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***Power Without a Script: Hybrid Coercive Control in
Technology-Facilitated Intimate Partner Violence in Gay
and Bisexual Men's Relationships***

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Criminology
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DECLARATION

I, Sofoklis Giannakoulakos, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Electronic signature:  _____
Date: 28/08/2026 _____

Abstract

This thesis examines technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) within gay and bisexual men's same-sex intimate relationships in the United Kingdom, focusing on how digitally mediated behaviours are interpreted, situated within wider dynamics of coercive control and identity abuse, and understood within professional contexts. It brings UK scholarship on same-sex intimate partner violence into dialogue with international research on technology-facilitated abuse. The study adopts a qualitatively driven mixed-methods design. It draws on a UK-centred online survey comprising 1,000 response records, including 650 gay or bisexual men. Detailed analysis uses a verified 200-respondent analytic sample for linked structured and demographic analysis and a verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus. These data are complemented by 30 semi-structured practitioner interviews across LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic-abuse, statutory, voluntary, community, health and policy settings. The study does not estimate victimisation prevalence, and survey participation is not treated as evidence of personal abuse. Findings demonstrate that the meaning of digitally mediated conduct depends on relational context rather than technology alone. Practices involving access, monitoring, availability, visibility and communication could be interpreted as intimacy or care but became coercive where consent could not safely be withdrawn, relationship rules were imposed and resistance produced consequences. Descriptive age-related differences were identified in interpretations of some behaviours, without supporting a simple generational divide. Separation emerged as a particularly important analytical lens. Digital access, information and permissions accumulated during intimacy could enable coercive practices to persist or be reconfigured after physical separation. Identity and visibility also shaped coercive possibilities, including outing, bisexual delegitimation, intimate material and reputational vulnerability. Apparent reciprocity did not necessarily indicate equal power, requiring attention to motive, pattern, impact and space for reaction. Practitioner accounts revealed substantial variation in professional recognition. Stronger responses connected digital conduct to relational pattern, identity context and offline consequences, whereas weaker responses fragmented digitally distributed behaviours or placed excessive responsibility on victim-survivors to manage technology themselves. The thesis develops Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC) as a mid-level conceptual framework for understanding how coercive control operates through interconnected digital, embodied, emotional, identity-based and social mechanisms across relational time and space. It argues that effective responses require coercive-control analysis, LGBTQ+ cultural competence, professional curiosity and digital-safety expertise.

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
COHSAR	Comparing Heterosexual and Same sex Abuse in Relationships
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DARA	Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment
DASH	Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and 'Honour'-Based Violence
GB	Gay and bisexual
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GPS	Global Positioning System
HCC	Hybrid Coercive Control
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IPV	Intimate partner violence
IPV-GBM	Intimate Partner Violence among Gay and Bisexual Men
ISVA	Independent Sexual Violence Adviser
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and other sexual and gender minority identities
NHS	National Health Service
PrEP	Pre-exposure prophylaxis
RQ	Research question
SSIPV	Same-sex intimate partner violence
TFA	Technology-facilitated abuse
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and the Research Problem

Digital technologies are embedded within contemporary intimate life. Mobile phones, messaging services, social-media platforms, dating applications, shared accounts, location services and networked devices support communication, care, sexual connection and social belonging. The same infrastructures can also facilitate surveillance, persistent contact, account interference, impersonation, image-based sexual abuse, threats, humiliation and restrictions on autonomy. Research on technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) has consequently moved beyond treating the internet as a separate location in which a new form of abuse occurs. It increasingly examines how ordinary technologies can extend the reach, continuity and apparent omnipresence of established abusive practices across digital and physical environments (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

This thesis examines these issues within gay and bisexual men's same-sex intimate relationships. Its starting point is not that coercive control or intimate partner violence have been considered only within heterosexual relationships. UK and international research has already demonstrated that patterned domestic abuse can occur in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships, that victimisation between two men may be difficult to recognise, and that the direction of power cannot be inferred reliably from the partners' genders alone (Donovan and Hester, 2010;2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). The research problem addressed here is therefore one of specificity and integration. The substantial UK literature on same-sex intimate partner violence (SSIPV), recognition and help-seeking has not been integrated consistently with the international literature on technology-facilitated coercive control, while TFA research has only rarely centred gay and bisexual men as a distinct population within male same-sex relationships.

Feminist domestic-abuse scholarship remains indispensable to this task. It established that domestic abuse is not reducible to isolated incidents or visible injury, but is organised through wider patterns of domination, entitlement and restriction (Stark, 2007). It also demonstrated that such abuse is shaped by structural gender inequality. The difficulty arises when an empirically important pattern abuse perpetrated by

heterosexual cisgender men against heterosexual cisgender women becomes the only culturally intelligible story of domestic abuse. Donovan and Hester (2010, 2014) describe this as the public story: an account that associates the perpetrator with male strength, the victim with female vulnerability and abuse principally with physical violence. That story may impede recognition where both partners are men, where the victim-survivor resists, or where coercion is enacted through access, emotional responsibility, sexuality, visibility and technology.

Gay and bisexual men's relationships do not exist outside gendered structures. Masculinity can influence self-recognition, disclosure, assessments of vulnerability and assumptions that conflict between two men is inherently equal. Heteronormativity also shapes which relationships and harms are anticipated by law, services and public discourse. The thesis therefore does not replace feminist analysis with a purely individual or gender-neutral account of relationship power. It retains attention to gendered structures while examining relationally who establishes the terms of intimacy, who is made responsible for maintaining the relationship, whose autonomy is restricted and who can impose consequences when expectations are challenged.

