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The personal is political? Blogging and citizen stories, the case of *Mum's Army*

1. Introduction

There is a burgeoning range of academic literature concerned with the phenomenon of blogging. A major theme of scholarly work is concerned with how blogging could potentially reshape political spaces, strengthen democratic processes and increase civic participation. For example, how politicians might use blogs to reconnect or engage more directly with the public [2, 4]. However, the impact and potential of blogs in this context remains unclear and there is still much more to glean on this debate. A number of themes relating to the intimate and personal nature of blogging (See Francoli and Ward; Wright in this volume) as a form of communication have emerged. This paper will explore this through case study analysis of a blog called 'Mums' Army' (http://mumsarmy.blogspot.com/), which aims to mobilise women in their communities to tackle 'antisocial behaviour'. The rationale and structure of Mums' Army will be addressed later, but this case study illuminates how intimate stories can mobilize previously disengaged citizens to become more politically aware and engaged in their local communities. The main conceptual frame being utilised is Ken Plummer's work on Intimate Citizenship [12]. The emphasis on the crossing between the public and private sphere, the advancement of stories relating to the self and the intimate in Plummer's theoretical frame seem to resonate with the way in which the Mums' Army blog operates. In addition, this case study illustrates how distrust of traditional political representatives and processes, which is expressed in the

Mums' Army blog, is countered through the articulation of personal stories as the basis for action at a 'grass roots' level.

2. 'Me media' and stories of the self

A common refrain in the discussion of blogs is the emphasis they place on the personal and the self. Blogging is often seen as another example of exhibitionism and narcissism (for an interesting discussion of this see Cohen,[3]) on the net alongside personal websites and profiles on social networking sites such as *Myspace*. It is no surprise that a diaristic style of blogging offers the opportunity for people to express and reflect on personal experiences. Data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project entitled 'A Portrait of the Internet's New Storytellers' reports that 37% of blogs in the US are concerned with 'my life and experiences' with politics and government second at 11% [8, p.ii]. The Pew report goes on to say that a major reason people blog is to share experiences and express themselves creatively [8, p.iii]. Though the neat separation between life experience and politics employed in these classifications is problematic, the data does seem to illustrate the way blogs foreground the subjective and the experiential.

What is the significance of the mode and style of address in blogs that relate to personal and subjective experiences? In her analysis of citizen journalism and political campaign blogs, Mary Griffiths suggests the 'about me' qualities of blogs offer the potential for 'democratic deliberative space' [6, p.163]. Grifiths, seems to be arguing that the personal address evident in blogs offers the potential to shape 'democratic literacies' between political representatives and citizens[6, p.155]. More importantly for Griffiths, is the mode of address, again concerned with the individual

the personal, which she sees as changing how a '…critical democratic mass interacts'[6, p.155]. This returns us to the notion that blogs can cultivate a public space for participation between and amongst citizens and political elites. This is, however, tempered with her caveat that such blogs do not resort to being tools for self publicity and political marketing.

It is the form of address, the emphasis on personal experience that is of interest here, and particularly how the boundaries between the personal and private spheres are being transgressed. It will be argued below that blogs move across this boundary in a number of ways, which has implications for how political debates are being articulated. In this sense, blogs as Cohen argues do not sit neatly into existing modes of address and traditional media forms[3]. Cohen adds, Blogs, may well be viewed as 'like' journals and 'like' diaries but who/what they are speaking to is not clear cut. As he states:

The difficulty here is due to the fact that blogs sit irregularly between familiar modes of address, never quite a addressing a person (dialogue) never quite addressing a crowd (speech, public address), never quite speaking to oneself (diary monologue, soliloquy)-and no one struggles more with this ambiguity, this awkwardness of address, than bloggers themselves'. [3, p.164-165]

For Cohen, it is this mode of address that is important, blogs challenge and reveal much about the conditions and standards of public speech. The criticism that blogs are *too* personal or boring according to Cohen tells us more about how the 'liberal tradition'of 'publics' is constituted, that is one typically unmarked by emotion and subjectivity. Therefore, Cohen does not argue that this mode can be viewed as intrinsically oppositional or radical but rather blogs:

...appear to be shifting the balance of personality and impersonality in the operation of publics and in the production of public subjects-which is to suggest that blogs are shifting the grounds for selfhood *tout court*.[3, p.166]

It is this public/private vector that will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the main premise here is that the mode of address and form of blogs could arguably be indicative of a shift where the political is increasingly framed in terms of the personal.

