

## Rhetorical Devices as Multimodal Conceptual Blends in Brené Brown's 99U Conference Talk (2013)

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### Abstract

The present study examines the rhetorical devices used by Brené Brown in a 99U conference Talk (2013) in order to engage and persuade the audience that vulnerability is the seed of creativity and therefore, should be embraced as a stepping-stone to success. The study mainly explores the role conceptual blending theory plays in the exploitation of multimodal rhetorical devices, which include an inspirational quote, analogies and metaphors (both verbal and visual) and how they form a 'mega-blend' and a complex network of conceptual integration. The study also applies the conceptual blending model and the discursive process of framing in the analysis as crucial for the meaning construal of these multimodal rhetorical blends. The blending-framing analysis showed that these diverse rhetorical devices often require a complex multi-frame analysis and a larger mental space network of mappings to derive the intended message and achieve the intended rhetorical effect on the audience. The analysis also showed that the blending-framing model provided a unified theoretical framework that could examine the discursive function and multimodal representations of diverse rhetorical devices in edutainment events.

**Keywords:** conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), conceptual blending theory (CBT), multimodal rhetorical devices (MRDs), edutainment events, and the blending-framing model

### 1. Introduction

Recent studies in multimodal communication show that rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors, analogies, quotes and narrative) often require a complex multi-frame analysis and a larger mental space network of mappings to derive the intended message and achieve their rhetorical effect (see Coulson & Oakley, 2016; Coulson & Pascual, 2006; Fonseca, Pascual, & Oakley, 2020; Grady et al., 1999; Nadeem, 2019; Oakley, 1998; Oakley & Pascual, 2017; Pascual, 2008, 2009). Various studies have explored the rhetorical manipulation of visual metaphors and analogies in different communication genres; e.g., in commercial ads (Coulson, 2001; Feng & O'Halloran, 2013; Forceville, 2009, 2016; Joy et al., 2009; Ox, 2014; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004; Sweetser, 2017), and political discourse (Bogetić, 2019; Barczewska, 2017; Bolognesi et al., 2018; Coulson & Oakley, 2005; El Refaie, 2003, 2009; Krennmayr, 2011; Raymond & Gibbs, Jr., 2011). Multimodal blends involving visual information, material structure, gestures, and grammaticalized entities as in signed languages have also been studied in the literature (see Dudis, 2004; Hutchins, 2005; Liddell, 1995, 2003; Parrill & Sweetser, 2004; Sinha, 2005; Williams, 2004, 2008). Still, further studies are needed to explore the integration of diverse multimodal rhetorical devices (MRDs)—or what is known as mega blends—in argumentative discourse in general and particularly in edutainment events (e.g., TED Talks or 99U conferences). In these events, speakers often use a variety of rhetorical devices and new representational frames in order to engage the audience and get them to adopt new perspectives about the presented topics. These multimodal rhetorical devices often exploit different mapping schemes of source inputs in order to enhance the persuasive power of the speaker's argument and positively affect the audience's acceptance of a certain idea (see Ludewig, 2017; Nadeem, 2019, 2020; Romanelli et al., 2014).

Therefore, it is argued that conceptual blending theory, based on Fauconnier and Turner's work (1994, 1998, 2002 and 2008) as well as the framing analysis of various rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors, inspirational quotes and analogies) will shed light on the commonalities rather than the differences between these diverse

rhetorical devices and their integration to achieve the conference speaker's persuasive outcomes. The blending-framing analysis aims to provide empirical evidence that they not only similarly involve the integrations of knowledge from multiple source inputs and presentation modes to fulfil a particular rhetorical function in discourse but also their integration in mega blends help increase their persuasive effect on the audience. Considering rhetorical devices as multimodal conceptual blends can, thus open new avenues of research about the media resources used in their creation, the communicative processes involved in their meaning construction and their rhetorical effectiveness in edutainment events. The study mainly attempts to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** how can conceptual blending theory and framing analysis provide a unified analytical model that accounts for the integration and rhetorical effectiveness of diverse rhetorical devices as evidenced in the data?

**RQ2:** how did Dr. Brown build and integrate multiple conceptual mappings while creating rhetorical devices in her 99U conference talk (2013)?

**RQ3:** What are the implications for conceptual blending theory, multimodal communication and theories of rhetoric?

In the next section, I will explore how conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), blending theory (BT) and framing analysis link discourse-based and cognitive approaches to the analysis of multimodal rhetorical devices, and then present the blending-framing model used in the analysis. Section 3 includes the data description and the blending-framing analysis. Finally, section 4 presents the discussion and implications of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Blending Theory and the Interpretation of MRDs

In cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) refers to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another e.g., "ARGUMENT is WAR" and "TIME is MONEY" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 4, 7). In CMT, metaphors are matter of thought and not merely of language so, they relate closely to image schemas, mental representations used in reasoning, through the extension of spatial and physical laws to more complex situations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 11). According to CMT, mappings between conceptual domains describe the mental organization of information through which a source domain tracks onto and describes aspects of the target domain. Metaphors such as "ARGUMENT is WAR" draw upon other sub-domains of the source domain "WAR" and shape our language in the way we view argument as a battle to be won (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 10). These conceptual domains can be any mental organization of human experience and their mappings cognitively explain the underlying phenomenon that drives metaphorical usage in language.

A more recent framework, proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1994, 1998, 2002 and 2008) seeks to unify the analysis of conceptual metaphor with the analysis of a variety of other linguistic and conceptual phenomena. While CMT is primarily concerned with well-established metaphoric associations between concepts, according to conceptual blending theory, the construction of meaning depends on a set of cognitive operations for combining (or blending) elements from various forms of conceptualizations e.g., words, images, and ideas in a network of "mental spaces". CMT mainly posits relationships between pairs of mental representations whereas the blending process involves the selection and mapping of features (e.g., connotation, value, attitude, emotion) from at least two distinct input spaces, which go into creating new emergent concepts or blends. Thus, BT offers a general model of meaning construction, whereby language users manage to combine aspects of distinct and sometimes disparate scenes and scenarios into new 'blended' spaces, which arise as they speak and may be short-lived. The blending model posits a minimum of four mental spaces: a) a generic space that contains what the two inputs have in common, two input spaces, and a blended space that contains additional elements from each input space (Figure 1). There have also been additions and variations of the main figure to account for the contextual aspects that guide the interpretation of the emergent structure in the blend (see Brandt & Brandt, 2005; Brandt, 2013; Moreno, 2007).