Digital technologies sharpen these questions because their meanings are rarely fixed. Location sharing may be consensual and supportive, or it may enable monitoring that cannot safely be refused. Frequent messaging may communicate affection, or it may enforce continuous availability. Shared passwords may be mutually negotiated, or they may form part of a wider demand for transparency that removes one partner's privacy. The analytical task is therefore not to classify a technology as inherently abusive. It is to examine consent, repetition, relational context, impact, the freedom to withdraw agreement and the consequences of non-compliance. These questions connect TFA directly to coercive control and prevent the analysis from treating digital conduct as either trivial because it is ordinary or novel simply because it is technologically mediated.

Sexuality and identity can shape both the mechanisms and consequences of this conduct. Threats to disclose sexuality, HIV status, intimate images or participation in queer social and sexual networks may connect digital access to family relationships, employment, housing, community standing and personal safety. Such tactics are not necessarily unique to gay and bisexual men, and not every act involving identity should be treated as a distinctively queer form of abuse. Their coercive force depends on the

particular social consequences available to the abusive partner. This requires attention to selective outness, bisexual erasure, stigma, masculinity, community belonging and the unequal safety of visibility across different audiences (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The institutional context is equally significant. Contemporary law in England and Wales is formally inclusive of same-sex relationships, but formal inclusion does not ensure that abuse is interpreted accurately in practice. Gay and bisexual men may still encounter assumptions of mutuality, male resilience or relationship conflict, particularly where the reported conduct is digitally mediated and lacks a single visible incident. At the same time, institutional response is not homogeneous. Practitioners work within different specialist, statutory, domestic-abuse, LGBTQ+, counselling and community settings, and their capacity to recognise TFA is shaped by training, organisational remit, risk processes, resources and referral pathways. This thesis therefore examines professional understanding without treating practitioners as either neutral authorities or a uniformly deficient group.

The study makes a queer criminological contribution with victimological implications. Queer criminology is used here not merely to add LGBTQ+ people to established categories, but to question how assumptions about gender, sexuality, intimacy, victimhood and legitimacy organise those categories (Ball, 2016). Queering the analysis does not make the distinction between victim-survivor and abusive partner impossible. It requires those positions to be established through evidence concerning pattern, motive, impact, responsibility and the consequences of resistance rather than presumed through gender, physical size or ideal-victim behaviour.

The thesis ultimately develops Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC) as a mid-level conceptual framework for understanding how coercive control is organised through interconnected digital, embodied, emotional, identity-based and social mechanisms, with technologies functioning as infrastructures through which relational entitlement can be established, enforced and preserved across time and space. HCC is not presented in this chapter as a conclusion already proven. It is introduced as an analytical proposition that is developed iteratively through the empirical chapters and evaluated in the conclusion. Its purpose is to integrate established coercive-control,SSIPV and TFA scholarship without claiming that technology has created an entirely new form of abuse or that the framework is universally applicable.

Against this background, the thesis investigates how gay and bisexual men interpret digitally mediated relationship behaviours, how respondents describe forms and meanings of TFA, how such conduct connects with coercive control, identity and the online–offline nexus, and how practitioners understand and respond to these harms. It does not estimate the prevalence of TFA among gay and bisexual men. Its contribution lies in connecting different sites of interpretation survey classification, brief respondent explanation and situated professional understanding to examine when digitally mediated intimacy becomes coercive and why that coercion may remain difficult to recognise.

1.2 Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

The principal aim of the thesis is to examine how technology-facilitated abuse is interpreted and relationally organised within gay and bisexual men's same-sex intimate relationships, how digitally mediated practices connect with wider dynamics of coercive control and identity abuse, and how such harms are understood within professional and organisational contexts. Four objectives operationalise this aim. First, the study examines how potentially harmful digital behaviours are classified and explained by gay and bisexual male survey respondents. Second, it identifies the forms, relational meanings and consequences of TFA represented within the verified open-text corpus. Third, it analyses how practitioners working across different service contexts understand, assess and respond to TFA affecting gay and bisexual men. Fourth, it develops and evaluates a conceptual account capable of connecting digital infrastructures, relationship rules, embodied consequences, separation and institutional recognition without overstating the evidence.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do gay and bisexual men describe and interpret technology-facilitated abuse in same-sex intimate relationships?

RQ2: What forms of technology-facilitated abuse are identified by gay and bisexual men, and how are these situated within broader dynamics of coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces?

RQ3: How do practitioners working across domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory and community settings understand the nature and impact of technology-facilitated abuse affecting gay and bisexual men?

RQ4: How do age and different forms of digital socialisation relate to gay and bisexual men's perceptions of what constitutes abuse, control or "normal" behaviour within digitally mediated intimate relationships?

The wording of the questions reflects the limits of the available evidence. RQ1 does not assume that every survey respondent had personally experienced TFA. It examines classifications of hypothetical behaviours and the meanings respondents attached to them. Personal or witnessed victimisation is identified only where it was introduced explicitly in an open-text comment. RQ2 is supported principally by the verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus and examines both conduct and relational context. RQ3 is addressed principally through the 30 practitioner interviews; survey comments about help-seeking or service encounters provide supplementary evidence only. RQ4 concerns descriptive patterns within the verified survey material and does not claim that age causes particular attitudes or that age is equivalent to digital knowledge, platform use or relationship experience.