3. Public and private sphere

The movement between the public and private sphere in blogs have been commented on by a number of scholars. Feminist scholars writing on technology have long explored the relationship between the public and private, particularly how women, usually framed in terms of the private sphere, can utilise the internet to build networks, create spaces that empower and validate their experiences and lives [7, 15]. From another perspective, Alexanian's [1] research on Iranian bloggers based in the US, discusses how the public private sphere is negotiated through the online interactions of bloggers. She argues that the rigid public private boundary in the context of Iranian society can intersect through the practice of blogging; that is, intimate accounts and disclosure are expressed in the public realm of blogs. Furthermore, this has a bearing on questions of identity and community in the Iranian diasporic context: 'Intimacy is expressed in culturally meaningful ways' [1, p.145]. Though Alexianian is referring to a very specific cultural backdrop, her research does indicate the importance of recognising the public private vector in the process of blogging. Moreover the implications of this in terms of shifting these boundaries and in turn opening up spaces for new voices and experiences to be expressed.

On a more literal level blogs can provide glimpses into the personal and domestic realm. One prominent example was a video on David Cameron's blog (*http://www.webcameron.org.uk/*) showing him doing the washing up whilst addressing the audience. This can be seen as an attempt by politicians to in some way reconnect with their voters and present themselves in a more direct and personal way (see Coleman in this volume). Though a cynical view could perhaps see political blogs as another opportunity for marketing and staged self promotion, there may be a number of motivations behind the use of blogs by political representatives. What is clear is the way political elites are attempting to connect with the public by adopting a personalised mode of address. As Stephen Coleman succinctly puts it:

> The increasingly accepted notion that the personal is political challenges the belief that experience is only politically significant if it can be represented as a collective interest. As people have adopted more personalised conceptions of political life, greater significance has been attached to narrative testimony, dramatic enactment and public conversation as forms of political self-representation [4, p. 275].

It is this shift to a personalisation of political life that is of importance, the emphasis on personal narratives, I want to argue, increasingly framing political discourses. In turn, the particular authenticity placed on personal narratives renders the private sphere all the more important in political debate. Blogs tap into this in that they appear unmediated, direct and emphasise self expression. Coleman has elaborated on the 'structural transformation of the blogosphere' on three levels. To summarise: they provide a bridge between the '…private, subjective sphere' and the realm of the 'civic sphere'[4, p.277]; allow the expression of 'incomplete thoughts'; and offer forms of

entry for previously 'marginalised voices'. Though this is a somewhat distilled version of a broader, nuanced argument it again alerts us to the mode of the discussion these blogs employ. It also, as will be outlined, connects with Plummer's notion of intimate citizenship. The focus being at the level of civil society, where we witness the emergence of new stories rooted in the private making their presence felt in the public sphere.

4. Intimate Citizenship

Plummer's conceptualisation of intimate citizenship resonates with many of the debates about the public private boundary. Plummer proposes a fourth, intimate sphere, in addition to the civil, political and social rights set out in T.H. Marshall's[9] classic model of citizenship. The intimate sphere is concerned with the body and the self: erotic, intimate desires, pleasures, relationships and 'gender experiences' [12, p. 151]. 'New' stories, or personal narratives, of 'coming out', stories about abuse and recovery are being told and circulated within the public sphere. These stories can be contextualised against the shifting political backdrop of late modernity, which, to summarise, is about change, the collapse of dominant truths, contested claims and diverse experiences. A key example is new social movements, which encapsulate these shifts and articulate claims to rights and recognition and emphasise that the 'personal is political'. In addition, they mark the emergence of new stories:

> Intimate citizenship does not imply one model, one pattern, one way. On the
> contrary, it is a loose term which comes to designate a field of stories, an array
> of tellings, out of which new lives, new communities and new politics may
> emerge [12, p. 152]

Plummer is at pains to argue that social inequalities are not being displaced but he seems to argue they are being challenged in new ways and that the telling of stories previously located in the private sphere are gaining a momentum within the public sphere and buffeting against structures of power.