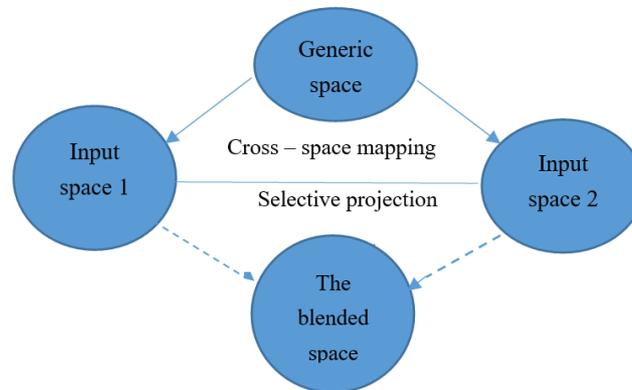


Figure 1. Fauconnier and Turner's original blending model (1998)

According to BT, the blending process “mainly depends on one’s cognitive association abilities or the abilities of cross-space projection and conceptual blending” (Ren & Li, 2015, p. 2094). The blending formula can be one of identity as in metaphors ‘A is B’ as well as other “relationships such as similarity, analogy, role-value relationships, and other pragmatic functions” (Coulson & Oakley, 2005, p. 1513). These ‘blends’ initiate conceptualizations and inferences that are not the sum of but are in fact distinct from their ‘input’ scenes and scenarios. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002), the generation of a blend can be summarized in three general steps:

a) composition: the (partial) selection of elements, structures or frames from input spaces and their projection into the blended space to generate new relations and scenarios;

b) completion: the additional material from the speaker’s background knowledge to the blend to enrich the relations and scenarios of the blend

And c) elaboration: the running of the blend, or the unfolding of the scenarios or development of the relations involved.

### 2.2 Rhetorical Devices as Multi-Modal Conceptual Blends

Rhetoricians often exploit the blending technique not just to activate what is already in the audience’s mind but also to create new emergent meaning connections and concepts. For example, blending theory successfully addressed the meaning construction in metaphorical expressions that do not employ conventionalized mapping schemes. Other rhetorical devices, e.g., inspirational quotes and analogies similarly involve the active combination and blending of information from multiple input spaces and modes into an emerging blend. Inspirational quotes can be regarded as a conceptual blend since their rhetorical use often involves the integration of at least two input spaces: ‘the abstract meaning of the quote’ and ‘its domain of application’; i.e., the social situation to which the quote applies (see Nadeem, 2019, p. 4). Users of inspirational quotes typically make relevant feature mappings between the quote and the social reality it reflects in order to advance a certain worldview to their intended audience (see Burke, 1967, p. 293). In other words, the argumentative function they fulfil largely depends on the conceptual mapping process and how they systematically establish correspondences between conceptual domains (see Figure 2).

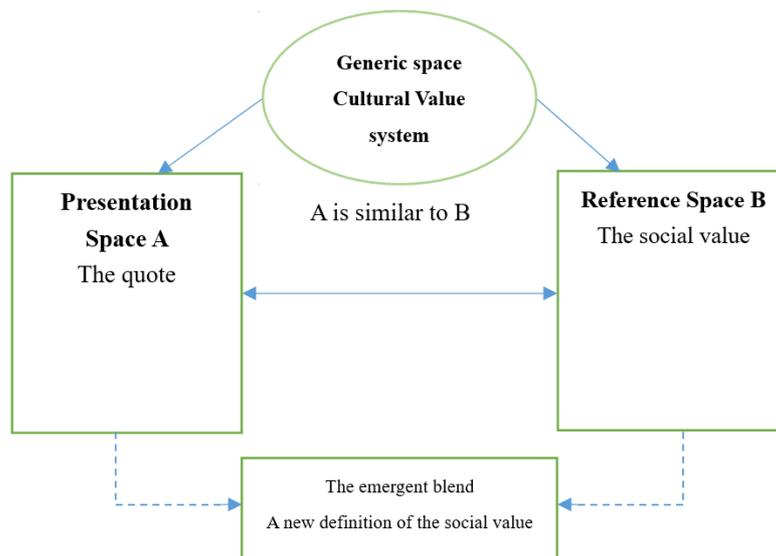


Figure 2. The blending process involved in the rhetorical use of quotes (adapted from Nadeem, 2019, p. 4)

Metaphors, analogies, and quotes share common conceptual features (cf. Pálinkás, 2014, pp. 612–613):

- a) They involve the selection and mapping of features (e.g., connotation, value, attitude, emotion) from at least two distinct input spaces that go into creating the blend;
- b) They employ various blending formula e.g., identity as in metaphors ‘A is B’ or other “relationships such as similarity, analogy, role-value and other pragmatic functions” (see Coulson & Oakley, 2005, p. 1513);
- c) They all create new knowledge out of existing conceptual domains and are often used discursively to advance the speaker’s viewpoint.

Previous studies have proven that multi-modal conceptual blending is involved in the creation of diverse rhetorical devices and it would be extremely useful methodologically to provide a unified framework and analytical model for investigating these novel cognitive experiences (see Nadeem, 2019). Conceptual blending is also closely related to frame-based theories since the two together explain the dynamic process of creating new meaning connections and products of creative thinking in general.

### 2.3 Integrating Framing Analysis into the Blending Model

According to Entman (1993, p. 52), “framing essentially involves selection and salience”. Conceptually, the creation of MRDs involves the mapping of aspects between distinct spaces to create new emergent meanings. This bias in the process of conceptualization through selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient constitutes the persuasive power of MRDs in discourse. From a rhetorical perspective, framing analysis highlights the importance of these rhetorical devices as opinion shapers particularly in the way they evoke evaluations, emotions, and perceptual simulations, which if used effectively, may cause drastic frame shifts in the audience’s perception about the topic (see Ox, 2014; Ritchie, 2013; Ritchie & Cameron, 2014). They not only reflect and influence how we think about different kinds of experiences, but also potentially influence how we consequently act.

From a discourse perspective, framing analysis allows us to explore the communicative processes that promote the construction and integration of these novel cognitive experiences in context (see Cameron et al., 2010; Ritchie, 2013; Semino, 2008, Semino et al., 2018). The framing power of MRDs does not merely depend on the conceptual structures involved in creating the blends, but emerges in the dynamic multimodal interaction between the speaker and the audience in the conference hall. Coulson and Oakley (2005) added a grounding box to the blending model which includes all the contextual factors (e.g., participants, topic, genre features, and media resources), that get into the interpretation of the emergent blend. They (2005, p. 1511) wrote, “Interpreting these blended cognitive models, however, requires the recruitment of a large stock of extra linguistic information, including background knowledge, knowledge of conceptual metaphors, and local contextual information”. In these edutainment events, the time limit and the media resources available are so restricted that the conference speakers would have to use their body postures, voice tone, hand gestures and facial expressions as aids to get

the message through—what Clark (1996) called ‘indexical signaling’.

Thus, framing analysis is not limited to semantically creating partial assemblies of mappable elements across distinct domains but points to the way these MRDs reflect the conference speaker’s unique representation of his/her stance in relation to a certain topic. Musolff (2006) pointed out the inadequacy of the general notion of conceptual domain for discourse approaches of metaphor analysis and proposed the more specific notion of ‘scenario’ as a ‘specific sub-domain category’ (see also Semino, 2008; Semino et al., 2018). Musolff (2006, p. 24) defined ‘a scenario’ as:

a set of assumptions made by competent members of a discourse community about ‘typical’ aspects of a source-situation, for example, its participants and their roles, the ‘dramatic’ storylines and outcomes, and conventional evaluations of whether they count as successful or unsuccessful, normal or abnormal, permissible or illegitimate, etc.

