

# C&W CONFERENCE TALK

Final Deliverable for WAC  
[Conference Proposal](#)

## Introduction –

I have always been *in-between*, wedged between dichotomies and binaries. I am — Hispanic, but white-passing; bilingual but fluent in tex-mex/border-slang; pursuing a PhD but seeking an alt. Ac. career. The list goes on. These distinctions bring with them negatives and positives, highs and lows. Being stuck in-between means that, for me, research research *has always had* to be made personal for it to matter because the contributions I've put forth towards the various communities that I'm a part of have helped to guide, shape, and determine the ways I'll ultimately put my education to use long-term.

Throughout the duration of my time at Purdue, I've served as an instructor of First Year Composition and Professional Writing, as a Writing Lab peer tutor, and — more recently — I've taken over as the Writing Lab's WAC Workshop Coordinator. Apart from the university, I'm an active member of a local church, I've taken up coaching little league softball for young girls ages 5-9, and I'm a member of a fitness community that's focused on helping people achieve their goals so they can make the most of their lives. I wouldn't be me without each of these different roles and the people in each of these domains in my life. For example... my different sets of experiences enable me to be an asset to those whom are directly connected to whichever task I take up. My past life as a camp counselor helps me connect with my Little Leaguers and my current life as an instructor bleeds into that role as well. Every time I think about it, I am fascinated with the way these roles run parallel, perpendicular and opposite each other, and where I find myself in and between them. [For this reason, much of my research over the past four years has focused on identity \[SLIDE\] and language \[SLIDE\].](#) And, as I progressed from my master's to Phd program, I became increasingly interested in the ways “work” and technology fit into the identity equation.

I know I'm not alone. Many of us of us inhabit similar *in-between*, liminal spaces that occupy our identities and our research. Not to mention, the variables that are identity, language, and technology become increasingly more layered when we examine them from perspectives in and outside educational settings and - at times - it can be hard to separate the two.

## Overview –

In 2017, Friederike Welter co-published a call to move beyond an infatuation with the glitz and glamor offered by silicon-valley models of entrepreneurship. The Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerbergs of the world are not representative of the greater majority of the entrepreneurs out in the world. Welter and company go on to push for the need to embrace the entrepreneurial diversity offered by the remaining 99% of individuals who practice “everyday entrepreneurship” in the different spaces they are a part of.

[\[SLIDE\]](#) I argue that the “remaining 99% of individuals practicing ‘everyday entrepreneurship’” are entrepreneurial because they make strategic use of their identity, language, and the technology at their disposal. At the nexus of each of these variables I've come to develop a rough sketch definition of what it means to construct and inhabit an entrepreneurial identity. But before we move any further, I want to be clear in that **my broadened definition of entrepreneurial identity includes people who are working not necessarily only for themselves, but also within companies, and non-industry related organizations.**

**[SLIDE]** Definitions –

**[SLIDE]** Johnny Saldaña (2016) writes that “Identity is a concept (or construct, process, phenomenon, etc.) that has multiple approaches to and definitions of it, depending on the discipline - if not the individual.” He goes on to expand saying “Some will say identity is a state of being; others will say it is a state of becoming [...] some say it is how you perform; and others say it is what you own and consume [...] but] the point here is that *identity exists by how it is defined*” (pp. 71-72).

To make matters even more complicated, when it comes to talking about entrepreneurial identity, there’s a general disagreement on *what* entrepreneurship is and *how* to talk about it in relation to identity (Garner, 1990; Essers et al., 2017; Elliot, 2011; Cerulo, 1997). Now, I could get into a deep conversation with lots of dense theory about how words are signs with culturally agreed upon meanings, and — while I do believe that plays a significant role in fleshing out what we’re talking about— I won’t bore you with all the nitty gritty details.

Instead, let’s paint with broad strokes... Typically, when we think about entrepreneurship — in the noun form — we think about profit in terms of money, we think about high risk situations, corporate/industry environments, and new frameworks where products are developed from scratch. In fact, **[SLIDE]** the OED defines entrepreneurship as an “activity, behaviour, or attitudes characteristic of an entrepreneur — a person who owns and manages a business, bearing the financial risks of the enterprise.”