Though Plummer is mainly concerned with the telling of sexual stories, his theoretical framing allows us to gain purchase on the political significance of blogs such as Mums' Army. This blog, like Plummer argues, employ a language steeped in emotion, the domestic, the intimate and the personal. However, Plummer does make distinct the linear, modernist stories that make claims to truth against the increasingly fragmented late modern stories that do not lay claim to any essential truth. When examining Mums' Army we might, therefore, trace the way in which these stories are told: do they conform to familiar linear narratives or offer a more fragmented and complex narrative? Also, though the 'personal is political' cry of new social movements seems to fit with the personal narratives advanced in blogs, it is not possible to graft the very particular historical social backdrop from which new social movements emerged onto the current political social environment. Particularly as many of the new social movements had at their inception a broad based group identity whilst Blogs, as Griffiths [6, p.155] argues, are representative of an 'individuation' of political participation. But, importantly, blogs such as Mums' Army show that this is not always the case: the logging of similar, individual experiences can be mobilised collectively to demand change and call out for political action.

5. Mums' Army

The Mums' Army blog was launched in January 2006 by *Take a Break*, a UK based 'best selling' weekly magazine aimed mainly at women that features 'true life' stories. The magazine's website declares that the Mum's Army campaign was launched as a pressure group to '…push the problem of antisocial behaviour higher up the political agenda' (http://www.takeabreakmagazine.co.uk/Default.aspx?Page=3). The website lists a number of ways they wish to tackle the problem of 'yob culture' including 'better policing', re-establishing 'traditional values' and creating more opportunities for young people to stop them from 'misbehaving'. According to the Mums' Army website the campaign has involved a petition with 14,000 signatures that was sent to the Prime Minister on Mother's Day 2006 to raise the issue of antisocial behaviour. The Mums' Army blog proudly states it is a registered political party and that: 'With 300 active campaigners across the UK, we intend to put up candidates for the local elections in May 2007'.

The magazine has been active encouraging campaigners to stand in local elections as Amy Thompson who runs the blog, responds to my question about how many of the Mums' Army campaigners stood in local elections:

'In answer to your question about local elections, existing Mums' Army campaigners are contacted by *Take a Break* and encouraged to take part. We offer information and support to help them. In 2006 three of our members stood in their local elections and two polled more votes than their Conservative rivals. This year, two of our members stood[1].

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[1] Personal E mail received from Amy Thompson at *Take A Break* magazine 16 August 2007.

Though, as Amy Thompson's reply states, there has been some success in beating the established political parties like the Conservatives, it would appear the candidates were not successful in getting elected. However, what is interesting is that Mums Army candidates, like Donna Still who stood as a candidate in her local area of Kent have become more informed and engaged with the political process, attending council meetings to see how they work.

The launch of Mums' Army garnered some media publicity, though it was greeted with a degree of scepticism. The campaign was seen as a publicity gimmick, particularly in view of other competitors entering the market such as *Pick Me Up* magazine [10]. However, the magazine's editor, John Dale, was quoted as saying '…the move was 100 per cent heartfelt' and he tellingly adds:

> This is not something that may be understood by people in the big metropolitan centre because that is not where *Take a Break* sells, but our readers love their magazine because it is fighting their corner when no-one else is, and this is not a publicity stunt, it is a serious campaign [5].

Dale's comments can be seen in the context of the magazines main audience: working class women based in 'industrial towns and cities' [11]. Of the roughly 4 million readers, around 2.5 million do not vote: 'That's a large chunk of the electorate who is disillusioned' and might become politically engaged [11]. There is, perhaps, a mix of savvy PR work and issue based populism at play here. However, the level of response from 'ordinary' women – and some men – suggests that the campaign is striking a chord. Local newspapers have covered the opening of Mums' Army chapters up and down the country. A typical example from the Waltham Abbey Guardian features a mugging victim who was quoted as saying: 'I am 101 per cent

behind Mums' Army and I will do everything in my power to get on the council and start making changes'. She adds 'I will be campaigning out on the streets to get votes and I urge other people who want to stop anti-social behaviour to get involved.'[14].

The Mums' Army campaign, with its emphasis on encouraging perhaps hitherto disenfranchised people to participate actively in the community and become involved in political processes, seems a pertinent illustration of grass roots activism is harnessing the use of blogging. Perusing blog search engines and blog tracking sites like *Technorati*, with key words such as 'community' and 'pressure group' reveal a range of blogging sites aimed at citizen participation. Examples include the *Neighbourhood Watch* crime blogs:

(http://www.nwinfo.co.uk/blogs/index.php?SubjectId=1) and *Neighbourhoods*, a general blogging site that reports on a range of issues such as housing, crime and community based projects (http://www.nwinfo.co.uk/blogs/index.php?SubjectId=1). Similarly, *Knife Crime Blog* (http://knifecrime.blogspot.com/) was set up by a 'concerned citizen' and aggregates news stories and commentary on knife crime and links to other campaigning websites concerned with street violence and crime. A full empirical survey is not the purpose of this paper but the examples indicate how blogs are being used by citizens to highlight a number of issues in their communities.

