic threat was strongly ( $> .50$ ) and positively correlated with negative attitudes towards immigrants (see Table 3.2.), that is, a higher perception of symbolic threat was related to more negative attitudes towards immigrants. Based on this correlational analysis we decided to explore a new conceptual model, with perceived identity indispensability as the predictor variable, since recent research demonstrates that the more a minority outgroup is perceived as indispensable, the more it may be perceived as a threat (Verkuyten, 2024), attitudes towards immigrants as the outcome variable, and perceived symbolic threat as the mediating variable.

**Table 3.2.***Bivariate Correlations for Study Variables*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	45.27	14.32	—											
2. Gender			.18*	—										
3. Level of education			-.18*	-.17	—									
4. Satisfaction with present income			-.03	.01	-.29**	—								
5. Political orientation			.14	.16	-.02	-.01	—							
6. Perceived symbolic threat	3.79	1.04	.03	-.04	-.22*	.21*	.28**	—						
7. Perceived identity indispensability	3.03	1.11	-.01	.10	.11	.01	.03	.25**	—					
8. Perceived functional indispensability	3.21	1.38	-.25**	-.01	.24**	-.15	-.17	-.35**	.16	—				

9. Attitudes towards immigrants	2.65	.93	.07	-.09	-.1	.09	.09	.55**	.3**	-.44**	—			
10. Social distance	4.07	2.26	.01	-.03	-.06	.04	-.03	-.17		-.01	.09	—		
11. Independent self-construal	4.65	1.38	.17	-.08	-.23*	.06	.08	.12	-.04	-.001	-.01	-.05	—	
12. Interdependent self-construal	3.84	1.23	.09	.24*	.04	.03	.02	-.03	.1	.17	-.07	.03	.01	—

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\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 3.3.***Bivariate Correlations for Perceived Identity Indispensability Items*

Items and Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Item 1	—									
2. Item 2	.15	—								
3. Item 3	.32**	.13	—							
4. Item 4	.58**	.25**	.25*	—						
5. Item 5	.41**	.13	.22*	.59**	—					
6. Item 6	.40**	.13	.65**	.25*	.28**	—				
7. Perceived symbolic threat	.1	-.23*	.25*	.1	.26**	.35**	—			
8. Perceived functional indispensability	.07	.5**	.1	.05	-.15	.12	-.32**	—		
9. Attitudes towards immigrants	.14	-.22*	.26**	.22*	.37**	.29**	.51**	-.43**	—	
10. Social distance	-.07	-.03	-.09	.15	.15	-.16	-.17	-.05	.1	—

*Note.* Item 1 = “I would have a very different conception of Portugal if Brazilian immigrants were not part of it.”, Item 2 = 2. “You can’t possibly describe Portuguese history without speaking of Brazilian immigrants.”, Item 3 = “Portugal would be a different country without the presence of Brazilian immigrants.”, Item 4 = “I would feel very different about what it means to be Portuguese if Brazilian immigrants were not part of the country.”, Item 5 = “The meaning of what it is to be Portuguese would change if Brazilian immigrants were not part of Portugal.”, Item 6 = “Without Brazilian immigrants, Portugal would feel like a different country.”

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

### 3.3.1. The Indirect Effect of Perceived Symbolic Threat

To analyze the indirect effect of perceived identity indispensability on attitudes towards immigrants through perceived symbolic threat, we used Model 4 of SPSS Process macro

(Hayes, 2018), with bootstrapping with 5,000 samples and 95% bias corrected confidence intervals.

Perceived identity indispensability was positively related to perceived symbolic threat, such that higher perceptions of identity indispensability were related to higher perceptions of symbolic threat. Perceived symbolic threat was also positively related to attitudes towards immigrants, such that higher perceptions of symbolic threat were related to a higher endorsement of negative attitudes towards immigrants (Table 3.4).

Finally, the indirect effect of perceived identity indispensability via perceived symbolic threat was significant for attitudes towards immigrants (see Table 3.4.). Moreover, it is relevant to highlight that social distance was not included in the model as an outcome variable since it did not show significant correlations with any of the mediator and predictor variables.

