Identity Group Theory

A Conceptual Framework and Research Guide

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How identities organise action and social life

People sustain several identities through finite and unequal resources. This guide explains how identity narratives shape expectations, practical possibilities, authority and allocation. It sets out the framework's concepts, the claims that remain open to challenge, and ways to investigate particular mechanisms.

Readers new to IGT can begin with Sections 1–4, then follow the resource account in Sections 5–8. Sections 9–11 address power, collective preservation, responsibility and ethics. Sections 12–13 explain evidential standards and applications. Section 14 provides the glossary; Sections 15–16 provide published sources and citation guidance.

This public edition has its own stable section numbering. It presents theoretical commitments and research proposals with their qualifications; it does not report validation of the framework as a whole.

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1 Purpose and scope

Identity Group Theory (IGT) examines how people live through plural identities under finite and unequal resource conditions. It asks how socially circulating accounts of membership organise expectations, obligations, authority and access to resources, and how these arrangements sustain cooperation, generate conflict and change over time. Its starting point is the person living several orientations through one embodied life. Its explanatory task is to connect those orientations to observable relationships, decisions and consequences.

A person may be a parent, employee, friend and political participant. The demands associated with these identities can reinforce one another or compete for the same capacities. The important questions concern which expectations become consequential, who can impose or revise them, what resources can actually be used, and whose possibilities are altered. Merely identifying several memberships does not explain what happens.

IGT was introduced in Barker-Ciganik's published foundation (2024). Subsequent work has applied the framework to narrative practices and resource allocation, including a study of Zakes Mda's fiction (Barker-Ciganik, 2026). This guide presents a later conceptual specification. Its refinements should not be attributed retrospectively to those publications. It is a theoretical reference and research guide, not a report of empirical validation or a systematic review of neighbouring theories.

The framework's usefulness depends on whether it clarifies a particular mechanism or comparison. Other traditions already investigate multiple identities, norms, resources and power. IGT does not establish explanatory superiority through breadth of vocabulary. Researchers should compare its explanations with plausible alternatives and report evidence that limits them.

The central commitments are plural selfhood, finite and unequal resources, identity narratives, hierarchy and overall allocative asymmetry within identity groups, and the latent possibility of collective preservation taking priority over members' welfare. Their meanings and limits are set out below. Definitions, substantive commitments, hypotheses, model assumptions and findings have different evidential roles. Section 12 explains those differences.

2 Persons and the collective self

2.1 One person and plural lived orientations

The person is the embodied locus of experience, action and consequences. IGT describes the individual as a collective self: a changing plurality of lived identity orientations. A social self is the person living a particular orientation and negotiating its standards. These selves may sustain, constrain or oppress one another; they can compete, cooperate, harmonise or fall silent. This plurality implies neither independent organisms nor a clinical diagnosis, continuous conflict or conscious internal dialogue.

An identity repertoire comprises the identities a person can claim, is assigned, recognises or enacts. Institutions, history, material conditions and other people shape which identities and ways of living them are feasible. Neither unrestricted choice nor complete determination is presumed. Membership, identification, conduct and acknowledgement by others can diverge.

Distinguish conflict among selves from conflict within an identity relation. A daughter may dispute what daughterhood requires while continuing to live as a daughter. Her daughter-self may

also conflict with her sister-self or lover-self. Relational agonism names this question of struggle within or among identity relations. It does not require finding a struggle in every episode.

2.2 Self narrative and standard

A lived self, a circulating identity narrative and an individualised identity standard are related but distinct. The narrative provides socially available accounts of membership and conduct. The individualised standard interprets those expectations. The lived self accepts, modifies, resists or fails to enact them within a particular life. A description of a group's expectations cannot substitute for evidence about a person's relation to them.

Plural selves do not possess separate bodies or separate supplies of time. One person bears the consequences of competing demands and of choices made at different moments. An action that sustains one orientation may constrain another or impose costs on a later self. Conversely, one activity may support several identities at once. Resource conflict must therefore be investigated rather than inferred merely from multiplicity.

3 Categories membership and groupness

A social category classifies people by a criterion. Membership means inclusion in a collectivity, whether claimed, acknowledged, attributed or imposed. Identification means orientation towards an identity as meaningful to oneself or towards a collectivity as a meaningful "we". None of these observations alone establishes the others.

Groupness is the variable extent to which a collectivity is experienced or enacted as a consequential social "we", generating recurring expectations about belonging, boundaries, membership or conduct. Evidence can include mutual expectations, shared practices, collective claims, identity-linked sanctions, boundary maintenance or coordinated activity. No single indicator is universally sufficient. Disagreement, unequal power and limited face-to-face contact do not rule groupness out.

An identity group is a category, affiliation or relational collectivity around which sufficient recurring groupness is evidenced to generate socially consequential membership expectations. What counts as sufficient is a reasoned analytical judgment grounded in a study's observations and scope, not a universal numerical threshold. Groupness should be established independently of the allocation being explained. Receipt of a benefit cannot serve as both the sole evidence that a group exists and the outcome supposedly explained by that group.

A categorical allocation regime is a recurring arrangement in which classification affects allocation without demonstrated groupness among those classified. An administrative eligibility band can affect access profoundly without its members sharing an identity. The officials applying it may belong to a consequential identity group even when its recipients do not. IGT can investigate classification and power without calling every such arrangement an identity economy.

Agency concerns how people inhabit, interpret, negotiate, resist or attempt to leave identity positions under unequal conditions. Separate endorsement, outward compliance, disclosure of dissent, exit from an affiliation and the ability to change others' classification. Rejecting a classification need not remove its consequences. Continued participation does not prove satisfaction, and costly exit does not prove endorsement. A practice may involve devotion, habit, aesthetics, accommodation, coercion or mixtures of these. Conduct alone does not settle its meaning or the actor's freedom.

4 Identity narratives and regulation

4.1 What membership makes intelligible

An identity narrative is socially circulating content through which people understand who members are, what they can know, how they should act, what they value and what they may claim. Stories, classifications, symbols, exemplars and taken-for-granted assumptions can carry it. Narratives establish evaluative contrasts between approved and disapproved ways of being. These contrasts can be implicit, internally inconsistent or contested; a consensual doctrine is not required.