Mums' Army contains some of the typical elements of a blog (see Siapera, in this volume) such as messages presented in reverse chronological order and the opportunity to leave comments. However, Mums' Army operates somewhat

differently to a 'traditional' blog. There is one blog (as opposed to a series of Mums' personal blogs) controlled by the magazine, operating as a centralised hub for readers' accounts. Readers are encouraged to call the Mums' Army hotline to tell their story: they cannot add their accounts directly. The magazine maintains editorial control, rewriting each story in a journalistic style. Some messages include photographs and E. mail addresses of users and many say that they are setting up a group in their local area. Amy Thompson who runs the blog, explained why she has used this particular format: 'A blog was chosen because it is much easier to update every week. It is an online record of the magazine's Mums' Army stories.'[2]. The blog in conjunction with the magazine becomes a record of the stories and contact details of those involved in the campaign. The blog is maintained and controlled by Amy but she states that comments can be sent to her and they 'cannot' be edited . Therefore, we might think of Mums' Army Blog in relation to the Triangulated Diagram of Political Communication (see introduction to this volume) where the axis between citizen-journalist is narrowed in the recording of experiences of antisocial behaviour on the blog. The blog, then is a useful tool for citizens who want to share their experiences and provide contact information regarding the activism in their local area. It also allows the magazine a degree of editorial control over who is involved in their campaign and the way in which their stories are told.

6. Bearing Witness, modernist stories

The emphasis is placed on people telling personal stories of antisocial behaviour in their particular area. The stories are authenticated by the 'experiential', that is, 'this

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[2] Personal E mail received from Amy Thompson at *Take A Break* magazine 16 August 2007.

has happened to me' this is the truth of my experience. In respect of this, they perhaps resonate more with Plummer's notion of modernist stories:'…there is always a suffering which gives the tension to the plot; this is followed through a crisis or turning point or epiphany where something has to be done-a silence broken; and this leads to a transformation-a surviving and maybe a surpassing'[12, p. 54]. Though these stories do not have the 'shame' that is often expressed in the narratives of survivor's of rape and sexual abuse that Plummer includes in his discussion, they do seem to follow this template. For example a recent blog dated Tuesday March 20 2007, from Lisa in Tyne and Wear:

When Lisa Green took her newborn baby to her sisters home, only a few doors away from her own, a gang of youths gathered outside. They shouted abuse and hurled missiles at the windows. Lisa approached them and said: 'Please stop it, my baby can't sleep.' The youths pretended to apologise but when she turned her back, they attacked her. Lisa, 26, told Mums' Army: 'I was pulled to the ground by my hair and kicked and punched from every direction. My family tried to help me but they were held back by youths with knives and broken bottles. The attack lasted 25 minutes, until the police arrived. One of the ring leaders was arrested and I was taken to hospital. I lost four teeth, had a suspected fractured cheekbone, extensive bruising and impaired vision. 'Weeks later, three more arrests were made. Yet all were released and no further action was taken. I was scared to go outside alone, but determined not to let my attackers get away with it. So finally I wrote to the Independent Police Complaints Commission and after my case was investigated, two officers were charged with misconduct. 'All I wanted was for those responsible to be punished but when police failed to

do that, I had to do something. Lisa, of Houghton-le-Spring, has moved twice since her attack, which took place in Sunderland. She says: 'I'm joining Mums' Army because I want to do everything I can to help change things and protect my three children.

In Lisa's message we have a linear story that begins with harassment, moves to a discussion of pain and suffering and a quasi redemptive conclusion where Mums' Army offers the possibility to change and address this negative experience.   This example is also accompanied by two photographs of what we are to assume is Lisa, with substantial physical injury to her face. Occasional gory pictures of injury accompany entries into the blog. This connects with a common element of these stories (and one expressed in the example above): the lack of response from the police and politicians to the 'real' problems of antisocial behaviour in their communities.   In this sense, the blog espouses the view that politicians, the judiciary and the police have become disconnected from the 'ordinary' experiences of people in local communities. For example this account dated Friday March 20, 2007 from Amanda Kinslow in Gillingham:

> When Eric Hazel tried to deliver a pizza he was approached by a group of six youths. They asked him to hand it over and when he refused he was clubbed over the head with a metal bar. His girlfriend Amanda Kinslow was left so upset and angered by the incident that she contacted Mums' Army. Amanda, 24, explains: 'Eric had a serious head wound and he needed stitches. The police had evidence but failed to act on it and no action was taken against any of his attackers.
>
> 'Is it any wonder that people are taking the law into their own hands when the

police can't be bothered to pull their fingers out and do what they're paid to do?'