In other words, framing points to the “socially and culturally-embedded schema or structures of expectation about what the juxtaposition of certain elements within a frame means” and the degree of the individual’s agency in manipulating existing frames to create new ones (Wine, 2008, p. 2). In fact, the generic space mainly depends on these culturally shared frames and scenarios on which the mapping process depends. In the data analysis, framing involves three interrelated perspectives, which together provide the interpretive schemes for the emergent meaning of MRDs in context—rhetorical, cognitive and discourse-based.

A) From a rhetorical perspective, MRDs are examined as opinion shapers through identifying the argumentative and persuasive dimension that these MRDs are meant to serve. Framing also explains the way these MRDs are manipulated to trigger specific structures of expectations; i.e., the background knowledge that these MRDs presuppose and cognitively trigger within a particular community (Wine, 2008, p. 2).

B) From a cognitive perspective, they are investigated as metaphorical containers—what Coulson (2001, p. 12) defined as the semantic frame shifting that often happens in conceptual blending, “a set of cognitive operations for combining frames from different domains” that lead to the “semantic reorganization that occurs when incoming information is inconsistent with an initial interpretation”.

C) From a discourse perspective, the analysis investigates the “scenario/s” used in creating these MRDs and the success or failure of their use in a particular context to fulfil a particular function.

The blending-framing analysis not just sets the relationship between the mapped elements within the blend, but explains how the conference speaker exploits specific scenarios of particular domains to promote a particular version of reality and organize the receiver’s belief system (Entman, 1993, p. 53). This dynamic discourse-based perspective shows how various cognitive, linguistic, and cultural forces simultaneously shape people’s use and understanding of various rhetorical devices in context.

Therefore, the blending framing model below (see Figure 3) aims to provide a unified analytical tool that examines the rhetorical function of MRDs in the data. The model is adapted from Brandt and Brandt (2005) and Coulson and Oakley (2005) and includes the two processes of framing and blending in separate, yet interrelated boxes. It also includes the grounding box that shows all the contextual factors that affect the interpretation of the MRDs and includes the following key perspectives:

A) Framing: identifying the argumentative function that each MRD is meant to fulfil, the background information against which these rhetorical blends are created, the particular scenarios they draw upon and the discourse-meanings they acquire.

B) Blending: the mapping of a subset of attributes from multiple space inputs into a blended space, the relational structure and the emergent meanings that arise as a result.

The double-headed arrows that connect the three boxes show the overlapping role of these processes in creating and interpreting these MRDs while the dotted arrows indicate the emergent meaning in the blend (see Figure 3):

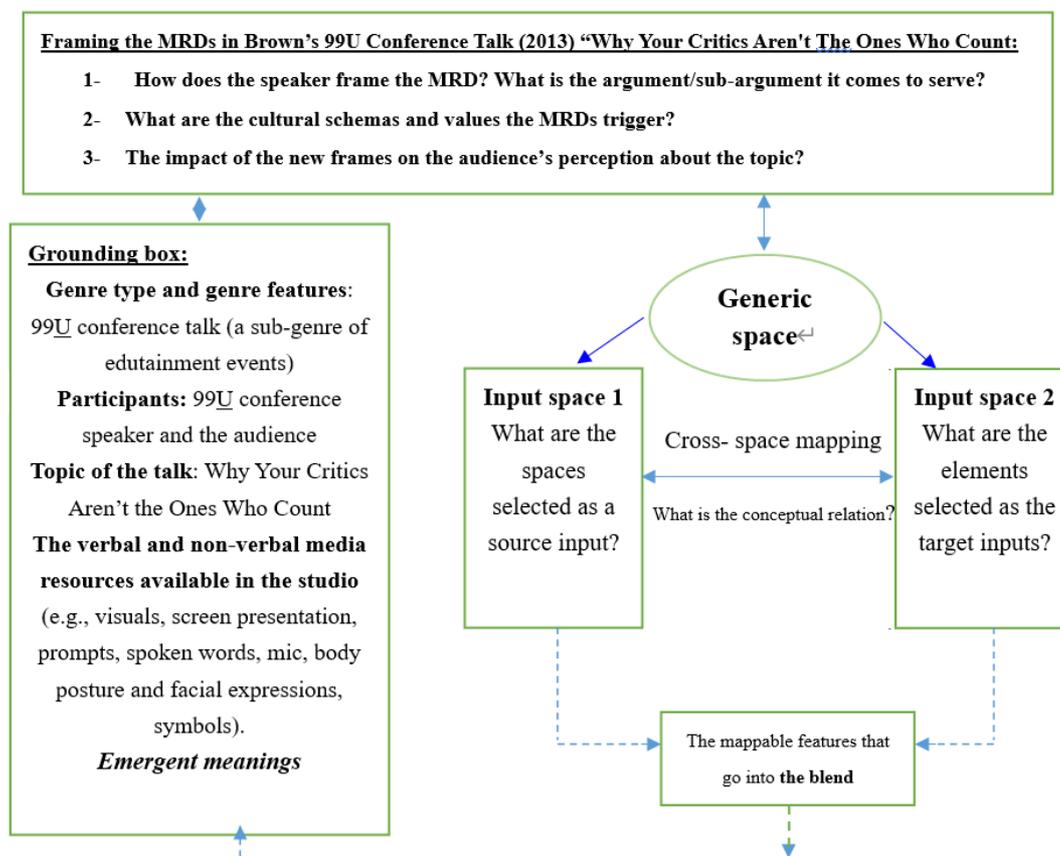


Figure 3. The blending-framing model (adapted from Brandt & Brandt, 2005; Coulson & Oakley, 2005)

### 3. Data Analysis

#### 3.1 Brown's 99U Conference Talk (2013) "Why Your Critics Aren't the Ones Who Count"

The data used in the analysis are excerpts from a 99U conference talk entitled "Why your Critics aren't the Ones who Count" by Brené Brown (2013, Note 1). Dr. Brown is widely known as a vulnerability researcher. Her talk is based on her academic research and an earlier publication on vulnerability entitled "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead" (2012). In the talk, Brown (2013) skillfully explained the meaning of "daring greatly" through exploring Theodore Roosevelt's "in the arena" quote, which he used in his speech "Citizenship in a Republic" (1910, Note 2). She (2013) explained how the quote changed her life saying, "I think a quote can change your life, but sometimes when you hear something when you need to hear it and you're ready to hear it, something shifts inside of you". The main argument in the talk was showing the connection between vulnerability and the process of creativity. She developed the argument through the following argumentative moves (see van Eemeren, 2018):

A) Drawing on the metaphoric implications of the quote to explain the concept of vulnerability and its connection to the process of creativity

B) Manipulating three verbal-visual metaphors to extend the link between vulnerability and creativity.

In the talk, Brown (2013) built up a complex network of metaphoric mappings that involved the integration of the quote by Roosevelt (1910) and the themes of vulnerability and creativity. Once the core mapping link between the quote on the one hand and the themes of creativity and vulnerability was established, the extension to the metaphors (the underground pit, the arena site and the reserved seats in the arena) helped to guide the audience into the further construal of more relevant mappings that best served Brown's argument. In other words, the verbal-visual metaphors constituted further evidence of the legitimacy of the core connection claim between the quote and the two themes. According to the blending-framing model, the following contextual aspects are constant in all blends and are included in the grounding box:

a) Genre features: 99U conference talk as a genre of edutainment events

- b) The participants: the conference speaker and the audience.
- c) Topic: “Why Your Critics aren’t the Ones who Count”
- d) The media resources available: the multi-modes involved in the creation of the MRDs including visuals and indexical signaling (see Clark, 1996).