Five dimensions guide analysis. Ontology concerns what is treated as real or existing. Epistemology concerns knowledge and credibility. Ethics concerns right conduct. Aesthetics concerns valued forms and presentation. Behavioural norms concern expected practice. These are analytical dimensions, not compartments equally visible in every case. Ontological assumptions do not imply a separate reality for each group, and narratives can overlap without being identical.

Practical standards extend beyond morality. A good, proper, real or appropriate member may be judged for competence, credibility, authenticity, presentation or conduct. Identify the dimension, audience and operative standard. Distinguish expectations about what members usually do from expectations about what they should do, and do not infer consensus from one elite statement.

4.2 Understanding is not endorsement

Shared intelligibility means understanding an expectation well enough to anticipate judgments and recognise departures. It differs from endorsing the expectation, being motivated by it on a particular occasion and conforming to it. None entails the next. A teacher may understand a good-teacher standard while disputing it or declining to enact it. Resistance can presuppose a shared reference point without accepting its authority.

Interpellation is the addressing, classification or positioning of someone as a particular kind of subject. It invokes possible standards, entitlements and consequences without guaranteeing acceptance. Ask which identity is invoked, by whom, before which audience, and whether the identity or its governing rules are contested. Identity performance is conduct enacted or interpreted in relation to an identity; it can be sincere, habitual, strategic, coerced or resistant.

4.3 Regulation continuity and change

Identity regulation comprises practices that shape, evaluate, reinforce or contest identity-linked membership, conduct and standing. External enforcement changes consequences through authorities or other actors. Audience regulation operates through anticipated judgment or exclusion. Internalised regulation operates through standards a person treats as their own. Similar conduct can arise through different combinations of these processes.

Regulation and allocation remain distinct. A professional standard describes legitimate expertise; a hiring committee allocates employment. A family expectation assigns responsibility; particular people supply care. Analysis must trace the actors and procedures joining the standard to the consequence. A group cannot be treated as a single intentional actor without evidence of a collective decision mechanism.

Narrative persistence depends on repeated circulation, enactment, institutional reinforcement and evaluation. Change requires uptake of alternative interpretations that affects expectations, practices or sanctions. An individual departure, a tolerated exception, an intelligible alternative, an accepted alternative and a new expected standard are different observations, not an inevitable sequence. Different dimensions and institutions may change at different rates. Separate intention, audience interpretation and consequence; an observer's reading of a gesture does not establish its performer's motive.

5 Centrality activation and allocation

Allocation-based salience is the extent or pattern of resources devoted to enacting an identity in a specified setting and period. This preserves IGT's foundational emphasis on allocation. The explicit label distinguishes it from other theories' uses of salience, which should retain their own definitions when discussed.

Identity centrality is reported importance to self-understanding. Situational activation is an identity's accessibility or foregrounding at a particular moment. Allocation priority is a stated or demonstrated ordering when commitments compete. Valuation weight is the importance assigned to an outcome or resource in a decision model. These concepts may be related, but none substitutes automatically for another.

A person can regard parenting as most central, spend more hours in employment because income is necessary, and experience national identity as briefly foregrounded during a ceremony. High work allocation need not indicate greater affection for work. An explanation must distinguish preference, duty, opportunity and imposed demands.

Measurement should name the resource, period, identity attribution and relevant constraints. Hours, money and effort ratings should be reported separately unless an aggregation rule is justified. Where an activity serves several identities, disclose how it is attributed or report the overlap. Participatory inputs include contributions of time, effort, care or money; investment is the subset oriented towards anticipated or retrospectively interpreted future value. A history of contributions is not the same as a retained stock of capital.

Allocation cannot independently explain salience if salience is calculated from that same allocation. A test should predict a later, separately measured outcome or compare clearly distinguished importance and allocation measures. Low allocation may reflect lack of opportunity rather than indifference. Increased participation after assistance may mean that an existing commitment has become practicable, rather than more central.

6 Resources and their practical use

6.1 Six overlapping classes

IGT classifies individual resources into six exhaustive, overlapping classes. Exhaustiveness is a theoretical classificatory commitment, not a claim that every application is settled, every observer knows the whole account or all human value is a usable resource. The classes do not share a natural unit and are not universally substitutable.

Time is the finite duration available for action and experience, including opportunities and discretion over its use. Control over someone else's schedule is a relational capacity, not extra hours in one's own life.

Energy comprises capacities for exertion, including bodily and mental effort. Depletion and replenishment must be specified rather than assumed.

Monetary resources comprise money and fungible assets. Describe property, equipment and benefits in kind through their material or exchange capacities, noting restrictions and practical access. A possession may not be immediately saleable.

Renown comprises socially attributed standing and favourable or adverse evaluations within an audience and domain. It includes respect and honour as well as disrepute and degradation.

Psychic resources comprise knowledge, skills, physical capacities and psychological capacities belonging to the person. This is a broad theoretical usage, not a mind-only category or a single psychological scale.

Reciprocal resources concern accessible assistance, mobilisable claims and relationships of contribution, favour and return. Obligations incurred should be recorded alongside claims held. Assistance can also be non-reciprocal.

A concrete resource may participate in several classes. Time and energy enter the acquisition, maintenance and deployment of the other classes. This does not turn every stock into time or energy, or permit overlapping contributions to be counted as independent quantities in a total. The older horizontal/vertical distinction describes time and energy alongside monetary, renown, reciprocal and psychic resources. It does not describe transaction direction or a hierarchy of worth. Four-domain and seven-family descriptions in earlier work remain supplementary mappings, not replacements for these six classes.

6.2 Resource capital good and currency

Value is attributed worth. A good is a valued outcome or experience. A resource is a capacity, means, entitlement or opportunity that can enable action, security or further access. Capital is a resource with a demonstrable capacity for retention or accumulation and productive mobilisation. Currency is a recognised medium or unit of exchange. These terms are related but not interchangeable.

A pleasant experience may be valued without becoming capital. Reputation may endure and open opportunities, making capital language appropriate when that process is evidenced. A metaphorical exchange does not establish a currency, price or market-clearing mechanism. A scalar decision index can be useful for a declared local model; universal maximisation, fixed exchange rates and a common utility metric are not IGT axioms.