**[SLIDE]** Conversely, the adjective — entrepreneurial — lends itself to more flexible signification. The OED’s definition of entrepreneurial is laid out as “of, relating to, or characteristic of an entrepreneur.” Therefore, those **individuals who possess an entrepreneurial identity develop alternative conceptions of profit and their skill sets are not limited to corporate/industry environments.** Not to mention, entrepreneurial individuals experience fluctuating levels of risk and they call on their resources available from pre-existing frameworks. Thus, **the rhetoric fueling entrepreneurial performance is found in an individual’s ability to read the social situation at specific moments, seize the opportunity at hand, draw skills/key insights from previous experiences, and play to their audience through a response that caters to their needs.**

Let’s take Elizabeth, for example... Elizabeth’s mother died when she was 16. Throughout her highschool and college years, she worked at a restaurant in order to afford to pay the bills. She developed a whole host of literacies that are specific to that context (e.g., time management, scheduling, dealing with clients/customers, etc.) Now, as her life continued to change, she got accepted into graduate school and, as she started to shift between roles, domains, etc. she found she was able to *transfer* these literacies by applying her rhetorical know-how (which she’s pulling from a different set of experiences, roles, domains, etc.) in her jobs as First Year Composition instructor, peer tutor, and the like. Each of her experiences require a shift according to the task she’s performing, who she’s interacting with, etc. Thus, Elizabeth embodies an entrepreneurial identity that facilitates success in each of the different areas of her life (both inside and outside school) because of the way that she curates experiences for herself and others.

**[SLIDE]** During my interviews, when I was in the process of data collection for some prior work, and at other times when I would talk about my work with people, I often conflated the terms entrepreneurship/entrepreneurial/entrepreneur without as much as a second thought. Consequently, when I referenced one of my interviewees as an entrepreneur — he stopped and corrected me, stating “I’m not an entrepreneur. I’d agree that I’m entrepreneurial... but don’t confuse the two.” That was a big light-bulb moment for me and in that moment, I realized I was guilty of the same error that other scholars in the field were criticizing.

**[SLIDE]** The overlap between definitions of entrepreneur and entrepreneurial suggests, then, that **all entrepreneurs possess an entrepreneurial identity but not all those who possess an entrepreneurial identity are entrepreneurs;** nevertheless, both produce and facilitate innovation, leadership, and capital. And, ultimately, specification of these terms (i.e., in each form) has a notable rhetorical impact on how they are understood.

**[SLIDE]** Prior Work / Research Methods –

Defining and assessing entrepreneurial identity has been a passion project of mine for quite some time. The journey has been chalk full of obstacles... but I've found that the literacies that individuals possess provide clear in-roads for the development of a nuanced understanding. Over the years, **[SLIDE]** I've conducted site studies, interviews, and gathered secondary data sources while exploring the topic in explicit detail. Then, as I wrote memos about my experiences, transcribed the interviews, and coded my notes — I came upon a quote that helped illuminate categories for me to code that data with and from there I was able to crystalize and develop my cube and contribution to the surrounding scholarship.

**HANDOUT QUOTE ON SLIDE HERE.****[SLIDE]** Contribution –

**[SLIDE]** I have developed and conceptualized a 3-dimensional cube as a heuristic for better understanding entrepreneurial identity. My work is informed by the George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. They explain “since metaphorical expressions in our language are tied to concepts in a systematic way, we can use linguistic expressions to study the nature of [those] concepts and to gain an understanding of the nature of our activities” (7). **As such — the cubed identity heuristic presents researchers with a series of schemas that organize research methods, key components, and theoretical frameworks for the study of entrepreneurial identity cases.**

Building on the critical, foundational work set forth by Mary Romero (2018), David Brunsma et al. (2013), Ann C. McGinley's (2013) and others, the cube **offers a conceptualization of a methodology that facilitates analysis of the way entrepreneurial identity is understood, constructed, and performed.** While the concepts of identity, entrepreneurship, literacy, knowledge transfer, and community have each merited widespread attention in a host of disciplinary fields, traditional approaches for studying these topics are often split by disciplinary sponsored divides featuring qualitative or quantitative perspectives, but the cube opens up possibilities for more approachable mixed methods case studies.