**Table 3.4.**

*Indirect Effects of Perceived Identity Indispensability on Attitudes Towards Immigrants via Perceived Symbolic Threat*

					R <sup>2</sup>
Model 1	Outcome: perceived symbolic threat				.07
		Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Perceived identity indispensability	.24	.09	2.72	.01
Model 2	Outcome: attitudes towards immigrants				.36
		Coeff.	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Perceived identity indispensability	.14	.07	2.06	.04
	Perceived symbolic threat	.48	.07	6.74	.000
<i>Bootstrapping results for indirect effect</i>					
Indirect effect of Perceived identity indispensability on attitudes towards immigrants <i>via</i> perceived symbolic threat	Effect	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	
	.11	.05	.01	.22	

Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. 5000 bootstrap samples; LL – lower limit; UL – upper limit; CI – Confident interval

<sup>1</sup> We replicated the analysis using demographic variables that were significantly correlated with perceived symbolic threat (i.e., level of education, satisfaction with present income, and political orientation). No changes were observed in the model.





## CHAPTER 4

# Discussion

Researchers acknowledge that within culture differences in self-construals may account for a variety of psychological phenomena (Cross & Madson, 1997, as cited in., Cross et al., 2011). Indeed, several priming studies that manipulated self-construals have demonstrated innumerable implications across various domains (e.g., Utz, 2004; Gardner et al., 1999; Shao et al., 2018; Han & Humphreys, 2016). In the context of intergroup relations, even though it has been demonstrated that interdependent self-construals are associated with less positive intergroup outcomes (e.g., Tawa & Montoya, 2018; Wang et al., 2015), to the best of our knowledge, self-construals have not been investigated as potential predictors of prejudice towards immigrants. Accordingly, the current study aimed to examine the effects of individuals' self-construals (independent vs. interdependent) on prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants, perceived outgroup indispensability, and perceived symbolic threat. Furthermore, it sought to examine whether the perceptions of outgroup indispensability and symbolic threat explained the relationship between the self-construals and prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants.

Overall, the results did not support the proposed hypotheses. Contrary to the predicted, priming the independent and interdependent self-construals did not impact the majority of the outcome measures. A possible explanation for these results can be found by looking at the implementation of the manipulation.

As previously noted, the study was conducted online, and while this type of data collection offers several advantages (e.g., lower response time, simplicity of data input), it also holds certain limitations, such as lower response rates, and potential measurement errors (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). Accordingly, given that the manipulation applied in the present study was converted from a paper-and-pencil format to an online format, measurement errors might have occurred (Arnau et al., 2001, as cited in., Granello & Wheaton, 2004), hindering the effectiveness of the manipulation. Furthermore, the original priming technique developed by Trafimow and colleagues (1991) did not incorporate a neutral or no-prime control condition. As a result, we created our own, which may also have compromised the effectiveness of the manipulation. Specifically, in the control condition, we instructed participants to think about their favorite color and to write down five objects that were the

same color, and five objects that were a different color. Therefore, it is possible that we might have activated participants' independent self-construal, by asking them to think about a personal characteristic (i.e., favorite color).

Nevertheless, to gain a better understanding of our pattern of findings we conducted exploratory correlational analyses from which we highlight three major findings: 1) perceived symbolic threat was positively correlated with negative attitudes towards immigrants; 2) perceived identity indispensability was positively correlated with perceived symbolic threat and negative attitudes towards immigrants; 3) perceived symbolic threat mediated the relationship between perceived identity indispensability and negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Regarding our first finding, the positive association between perceived symbolic threat and negative attitudes towards immigrants is in line with previous research. Indeed, research has consistently demonstrated the importance of symbolic threat for the development of negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration (Blalock 1967; Blumer 1958; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2018; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002, as cited in., Davidov et al., 2020). Moreover, this association has also been observed in Portugal. A study by Vala and colleagues (2006) demonstrated that cultural threat significantly predicted opposition to immigration. Furthermore, Gonçalves and collaborators (2023) also found that perceived intergroup threat (i.e., realistic threat, symbolic threat, and zero-sum beliefs) was positively associated with unfavorable attitudes towards immigrants.

Regarding our second finding, the positive association between perceived identity indispensability and symbolic threat and negative attitudes, was not consistent with previous research. According to Fluit and colleagues (2023), most previous studies showed that perceived outgroup indispensability is associated with more favorable views of immigrants, not only within the Portuguese context (Guerra et al., 2015) but also in other countries, including the United States (Guerra et al., 2016), Malaysia (Verkuyten & Khan, 2012), the Netherlands (Mepham & Verkuyten, 2017; Verkuyten et al., 2014), and Mauritius (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010). Thus, our current findings were surprising. Next, we discuss the potential explanations for the positive relation between perceived identity indispensability and perceived symbolic threat drawing on research on the Threat-Benefit Model (Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2016).