6.3 From possession to effect

Distinguish possession or entitlement, practical access, deployment and realised effect. A leave entitlement may exist without usable cover. Knowledge may remain after institutional access is withdrawn. Ownership may persist while secure use deteriorates. Trace acquired, depleted, retained, blocked and conditional resources through time and identify effects on later options.

Authority, legal rights, institutional access, tools and physical security belong within the resource account. Their functions must remain visible. Authority may involve standing, material control,

procedural competence and assistance, but admiration alone does not explain the power to make decisions binding. Tools combine material means with skill, time and energy. These are possible cross-class connections, not fixed equivalences.

Narratives can affect which capacities are presumed relevant, who may deploy them and what counts as an adequate contribution. Separate expected capacity, actual capacity, available opportunity, attempted contribution and achieved effect. Money, presence, care and delegated assistance may not substitute for one another under the governing standard, even when they contribute to a related outcome. Resources enable and constrain action without necessarily supplying its ultimate purpose.

7 Reciprocity and psychic capacities

7.1 Reciprocity without presumed repayment

Reciprocity is a norm or mechanism linking provision to expectations of return. Return may be direct or indirect, delayed, disputed, unequal or understood through general membership. The mechanism is distinct from the resources it can make accessible. A reciprocal claim is a socially recognised expectation that assistance can be called upon because of contribution, relationship or accepted obligation. Actual support is a further observation.

A colleague who has covered shifts may have grounds to expect help, but that claim may fail if others deny it or have no capacity. Network size alone does not establish usable support. An obligation to provide help is a burden on the person who owes it and may enable another's claim; it is not a resource available to its bearer. Reciprocity capital requires evidence of durable, mobilisable access rather than simply a relationship's existence.

Care may be unconditional, compulsory, affectionate, professional or offered where return is impossible. Classify non-reciprocal assistance through the capacities and means supplied without inventing a favour debt. Reciprocal relationships can impose unwanted indebtedness and do not imply fairness, consent or equal exchange.

7.2 Capacity effort cost and value

Psychic resources are capacities. Psychic capital is the narrower claim that some such capacities persist or accumulate and can be mobilised across relevant situations. Psychic value concerns valued experience, such as meaning, dignity or coherence. Psychic cost concerns an experienced or measured burden, such as distress. Psychological effort is the expenditure of cognitive or emotional capacity. These should not be represented by one unqualified quantity.

Criticism may produce distress; confidence may help someone persist; reflection may require effort; restored coherence may be valued. Each is a distinct observation or hypothesis. A claim of depletion requires an indicator, timing, baseline and alternatives. A claim of capital requires more than immediate mood change.

Do not infer a hidden psychic reward merely because a person acted, or define psychic capital as whatever enabled continued participation. Either move insulates the explanation from contrary evidence. Distinguish the proposed capacity from established constructs such as self-esteem, positive affect and resilience. If it adds no discriminant or predictive value, the more precise established construct may suffice.

8 Identity economies and conversion

An identity economy is a recurrent social configuration in which membership in a collectivity with evidenced groupness conditions participation and access to, withholding of, or conversion among heterogeneous forms of value through identifiable mechanisms. It is a conditional configuration within the broader framework of IGT.

Three demonstrations justify the term: a consequential identity group; recurring membership-linked allocation; and several distinct value domains or a specified connection between domains. Recurrence can be evidenced over time or through a durable rule operating across cases. A transient group can qualify if organised relations are demonstrated during its existence. No universal duration or transaction count is stipulated.

A category label, statement of belonging, isolated exchange or count of identity-related words is insufficient. Where only administrative classification is established, categorical allocation regime is the appropriate description. Where only esteem is being studied, a specific account of esteem may suffice. A vignette can test a hypothesised mechanism without proving that its fictional setting is a real identity economy.

Personal resource allocation concerns the deployment of a person's capacities or means. Social resource allocation concerns the distribution of resources, goods, opportunities and burdens. Identity-position allocation concerns assignment to roles, categories or positions. A resource claim is an act of discourse, not evidence that distribution occurred.

Conversion changes access or value across classes or domains. This differs from classifying a single resource under several headings. A professional reputation may help secure a flexible schedule, but the request, the manager's permission and an implemented change are distinct events. The mechanism depends on the identity invoked, the applicable narrative and allocation rules, and the available cooperation and means.

Distinguish permitted, practically possible, attempted and achieved conversion. A forbidden conversion may succeed through coercion or concealment; a permitted conversion may fail. Identify direction, costs, beneficiaries, burden bearers and failure conditions. Correlation or transfer between people does not itself establish conversion. Conversion may be asymmetric or non-compensatory.

9 Power hierarchy and collective preservation

9.1 Power and differentiated authority

Power includes the capacity to shape others' feasible actions, allocate or withhold resources, establish applicable identities and standards, authorise or obstruct conversion, and impose costs of refusal. Identify who can command, define, judge, allocate or change the rules. Authority is a particular form of power whose mandates and enforceability require investigation. Power is not a single aggregate of resources.

IGT adopts hierarchy as a universal theoretical commitment concerning identity groups: positions carry differentiated authority, influence or standing in consequential group relations. Power distance may be small, authority distributed, and rankings fluid or different across domains. This does not require a permanent leader, a single ordering of members, harmful consequences or the

absence of democratic practices. The commitment is open to empirical challenge; apparent counterexamples cannot be excluded merely by redefining them as nongroups.

IGT also adopts asymmetry in the overall distribution of resources, opportunities and burdens within identity groups. Equal allocations in particular domains remain possible. Higher rank does not imply more of every resource. Map authority, benefits, effort, risk and blame separately. Inequality alone establishes neither unfairness nor consent or compensating benefit.

Resource predominance does not remove constraints. The relationships and obligations sustaining authority can limit its exercise. A powerful person may remain dependent on cooperation, divided among selves or unable to convert standing into the desired response. The task is to explain how resources become effective in a particular encounter.

9.2 Continuity and the preservation imperative

Identity infrastructure consists of relatively durable arrangements carrying classification, regulation and allocation through time: institutions, organisations, roles, practices, media and technologies. These can reproduce an arrangement as members change. An organisation may support several identity groups; the organisation and any one group are not automatically coextensive.