Table 1.1 provides a concise map between the research questions and the evidence used to address them. The complete operationalisation, analytical procedures and limitations are set out in Chapter 3.

Table 1.1: Research questions, principal evidence and limits

Research question	Primary evidence	Supplementary evidence	Analytical strategy and limit
RQ1: Description and interpretation of TFA	Structured vignette classifications and verified 200-comment open-text corpus	Practitioner observations concerning recognition, where relevant	Descriptive presentation and thematic interpretation. Survey participation is not evidence of personal victimisation.
RQ2: Forms of TFA and wider coercive dynamics	Verified 200-comment open-text corpus	Practitioner accounts where they illuminate forms or contexts	Manual thematic analysis of behaviours, meanings, consent, consequences and online–offline connections. Counts are not prevalence estimates.

Research question	Primary evidence	Supplementary evidence	Analytical strategy and limit
RQ3: Practitioner understanding and response	Thirty semi-structured practitioner interviews	Survey comments explicitly concerning help-seeking or service encounters	Reflexive thematic analysis differentiated by sector and role. Practitioners are situated professionals, not proxies for victim-survivors.
RQ4: Age, digital socialisation and perceptions	Verified linked structured survey material and age-disaggregated interpretation	Practitioner observations where clearly contextualised	Descriptive within-sample comparison only. Age is not treated as a cause or as equivalent to digital competence.

Note: Full operationalisation, dataset construction and analytical procedures are presented in Chapter 3.

Taken together, the research questions organise the thesis around four connected problems: recognising abuse, identifying its relational and technological forms, understanding professional interpretation, and examining variation in the norms through which digital intimacy is judged. They also establish a disciplined boundary around the claims made. The thesis is concerned with patterns of meaning and interpretation within the available evidence, not with producing representative estimates of victimisation or causal claims about gay and bisexual men as a population.

1.3 Scope, Technology and Delimitations

The empirical study is UK-centred. The online survey was circulated principally through UK-based networks and the live survey implemented an eligibility rule of 18 years and over. Chapter 3 reports transparently the inconsistency in the ethics documentation, including an 18–45 reference, and the final sample composition. Practitioner participants worked across UK domestic-abuse, LGBTQ+, statutory, voluntary, counselling, community, health, housing, advocacy, policy and training settings. Where the thesis discusses criminal law and statutory domestic-abuse policy, the jurisdiction is England and Wales. “UK” and “England and Wales” are therefore not used interchangeably: the former describes the wider empirical and service context where appropriate, while the latter identifies the legal jurisdiction.

The analytic population is gay and bisexual men in male same-sex intimate relationships. In relation to the survey, this refers to respondents who identified as men

and as gay or bisexual. The category is used to provide a focused analytical population rather than to imply that gay and bisexual identities are fixed, homogeneous or interchangeable. Bisexual men may experience identity abuse, disclosure and relationship recognition differently from gay men, and a same-sex relationship does not exhaust a bisexual person's identity or relationship history. The study does not claim to represent lesbian, trans, non-binary or heterosexual experiences, although the conceptual framework may generate questions for future comparative research.

Technology-facilitated abuse is the thesis's broad organising term for abusive conduct enabled, intensified or extended through digital technologies. It includes practices such as monitoring, repeated contact, account interference, impersonation, threats involving intimate material, location tracking and restrictions on communication. Technology-facilitated coercive control is used more specifically where technologies form part of an ongoing pattern of relational domination rather than an isolated harmful act (Dragiewicz et al., 2018). Hybrid Coercive Control refers only to the mid-level framework developed through this thesis. Maintaining these distinctions prevents TFA, technology-facilitated intimate partner violence and HCC from being treated as interchangeable labels.

Domestic abuse is used when discussing the legal, policy and service context of England and Wales. Intimate partner violence is retained when engaging with international literature and as a broader term for abuse between current or former intimate partners. Same-sex intimate partner violence identifies the relationship context without implying that all LGBTQ+ experiences are identical. The term victim-survivor is used where victimisation is established within an empirical account or discussed conceptually. "Respondent" is used where survey participation does not establish personal victimisation, and "practitioner participant" identifies the professional interview sample.

The study is exploratory and interpretive rather than representative. The wider survey produced 1,000 response records, including 650 respondents who identified as gay or bisexual men. The final detailed analysis uses a verified 200-respondent analytic sample for linked structured and demographic analysis and a verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus for qualitative interpretation. These 200 comments were generated through one optional survey field and vary in length and detail. They provide concise participant-generated explanations and, in some cases, explicit personal or

witnessed accounts; they are not equivalent to in-depth qualitative interviews or complete life histories.

The theme counts reported in the findings chapters describe the number and proportion of the 200 comments in which a coded theme appeared. Comments could receive more than one code, and the percentages do not estimate how commonly gay and bisexual men experience the behaviour in the wider population. Similarly, descriptive differences between age groups identify patterns within the verified analytic material and do not support causal claims or statistical generalisation.

The study did not include direct qualitative interviews with victim-survivors, abusive partners or couples. Survey respondents were not invited to follow-up interviews because the survey was anonymous and no contact details were retained. Follow-up survivor interviews were also not part of the final approved research design. This protected confidentiality in research concerning digital monitoring and intimate abuse, but it also limits the depth of contextual and longitudinal interpretation. The thesis cannot clarify an individual comment, compare competing accounts of the same relationship or observe how control develops over time.