A key principle of this model is the general inclination of the local population to perceive an immigrant group as both beneficial and threatening to the host society. Although most studies showed the beneficial impact of perceiving an outgroup as indispensable, recent

research indicates that in certain contexts, majority non-immigrants members may respond more negatively to indispensable minority groups, as their perceived indispensability suggests a capacity to demand equality and justice, which could be seen as a threat to the majority's power and the established social hierarchy (Verkuyten, 2024). In addition, according to this Threat-Benefit Model, higher perceptions of identity indispensability are associated with blurred intergroup boundaries, which can be perceived as threatening the majority's identity (Guimond et al., 2010; Thomsen et al., 2008, as cited in., Verkuyten, 2024), a central element of symbolic threat. Therefore, the positive association between perceived identity indispensability and perceived symbolic threat could be interpreted through the lens of the Threat-Benefit Model.

We also predicted a negative relationship between perceived identity indispensability and negative attitudes towards immigrants, based on previous studies suggesting that stronger perceptions among majority members of minorities as indispensable for the identity and for the functioning of society are associated with reduced outgroup prejudice (Guerra et al., 2015; Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2010; Verkuyten & Kahn, 2012; Mephram & Verkuyten, 2017; Verkuyten et al., 2014; Guerra et al., 2016, as cited in Fluit et al., 2023). However, our correlational analysis showed the opposite pattern as perceived identity indispensability was related to more negative attitudes towards Brazilian immigrants. A possible explanation for this unexpected result may also be found in research on the Threat-Benefit Model. In line with this model, as perceptions of a minority outgroup's indispensability increase, so does its perception as a threat, which has associated negative implications for intergroup relations, such as outgroup prejudice (Verkuyten, 2024). Indeed, considering all the available evidence, the Threat-Benefit Model also provides a potential lens to understand our correlational findings. Our exploratory findings showed that perceived identity indispensability was positively associated with negative attitudes towards immigrants and this relationship was explained by perceived symbolic threat. That is, such a higher perception of identity indispensability was associated with a higher perception of symbolic threat, which, in turn, was related to more negative attitudes towards immigrants. Subsequent studies should be conducted to explore these relationships, given that they are not consistent with the findings of most previous research. Nevertheless, these findings contribute to advancing the understanding of the Threat-benefit model and its application in elucidating the mechanisms that underlie intergroup relations in the context of immigration.

Finally, we address a pattern of findings that we believe merits further examination and discussion. In our exploratory analysis, we analyzed correlations between the items from the

perceived identity indispensability scale and the outcome variables. Overall, results showed that only item two (i.e., “You can’t possibly describe Portuguese history without speaking of Brazilian immigrants.”) was positively correlated with perceived functional indispensability. This finding is partially aligned with prior research indicating that while both identity and functional indispensability are positively correlated, immigrants can be perceived as functionally indispensable for a society without necessarily being perceived as indispensable to its’ national identity (Mephram & Verkuyten, 2017). As discussed above, the results of our exploratory analysis showed that, overall, the identity indispensability items were positively correlated with perceived symbolic threat and negative attitudes towards immigrants, and this is not aligned with prior research. Beyond the above discussed theoretical speculation of the complex intertwined relations between perceived indispensability and perceived threat, one additional explanation could be that participants might have interpreted the items negatively. For example, when asked whether Portugal would be a different country without the presence of Brazilian immigrants (i.e., item three), participants may have interpreted this as implying that Portugal would be a different and better country. Indeed, the previous data collected in Portugal assessing Brazilian immigrants perceived indispensability was collected in 2015, when the migration context was rather different. Thus, the interpretation of some of the items may have been influenced by current contextual factors, such as the rising number of Brazilian immigrants in the country and mostly the widespread use of social media in disseminating prejudice against immigrants, with anti-immigration discourse leading to harmful consequences within and beyond digital platforms (Costa, 2021).