The collective preservation imperative names the prioritisation of a group's continued existence as a consequential collectivity through the narratives, dependencies and practices sustaining it. Arrangements ostensibly supporting members can come to demand their resources or sacrifice for their own continuity. This latent possibility is proposed for all identity groups. Its activation, intensity, resistance and outcomes are contingent. Pursuit to the bitter end is possible, not inevitable.

Specify what is being preserved: members' lives and welfare, the collectivity's recognisable identity, narrative practices, institutional capacities, incumbents' control or collective standing. These may conflict. A leader's claim that the group is threatened is not proof of an existential threat, and an incumbent can damage a collectivity while preserving office. Continuation and flourishing must be distinguished.

An explanation requires a mechanism connecting named participants, offices, organisations or coordinated practices. Loyalty, dependence, fear of blame and professional duties may converge without identical motives. There is no independent group mind. A biological survival instinct is a metaphor, not an established mechanism. Persistence alone does not demonstrate preservation; dissolution or inaction must not automatically be redescribed as hidden preservation either.

9.3 A conditional rescue explanation

Citizen rescue illustrates a proposed mechanism. When officials interpret a citizen's peril abroad as a test of collective protection or authority, they may anticipate consequences for credibility, membership or future cooperation and authorise exceptional expenditure. Identify who interprets the event, who decides, who pays, who acts and who bears risk.

The proposal does not predict that every state intervenes at any expense. Humanitarian commitments, legal duties, strategic interests, public pressure, institutional routines and decision-makers' incentives remain alternatives or interacting causes. Separate intended deterrence from achieved deterrence, and a decision from a successful or worthwhile outcome. Neither rescue's occurrence nor its cost proves collective preservation.

Domestic need and peril abroad may be organised through different narratives of entitlement, dependency and protection. That is a comparison to investigate, not an established universal contrast. A need omitted from a decision frame is not thereby objectively irrelevant or ethically unimportant. National identity should not be privileged in advance: distinguish the state's institutional capacities from national identification, government and other collectivities.

10 Responsibility rationality and sacrifice

10.1 Situated responsibility

Responsibility can be assigned through several actors' interpretations of relationships, capacities and obligations. Consider a hypothetical emergency in which a child is in danger near water. Kinship, professional expertise, physical capacity, proximity and available equipment can affect who is expected to help and which contribution is feasible. Swimming ability alone does not establish equal rescue capacity. Once assistance is underway, an appropriate contribution may change.

Others' expectations can affect conduct even when the eventual actor rejects the standard invoked. A person may reject a gendered protector expectation yet respond to dangerous delay that others' expectations helped produce. Distinguish this relational pathway from personal endorsement or motivation. The illustration is a way of separating possible mechanisms, not evidence for a population-level claim. Situated explanation does not itself refute universal moral obligations.

10.2 Rationality across selves and time

IGT interprets rationality relative to an identity's standards of value, justice and acceptable conduct in a specified situation and time. Conduct may be intelligible under one standard while conflicting with another self's interests or a later self's assessment. Such intelligibility establishes neither moral correctness, accurate prediction nor successful maximisation.

Consistency with a standard differs from deliberate calculation. An impulsive refusal can enact a standard of dignity without careful assessment of consequences. Later regret may reflect another orientation, changed circumstances or revised standards. Identify the standard and evidence for its role; do not invent a suitable standard after observing a choice merely to classify it as rational.

Reasons can be moral, prudential, instrumental, epistemic, aesthetic, behavioural or concerned with sustaining an identity or practice. These descriptions can overlap. Separate publicly offered reasons, motivating considerations, the analyst's inference and justification under a stated ethical standard. Social authority, motivational influence, sanctions and normative validity are different questions.

10.3 Sacrifice without a hidden profit

Sacrifice may be understood as expenditure or relinquishment of resources for something valued under an identity standard, including fidelity or resistance. A transactional interpretation need not imply calculation, profit, repayment, public acknowledgement or compensation. Identify what is relinquished, what is valued, by which self, under which narrative and at what cost to other or later selves. The loss may remain crushing and the sought value may later be repudiated.

The stronger claim that all sacrifice is transactional remains open. If sacrifice is defined as relinquishment for something valued, transaction may follow definitionally; an explanation must still establish the particular valuation and its role. Extending the claim to every costly action is a broader hypothesis. Coercion, non-reciprocal care, failed allocation and non-identity mechanisms remain possible. No invisible psychic profit should be inferred to balance every loss.

11 Critical Humanism and ethical assessment

Critical Humanism supplies the author's ethical orientation: equal moral consideration, fallibilism and scrutiny of social arrangements' consequences. IGT supplies descriptive and explanatory analysis. Researchers can test IGT without adopting every ethical commitment of its author. Normative judgments should state their premises rather than derive justice from a practice's persistence or acceptance.

Each person has an equal initial entitlement to be heard and taken seriously. Equal consideration does not entail equal evidential weight. Taking an experience seriously does not establish its attributed cause, another person's motive or the merits of a proposed remedy. No testimony receives an automatic credibility premium or penalty solely because of the speaker's identity. Assess content, opportunity to know, situated experience, corroboration and contrary evidence.

Distinguish legitimacy within a group's rules, ethical justification and practical durability. An arrangement may be accepted by authorised decision-makers while burdening others; it may be stable without being just. Examine effects on affected people as well as the views of those entitled to decide. Inclusive consideration does not predetermine which procedure or remedy will work.

Renown, recognition and moral worth must also remain distinct. Renown is socially attributed standing. Recognition, when it means acknowledgement of a person, membership, claim or entitlement, can affect standing or allocation without being identical to either. Citizenship acknowledgement need not confer prestige; visibility can coexist with disrepute; credentials can confer eligibility without esteem. Self-esteem is a person's appraisal of themselves, whereas perceived renown concerns others' appraisals. Recognition is neither the umbrella explanation nor a presumed universal aim of identity activity.

