



**BRIDGING THE GAP:
A PENTADIC ANALYSIS OF THERESA
MAY'S CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE
SPEECH, "BRITAIN AFTER BREXIT: A
VISION OF A GLOBAL BRITAIN"**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study of British Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative Conference speech "Britain after Brexit: A Vision of a Global Britain" delivered in the fall of 2016 uses pentadic criticism as the basis for its analysis. This study identifies women as an underrepresented minority in the realm of politics around the world and media as a powerful channel for their portrayal as politicians. It is important to understand the role that the media can play in the portrayal of women leaders in times of crisis or immediacy for both foreign and domestic audiences alike. This study reaffirms that more women in leadership within politics are needed for equitable gender representation in politics. May's speech and her portrayal within the media for both foreign and domestic audiences shows that it is possible for women to be seen as leaders, bridging the gender gap in politics.

PURPOSE STATEMENT & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Purpose Statement:**
 - The objective of this qualitative study was to explore British Prime Minister Theresa May's first speech as Prime Minister after the "Brexit" referendum to further understand the phenomena of women who rise to political leadership in times of crisis.
- **Research Questions:**
 - What was the persona May intended to present in this speech?
 - What was the importance of the media's role in May's ability to communicate leadership to both domestic and foreign audiences

ARTIFACT

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53zFtBZjc9M>
- Start at 0:34.
- End at 2:55.



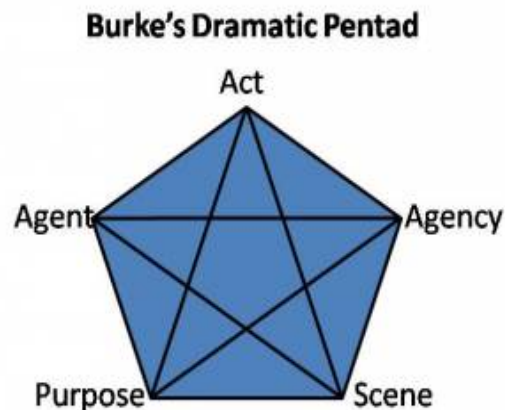
Theresa May addressing the 2016 Conservative Conference. Credit: Ben Birchall/PA Wire. Source: May, Theresa. "Britain after Brexit: A Vision of a Global Britain" 2016 Conservative Conference. England, Birmingham. 2 Oct. 2016. *Politics Home: All Today's Politics in One Place*. Web. 2 Nov. 2016.

METHOD

- **Pentadic Criticism-Kenneth Burke**

- Burke credits Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and Talcott Parson's *The Structure of Social Action* as the original sources of the concept of pentadic criticism.

- The pentad **in rhetorical criticism**, such as in this overarching study of Theresa May's Conservative speech about Brexit, is rooted in Burke's pentad.



(Foss 355)

METHOD

Pentadic criticism includes 3 steps:

1. Selecting an artifact

1. Theresa May's speech, "Britain after Brexit: A Vision of a Global Britain"

2. Analyzing the artifact—Labeling Terms

1. Using five elements known as **act (what), agent (who), agency (how), scene (when/where), and purpose (why)**

3. Analyzing the artifact—Applying Ratios to Identify the Dominant Term

1. Systematically pairing elements of the pentad to discover the relationship between them and the nature of the influence each has on the other

(Foss 357-364)

ANALYSIS-THE ELEMENTS

- **Act (what)**= May delivers the speech
- **Agent (who)**=May
- **Agency (how)**=speech delivered orally at the conference; transcript available online (May, Theresa, “Britain after Brexit: A Vision of a Global Britain”)
- **Scene(where/when)**=2016 Conservative Conference in Birmingham, England on Oct. 2; Metaphorically envisioning Britain’s transition to a global Britain
- **Purpose (why)**= Gain British and global support of May as new British PM; To visualize, motivate, and ensure Britain and the world of May’s plan to enforce Brexit

ANALYSIS—THE RATIOS

- Pairing and comparing ratios to find most dominant element
- 20 ratios possible with the 5 elements
- Ex: Purpose-Scene=The purpose of the speech(May's speech on Brexit), determined the scene at the Conservative Conference.
 - Scene-Purpose=The scene at the Conservative Conference was not as important as May's speech on Brexit because May could have delivered the speech anywhere else with the same impact.
 - Act-Agent=May's delivery of her speech was more dominant than May herself as PM, the agent, delivering the speech because Britain needs the speech itself and the plans for Brexit more than May herself as an individual.
 - Agency-Scene=The fact that the speech was delivered orally at the conference overpowers the fact that the speech was delivered in Birmingham. Again, the speech's content about Brexit was more important than where it was delivered.

ANALYSIS-THE RATIOS

- Most dominant ratio=purpose
 - Purpose was found to be dominant over the other elements in May's speech because her mission to talk about her plans for Brexit was the purpose of the speech itself and served as a conduit for presenting her as an assertive leader during this time of crisis.

CONCLUSION

1. May exuded an assertive and confident persona in following through with Brexit as PM.
She demonstrated her prowess at leadership through this assertiveness as well as through her articulation and conviction in the speech.
2. Media highlighted her policies, rather than critiquing her leadership style or gender.
Because of scope of Brexit, people cared more about what happens with Brexit than about May herself.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- Lack of literature on women in politics during times of immediacy made for interesting artifact.
- May's speech seen as bridge to connect the gap between men and women in politics in general, but particularly during times of crisis.
- Women in contemporary politics face a constant double-bind, via traditional vs. modern views of feminine and masculine leadership and communication styles.
- We need more women in positions of political leadership worldwide!

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