In addition, the expected negative correlations between perceived identity indispensability and both perceived symbolic threat and attitudes toward immigrants were only observed exclusively regarding the item number two. One explanation for this phenomenon is in line with a study conducted by Guerra and colleagues (2015), who propose that the perception of indispensability may vary among different immigrant groups, which may reflect their functional contributions or historical ties with the host society. Accordingly, the study revealed that Native Portuguese individuals considered African and Brazilian immigrants as more indispensable to define the national identity compared to Ukrainian immigrants, highlighting the significance of the shared colonial history and extensive historical connections between the groups. Therefore, the anticipated outcomes in this particular item contribute to demonstrating the considerable importance of historical relationships on perceptions of identity indispensability and their positive implications for intergroup relations. Moreover, the study also demonstrated that the more native Portuguese perceived Brazilian

immigrants as indispensable to either the national identity or the functioning of society, the less social distance they were preferred to maintain from those immigrants. However, the current results showed that there were no significant correlations between the perceived identity indispensability items and social distance. Possible explanations may be found in the limitations discussed in the following section.

#### **4.1. Limitations and Future Directions**

As with any study, the current research is subject to certain limitations that we consider important to acknowledge. Firstly, we were unable to recruit the expected sample size to ensure adequate statistical power, and the sample was composed of a convenience sample. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously, and further research is essential to validate and replicate these results. Secondly, an analysis of the participants' demographics suggests that the research sample does not adequately represent the broader Portuguese population, limiting the generalizability of the findings, given that a great majority of our participants identified as female.

Additionally, beyond the previously mentioned issues concerning the manipulation and its effectiveness, it is also important to underscore that the scale used to measure the activation of the self-construals, namely the Singelis Self-Construal Scale - Short Version, has, to our knowledge, been validated exclusively in an Italian population (D'amico & Scrima, 2016). Given that the current study was conducted within a different context and population, this may have influenced the findings of the initial study, rather than the manipulation itself. Therefore, although the results obtained with the short version appear highly promising within the Italian population, further research involving diverse populations, including the Portuguese, is necessary to validate the scale's psychometric properties.

In light of the findings of the present study, we would like to emphasize future directions for research on perceived outgroup indispensability and prejudice towards Brazilian immigrants in Portugal. These findings are correlational, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships between the variables. Consequently, it is important to replicate this study using an experimental design that manipulates both perceptions of identity and functional indispensability to determine whether these would result in more negative attitudes towards immigrants, through perceptions of symbolic and economic threat.

Despite Portugal's frequent recognition in various international instruments and indicators for its positive values regarding cultural diversity (Gonçalves et al., 2023), Brazilian immigrants

in the country have reported to having experienced prejudice and discrimination within the general society and in specific domains, such as the labor market and education, among others (e.g., Dos Santos, 2013; Padilla, 2005).

Therefore, we emphasize the importance of continuing research on the perception of Brazilian immigrants as indispensable to both the identity and functioning of Portuguese society, with the aim of fostering positive intergroup outcomes. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that, given the historical relations between these groups and the potential blurring of boundaries, there must be an active awareness of associated perceived threats, while considering them as one dimension of immigrant appraisal, rather than treating it as the exclusive focus.

## **4.2. Conclusion**

The current research showed that self-construals did not impact intergroup attitudes towards Brazilian immigrants, highlighting the need for further research to examine the role of self-construals in intergroup relations. However, correlational evidence revealed that perceiving immigrants as being indispensable to the society's identity was associated with negative intergroup outcomes, namely negative attitudes towards them and perceived symbolic threat. These findings are not in line with most previous research suggesting that perceived identity indispensability is associated with positive intergroup outcomes and lower perceptions of symbolic threat, thus they highlight the need to consider perceived identity indispensability particularly in the context of historical intergroup relationships, highlighting their importance as a contributing factor to positive intergroup relations. Indeed, the current research depicts perceived identity indispensability as a double-edged sword related to prejudice towards immigrants via perceived symbolic threat.

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## Appendix A – Informed Consent

O presente estudo surge no âmbito de um projeto de investigação a decorrer no **Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**. O estudo tem por objetivo compreender a forma como as pessoas se percebem a si próprias e na sua relação com os outros. O estudo é realizado por Inês Mendes (ines\_marques\_mendes@iscte-iul.pt) e supervisionado pela Dr. Rita Guerra (ana\_rita\_guerra@iscte-iul.pt), que poderá contactar caso pretenda esclarecer uma dúvida ou partilhar algum comentário.