12 Claims hypotheses and evidence

Definitions specify conceptual usage and are assessed for coherence and usefulness. Scope conditions specify where an explanation applies. Substantive commitments make claims about the social world that remain open to challenge. Hypotheses state relationships that can fail. Model assumptions simplify a particular representation. Evidence consists of observations and analyses appropriate to the claim. These roles should not be collapsed.

The six-class account is a classificatory commitment, not an empirical census. Hierarchy and overall allocative asymmetry are universal theoretical commitments, not established findings. Collective preservation requires evidence of activation and a mechanism in each application. Membership, regulation, allocation and conversion remain contingently related. Universal net benefit, equilibrium and maximisation are not required, and universal transactional sacrifice remains open.

Candidate hypotheses include whether identity activation selectively changes valuation of relevant outcomes; whether centrality and experienced obligation help explain later allocation

beyond constraints; whether reciprocal support buffers specified burdens; whether some psychic capacities persist and predict functioning beyond immediate affect; whether allocator legitimacy affects conversion of standing into opportunity; and whether alternative support reduces exit costs. These are questions for specified tests, not findings or claims of novelty.

Each test should state what would constrain its explanation. Absence of selective valuation change would constrain the first hypothesis; no incremental prediction beyond established measures would constrain a psychic-capacity claim. One positive result does not validate the whole framework, while failure of a bounded hypothesis does not automatically refute every component. Unexpected findings should prompt documented reassessment, not a redefinition that makes every outcome confirmatory.

Political realignment, leadership bargains, the effects of hierarchy and revolutionary outcomes require contextual evidence. Neither inevitable revolutionary failure nor the impossibility of democracy is adopted. Perceived displacement can affect conduct without establishing its alleged cause. Overlapping memberships also prevent treating working-class, majority and minority identities as necessarily separate populations.

13 Using IGT in research and practice

13.1 Specify a sequence that could have differed

Begin with the episode, question and evidence. Identify the person, identity or category, independently evidenced groupness where required, circulating expectation, allocator, resources, outcome and relevant alternatives. Then explain how the expectation was invoked, how actors related to it, what options were available and how their responses produced consequences. The sequence can be habitual, rapid or partly unarticulated; conscious deliberation is not a prerequisite.

Seek evidence of expectations independently of the conduct being explained. Inferring a protector narrative solely because someone rescues, then explaining rescue through that inferred narrative, is circular. Compare situations in which the relationship, relevant expertise, direct request or available equipment differs. State which observations would weaken the explanation.

Use consistent descriptive standards across affiliations. Separate experience or grievance, attributed causes, evidenced mechanisms, reasons offered and proposed remedies. A preferred explanation needs the same scrutiny as its rivals. Labels for political or moral positions do not replace evidence about exclusion, coercion, authority or allocation.

13.2 Match inference to the evidence

For literary interpretation, begin with an episode and the represented world. Describe what happens before drawing an IGT conclusion. Distinguish enacted events, character speech, focalised narration and reader inference. Trace selves, standards, resources and later options; do not force all six classes into every passage. Literature can support bounded interpretations without supplying population-level causal evidence. Historical context needs its own sources.

For discourse research, separate resource claims from distributions. For institutional research, trace the procedure linking rules and outcomes. For experiments, distinguish manipulation, mediator and outcome; association alone does not establish mediation. A hypothetical vignette

can test judgments under controlled variations but does not by itself establish real-world groupness or behaviour.

For surveys, distinguish reported importance, reported behaviour, hypothetical choices and observed consequential action. Do not describe a proposed sample, simulated dataset or unvalidated scale as completed validation. For comparisons, establish whether shared labels refer to comparable relations; identical questionnaires do not ensure measurement equivalence. For longitudinal inquiry, distinguish within-person change from differences between people. Analyses sharing a corpus should disclose that relationship rather than imply independent replication.

13.3 Analyse conflict and feasible change

First establish the dispute, its history and the outcomes people seek. Map affected persons and overlapping affiliations, including those outside formal decision-making. Participation, authority to decide, acceptance of an outcome and compliance are separate observations.

Next trace resources and alternatives over time: possession, practical access, deployment, loss and consequences. Identify who bears obligations and refusal costs, and distinguish anticipated from realised losses. Map authority to nominate, advise, select, veto, implement, enforce and revise procedures rather than inferring it from titles or consultation alone.

Compare feasible proposals by the mechanisms through which they would change the situation, the cooperation and resources they require, and the distribution of gains and burdens. Assess internal legitimacy, ethical consequences and implementation separately. Finally examine dissent, appeal, review and durability. A proposed settlement is not one implemented and sustained; deviations from expected outcomes should prompt reassessment.

Extensions are possible when their purpose and evidential status are explicit. A new term should identify what existing concepts cannot adequately express, how it relates to them and what would count as evidence. A local adaptation does not silently redefine the whole framework.

14 Glossary

The glossary provides concise definitions for use alongside the explanations and evidential qualifications in Sections 2–13. Related terms should not be treated as stylistic substitutes. Entries are grouped by subject.

14.1 People and collective life

Person. The embodied locus of experience, agency and consequences; not reducible to one identity.

Self. The person’s reflexive relation to their own experience, conduct and continuity.

Social self. The person living a particular identity orientation and negotiating its standards; related to but not identical with its circulating identity narrative.

Plural selfhood. Coexistence of changing selves within one individual, with possible competition, cooperation, harmony or silence and consequences across time.

Collective self. The individual constituted through plural, changing identity orientations whose relations sustain, constrain and sometimes oppress the person; not a group mind or a clinical diagnosis.

Relational agonism. Conflict or struggle within an identity relation or among selves over standards, claims or finite resources; investigate its presence and possible abatement rather than infer continuous conflict.

Identity. A socially meaningful orientation or positioning connecting a person to standards, relations, classifications and possible conduct. Specify claimed, attributed or enacted identity where relevant.

Identity repertoire. The set of identities available, claimed, assigned, recognised or enacted in a person's life.

Social category. A classification of persons by an attribute or criterion; not sufficient evidence of groupness.

Membership. Inclusion in a collectivity, whether claimed, acknowledged, attributed or imposed.

Identification. Orientation towards an identity as meaningful to oneself or a collectivity as a meaningful "we".

Groupness. The variable degree of consequential collective enactment or experience producing recurring membership expectations.