### 3.2 *Brown’s Reflections on Roosevelt’s “in the Arena” Quote (1910) and Its Connection to the Concepts of Vulnerability and Creativity*

It Brown (2013) introduced Roosevelt’s “in the arena” quote to discursively ground the core claim, “vulnerability is essential for creativity”. Though Brown (2013) used a shorter version of the quote, she drew on its metaphoric associations to make an extended analogy between innovators in all fields and the strong man in the arena. Based on many years of her academic research, the quote represents the full embodiment of the theme and “everything she knows about vulnerability” (Brown, 2013). Roosevelt’s quote (1910) said:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds, who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

According to the quote, innovators and great leaders, like warriors, are those who have the courage, skill, and tenacity to reach high achievements as opposed to the critics who are sitting on the sidelines, watching and simply pointing out “how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better”. Since “there is no effort without error and shortcoming”, this essential state of vulnerability is the very reason why the critics should never count. Even if the ‘man in the arena’ fails, he does so while daring greatly. He is the one who “strives valiantly”, and “knows great enthusiasms and great devotions”. Using the quote to support her argument, Brown (2013) explained how the process of creativity often involves vulnerability in terms of taking risks, feeling uncertain, experiencing failure and being publically exposed. To get the audience to see the creativity process from the perspective of vulnerability, Brown (2013) skillfully drew on the relevant conceptual properties of distinct domains as shown in Figure 4 below:

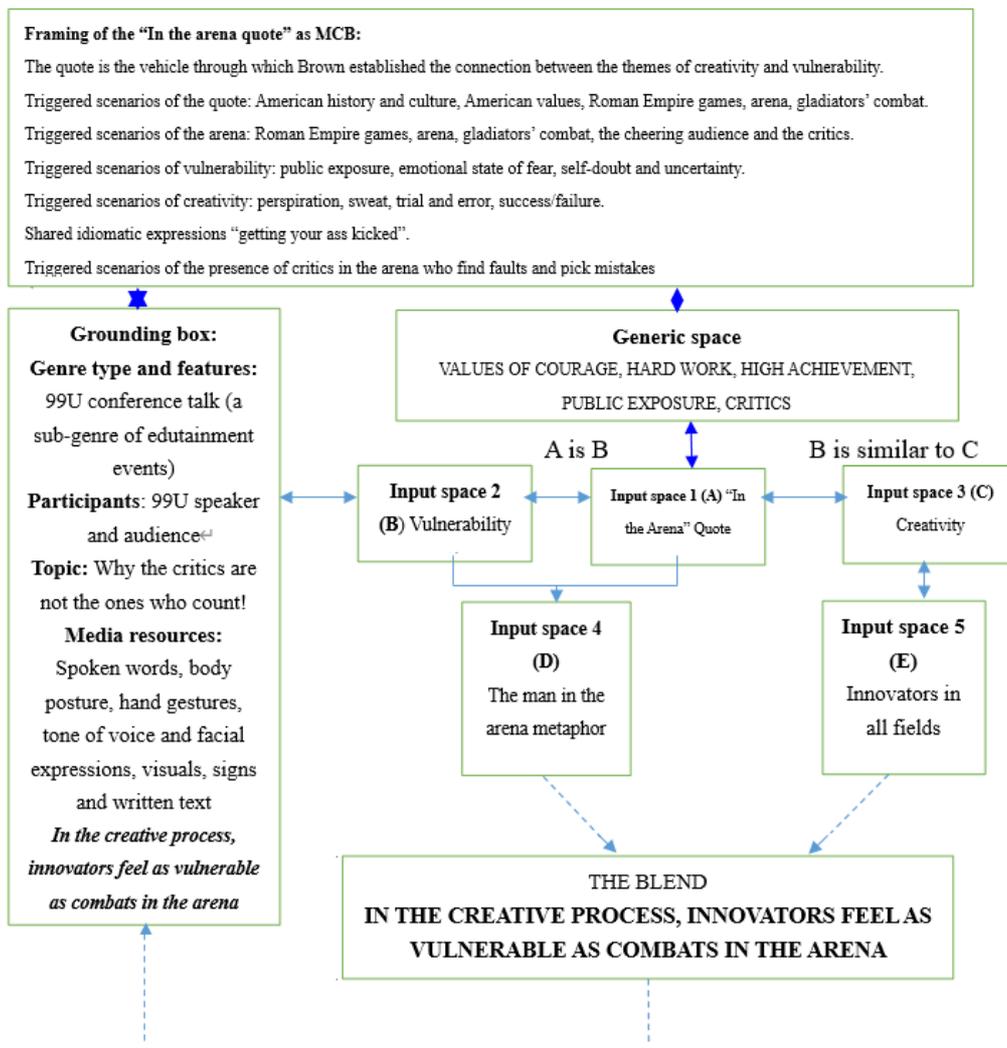


Figure 4. The blending-framing analysis of the quote and the themes of vulnerability and creativity

To examine the mapping details of the arena metaphor and the emerging analogies, let us consider the cross-domain mappings it builds upon:

Generic space: The values of courage, creativity, hard work, high achievement and the states of public exposure and criticism

Input space 1 (A): Roosevelt’s (1910) “in the arena” quote.

Input space 2 (B): The theme of vulnerability

Input space 3 (C): The theme of creativity

Input space 4 (D): Warriors and gladiators in the arena

Input space 5 (E): Innovators who exert a lot of effort to create a new product or idea.

Brown (2013) used the quote as an overarching frame to establish the connection between the themes of vulnerability and creativity. She said, “I spent the last years studying vulnerability and that quote was everything I know about vulnerability”. The mapping connection is one of identity A is B. The whole quote is mapped onto the concept of vulnerability to create a new definition and application in real life (see Figure 2). Roosevelt’s “in the arena” quote also cued shared frames of American culture and the set of values and beliefs that dominate the American society. The values that the quote advocates are DARING GREATLY (COURAGE), HARD WORK, HIGH ACHIEVEMENTS, VICTORY and the necessary states of PUBLIC EXPOSURE and CRITICISM which according to Brown (2013), are the same values the concepts of vulnerability and creativity semantically entail.

To get the audience to make these subtle connections, Brown (2013) drew on the following shared frames and scenarios:

- 1) The well-established quote in American history and the historical/ political conditions in which the quote was used.
- 2) Roosevelt as a great American leader and the shared American values of hard work, perseverance and creativity.