A sua participação no estudo, que será muito valorizada pois irá contribuir para o avanço do conhecimento neste domínio da ciência, consiste na realização de uma pequena tarefa de escrita e no preenchimento de um breve questionário online com duração máxima estimada de 12 minutos, não existindo respostas certas ou erradas.

Podem participar no estudo pessoas com **idade superior a 18 anos**, de **nacionalidade portuguesa**, **não existindo riscos significativos** expectáveis associados à participação no estudo.

A participação no estudo é estritamente **voluntária**: pode escolher livremente participar ou não participar. Se tiver escolhido participar, pode interromper a participação em qualquer momento sem ter de prestar qualquer justificação. Para além de voluntária, a participação é também **anónima e confidencial**. Os dados obtidos destinam-se apenas a tratamento estatístico e nenhuma resposta será analisada ou reportada individualmente. Em nenhum momento do estudo precisa de se identificar.

**Declaro** ter compreendido os objetivos de quanto me foi proposto e explicado pelo/a investigador/a, ter-me sido dada oportunidade de fazer todas as perguntas sobre o presente estudo e para todas elas ter obtido resposta esclarecedora, pelo que aceito nele participar.

**Declaro** também que cumpro os critérios de participação no estudo, mencionados anteriormente.

☐ Declaro que aceito participar. (3)

☐ Declaro que não aceito participar. (4)

## Appendix B – Demographics

Qual a sua idade (por favor, utilize números para representar os anos)?

---

Identifico o meu género como:

☐ Feminino (1)

☐ Masculino (2)

☐ Outro (por favor especifique) (3)

---

☐ Prefiro não responder a esta questão. (4)

Tem nacionalidade portuguesa?

☐ Sim (1)

☐ Não (Por favor, indique a sua nacionalidade) (2)

---

Nasceu em Portugal?

- ☐ Sim (1)
- ☐ Não (Por favor, indique o país onde nasceu) (2)
- 

Qual o nível de escolaridade mais elevado que completou?

- ☐ Ensino básico (1)
- ☐ Ensino secundário (2)
- ☐ Licenciatura (3)
- ☐ Mestrado/Doutoramento (4)
- ☐ Não sei (5)
- 

Qual é a sua situação laboral atual?

- ☐ Estudante (1)
- ☐ Desempregado/a (2)
- ☐ Empregado/a (3)
- ☐ Reformado/a (4)
- ☐ Outro (5)
-



## **Appendix C – Independent Manipulation**

Durante os próximos dois minutos, por favor, pense e escreva sobre o que o/a torna diferente da sua família e amigos e sobre o que espera de si próprio/a.

---



## **Appendix D – Interdependent Manipulation**

Durante os próximos dois minutos, por favor, pense e escreva sobre o que tem em comum com a sua família e amigos e sobre o que eles esperam de si.

---

## **Appendix E – Control**

Durante os próximos dois minutos, por favor, pense na sua cor favorita e escreva cinco objetos que têm a mesma cor e cinco objetos que têm uma cor diferente.

---

## Appendix F – Perceived Symbolic Threat

Por favor, indique quanto concorda ou discorda com cada afirmação.

[illegible]

Os valores e  
crenças de  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
em relação a  
questões  
morais e  
religiosas não  
são  
compatíveis  
com as  
crenças e  
valores da  
maioria dos  
portugueses.  
(4)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Os valores e  
crenças de  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
relativamente  
às questões  
familiares e à  
socialização  
dos filhos são  
muito  
semelhantes  
aos da  
maioria dos  
portugueses.  
(5)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Os valores e  
crenças de  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
relativamente  
às relações  
sociais não  
são  
compatíveis  
com as  
crenças e  
valores da  
maioria dos

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

portugueses.  
(6)

Os/As  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
não devem  
ser  
obrigados/as  
a aceitar os  
costumes  
portugueses.  
(7)



## Appendix G – Perceived Identity Indispensability

Por favor, indique quanto concorda ou discorda com cada afirmação.

[illegible]

Portugal seria um país diferente sem a presença de imigrantes brasileiros/as. (4)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Eu sentir-me-ia muito diferente acerca do que significa ser português se os/as imigrantes brasileiros/as não fossem parte do país. (5)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

O significado do que é ser português mudaria se os/as imigrantes brasileiros/as não fizessem parte de Portugal. (6)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Sem imigrantes brasileiros/as, Portugal pareceria um país diferente. (7)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

## Appendix H – Perceived Functional Indispensability

Por favor, indique quanto concorda ou discorda com cada afirmação.