Identity group. A collectivity with evidenced recurring groupness and socially consequential expectations concerning belonging, boundaries, membership or conduct.

Belonging. Experienced or acknowledged inclusion or connection; distinguish subjective belonging from formal eligibility.

Role. A socially recognised position carrying expectations, rights or duties.

Organisation. A coordinated entity with identifiable arrangements for roles, membership or decisions.

Institution. A relatively durable arrangement of rules and practices shaping social relations.

Network. A pattern of relationships; connectedness alone does not prove groupness or usable support.

Categorical allocation regime. Recurring allocation conditioned by classification without demonstrated groupness among those classified.

14.2 Meaning and conduct

Identity narrative. Circulating stories, classifications, symbols, assumptions and evaluative contrasts that make identity-linked membership, conduct, claims and trespasses intelligible. Approved and disapproved exemplars can be implicit or contested.

Ontology. What an identity narrative treats as existing or real.

Epistemology. Standards for knowledge and credibility, including who can speak with authority.

Ethics. Standards of right and wrong conduct; describing them does not endorse them.

Aesthetics. Standards concerning valued forms, styles, appearances and presentation.

Behavioural norm. An expectation about what members should or ordinarily do; distinguish normative and descriptive senses.

Identity group standard. A socially circulating benchmark for membership or conduct, possibly disputed.

Individualised identity standard. A person's interpretation of an identity-linked benchmark.

Lived self and standard. The self's experienced and enacted relation to an interpreted standard, including acceptance, modification, resistance and failure; distinct from the narrative and its individual interpretation.

Interpellation. Addressing, classifying or positioning someone as a particular kind of subject.

Identity performance. Conduct enacted or interpreted in relation to an identity, without implying pretence.

Identity regulation. Practices shaping, evaluating or contesting identity-linked membership, conduct and standing.

External enforcement. Regulation through consequences imposed by identifiable actors or arrangements.

Audience regulation. Regulation through anticipated social evaluation, recognition or exclusion.

Internalised regulation. Regulation through standards treated by a person as their own.

Legitimacy. Perceived or institutionally recognised appropriateness of an actor, claim, rule or allocation; not equivalent to moral justification by the analyst.

14.3 Attention participation and salience

Activation. Situational accessibility or foregrounding of an identity.

Identity centrality. Reported importance of an identity to self-understanding.

Allocation-based salience. The extent or pattern of resource allocation to identity enactment within a stated context and period.

Allocation priority. Stated or demonstrated ordering of commitments when allocations compete.

Participatory input. A contribution or expenditure associated with participation, whether chosen, habitual, obligatory or extracted.

Investment. Input oriented towards anticipated or interpreted future value; not a synonym for all participation.

Cumulative investment. A history of contributions, distinct from current allocation and from retained capital.

Valuation weight. Importance assigned to a resource or outcome in a specified model; not automatically identity salience.

Identity conflict. Incompatibility between identity-linked standards, demands or allocations in a defined situation.

Identity dysphoria. A proposed descriptive term for experienced unease or distress in inhabiting an identity, including discomfort with its identity narratives, expectations or demands. It can concern chosen or unchosen identities, coexist with attachment and continued participation, and vary in intensity and over time. Distinguish discomfort with the identity itself, particular expectations, and the conditions or resources available for living it. The term focuses on the

experienced relation to an identity: identity conflict concerns incompatible standards, demands or allocations; ambivalence concerns mixed feelings; psychic cost is the broader category of experienced burden. Disagreement, noncompliance or continued membership alone establishes neither discomfort nor its absence. Its added usefulness beyond existing concepts remains to be investigated. This is a nonclinical analytical proposal: it does not define, extend, limit or explain gender dysphoria and is not a diagnostic category. Claims about prevalence, causal mechanisms and distinctiveness require evidence. Empirical use should identify the identity, reported experience, relevant expectations, context, duration or recurrence, and available alternatives; no validated measure or threshold is supplied. The term is used here without a claim of original coinage.

Identity-relative rationality. Intelligibility of conduct relative to a specified identity standard, situation and time; distinct from moral correctness, careful deliberation, accurate prediction or successful maximisation.

Temporal identity change. Change in which self predominates or in a self's standards, alongside changing circumstances; later selves bear consequences of earlier decisions.

Sacrifice. Expenditure or relinquishment of resources for something valued under an identity standard; a transactional interpretation can concern enactment itself without compensatory return. The universal scope of this account remains open.

Transactional interpretation of sacrifice. An account identifying what is relinquished and what is valued, by which self and under which narrative; it does not require calculation, profit, reciprocal repayment or a net gain.

14.4 Resources and economies

Value. Attributed worth or desirability within a specified evaluative context.

Good. A valued outcome, object or experience, whether or not mobilisable for further action.

Resource. A capacity, means, entitlement or opportunity that can enable action, security or further access; distinguish possession, practical access, deployment and realised effect.

Capital. A resource with demonstrated or explicitly hypothesised retention/accumulation and productive mobilisation.

Currency. A recognised medium or unit of exchange; metaphorical usage must be identified.

Six resource classes. Time, energy, monetary, renown, psychic and reciprocal: exhaustive and overlapping, with no universal common unit or requirement of substitutability.

Time. Finite duration available for action and experience; discretion over its use and control over others' schedules require separate description.

Energy. Capacity for exertion, with its expenditure and replenishment specified; involved with time in acquiring, maintaining and using other resources.

Reciprocal resources. Assistance, favours and mobilisable claims within relations of contribution and return; record obligations owed as well as claims held.

Resource availability. Practical accessibility of a resource in a specified situation, distinct from possession or entitlement, deployment and realised effect.

Horizontal resources. Finite personal capacities, principally time and energy, with attention and effort related but distinct.

Vertical resources. Historical label for heterogeneous monetary, renown, reciprocal and psychic resources; not a single ladder or a claim of universal transferability.

Monetary resources. Money and fungible assets; identify concrete property and means through their material or exchange capacities without presuming unrestricted transferability. Distinguish assets, income, debt and expenditure.

Recognition. Acknowledgement of a person, membership, claim, standing or entitlement; the sense must be specified.

Misrecognition. Consequential denial or distortion of such acknowledgement, not every disappointing evaluation.