The practitioner interviews provide evidence about professional interpretation, organisational procedure, recurring casework concerns and institutional constraint. They do not provide unmediated access to the lives of the people practitioners supported. Practitioner knowledge is consequently treated as situated by role, training, sector and organisational remit (Haraway, 1988; Lipsky, 2010). Differences between LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic-abuse specialist, statutory and generic settings are retained rather than collapsed into one account of institutional response.

Intersectionality functions as a sensitising commitment rather than a claim that every social location could be analysed equally within the available sample. Sexuality and gender intersect with race and ethnicity, social class, disability, migration status, HIV status, age, degree of outness and access to digital resources (Crenshaw, 1991). These positions may alter the mechanisms and consequences of identity abuse and the conditions of help-seeking. However, uneven subgroup sizes and the brevity of the open-text comments limit systematic comparison. Where the thesis discusses intersectional dynamics, it does so only where the evidence and literature support the claim.

These delimitations are integral to the thesis rather than qualifications added after analysis. They define what each dataset can demonstrate and protect the distinction between interpretation and prevalence, between survey respondent and victim-survivor, between practitioner knowledge and lived experience, and between a mid-level conceptual contribution and a universal explanation.

1.4 Conceptual Orientation

The conceptual orientation brings feminist coercive-control scholarship, UK same-sex domestic-abuse research, queer criminology, intersectionality and international TFA scholarship into dialogue. The purpose is not to replace one framework with another. It is to retain feminist analysis of structural gender inequality while developing a relational method for identifying power where the genders of the partners do not reveal automatically who is exercising coercive control.

Stark's (2007) account of coercive control provides a foundational understanding of abuse as a patterned restriction of liberty rather than a sequence of isolated incidents. The significance of a behaviour lies in its relationship to a wider course of conduct, the constraints it establishes and the consequences of resistance. Digital technologies are especially important within this perspective because they can increase the frequency, reach and continuity of monitoring, preserve access after physical separation and connect apparently minor acts across different settings. The thesis nevertheless avoids technological determinism. Technology does not create the abusive relationship; it can become embedded within the relational organisation of entitlement, responsibility and punishment.

Donovan and Hester's public story identifies why abuse involving two men may remain difficult to recognise (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). The culturally dominant image of domestic abuse associates victimhood with femininity and passivity, perpetration with masculinity and physical strength, and seriousness with visible injury. Same-sex male relationships may consequently be interpreted as relationships between equals, while reciprocal action may be read as proof of mutual abuse. Queer criminology challenges these presumptions by asking how the categories of victim, perpetrator, violence and legitimate relationship are constituted through heteronormative assumptions (Ball, 2016). It does not require analytical indecision; it requires the direction of power to be demonstrated rather than presumed.

Relationship rules provide the principal relational method used in the thesis. Donovan and Hester identify two connected rules within abusive relationships. First, the relationship operates for the abusive partner and on that partner's terms. Second, the victim-survivor is positioned as responsible for the abusive partner, the relationship, the abuse and its consequences (Donovan and Hester, 2014, pp. 130–141, 164–165). The axis of power therefore concerns who can establish the conditions of intimacy, demand conformity and impose consequences. Within digitally mediated relationships, these rules may concern availability, response time, password access, location visibility, social-media contact and responsibility for reassuring the partner.

Practices of love help to hold these rules in place. Care, commitment, hope, vulnerability and responsibility can make compliance appear relationally meaningful rather than imposed. Transparency may be framed as trust, constant availability as care, account sharing as intimacy and continuing contact after separation as compassion or responsibility. Practices of love are not evidence that affection is inherently coercive. They explain how culturally intelligible expressions of intimacy can become the “glue” of an abusive relationship when the victim-survivor cannot refuse them without punishment, intimidation or escalation (Donovan and Hester, 2014, pp. 136–137, 164–165).

Identity abuse refers to the use of identity, stigma or social position as a means of degradation, isolation, threat or control. The concept did not originate in Donovan and Hester's scholarship; their contribution was to develop its application within British LGBTQ+ domestic-abuse research and to extend it beyond sexuality and gender to other minoritised identities and social locations (Donovan and Hester, 2014, pp. 213–216). In this thesis, identity abuse may include threats of outing, biphobic delegitimation, HIV-status disclosure, racialised discrediting or the strategic circulation of intimate information. Institutional failure to recognise such a tactic may compound its consequences, but institutional misrecognition is not itself automatically relabelled as identity abuse.

Experiential power has a more specific meaning. It concerns a partner with greater experience of being out, participating in same-sex relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities using that experience to define what is authentic, mature or normal for a less experienced partner (Donovan and Hester, 2014, p. 152; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). A partner may claim that invasive transparency, particular sexual expectations

or specific app practices are simply how gay relationships work. Technical expertise, income, professional status and institutional confidence may create other asymmetries, but they are not experiential power merely because they involve unequal experience. A digital extension is made only where technological knowledge is combined with identity authority to regulate the less experienced partner's understanding of queer intimacy.

Space for reaction addresses the danger of interpreting visible reciprocity as equal abuse. Victim-survivors may reply, resist, retaliate, gather evidence or use harmful conduct in attempts to defend themselves or re-establish limited autonomy. These actions are not automatically harmless, but nor do they establish that both partners exercise equivalent coercive power. Donovan and Barnes's concept directs analysis towards motive, pattern, impact, relationship rules, fear and the capacity to impose consequences (Donovan and Barnes, 2020, pp. 23–25). It therefore avoids both the mutual-abuse shortcut and an ideal-victim model in which a credible victim-survivor must remain passive.