[illegible]



## Appendix I – Attitudes Towards Immigrants

Por favor, indique em que medida ...

[illegible]

brasileiros/as?  
(6)

sente desdém  
em relação a  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as?  
(7)

sente  
aprovação em  
relação a  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as?  
(8)

sente ódio em  
relação a  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as?  
(9)

sente  
simpatia em  
relação a  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as?  
(10)

sente rejeição  
em relação a  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as?  
(11)

sente carinho  
em relação a  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as?  
(12)

☐☐

## Appendix J – Social Distance

Por favor, indique quanto concorda ou discorda com cada afirmação.

[illegible]

nenhuma  
resposta na  
escala de 1 a  
7. Esta  
pergunta  
serve para  
detectar  
respostas ao  
acaso. (6)

Aceitaria  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
como meus  
conhecidos.  
(7)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Aceitaria  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
no meu país.  
(8)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Sentar-me-ia  
ao lado de  
imigrantes  
brasileiros/as  
num  
transporte  
público. (9)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

## Appendix K – Manipulation Check for Independent Self- Construal

Por favor, indique quanto concorda ou discorda com cada afirmação.

[illegible]

## Appendix L – Manipulation Check for Interdependent Self- Construal

Por favor, indique quanto concorda ou discorda com cada afirmação.

[illegible]

A minha  
felicidade  
depende da  
felicidade  
das pessoas  
que me  
rodeiam. (4)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Fico num  
grupo se  
precisarem  
de mim,  
mesmo  
quando não  
estou  
satisfeito/a  
OU feliz  
com o  
grupo. (5)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

## Appendix M – Debriefing

Muito obrigado por ter participado neste estudo. Conforme adiantado no início da sua participação, o estudo tem por objetivo compreender a forma como as pessoas se percebem a si próprias e na sua relação com os outros. Mais especificamente, neste estudo, o nosso objetivo foi analisar se a maneira como os indivíduos se definem e se veem em relação aos outros (autodefinições) influencia as suas atitudes em relação a outras pessoas, especificamente em relação a imigrantes brasileiros em Portugal.

No âmbito da sua participação, utilizamos um procedimento comum em investigação em ciências psicológicas, no qual os/as participantes são aleatoriamente alocados para participar em diferentes tarefas. Neste caso, foi pedido a algumas pessoas participantes para pensar no que têm em comum com as suas famílias e amigos, bem como a sua perceção relativamente ao que estes esperam de si. Outras pessoas participantes foram instruídas a pensar no que as torna diferentes das suas famílias e amigos, bem como nas expectativas que têm sobre si mesmas. Por sua vez, outras pessoas foram instruídas a pensar sobre a sua cor favorita e em cinco objetos que possuem a mesma cor. De seguida todos responderam a questões relacionadas com a forma como pensam e se sentem em relação a pessoas imigrantes Brasileiras em Portugal. A investigação anterior mostra que as autodefinições influenciam as relações entre grupos, nomeadamente a facilidade das pessoas em transitarem entre os mesmos.

Os resultados do presente estudo são importantes para compreendermos os fatores individuais que explicam as atitudes positivas e negativas em relação às comunidades imigrantes em Portugal.

Reforçamos os dados de contacto que pode utilizar caso deseje colocar uma dúvida, partilhar algum comentário, ou assinalar a sua intenção de receber informação sobre os principais resultados e conclusões do estudo: Inês Mendes (ines\_marques\_mendes@iscte-iul.pt) e Dr. Rita Guerra (ana\_rita\_guerra@iscte-iul.pt).

Se tiver interesse em aceder a mais informação sobre o tema do estudo, pode ainda consultar as seguintes fontes:

Fluit, A. M., Martinović, B., Verkuyten, M., & Zhou, S. (2023). With or without you? Perceived indispensability and opposition to separatist movements. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 62(2), 655-672.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2010). Cultures and selves: A cycle of mutual constitution. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(4), 420-430.

Stephan, W. G., Renfro, C. L., Esses, V. M., Stephan, C. W., & Martin, T. (2005). The effects of feeling threatened on attitudes toward immigrants. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(1), 1-19.

Mais uma vez, obrigado pela sua participação.