Then, she connected the concept of creativity to vulnerability saying: “There is nothing more vulnerable than creativity” (B is similar to C). She then drew on particular domains from each input space to connect “the man in the arena” to “innovators” through analogy (B to D is similar to B to E). She (2013) said:

The only certainty you have if you’re gonna go in the arena and spend any time in there whatsoever, especially if you’ve committed to creating in your life, you will get your ass kicked... *Without vulnerability, you cannot create.* (Emphasis mine)

Here, Brown (2013) exploited specific scenarios from the broad conceptual domains of the quote and the MAN IN THE ARENA metaphor to establish the similarity link between the two concepts. As Musolff (2006, p. 36) pointed out these scenarios are activated in discourse and cognitively provide “a platform to link the conceptual side of metaphor to its usage patterns in socially situated discourse”. For example, the quote characterized ‘the man in the arena’ as the embodiment of the ideals of hard work and vulnerability in “marred with dust and sweat and blood”. The metaphor of “the man in the arena” also evoked relevant mappings that connected him to innovators, such as HARD WORK, SWEAT, POTENTIAL VICTORY and DEFEAT as well as dealing with public CRITICISM. She also employed a shared idiomatic expression “get your ass kicked” to engage the audience and get them to laugh. The mapping process also depended on activating the following shared scenarios:

- 1) The arena as a symbol of competition, sportsmanship, the Roman Empire, gladiators’ combat, great victory or defeat at the end of the game.
- 2) The presence of the critics who find faults and pick out mistakes in others’ performance.
- 3) Shared idiomatic expressions “get your ass kicked”.

Brown (2013) also manipulated the metonymic symbols “dust”, “sweat” and “blood” that are used in the quote to connect the three domains together and reinforce the link between “perspiration” i.e., “the hard work exerted in the process of creativity” and “vulnerability”. She (2013) said:

I name my keynote presentations things that will make me feel better about being here. So, this one’s called *sweaty creatives* because I know what it means to be a sweaty creative because I create all the time when I write, the way I translate my research, when I talk and I know what the perspiration feels like. So, what I want to talk about today is the perspiration that no one talks about very often. And that is not the perspiration from the hard work and the laborious part of creating. It’s the perspiration from fear—from the cold sweat—the stuff that pops up on our eyebrows when it’s not supposed to be there, because we’re presenting an idea, we are talking about something that we care about, and then we’re begging our body not to sweat.

Here, she referred to a shared definition of creativity as “99% perspiration”, “the laborious part of creating something new” and connected it to ‘the cold sweat’ that comes out of fear and self-doubt as typical states of vulnerability. The juxtaposition of the three kinds of sweat: “combats sweating in the arena”, “the sweaty creatives” and “the cold sweat of vulnerability” helped to reinforce this connection for the audience. The term “sweaty creatives” Brown (2013) used as a title for her talk could potentially refer to a much wider range of people, indeed anyone who gets into the business of creating new ideas, research or products. Therefore, it could appeal to a large audience, not just the target audience of innovators in the conference hall, who could easily relate to the arena quote as the symbol of perseverance and diligence. The dust aspect of the arena also derived from its original meaning in Latin—sand because the stage where gladiators fought used to be covered with a thin layer of sand. The emerging analogies from the blending process of the above input spaces and the selected scenarios are as follows:

- 1) Warriors in the arena are similar to innovators because they both strive hard to reach high achievements, and are subject to potential error, failure and criticism.
- 2) State of vulnerability that the gladiators go through in the arena is similar to the state of vulnerability creators of new products go through during the creative process.

3) Critics of warriors in the arena are analogous to the critics of innovators.

Finally, the integration of mental spaces also involved the recruitment of a number of media resources that equally contributed to the mapping connections while delivering the talk (e.g., the visuals at the back screen, her tone of voice, using hand gestures to point to the inside of the arena, her facial expressions and body movements). What the multiple space blend sought to prove was that “vulnerability is an essential ingredient of creativity”. The emergent meaning in the blend can be summarized as follows, “*In the creative process, innovators feel as vulnerable as combats in the arena*”.

### 3.3 Integrating the Verbal-Visual Metaphors into the Mega Blend

Having thus, introduced the metaphoric connection between ‘the quote’ as a source domain on the one hand and the themes of ‘creativity’ and ‘vulnerability as target domains, Brown (2013) added three verbal-visual metaphors to extend the metaphoric network: a) the underground pit, b) the arena site and c) the reserved seats in the arena. Let us consider the underground pit metaphor.

#### 3.3.1 The Underground Pit Metaphor

To describe the state of vulnerability during the creative process, Brown (2013) projected an image of a dark underground hole with steps leading up to the arena (see Figure 5 below). Brown invited the audience to internalize the underground pit experience by pointing at the image and engaging them in the description saying, “This is where we sweat”. She kept asking the audience, “How many of you know this feeling by just looking at the picture? Show of hands, how many of you know that feeling?” Brown also personalized the dark pit experience by saying “I set camp down here...just dreaming about the day that I come up”. The image was also used to represent the psychological insecurities, the state of fear, self-doubt, comparison and uncertainty that creatives often experience during the creative process. These exact emotions were projected in bold font on the side of the image to help the audience unravel the visually cued connection. The dynamic source properties activated in the image were the darkness of the pit, the reinforcement of ‘sweaty creatives’ and the sense of isolation while the evoked feelings were those of fear and insecurity as signs of vulnerability. The side box below shows the activated frames and scenarios that she manipulated while developing the metaphoric analogies. The metaphoric mapping is explained under each excerpt and the multi-modal signaling is inserted between brackets in bold letters. Brown (2013) said:

<p><b>Activated frames and scenarios</b></p> <p>Underground hole</p> <p><b>Shared experiences</b></p> <p>set camp</p> <p>order takeout food</p> <p><b>emotional states:</b></p> <p>Fear/ self-doubt</p> <p>comparison/uncertainty</p>
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... (**Projecting the image of the underground pit on the screen**) this is where we sweat (**facing the audience and pointing to the picture with her hand and the audience laughing**). How many of you know this feeling by just looking at the picture? Yeah! Show of hands! How many of you know that feeling? So, this is what we do down here... (**emphatic tone of voice and hand gestures**) I set up camp down here, I like stringing up twinkle lights, (**moving on the stage**) I order takeout food, I live down here sometimes (**more emphatically**) just dreaming about the day that I come up (moving her hand up and smiling) and how awesome it’s gonna be like! But I stay down here a lot (**projecting on the screen the words: fear, self-doubt, comparison and uncertainty**).



Figure 5. The underground pit as a symbol of vulnerability

As a visual sign, the underground pit was manipulated to trigger the following features: darkness versus the light showing outside, sweating, lack of social contact, and physical confinement (cf. Bolognesi et al., 2018). Thus, the verbo-pictorial metaphor of the underground pit added extra metaphoric mappings to the blend:

A) TO BE A CREATIVE IS LIKE BEING IN AN UNDERGROUND PIT

B) SWEATING IS A VERBAL METONYM FOR HARD WORK.

C) TO BE A CREATIVE IS TO BE VULNERABLE AND EXPERIENCE FEAR, SELF-DOUBT, COMPARISON, ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY.