The gap of trust concerns the historically structured relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and formal help-providers. It is particularly significant for gay men and men who have sex with men because the state historically criminalised and policed male same-sex sexuality, positioning these men as potential offenders rather than potential victims. Trust in police, criminal justice, healthcare and domestic-abuse services cannot therefore be presumed simply because contemporary policies use inclusive language (Donovan and Hester, 2011; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). The concept is not used as a general synonym for mistrust within an intimate relationship, community gossip or reputational harm. It directs attention to how confidentiality, visible inclusion, previous institutional contact and the response to an initial disclosure produce or undermine confidence.

Intersectionality connects these relational concepts to wider structures of inequality. Sexuality cannot be separated analytically from race, class, disability, migration, health status, age or material resources (Crenshaw, 1991). An outing threat, for example, may acquire different consequences according to family, employment, immigration, religious or community context. Intersectionality is used to prevent "gay and bisexual men" from becoming a falsely uniform category. It does not permit unsupported assumptions about groups for which the study has limited data.

These concepts operate as sensitising resources rather than predetermined categories into which every response is placed. The analysis begins with what respondents and practitioners described, then examines whether an established concept clarifies the pattern. Where a concept is extended, its original meaning is stated before the extension is proposed. This is especially important to HCC. The framework emerges from repeated evidence concerning the embedding of digital practices within intimacy, movement between online and physical environments, material consequences, persistence across relational phases and continued access after separation. It is evaluated through Chapters 4–8 rather than treated as established by the introduction alone.

The conceptual golden threads carried through the thesis are therefore recognition; relationship rules and practices of love; identity, visibility and reputation; the online–offline nexus; separation and temporal continuity; space for reaction; professional and institutional mediation; and HCC. These threads provide coherence without requiring every chapter to repeat the complete theoretical framework.

1.5 Legal and Policy Context

The empirical study is UK-centred, but the principal statutory discussion concerns England and Wales. Contemporary law is formally inclusive of domestic abuse within same-sex relationships. Section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse where both parties are aged 16 or over, are personally connected and the behaviour is abusive. Abusive behaviour includes physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse and psychological, emotional or other abuse. The definition is not restricted by the gender or sexuality of the parties (Domestic Abuse Act 2021).

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 did not create the criminal offence of controlling or coercive behaviour. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 introduced the offence in England and Wales. It concerns repeated or continuous controlling or coercive behaviour that has a serious effect on the victim and which the perpetrator knows, or ought to know, will have that effect. Section 68 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 subsequently amended the offence by removing the former cohabitation requirement for former intimate partners and family members. The change came into force on 5 April 2023 and is not retrospective (Serious Crime Act 2015; Domestic Abuse Act

2021; Crown Prosecution Service, 2025). This correction is important because post-separation conduct is not formally excluded from the current offence.

TFA is not a single standalone offence. Depending on its form and context, digitally mediated conduct may be addressed through controlling-or-coercive-behaviour, stalking, harassment, communications, computer-misuse, sexual-offence and intimate-image provisions. This distribution across legal categories can still create practical difficulty because a victim-survivor may experience an integrated course of control while institutions encounter separate messages, devices, accounts or offences. The problem identified by the thesis is therefore not the complete absence of legal categories. It is the challenge of recognising and evidencing the relationship between digitally distributed acts, their cumulative impact and their movement between online and physical life.

The Home Office statutory guidance on controlling or coercive behaviour expressly recognises technology-related practices, including the use of smart devices and social media to monitor or control, password demands, restrictions on communication and location tracking (Home Office, 2023). The legal and policy issue is thus not that technology is wholly invisible within current guidance. It is whether practitioners connect apparently ordinary digital conduct to relationship rules, fear, restriction and the consequences of refusal, particularly where the parties are two men and gender does not provide a conventional shortcut.

Risk assessment requires the same distinction. The College of Policing Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) is used within police first response, while the SafeLives Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) checklist remains influential within specialist and multi-agency practice (College of Policing, 2022; SafeLives, 2025). Neither was designed specifically for TFA affecting gay and bisexual men, but it would be inaccurate to claim that they contain no relevant indicators. Fear, stalking, harassment, separation, isolation, repeated contact, jealousy and controlling behaviour may all capture aspects of digitally mediated abuse. Their effectiveness depends on professional curiosity, follow-up questions and the ability to reconstruct a course of conduct rather than treating checklist completion as a substitute for judgement.

This is particularly important when both partners have acted. A screenshot or message log may display reciprocal contact without showing the relationship rule, earlier threat, fear or consequence that shaped a reply. Gender-neutral procedure is not sufficient if it becomes process-driven equality that avoids identifying power. Risk assessment must examine who established the terms of access, who attempted to create distance, what happened when contact was refused and whether one partner's behaviour progressively restricted the other's choices.

Service provision is similarly differentiated. LGBTQ+ by-and-for services can provide cultural knowledge concerning identity abuse, selective outness, bisexuality and the gap of trust, while domestic-abuse specialists may provide stronger coercive-control and safety-planning expertise. Statutory organisations possess formal powers but may operate through restrictive thresholds, and counselling or community organisations may provide relational continuity while lacking specialist pathways. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's mapping demonstrates the continuing unevenness and fragility of specialist provision across England and Wales (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022). The thesis therefore avoids presenting either mainstream or specialist response as uniformly effective.

