

Divorce doesn't have to be bloody difficult



*Framing Brexit as overwhelmingly negative prevents productive dialogue. **Jennifer Jackson-Preece** who has recently [introduced](#) the [Generation Brexit](#) project on the blog, which gives voice to the millennial generation, addresses ways of developing a less confrontational Brexit identity.*

In a recent [blog](#), Steve Bullock rightly reminds us that tough and difficult are not the same thing. As a former EU trade negotiator, he speaks from experience. But his article is itself a statement of 'bloody mindedness'. As with so much of the recent media coverage, Bullock's framing of the Brexit negotiations is overwhelmingly negative... to the detriment of a productive dialogue. Perhaps if we changed the rhetoric, we might create a less confrontational Brexit identity?

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A broadly critical discourse analysis of 'Brexit' framing may offer insight. From this perspective, identity reflects a continuous process of social representations underscored by changing aspects of positioning between self and other (Andreouli 2010). In the Brexit process, the central social actor positioning is between the UK and the EU. The boundary between the UK and the EU in this context is highly contested and embodies deep-seated power configurations constructed, maintained and reproduced by a variety of social, cultural and political actors. The forms that such struggles take, which we can usefully conceptualise as 'identity performances', determine the semiotic content of public debate on Brexit.

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Divorce is the dominant metaphor of Brexit. Its predominate usage in the mainstream media operates to sustain an adversarial, indeed, antithetical, representation of the UK and the EU. Yesterday's headline story about the latest quip from Boris Johnson that ['the EU can go whistle'](#) if they expect the UK to pay a divorce bill is a classic example.

But if we look at the popular discourse of 'real' divorce online, we find a more positive framing. Various 'self-help' websites advocate a 'healthy divorce' identity. For example, the American Psychological Association advises ['not to think of the breakup as a battle'](#). Similarly, the NHS encourages those going through a divorce 'not to get angry' and to only enter into ['conversations with a clear idea of what you want to achieve without getting drawn into old arguments.'](#) Relate says 'blaming yourselves as individuals' is counterproductive; a far better approach is to focus on 'what the relationship was lacking' and 'how the relationship failed to meet you or your partner's needs'.

The 'healthy divorce' discourse enables constructive dialogue because it reformulates conflict as cooperation. The bright dichotomy between self and other that sustains a 'bloody difficult' divorce identity becomes blurred. Compromise thus emerges as a reasonable prospect.



The [Generation Brexit](#) project offers scope for exactly this sort of 'healthy divorce' approach. On the [Generation Brexit](#) platform, under 35s from across the UK and the EU are actively engaged in thinking about how the UK and the EU can remain on good terms after Brexit. May and Juncker should take note of their constructive ideas.

This blog represents the views of the author and not those of LSE Brexit blog, nor the LSE.

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