### 3.3.2 The Arena Metaphor

Then, Brown (2013) expanded the connection between the underground pit visual and the arena, but this time she focused on the juxtaposition between the dark underground pit and the outdoor arena. In contrast to the dark pit image, the arena visual was outdoor and full of sunshine (see Figures 6 and 7 below). She (2013) said:

<b>Activated frames and scenarios</b>
Underground hole
<b>Shared experiences</b>
set camp/order takeout food
<b>emotional states:</b>
Fear/self-doubt
comparison/uncertainty
<b>Feelings in the arena</b>
Love, belonging, joy,
trust, empathy

And here's what we do! *The ring is right there. You can see it, the lights are there and (facing the audience and speaking more emphatically) the fear is this 'I'm scared', (with her hands slightly clutched in front of her body) a lot of self-doubt, (turning to point to the projected image of the pit) comparison, anxiety, uncertainty and (holding one hand up to point to the image).* So, what do most people do when they're walking into the arena and those things are going to greet them at up top? (What do you do, *you armor up*, right?)

This is where I would imagine *the old days that they got all their stuff on (mimicking how they put their heavy stuff on). (Bending her head down then raising it to face the audience as she said emphatically)* But God! That stuff is heavy and that stuff is suffocating and the problem is when you armor up against vulnerability you shut yourself off... *(Hands clutched and raised then, pointing to the audience with her hands and saying more emphatically and decisively)* You armor up in this hallway, you shut yourself off from everything that you do and that you love because *(in a low tone of voice while walking with her face down on stage)* vulnerability is certainly a part of fear and self-doubt and grief and uncertainty and shame. **(Looking back at the visual with a changed text)** but it's also the birthplace of these. *It's the birthplace of (using her hand to count while pausing after each word) love, belonging, of joy, trust empathy, creativity and innovation* (see Figures 6 and 7 below). *(Emphatically) Without vulnerability, you cannot create.* (Emphasis mine)



Figure 6. The juxtaposition between the underground pit and the outdoor arena



Figure 7. The outdoor arena where gladiators combat used to take place

Historically, the “arena” was a stage for gladiators’ combat, the Roman stadium where gladiators showed up in full armor. As a symbolic visual, the rise into the arena further connected the themes of vulnerability to creativity. Walking into the arena involved not just the display of creative talent but also the feelings of “fear, self-doubt, grief, uncertainty and shame”. Unlike the quote, the activated scenario of ‘the man in the arena’ in the above excerpt was focusing on the symbolic act of “armoring up against fear and self-doubt”. While gladiators carried ‘the heavy stuff’ to protect themselves from opponents, innovators needed to “armor up against vulnerability”. However, the arena is also “the birthplace of love, belonging, of joy, trust empathy, creativity and innovation”. She also described showing up in the arena as “getting naked, getting really real, putting yourself out there and walking out there so people can see you and see what you’ve made and see what you’re doing”. This symbolic

nakedness stood for both creativity (full display of self and talent) and vulnerability (being publically exposed). Thus, the arena image expanded the conceptual features in the initial quote and added extra metaphoric mappings to the extended analogy between ‘creatives’ and the ‘man in the arena’:

- A) THE ARENA IS A METONYM FOR VULNERABILITY
- B) LIKE GLADIATORS, INNOVATORS ARMOR UP AGAINST VULNERABILITY
- C) ARMORING UP IS A VERBAL METONYM FOR GLADIATORS’ COMBAT COMPETITION.
- D) ARMORING UP IS EMOTIONALLY LIKE CARRYING A HEAVY STUFF.
- E) ARMORING UP IS SUFFOCATING.
- F) THE ARENA IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF LOVE, BELONGING, JOY, TRUST, EMPATHY, CREATIVITY and INNOVATION.
- G) BEING IN THE ARENA IS LIKE GETTING NAKED IN PUBLIC.

In fact, there are many more evoked aspects to the analogy and the verbo-pictorial mappings than what is simply stated above. As Sweetser (2017, p. 68) pointed out “advertisers who evoke potential source and target frames certainly do not have to lay out the mappings between them to prompt construction of a metaphoric blend” since “parallel inferential structures guide the blending process”. For example, the innovator-gladiator analogy as a reflection of the themes of vulnerability and creativity developed through the juxtaposition of ‘evoked’ scenarios in the projected visuals, e.g.,

- A) The darkness of the pit is contrasted with the light in the arena.
- B) The isolation and physical confinement in the pit are contrasted with the public exposure and social contact in the arena.
- C) The psychological struggle of the innovator is compared to the gladiators’ physical combat in the arena.

To maximize the audience’s engagement in constructing the metaphoric blends, Brown also skillfully exploited her hand gestures, tone of voice, body posture and movement, which formed a paralinguistic aid in delivering and internalizing the message of how it felt like to be in the arena. Brown’s tone of voice, head down and hand gestures completed the indexical signaling of what vulnerability felt like.

### 3.3.3 The Reserved Seats Metaphor

Brown (2013) discursively explored extra domain features and scenarios of the arena through using the ‘reserved signs’ metaphor to describe the various occupants of the spectators’ seats, particularly the critics’. In ancient Rome, the arena was typically a large open space designed to accommodate a multitude of spectators and thus, allowed maximum visibility of the performers and a lot of public attention. Initially, the visual showed the arena image full of sunlight with the tiered seating for the spectators and then, the ‘reserved seat’ signs were added to the image (see Figure 8). Brown (2013) said:

Activated frames and scenarios
The arena
public exposure
Seats in the arena
stadium
Spectators
critics
Support group
fans

**(Turning back to project the arena image)** so when we walk out **(facing the audience)**, this is what we see lots of seats, lots of people **(turning back to look at the image and saying emphatically)** but we... focus on

this the critics (**facing the audience and using hand gestures**). I used to think the best way to put your work out into the world is to make sure the critics are not in the arena, but you have no control over who is in the arena. And (**moving on the stage**) the best way I have found is to know (**using her hand to point**) that they're there and to know exactly what they're going to say to you.



Figure 8. The arena steps with the reserved seats sign

Then, Brown (2013) personified the feelings of vulnerability as the occupants of the main seats in the arena, she said, “When you walk into the arena, when you share your work with someone, the three seats that will always be taken are shame, scarcity and comparison”. Then, she described the seats taken by the critics in detail as:

A) A seat for self-criticism

She said, “When we look up and we're putting an idea, our piece of art, our design forward, who do you think is the biggest critic in the arena? Normally, it is yourself”.

B) Seats for external critics

She said, “whether you know it or not the critics are in the arena, whether you identify them and think about the messages that keep us small, they're there, whether you do that or not”. She advised the audience to say to the critics, “I'm trying to be creative and I'm trying to innovate, I'm going to show up and do this anyway and I've got a seat for you and you're welcome to come, but I'm not interested in your feedback”.

C) There are also seats for the support group and fans

She said, “You got to have at least one person in your life who's willing to pick you up and dust you off and look at you when you fail, which hopefully, you will, because if you're not failing, you're really not showing up”. She added, “but who was willing to look at you when you fail and say ‘man that sucked’.... This is someone who loves you not despite your imperfections and vulnerabilities but because of them and they should have great seats in the arena” (see Figure 9 below)



Figure 9. The seats reserved for the innovator's support group

#### D) Finally, a seat for the self

She said, "The last thing, which I think is the hardest is this, one of these seats needs to be reserved for you". So, when innovators look back at their achievements in life, they might say, "It feels dangerous to be seen, it's terrifying but it is not as scary, dangerous, or terrifying as getting to the end of our lives and thinking what if I would have shown up, what would have been different?" (See Figure 10 below).