The practice implication previewed here is the need to combine domestic-abuse knowledge, LGBTQ+ cultural competence and digital understanding. Advice to block an abusive partner, delete an account or leave a platform may sometimes support safety, but it is not neutral where the same platform provides work, parenting, community, evidence or social support. Contemporary practitioner guidance increasingly recognises the need for integrated digital-safety work rather than treating the technological element as separate from domestic abuse (National Cyber Security Centre, 2025).

Formal legal inclusion and the existence of relevant guidance are necessary but not sufficient. The central issue examined by the thesis is how conduct becomes institutionally legible: whether digital acts are connected into a pattern, whether male victimisation is recognised without assumptions of mutuality, whether identity-based consequences are understood and whether organisational pathways enable recognition to become effective intervention.

1.6 Overview of the Research Design

The study uses a qualitatively driven mixed-methods design informed by a constructionist and interpretivist orientation. It combines a UK-centred online survey with 30 semi-structured practitioner interviews. The structured survey material, open-text comments and practitioner interviews perform different evidentiary functions. They are integrated through the research questions and during interpretation, while remaining separately coded, attributed and bounded.

The survey generated 1,000 response records, of which 650 were from respondents who identified as gay or bisexual men. The live survey implemented an 18+ eligibility rule; the discrepancy between that implemented rule and the inconsistent 18–45 wording in the ethics paperwork is documented in Chapter 3 rather than resolved through retrospective exclusion. The instrument included eight vignettes four male same-sex and four heterosexual scenarios through which respondents classified digitally mediated relationship behaviours as normal, controlling and abusive. These structured classifications are used descriptively. They are not treated as measures of victimisation, prevalence or causal relationships.

The final detailed analysis uses a verified 200-respondent analytic sample for linked structured and demographic analysis. The same analytic pathway produced a verified 200-comment open-text corpus from gay and bisexual male respondents. The comments were generated through one optional field following the vignette set. They were manually checked, linked to existing corpus identifiers and analysed using a structured coding spreadsheet. Coding attended to behaviour, relational meaning, consent, consequences, identity, separation, online–offline connections, resistance and help-seeking. The final coding framework contains nine overlapping themes, and numerical summaries indicate thematic prominence within the corpus rather than prevalence among gay and bisexual men.

Personal victimisation was coded only where a respondent explicitly disclosed it. A person was not treated as a victim-survivor merely because he classified a hypothetical behaviour as controlling or abusive. This evidentiary distinction is carried throughout Chapters 4–6. Direct survey extracts use their existing C-codes, permitting quotation-level traceability, while paraphrase and theoretical interpretation are presented as such.

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners working across LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic-abuse, statutory, voluntary, counselling, community, health, housing, advocacy, policy and training settings. The interviews addressed professional definitions of TFA, risk and evidence, apparent mutuality, identity-related harm, service pathways, organisational constraints and examples of effective practice. They were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2021). Practitioner participants are not treated as proxies for victim-survivors. Their accounts provide situated evidence about professional and organisational interpretation.

Integration is best described as complementarity rather than conventional triangulation. The survey examines classification and respondent meaning-making; the practitioner interviews examine professional and institutional sense-making. Agreement across the datasets may show that a concern appears in different sites, but it does not validate one account through the other or establish frequency. Divergence is equally important because it may reveal a gap between how conduct is understood by respondents and how it is translated through professional frameworks.

The survey was anonymous and no contact details were retained. Respondents could not therefore be invited to follow-up interviews. Direct victim-survivor interviews were also not part of the final approved design. This decision reduced the collection of identifying information in research involving digital monitoring and intimate abuse, but it imposes a substantive limitation. The thesis cannot probe ambiguous comments, construct extended biographical narratives or follow individual relationships across time. These constraints are stated directly rather than reframed as an uncomplicated methodological advantage.

The design is shaped by feminist, queer and intersectional approaches to situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Crenshaw, 1991; Ball, 2016). Reflexivity concerns how the research questions, coding decisions, selected extracts and theoretical commitments shaped the knowledge produced. Analytical rigour is pursued through traceable coding, code definitions, theme maps, contradictory-case attention, quotation verification and the removal or qualification of claims that exceed the available evidence. Detailed procedures, ethics and limitations are presented in Chapter 3 and Appendices M–O.

1.7 Original Contribution and Significance

The significance of the study lies in the integration of fields that have often developed in parallel. Feminist coercive-control scholarship offers a powerful account of patterned liberty restriction; UK SSIPV research provides relational concepts for analysing power, identity and recognition within same-sex relationships; and international TFA research demonstrates how technologies expand surveillance, contact and reach. Bringing these literatures together creates a more specific account of digitally mediated coercion within gay and bisexual men's relationships without claiming that either coercive control or TFA is wholly new.

Empirically, the thesis provides focused UK evidence about how gay and bisexual men classify and explain digitally mediated relationship behaviours, the forms and meanings identified within a verified 200-comment corpus, the organisation of control around identity and visibility, the persistence of access through separation, and practitioner understanding across different organisational contexts. It distinguishes respondent interpretation from explicit victimisation and practitioner knowledge from lived experience, thereby offering a more transparent account of what the evidence can demonstrate.

