

# Has Gordon Brown Stopped Beating His Wife?

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/09/27/has-gordon-brown-stopped-beating-his-wife/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/09/27/has-gordon-brown-stopped-beating-his-wife/)

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[Andrew Marr](#)'s producers will be delighted with the ripples in the media pond spread by his [question to the Prime Minister](#) this morning. In a tortuously roundabout way the big-eared BBC presenter asked Gordon Brown if he was 'one of those people' who take prescription drugs. Is the reason he asked it because of the '[right-wing blogosphere](#)'?

The [blogger that first raised the issue](#) admitted he had no actual evidence. But [it took a while to take off](#). Leading right-wing blogger, Guido Fawkes, actually posed the question 'Who Will Ask The Prime Minister' as the title of this article from nearly two weeks ago:



*"Last night Guido was on a panel chaired by Jeremy Vine when the subject of Gordon Brown's alleged anti-depressant pill popping came up. Jeremy had read Simon Heffer's [article](#) the night before (on his iPhone in bed) and thought that this blog had ran the story. Guido had not, but on Monday this blog ran a cartoon that referenced the rumour that everyone in the Westminster Village has heard. The Prime Minister is said to be taking powerful mood altering anti-depressants, specifically Mono Amine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs) which are very rarely prescribed since the arrival of Prozac derivatives, used only sparingly when dealing with severely depressed patients."*

This is significant because it indicates the growing influence of online political gossip upon the mainstream media agenda. It is the kind of incident that is cited by [those](#) who fear that the Internet is polluting political discourse.

However, as Guido himself pointed out, it was mainstream media that was also indulging in this very personal speculation:

*In the broadsheets [Simon Heffer](#), [Matthew Parris](#) have touched on the issue and this morning [Matthew Norman](#) in the *Independent* has [explicitly referred](#) to the allegation that Gordon Brown is taking "heavy duty antidepressants known as MAOIs (Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors)".*

So by the time Marr got around to putting this bit of gossip to the Prime Minister, it was already [up and running](#). In that sense I think it was a legitimate question. Brown was obviously surprised and upset by the question but he answered it very clearly: 'No'. In that sense Marr was doing his job, which is partly to allow politicians to categorically kill off untrue allegations. As long as the BBC doesn't now bang on about it all day I think Marr is absolved of accusations of following a sinister right-wing agenda.

But even if it is not a Tory plot it is ammunition to those like [Alastair Campbell](#) who think the whole media is in the gutter. But that's odd coming from someone who carefully honed the presentational politics of personality while working for Tony Blair. It's just that TB could handle that kind of character-based campaigning, Gordon can't.

I am deeply fascinated and concerned about the PM's character. I think the country is, too. It is an issue. His leadership style is bizarre. It has had a deep effect upon this government's effectiveness and his Party's catastrophic decline in the polls. Brown's reaction to the Marr question and the way he rambled off into what was obviously a heart-felt disquisition on his eyesight 'handicap' indicated to me that his health/state of mind is a factor. Let's be honest, if you had taken over a country only to walk into one of the world's worst economic disasters you

would be sorely tempted to seek chemical assistance. What makes it worse for Gordon is that his colleagues, let alone the media, are not providing any kind of balm.

[Here is a very good blog post](#) by Tory MP Nadine Norries, someone who has suffered from malicious and unsubstantiated gossip in the past in which she argues that Marr should NOT have asked the question:

*“If Gordon Brown were blind, we would notice. Is it a crime to have poor eyesight? Do we believe that, as three out of five people suffer with mental health problems/depression at some stage during their life, those people should be excluded from holding high office forever? I use my blog frequently to criticise this Government and indeed Brown himself. However, regardless of the political differences parties and politicians have between each other and regardless of how desperate we Conservatives are to expose Labours failings, remove them from office and get behind the wheel ourselves, I cannot believe there is one Conservative MP, who, if sat in Marr’s place, would have asked those questions.”*

The Telegraph’s [Benedict Brogan](#) says he is ‘uncertain’ on this one and I think that is a good thing. There are no rules about these dilemmas and each case should be taken on its own merits. Although I notice that Ben quotes my former colleague Jon Snow, the Channel 4 News presenter, as having no qualms:

*“He put up a good argument that the Prime Minister’s state of mind is always a legitimate question, even more so in Mr Brown’s case because of the frequent accounts we hear of his outbursts of temper in No10.”*

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