**[SLIDE]** In the most simple terms, my heuristic serves two functions: 1) it provides a multidisciplinary approach for helping us better understand the different components of entrepreneurial identity, and 2) it gives people who possess an entrepreneurial identity a vocabulary for marketing themselves and their skill sets as they navigate spaces *in-between* roles and amidst their communities. Not to mention, the tool could be used for under/grad students, as well as individuals on the job market.

## Explanation of the Cube –

**[SLIDE]** So, now that you have the back-story, let's break down this heuristic. The cube probes nuanced understandings of the qualities and performance of entrepreneurial identity. **Each panel represents the different features that constitute my understanding of the entrepreneurial identity profile and they were derived from my initial pre-pilot study with a local multimedia radio news anchor and the director of development for the city of West Lafayette.** When I apply the cube concept, I see that what can be observed and analyzed about entrepreneurial identity, from any situation, is only the data pertaining to the panel or panels that are facing me, depending on the angle. **The greatest strength of this heuristic is that it places attention on the inherent socio-cultural power dynamics at play that foreground certain facets of entrepreneurial identities in context, while hiding others.**

## Current Research Project –

Once I put the cube together, the next step in my research process required testing and assessment of the cube in a triangulated context that introduced different methods and participants. For this, I felt that Elizabeth Holmes and her company Theranos might be a good fit.

**[SLIDE]** At nineteen years old Elizabeth Holmes dropped out of Stanford, fashioned herself as the biomedical version of Steve Jobs, and began her own startup company. Established in 2003, Theranos sought to make blood testing convenient, promising clients the production of a hypodermic needle that could be drawn from home and also uploaded to perform a full range of blood tests in walk-in clinics. Holmes and Theranos raised hundreds of millions of dollars from investors, but the promises of revolutionary technology were built on a foundation of lies. I found that the media's framing of entrepreneurial identity foregrounds a priority on language, embodiment, and domain. **It was her entrepreneurial identity that facilitated her fame and fortune, not her entrepreneurship practices.**

An initial search for “Theranos” on the *New York Times* yielded 176 results (ranging in relevance) dated July 9, 2010 to recent mentions in 2019. These entries are tagged in ‘Dealbook, Technology, Business Day, Fashion, Health, and Opinion Editorial’ — six of twenty different sections of the online *Times*, including the homepage. For the sake of scale, scope, and time, I reviewed and analyzed five of these articles, dispersed across a wide range of dates, each from different sections of the *Times*. Using the cube's panels as categories, I did an initial round of provisional coding, then ran a second round of NVivoCoding, and ended with a third round of concept coding.

**CODING SCHEMA FROM HANDOUT HERE.**

**[SLIDE]** Consequently, the other panels on the cube remained hidden — which was also a data point worth noting. These results suggest that the other panels — those ones excluding language, embodiment, and domain — are best brought to light with primary research methods, as opposed to the secondary data collection methods I was using this time around. In addition, it is also worth mentioning that a new category emerged during the coding process, one that I had not previously considered for the cube. As I move forward with this project, it may be worthwhile to explore revision of the cube's panels to include a side dedicated specifically to the product, service, and/or consumable capital produced by the participant under observation.

## Key Takeaways/Conclusion –

**[SLIDE]** In its current state, my research offers instructors the opportunity to reframe the way we understand “work” for ourselves and our students, while also modeling interdisciplinarity in praxis. We are the remaining 99% of individuals that Welter's 2017 call urges a shift of focus, attention, and research towards. More often than not, we find ourselves wedged in *in-between* spaces, inhabiting an array of shifting contexts that require resourcefulness as we acquire and apply various skills through technology and writing. I urge each of you to harness the cubed heuristic to help you develop and better understand your own entrepreneurial identities and navigate the communities and literacies, which will draw upon skills from different areas of your life.

**[SLIDE]** References –

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