Theoretically, the study develops HCC as a mid-level framework. It conceptualises coercive control through four connected propositions that are tested and refined across the empirical chapters: relational integration, through which digital conduct acquires meaning within relationship rules and practices of love; infrastructural integration, through which accounts, permissions, devices and data stabilise access; spatial and material integration, through which digital acts produce embodied, economic, reputational and social consequences; and temporal continuity, through which access and information accumulated during intimacy can be mobilised after separation. Institutions are positioned separately as mediators of recognition, documentation and intervention rather than as equivalent perpetrators of intimate coercion.

The theoretical contribution also lies in applying established concepts accurately to contemporary digital relationships. Relationship rules identify who sets the terms and who is made responsible; practices of love explain how care and obligation can legitimise compliance; identity abuse locates the use of stigma and disclosure;

experiential power addresses identity-related authority; and space for reaction provides a method for analysing visible reciprocity without presuming mutual abuse. The thesis extends these concepts only after retaining their original meanings and makes clear where a digital application is the study's own analytical development.

Methodologically, the thesis demonstrates the value of complementary evidence drawn from different sites of meaning-making. Structured classifications show how behaviours were judged; open-text comments reveal brief explanations, ambiguity and explicit disclosures where offered; practitioner interviews show how harm is translated through professional and organisational frameworks. The transparent construction of the 200-comment corpus, manual coding table, codebook, frequency summary and theme map responds directly to the evidentiary challenge of using open-text survey material as a central source of analysis.

The policy and practice contribution is equally specific. The findings support risk assessment that reconstructs a course of conduct rather than relying on gender, injury or a single incident; digital-safety planning that considers the costs of disconnection; recognition of identity and visibility as potential terrains of coercion; contextual analysis of apparent mutuality through space for reaction; stable LGBTQ+ by-and-for provision combined with mainstream responsibility; and cross-sector pathways that integrate domestic-abuse, LGBTQ+ and digital expertise.

The study also contributes to queer criminology by demonstrating that inclusion requires more than inserting gay and bisexual men into pre-existing frameworks. The categories through which abuse becomes recognised must themselves be examined. At the same time, queering the analysis does not mean dissolving accountability or treating power as unknowable. The empirical task remains to identify who establishes the rules, who bears responsibility, whose autonomy is constrained and what follows resistance.

These contributions are bounded. The study does not establish national prevalence, provide direct longitudinal survivor testimony or demonstrate that HCC applies unchanged across all relationship configurations. Its significance lies in producing a coherent, evidence-led framework for interpreting a specific and under-integrated problem and in generating questions that can be tested through future survivor-led, longitudinal, intersectional, legal and platform-focused research.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised across eight chapters. The chapters are connected by the golden threads established above: recognition; relationship rules and practices of love; identity and visibility; the online–offline nexus; separation and temporal continuity; space for reaction; institutional mediation; and the development of HCC.

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, critically examines scholarship on domestic abuse, coercive control,SSIPV, gay and bisexual men’s victimisation, TFA, help-seeking, service provision, digital socialisation and the COVID-19 context. It establishes that the research gap concerns specificity and integration rather than the absence of existing same-sex coercive-control scholarship. The chapter defines the conceptual tools used later in the analysis and presents HCC as an analytical proposition to be examined rather than a conclusion already established.

Chapter 3, Methodology, explains the qualitatively driven mixed-methods design. It documents the UK survey, the verified 200-respondent analytic sample, the verified 200-comment open-text corpus and the 30 practitioner interviews. It maps the research questions to their primary and supplementary evidence, explains the manual coding and reflexive thematic analysis, sets out the ethical framework and states the limitations concerning recruitment, inference, survivor interviews, subgroup comparison, manual analysis and technological change.

Chapter 4, Recognition, Control and Digital Intimacy, addresses how gay and bisexual men classified and explained the vignette behaviours. It presents the structured findings, distinguishes interpretation from explicit victimisation and examines consent, surveillance, normalisation, digital socialisation and apparent mutuality. The chapter begins the empirical development of HCC by showing how relational meaning determines whether ordinary digital practices become coercive.

Chapter 5, Technologies of Intimacy and Control, examines how digital access, availability, identity, visibility and online–offline continuity are organised within intimate relationships. It applies relationship rules, practices of love and identity-related analysis to technologies of everyday connection and shows how digital conduct can produce embodied and material consequences. It also addresses descriptive differences in age and digital socialisation without treating them as a fixed generational divide.

Chapter 6, Separation, Continuity and Technology-Facilitated Abuse, treats separation as an analytical lens rather than a guaranteed endpoint to abuse. It examines the persistence and reconfiguration of access, identity abuse, post-separation contact, apparent mutuality, resistance and help-seeking. The chapter develops the temporal dimension of HCC by showing how resources accumulated during intimacy can survive the formal relationship and how coercion may become especially visible when relational entitlement is withdrawn.

Chapter 7, Institutional Responses to Technology-Facilitated Abuse, uses the 30 practitioner interviews as its primary evidence. It compares understandings across LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic-abuse, statutory, voluntary, counselling, community, policy and training contexts. The chapter distinguishes effective, partial and misrecognising practice; analyses risk, evidence and professional curiosity; applies relationship rules and space for reaction to apparent mutuality; and examines by-and-for provision, organisational constraint and the gap of trust. Institutions are analysed as mediators of the visibility and trajectory of hybrid harm rather than as equivalent perpetrators.

Chapter 8, Conclusion, answers the four research questions directly and separates the empirical, theoretical and methodological contributions. It defines HCC as a mid-level framework through relational, infrastructural, spatial/material and temporal integration; states the limitations; and sets out implications for services, commissioners, criminal-justice agencies, platforms and law. It also identifies future research questions, including the need to examine how rapid developments in generative artificial intelligence may reshape impersonation, identity abuse, image-based sexual abuse and evidentiary credibility.