'I'm joining Mums' Army because I have three young children and I refuse to fear for their safety.

And similarly an entry dated 19 September 2006 from Margaret Penman in Scotland: 'People are getting seriously hurt. The police and the council promise to make changes but nothing is done. I desperately hope that Mums' Army can help change things.' The remoteness of politicians is articulated in this entry from Donna in Kent dated 31 October:

Donna explained how hard she's campaigning for her local neighbourhood and that she's determined to get on the council. She said: 'The trouble with the current politicians is that they lead such a privileged life and I don't think they're on the same level as normal people.'

There are numerous examples of this across the blog entries. Perceived inaction from established institutions is often presented as the impetus for joining Mums' Army.

7. Victims and villains

There are some familiar figures that appear in the stories: 'victims' and 'villains'. To start with victims, there is particular emphasis on the vulnerable that feature frequently in the accounts of violence. Many do not 'speak for themselves' directly on the blog: carers and relatives identify the victims in their stories and add weight to the ferocity of violence that is cited in the stories. The vulnerable include the elderly and infirm and pregnant women, and mothers. One message from Mary Vaughan of Scotland dated 19 September 2006 features one such vulnerable victim: 'When her

parents died, Mary Vaughan took over the care of her 35-year-old brother Tony who has Down's syndrome. It wasn't long before yobs saw a target'. It goes on to state: 'I called the police but the boys denied everything. When I went to speak to the father of the ringleader, he punched me in the head. I have epilepsy and could take no more'. Another message dated 19 September 2006 from Anita Cottle, in Northants features a racist attack:

> After Anita Cottle's family moved, they became victimised because of their race. Mum of three Anita, 40, says:
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> 'My 20-year-old daughter Jasmine was attacked and they spat in her face as my two other children were forced to watch. She is traumatised — we all are. 'Since arriving here three years ago, my kids have been verbally abused because they are of Asian origin. We were all born in the UK. I can't believe what we've been subjected to. 'Although we're now being accepted in the community we never expected anything this bad to happen. Jasmine's attack has shocked everyone'.

Anita's experience is accompanied by a photograph of her bruised face after she had been attacked. These stories produce conventional notions of victimhood based on passivity, especially where it concerns vulnerable people. It ties in with the theme that local communities lack protection and have unresponsive police forces. However, the story ends, as so many do, with the claim that by setting up a local group they may be able to affect change in their communities.

Where there are victims there are villains. This binary is quite clear cut in many of the stories presented on the blog. Bored 'youths', 'yobs', 'gangs' and 'junkies' are regularly referred to in the accounts. The identification of villains is normally

accompanied by the perceived motives behind antisocial behaviour. Messages typically refer to the breakdown of society, a lack of discipline, and the lack of facilities for young people. This is illustrated by Lisa Wise's, entry dated 27 February 2007 which states: 'All isn't lost with the youth of today. We must provide positive role models and pressure authorities into creating opportunities so that youngsters can have somewhere to go and something to do.' Similarly, Sandy Shepheard's entry dated 31 October 2006 states: 'I feel sorry for young people who have nothing to occupy them, but it's not fair that they bully others. We need the Government to provide more facilities to get them off the streets – and to make their parents accountable for their actions'. In a more direct way, the Mums' Army campaign is presented as active in setting up spaces for young people to come to, as shown by a January entry in 2007, where Dawna Chisholm reports on a youth art project set up by her branch of Mums' Army:

> Dawna, 33, says: 'I became a member of the tenants and residents association and we ran a competition in local schools to find the best designs for themed murals. These were then painted by young people on three of the town's underpasses.' Falkirk Council awarded Dawna £4400 to fund the project. She says: 'We successfully diverted young people away from crime and antisocial behaviour by providing them with a way to express themselves creatively. Now they are proud of their achievements. The community as a whole feels positive and the council is planning to repeat this elsewhere. Young people want to see changes just as much as we do.'

In the above account young people are no longer 'yobs' but creative people enhancing the local area, this is reinforced by a picture of young people painting a colourful mural.