Renown. Socially attributed standing and favourable or adverse evaluation within an audience and domain, including respect, honour and degradation; distinguish standing from acts that alter it.

Renown capital. Durable, mobilisable evaluative standing.

Reciprocity. A relational norm or mechanism linking contribution or provision to expectations of return.

Reciprocal claim. A socially recognised expectation of assistance or return grounded in contribution, relationship or obligation.

Reciprocal support. Assistance accessible or supplied through reciprocal relations.

Reciprocity capital. Durable, mobilisable reciprocal claims or access; a qualified resource concept, not the mechanism itself.

Psychic resources. The person’s knowledge, skills, physical capacities and psychological capacities; specify the particular capacity and context, without assuming a unitary scale.

Psychic capital. Psychic resources claimed to persist or accumulate and enable further action; requires evidence beyond immediate affect.

Psychic value. Valued experience such as meaning or coherence; not automatically a capacity or capital.

Psychic cost. An experienced or measured psychological burden; distinguish from effort and from a resource stock.

Psychological effort. Expenditure of cognitive or emotional capacity in an activity.

Identity economy. A recurrent membership-conditioned allocation configuration involving evidenced groupness, heterogeneous value and identifiable mechanisms.

Identity economies. Plural configurations, or the explicitly named allocative strand of IGT; not an unqualified synonym for IGT.

Personal resource allocation. Deployment of a person’s capacities or means across activities or commitments.

Social resource allocation. Distribution of resources, goods, opportunities and burdens through social arrangements.

Identity-position allocation. Assignment to roles, categories or positions, distinct from resource distribution.

Allocator. An actor, institution or specified distributed process through which an allocation occurs.

Conversion. A process changing access or value across classes or domains, conditioned by the identity invoked and applicable narrative rules; distinguish allowed, possible, attempted and achieved conversion.

Conversion constraint. A condition limiting or blocking a conversion, including rules, gatekeeping and lack of recognised standing.

Resource bundle. Several distinguishable goods or resources linked in an event or relationship.

Non-substitutability. Failure of one good or resource to compensate for another under specified conditions.

Identity infrastructure. Durable arrangements carrying identity-linked classification, regulation and allocation across time.

Power. Capacity to shape others' options, allocate or withhold resources, establish applicable identities and standards, authorise or obstruct conversion, and impose costs of refusal.

Exit cost. A specified burden associated with leaving or reducing participation; continued membership does not establish endorsement.

Identity Group Theory. The framework beginning with the individual as a collective self and examining how plural identities, narratives, regulation and resource allocation sustain or transform conduct and social order.

14.5 Recognition and institutionalisation

These specialised terms support analyses of acknowledgement, classification and institutional access. They do not make recognition the organising concept of IGT. They do not establish original coinage, validated measures or universal findings. Recognition need not be favourable or produce resources; the groupness and allocation conditions in Section 8 still apply.

Norm inertia. Persistence of established normative expectations or evaluative scripts despite contestation or changes in actors and circumstances. Unlike the general concept of a norm, it identifies continuity over time. Trace the same expectation across dated episodes and changing personnel, cohorts or domains; repeated wording alone does not establish an unchanged institutional effect.

Narrative drift. Gradual reconfiguration of what an identity category legitimately means, includes or permits. It names change in narrative content over time, rather than merely increased visibility or a new label. Compare category predicates, histories, boundaries and authorised uses across dated episodes. Drift can coexist with norm inertia in other domains; neither progress nor an inevitable movement towards institutionalisation is built into the definition.

Recognition regime. An arrangement of narratives, social scenes, audiences, authorities and allocative practices through which an identity-linked performance is interpreted and acted upon. Its distinctive focus is the organisation of consequential judgment: who may evaluate, what counts as evidence, and how a judgment can acquire social force. Identify these actors, criteria and

pathways separately. A recognition regime need not be unified, consensual or an identity economy; the groupness and allocation conditions in Section 8 remain necessary for the latter.

Recognition move. An observable act that categorises a practice or person, invokes identity-linked predicates, or evaluates on that basis. It is a unit for tracing recognition, whereas a regime is the arrangement within which such acts acquire force. Code the actor, performance, category or predicate, audience and evaluative consequence. Naming, praise, correction, publication or refusal can qualify; a linguistic choice or technical description alone does not establish an identity process.

Counter-interpellation. An alternative identity positioning offered in response to an imposed or established positioning. It can change the category, its history or its predicates, rather than merely reverse a negative judgment. Identify the positioning challenged, the alternative proposed and its addressees. Uptake must be examined separately; resistance does not automatically supply an alternative category, and an emancipatory counter-position can itself become regulatory.

Counter-category. A category proposed or reworked to challenge an established classification and the identity-linked judgments attached to it. It names the classificatory content offered through counter-interpellation, not an already homogeneous group. Trace its name, predicates, boundaries, proponents and contested uses; acceptance of a practice does not prove acceptance of its counter-category.

Uptake and divisible uptake. Uptake is whether and how an addressee responds to and takes up an offered identity positioning, recognition claim or act of voice. Divisible uptake means that its components can be accepted, refused or enacted differently: a person may affirm a practice while rejecting its name, genealogy or group boundary. Code those components and responses separately. Public endorsement, self-identification, behavioural accommodation and institutional action are distinct observations; participation does not establish full internalisation.

Practice recognition with category refusal. Acknowledgement or defence of a practice's legitimacy while rejecting the identity label or collective positioning proposed for it. This specifies one form of divisible uptake and prevents category refusal from being coded as rejection of the practice. Establish both the affirmative claim and the refused classification in the actor's response.

Strategic accommodation. Adaptation of conduct to an evaluator's expectations to obtain or retain access, including where an actor continues to value an identity or repertoire that the setting penalises. It specifies a relation between anticipated evaluation and performance, rather than proving changed identification. Trace the stated or evidenced expectation, adaptation and costs; do not infer a conscious strategy, endorsement or absence of burden from conformity alone.

Domain-conditioned recognition. Recognition whose valuation and practical consequences depend on the social domain, audience and allocative scene. It identifies variation in the treatment of a practice across settings, rather than assigning it one overall level of acceptance. Compare the relevant judgments and resources in each setting; cultural prestige does not establish educational, professional or material inclusion.