Figure 10. Brown's picture as she positioned herself in one of the seats in the arena

The metaphoric mappings below drew on more scenarios and sub-domains of the 'man in the arena' metaphor and the extended analogy between the innovator and the gladiator:

- 1) RESERVED SEATS IN THE ARENA ARE A VERBAL/VISUAL METONYM FOR THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS THAT OCCUPY SPACES IN THE INNOVATORS' LIFE AND MIGHT ENHANCE OR HINDER THEIR CREATIVITY.
- 2) FEELINGS OF VULNERABILITY-SHAME, SCARCITY, SELF-CRITICISM AND COMPARISON-OCCUPY THE MAIN SEATS IN THE ARENA
- 3) CRITICS AND FANS IN THE ARENA STADIUM ARE LIKE THE CRITICS AND FANS IN THE INNOVATOR'S LIFE.
- 4) INNVOATORS REFLECT ON THEIR LIFE ACHIEVEMNTS AS THE AUDIENCE SIT AND WATCH THE GLADIATOR'S PERFORMANCE IN THE ARENA.

Below is the conceptual blending-framing analysis of the 'man in the arena' mega blend. It shows how Brown (2013) drew on 8 overlapping conceptual domains to support her argument: Roosevelt's quote (1910), the themes of vulnerability, creativity, the man in the arena, the underground pit, the ring and the reserved seats

therein (see Figure 11 below)

Figure 11 shows the blending-framing model that describes the mega blend and the integration of the multiple input spaces and domains that are manipulated in its creation. The analysis model shows how Brown (2013) created the verbal-visual metaphors using multi-space/multi-modal rhetorical blends. The framing box shows the main argument that these MRDs came to serve and the frames and scenarios they triggered. Allusions to culturally shared frames (e.g., Roosevelt's 1910 quote, the Roman Empire sports frame and familiar visual symbols (e.g., the underground pit, the arena and the reserved seats for the spectators) all help to activate the relevant conceptual scenarios within these frames and generate new meaning connections. The grounding box include all the contextual factors that affect the communication process and provide the media resources that contribute to the blending process. Brown (2013) actively engaged the audience verbally, visually and para-linguistically while building up the various mental space blends and allowed them to view the connection between the themes of vulnerability and creativity from more than one perspective. Modes of expression of source and target domains are not just language and image but truly multimodal via using spoken words, images, texts, symbols, tone of voice, intonation, body posture and more). Manipulating these shared frames of indexical signaling helped to reinforce the metaphoric connections and engage the audience in reconstructing Brown's argument.

The blending boxes show the multi-space inputs that create the mega blend and how the quote serves as the core metaphoric mapping that justifies the connection between creativity and vulnerability. The metaphoric connection between the input spaces is written on top of the arrows and the double-headed arrows indicate the mapping effect on reframing the input domains. Once these inputs get into new mapping relations, they come to acquire new meanings and undergo frame shifts. The dotted arrows show the selection of the input spaces that get into creating the blend while the rhetorical impact on the conference audience is shown in the dotted line that connects the blend to the grounding box. The arena metaphor is accessible via the visual display of the source domain image of 'the arena' and the verbal depiction of the emotional state of vulnerability experienced there. It acts as the nodal point that binds the entire metaphoric network. The extended analogy between the innovator and the man in the arena also provides more evidence of the connection between the two themes. The further Brown exploits the analogy, the stronger and more convincing the argument becomes. Oswald and Rihs (2013, p. 9) wrote, "extended metaphors, provided they are exploited in a way that is perceived as relevant by the audience, can lead to an identification of source and target domains". In fact, the overall relevance and adequacy of the core mapping is enhanced by the overlap between the elements in each respective subdomain. On a discourse level, each mapping correspondence depends mainly on the various associations of the arena metaphor, which helps to strengthen Brown's argument and provides extra evidence of why vulnerability is essential to creativity. The mega blend thus emerges as a combination of all the different inputs and meaning connections that arise through the processes of blending and framing.