8. Individual experience, collective interest.

Though it comprises a collection of individual experiences and perspectives, the sharing of stories around the topic of antisocial behaviour becomes a way to galvanise and mobilise collectively. The sharing of stories in a supportive and sympathetic space has an almost therapeutic feel to it. It resonates with this idea of how the clustering of similar minded people around a blog is 'preaching to the choir' [6, p.156]. Throughout, blog messages espouse 'working together'. For example, in the 17 April entry from Vaunda Hoscik in London: 'I hope that by joining Mums' Army, I will encourage other parents to voice their opinions so together we can change our community.'. Similar sentiments are expressed about uniting and supporting one another. The inclusion of e-mail addresses and telephone numbers in some messages offer the opportunity for people to get in touch, join the local Mums' Army branch or set their own up. More generally, there is an emphasis on strengthening neighbourhoods and communities, but this is only achieved, again, through collaboration. Many branches of Mums' Army aim to bridge a perceived gap between young people and local residents as illustrated by Laura Reynolds in the West Midlands in her March 27 entry: 'I work for a youth club which mediates between the local community and the youths, and now I'm setting up a branch of Mums' Army to unite and strengthen my neighbourhood.' This fits a general ethos of how problems associated with antisocial behaviour can be tackled if a 'can do' attitude is adopted. Volunteering, obtaining grant money for community projects and hosting regular meetings with concerned residents seem to be activities that Mums' Army groups undertake. The sharing of stories offers inspiration and examples of what people can do. The individual stories shared on the online environment seem to impact up on the building of communities in the offline environment.

This emphasis on collective and 'taking a stand' usually conclude the stories of pain and violence posted on the blog. The negative experiences that start the stories then end with the possibility of hope and change through collective action and agency.

This contrasts with the feeling of fear and intimidation they initially feel as a result of their experiences. Roy West from Manchester, in an entry dated 19 September 2006: 'Joining Mums' Army means I'm not on my own. Together we must fight to ensure that values are restored so fear is no longer a way of life for so many'. 'Fighting back' and challenging the 'bullies' and 'yobs' is a common statement expressed at the end of many of the accounts on the blog. In addition, supporting others and using the negative experience to help others is expressed as in this February 2007 entry from Sara Bailey in Lincolnshire: 'With first-hand experience of the damage bullying and antisocial behaviour can cause, I'm joining Mums' Army to provide a voice for families in similar situations.'. The sharing of stories, then, serves a number of goals: creating a sense of community and solidarity in a sympathetic space. It also attempts in a practical sense to facilitate ideas and strategies for dealing with antisocial behaviour.

9. Conclusion

This paper has explored, through the central example of Mum's Army, how the blog provides a mediated space, for people to share their experiences of antisocial behavior in a way that can facilitate action offline and encourage participation in political processes. The Mums' Army blog is illustrative of how political discourse and debate increasingly foregrounds the personal and the intimate. As political elites attempt to reconnect and present themselves in a personalised way to the public, we have seen that citizens are already adopting this type of language online. The Mums' Army blog is a perfect example of how this language, concerned with the domestic, personal and the experiential is utilised to address issues concerning antisocial behaviour. The blog shows that people want their voice to be heard on this issue in the face of the

perceived lack of response by politicians, the police and the courts – the blog provides a tool to do this. However, the launch of Mums' Army may benefit the magazine *Take a Break* commercially through increased publicity and in turn circulation, and the blog, as set out earlier, applies journalistic templates and editorial control on the way stories are told. Therefore the blog, does rely on traditional media structures and processes in its operation.

More broadly, the Mums' Army is illustrative of the expediency of framing claims for change in a highly personalised language. Framing it in this manner connotes authenticity and truth, in other words 'this happened to me'. No matter what statistics on crime or violence are presented in the public domain, these stories are presented as the 'reality' of peoples lives that are missed by the powerful. In this respect the stories told on Mums' Army are familiar in that they are told through a conventional linear narrative, identifying archetypal victims and villains. They also express emotional pain, accompanied by images of physical injury, yet they also offer hope and agency. The telling of these stories in such a highly personalised ways can be seen as indicative of how blogs mark a blurring of the public private sphere. Blogs allow citizens the opportunity to share their stories in the public realm and bear witness to traumatic events in their lives. The language of the personal and the intimate, it can be suggested, is gaining currency in political debates and blogs as a medium are part of this.

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