Polycentric authority and allocative inequality. Polycentric authority is the coexistence of multiple centres able to classify, evaluate or refuse, without a single centre necessarily settling their judgments. Allocative inequality concerns differences in the resources, reach and durability those centres can command. Map each actor's domain, judgment and actual capacities separately.

The plurality of recognisers does not imply equal power, and discursive counter-sanctions do not establish the ability to reverse marks, hiring or funding decisions.

Authority to define, to represent and to allocate. Authority to define is recognised capacity to classify a practice or determine its public meaning; authority to represent is recognised standing to speak for a category or constituency; authority to allocate is capacity to decide access to resources or opportunities. These distinguish powers that may coincide but need not do so. Identify each mandate, decision procedure and domain, separating available from exercised authority. Prominence does not prove internal consent, and consultation does not prove budgetary control.

Symbolic recognition. Acknowledgement that affirms or changes the publicly attributed valuation or legitimacy of a practice, person or claim. Here this specifies a form of recognition, not a synonym for all esteem, visibility or actual redistribution. Identify who acknowledges what and how its valuation changes; praise alone does not establish institutional admission or resource conversion.

Institutional recognition. Acknowledgement that makes a practice or category legible and admissible within an organisation's established procedures, classifications or authorised activities. It distinguishes formal organisational entry from favourable public evaluation. Identify the operative category, rule, role or procedure and its practical reach. An award category, dictionary entry or official endorsement does not by itself demonstrate adequate funding, income or universal acceptance.

Recognitional arbitrage. Capture of a difference in the value of a cultural sign as an actor moves it between identity-linked markets or evaluative domains. This specifies an unequal conversion opportunity within the broader concept of conversion. Trace the sign, its valuation in each setting, the intermediary or performer, the benefits captured and the sanctions borne or avoided. It does not imply fixed exchange rates, exclusive cultural ownership, or that every act of borrowing is illegitimate.

Recognition infrastructure. The institutions, networks, media and other durable arrangements that connect performances and claims to audiences, authorised judgments and possible conversions. This is the recognition-specific application of identity infrastructure, not an additional kind of capital. Identify the practical mediators, their dependencies and the links that function or fail; voice or agency alone does not establish access to an effective allocator.

Stabilisation pressure. Pressure to give a fluid practice or category enough continuity for institutions to identify what they teach, fund, publish, document or reward. It identifies a possible consequence of institutional recognition rather than an inevitable transition to coercion or purity policing. Trace selection rules, authorised spellings, histories, representatives or boundaries and their subsequent use. Editorial selection alone does not prove that the selected account has become an enforced social standard.

Institutional-legibility paradox. The tension whereby categorical stability can enable durable institutional support while increasing the power of recognising institutions to define the practices and people supported. It connects access and classificatory authority, rather than treating recognition as an unqualified gain or formalisation as necessarily oppressive. Examine both the resource pathway and the authority acquired through it, including exclusions and revision routes. This is a scoped analytical proposition, not a universal law or proof that every dictionary suppresses variation.

Institutionalised contestability. An arrangement in which categories retain sufficient continuity for allocation while their meanings, boundaries and uses remain open to consequential challenge, refusal, variation and revision. As a normative objective, it specifies accountability after recognition rather than the elimination of regulation. As an empirical description, it requires evidence that objections can reach decisions capable of change. Examine entry conditions, judgment scope, revision procedures, participation costs, returns and refusal rights; public disagreement alone does not prove effective contestability.

Recognition after recognition. The continuing reorganisation of authority, boundaries and distributive disputes after a formerly marginalised claim gains recognition. It names the subsequent research problem: how a category counts, who represents it and who benefits. Trace changes in recognisers, institutional rules, conversion routes and renewed contestation. The phrase identifies a comparative question; it is not a necessary stage sequence, an additional capital, or a claim that all emancipatory interventions reproduce equivalent domination.

15 Published foundations and further reading

The 2024 article is the published foundation of IGT. The 2026 article applies identity economies to literary narrative. This public guide records subsequent clarifications in its own right; the publications below are not sources for every later formulation. The guide does not claim to replace engagement with the wider literature on identity, roles, narrative, capital, institutions or power.

Barker-Ciganik, D. (2024). Towards a new theory of identity and power: Identity Group Theory and a power-identity nexus. *JAFALA: The Journal of African Linguistic Anthropology, 3*(2), 14–33.

Read the published IGT foundation

Barker-Ciganik, D. (2026). Identity economies in narrative practice: Resource allocation and group identity in the fiction of Zakes Mda. *Critical Arts*. Advance online publication.

Read the Critical Arts article on identity economies

16 Citation and edition record

16.1 Cite the document and the location

Recommended reference: Barker-Ciganik, D. (2026). *Identity Group Theory: A conceptual framework and research guide* (Public edition 1.0).

When referring to a particular definition or argument, identify this public edition and its numbered section or PDF page. For example: “In the public conceptual guide, Barker-Ciganik (2026, Section 2.2) distinguishes the lived self, identity narrative and individualised standard.” Add year suffixes consistently if citing more than one work by the author from 2026.

Once a permanent public URL or repository DOI is assigned to this edition, include it in the reference. The ISIGT homepage is not a substitute for the exact document address. A changing online glossary is supplementary to this dated edition, not a replacement for its section locators. Section and page numbers belong to this edition and must be checked again when citing a later edition.

16.2 Relationship to the theory master

Public edition 1.0 is dated 17 November 2026. Its conceptual basis is the author's theory master version 3.2, dated 8 November 2026. The public edition is an adapted exposition with a separate numbering sequence.

This edition reorganises and condenses the exposition for public readers, retains the core commitments and qualifications, and includes a glossary and research guidance. Internal programme administration and development records are outside its scope. Earlier published formulations remain historical sources; subsequent refinements are not attributed retrospectively to them. Neither publication of this guide nor its edition number establishes peer review or empirical validation.

Future public editions will retain a dated record of changes and preserve access to the current edition. Changes of explanation or organisation will be distinguished from changes of theoretical commitment. Thus, a reader should be able to identify both the exact public text used and the conceptual specification it presents.