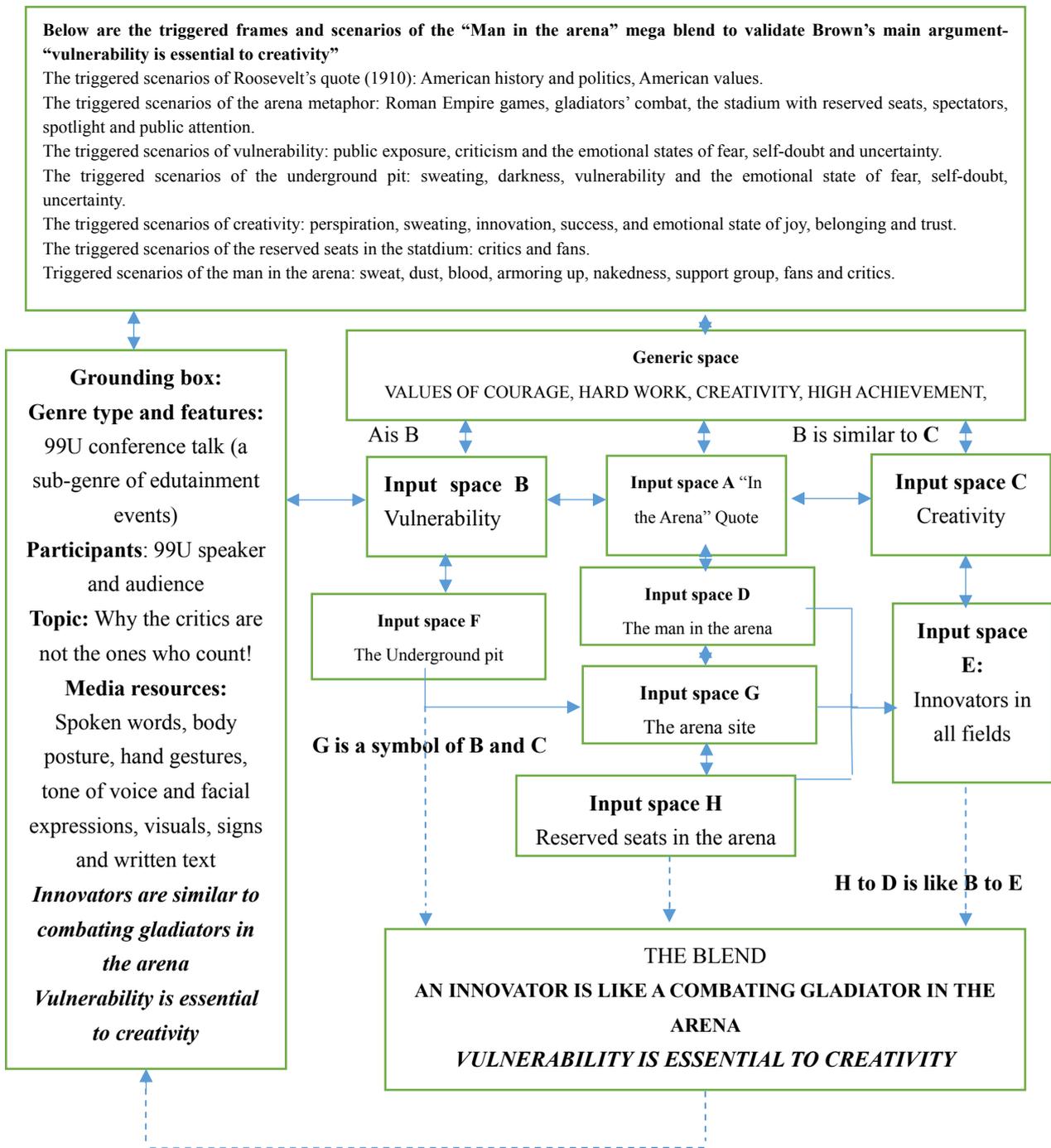


Figure 11. The blending-framing analysis of the ‘man in the arena’ mega blend

#### 4. Discussion

Although the analysis is limited to a small data set and one communication genre (a 99U conference Talk); still, it has important implications for conceptual blending theory, multi-modal communication and theories of rhetoric. The framing of the mega blend confirmed that all the metaphors and analogies build on different scenarios and associations of the core mapping between the innovator and the man in the arena. The emergent structure in the mega blend is so diverse from a rhetorical point of view that the audience could simultaneously see the relevance of vulnerability to creativity from different perspectives (the quote and the 3 verbal-visual metaphors of the pit, arena combats reserved seats for spectators, and the extended analogy) and via different

modes verbally, visually and paralinguistically. The analysis provides empirical evidence that framing analysis help to link discourse-based and cognitive approaches in the analysis of rhetorical devices as conceptual blends. Semino et al. (2018, pp. 630–631) wrote that Musolff's (2006) notion of scenario showed how the approaches to metaphor often labelled as 'cognitive' and 'discourse based' can be combined in practice and added, "this is particularly obvious in studies that investigate empirically how different metaphorical descriptions of the same topic can influence people's reasoning".

Though the emergent meaning in the blend rely on the metaphoric mapping between the different inputs; yet, it has its own metaphoric logic. In the data, the successive extension of 'the man in the arena' metaphor and the selected elements from each domain put a new spin on the two themes. Joy et al. (2009, p. 41) wrote, "people are sophisticated in drawing relationships between the blend and the inputs, but are by no means uniformly constrained to make structure in the blend match the inputs". As Sweetser (2017, p. 68), pointed out blends not only offer a new understanding of Target in terms of Source but a new perspective of representing both that emerge in the new blend as "new inferences arise from blending the two frames". Coulson and Oakley (2005, pp. 1514–1515) also wrote, "interestingly, even though cognitive models in blended spaces are occasionally bizarre, the inferences generated inside them are often useful and lead to productive changes in the conceptualizer's knowledge base and inferencing capacity". These novel representations are always partial mappings that are given from a specific perspective for specific communicative goals. Framing thus not just shapes reasoning in communication but affects change in the social world through the creation of these novel representational blends (cf. College, 2017; Vliegthart & Zoonen, 2011). "From this perspective, framing is a process that involves the use of metaphorical expressions to reflect and facilitate particular understandings and evaluations of topics or situations (Semino et al., 2018, p. 636). The relational structure of the mapping (whether identity, similarity or analogy) that frames the connection between the different input spaces in the mega blend not just imposes a certain structure on the way the audience perceive the creative process from the perspective of vulnerability but also introduces "daring greatly" as a new social value to the whole cultural value system.

The analysis has also given evidence that focusing on the verbal aspect of metaphoric mapping is not sufficient to understand the complex conceptual mapping phenomenon as a matter of cognition or rhetoric. In creating the mega blend, Brown (2013) manipulated a number of rhetorical devices and semiotic systems (a quote, symbols, images and indices) that made the argument more accessible to the audience. Adding the available media resources to the grounding box explains how visuals, gestures, tone of voice, body postures along with verbal description could be simultaneously exploited in the online construction of these rhetorical devices. As previous research has shown, these MRDs are rarely cued in a single mode/modality, but often draw on two or more modes simultaneously (Forceville, 2016, p. 3). Brandt (2013, p. 14) maintains, "the semiosis (the occurrence of utterances or other exchanges of signs) is the base for space building. It is the ground on which spaces are built". Genre also plays a significant role in identifying the function of these rhetorical devices as they represent the unique evolution of representational mappings that help in advancing the speakers' main argument as well as ensure the active engagement of the audience during the talk (see Nadeem, 2019, 2020; Romanelli et al., 2014). What these processes do is to provide new perspectives and create emergent meaning constructions that best serve the speaker's persuasive goals.

Thus, the data analysis and the blending framing model have important implications for theories of rhetoric and multi-media communication. The model not only provides an integrative theoretical framework for the study of MRDs but a unified analytical method to examine diverse rhetorical devices in terms of their rhetorical effectiveness and multimodal representations. Introducing framing analysis to the model helps to focus more on the commonalities between these diverse MRDs and get us closer to how they cognitively, rhetorically and communicatively operate. Oswald and Rihs (2013) wrote:

Accounting for the conditions under which people end up being convinced by discursive means has to incorporate some cognitive explanation. It is, we believe, by trying to assess the relationship between understanding and believing at the interface of language and cognition that the analysis of discourse can gain psychological plausibility and therefore explanatory power.

These commonalities are not simply confined to the rhetorical function of these devices (which has been extensively discussed in previous research) but in the processes that cognitively and discursively account for their creation, interpretation and effectiveness. In the case of unconventional and highly creative blends, the accumulative effect of domains, scenarios and modes do the job and guide the audience into the desired communicative inferences. The more the audience get confirmations about the message through numerous relevant instantiations of MRDs, the more persuasive the argument is and the more credible the content of the message gets to be (Oswald & Rihs, 2013).

## 5. Conclusion

So far, the analysis has empirically shown how rhetorical devices are created through the creative processes of blending and framing. Still, the blending-framing model needs to be tested and further applied to other MRDs to confirm its analytical rigor. If it proved to be applicable to other MRDs (e.g., multimodal memes and jokes), then, semiotic conceptual blending theory can do much more than simply study metaphoric mappings, but expand to cover a whole range of language and communicative phenomena in new genres of communication cutting across the diverse theories of metaphor, multimodal communication and rhetoric. Within conceptual blending theory, these instances of MRDs are devices that language users possess as social agents to restructure reality and bring about social change. In George Campbell's (1963) definition of rhetoric, they best serve us in "enlightening understanding, pleasing imagination, moving passions, and influencing will" (as cited in Foss, 2012, p. 2).

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### Notes

Note 1. Like TED talks, 99U conferences represent a unique genre of edutainment events. These conferences are hosted all over the world with the main aim of spreading innovative ideas or selling products, then they are disseminated via social media channels especially YouTube. The conferences have specific features in terms of recurring themes, argumentative, and rhetorical function, which make the talks very close to three parent genres—the sales pitch, the memoir, and the academic lecture (for full description of these conferences see Ludewig, 2017; Romanelli et al., 2014).

Note 2. The video and the transcript were retrieved from the YouTube channel. Below is the video link of Dr. Brown's talk (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-JXOnFOXQk&list=PL859s>

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