The structure is cumulative. Chapter 2 establishes the intellectual resources, Chapter 3 defines the evidentiary boundaries, Chapters 4–7 develop the empirical argument across recognition, intimacy, separation and professional response, and Chapter 8 evaluates what those findings permit the thesis to conclude. Chapter 1 therefore establishes a contract with the reader: the study asks specific questions of distinct forms of evidence, applies established concepts accurately, develops HCC cautiously and maintains throughout the limits of what its data can support.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews scholarship at the intersection of same-sex intimate partner violence (SSIPV), coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse (TFA), with particular attention to gay and bisexual (GB) men. Feminist research has been foundational in demonstrating that domestic abuse is not reducible to isolated incidents of physical violence, but is embedded within wider patterns of power, control and gender inequality (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Stark, 2007). At the same time, dominant public and institutional narratives have often imagined domestic abuse through the relationship between a heterosexual male perpetrator and a heterosexual female victim. Donovan and Hester (2010; 2014) describe this as the public story of domestic abuse: an influential account that makes gendered violence visible while also making abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships more difficult to recognise, name and respond to.

This thesis does not argue that coercive control has been considered only in heterosexual relationships. Research in the UK and internationally has already demonstrated that patterned, controlling abuse can occur within same-sex relationships and that its direction cannot be inferred reliably from the genders of the partners involved (Hester and Donovan, 2009; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Stark and Hester, 2019). The issue is therefore not the absence of scholarship, but the need to integrate established relational accounts of SSIPV with the growing literature on digitally mediated abuse. That integration must retain feminist attention to gender and structural inequality while avoiding the assumption that heterosexual gender roles automatically identify the abusive partner and victim-survivor.

Digital technologies are now embedded in the organisation of intimacy. Mobile phones, messaging services, social-media platforms, dating applications, shared accounts, location services and connected devices can support communication, care and community. The same technologies can facilitate surveillance, repeated contact, humiliation, sexual coercion, account interference and restriction. Research on digital and technology-facilitated coercive control demonstrates that technologies can extend abusive practices by increasing their continuity, reach and apparent omnipresence

across physical and digital environments (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019). Technology is therefore not treated here as an external tool added to an otherwise offline relationship. Its significance lies in how access, visibility, availability and communication become incorporated into the terms through which a relationship is organised.

Technology-facilitated abuse is used as the broad organising term for abuse enabled, intensified or extended through digital technologies. Technology-facilitated coercive control is used more specifically where technologies form part of an ongoing relational pattern through which one partner regulates another's autonomy, activities, relationships or access to resources. This distinction avoids classifying every harmful or unwanted online act as coercive control while preserving attention to the cumulative force of conduct that may appear minor when considered separately (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020).

A focus on GB men requires attention to sexuality, masculinity, identity and social context. Digitally mediated harm may involve practices found across different relationship configurations, including monitoring, repeated messaging and unauthorised account access. However, those practices can acquire particular meanings where an abusive partner can exploit disclosure about sexuality, bisexual identity, unequal experience of LGBTQ+ relationships, access to queer social or sexual networks, or fears of stigma and isolation. Threats to reveal sexuality, sexual practices, HIV-related information or intimate material may connect digital access to consequences involving family, employment, housing, community participation and personal safety. The distinctiveness of the analysis lies not in claiming that every tactic is uniquely queer, but in examining how familiar tactics operate within the social and relational conditions of GB men's lives (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Queer criminology provides one layer of this analysis. Its purpose is not merely to insert LGBTQ+ people into existing criminological categories, but to examine how those categories are organised through assumptions about gender, sexuality, legitimacy, victimhood and normality (Ball, 2014; Buist and Lenning, 2016). Applied toSSIPV, a queer approach questions assumptions that two men necessarily possess equal power, that violence between them is inherently mutual, or that male

victimisation is less serious because it does not correspond to conventional images of vulnerability. Queering the analysis does not require abandoning distinctions between victim-survivors and abusive partners. It requires establishing those positions through patterns, motives, impacts, responsibility and the consequences of resistance rather than presuming them from gender alone.

The chapter also draws on the relational framework developed by Donovan, Hester and Barnes. Identity abuse identifies circumstances in which sexuality or another minoritised identity becomes part of an abusive tactic or its coercive effect. Experiential power refers more specifically to the use of greater experience of being out, participating in LGBTQ+ relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities to define what is authentic or normal for a less experienced partner. Relationship rules identify two central dynamics: the abusive partner establishes that the relationship operates on their terms, while the victim-survivor is positioned as responsible for the abusive partner, the relationship and the abuse. Practices of love explain how care, need and emotional responsibility can sustain those rules, while space for reaction distinguishes victim-survivors' resistance from an automatic assumption of mutual abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). These concepts are explained and critically evaluated in Section 2.5.

The central argument of the review is that relevant knowledge remains divided across partially connected fields. Feminist coercive-control scholarship provides a powerful account of patterned domination but has historically centred heterosexual men's abuse of women.SSIPV scholarship has developed relational explanations of power, recognition, identity and help-seeking, but has not consistently centred digital technologies. TFA scholarship demonstrates how technologies extend surveillance and control, yet research focused specifically on GB men's current and former intimate relationships remains comparatively limited. Bringing these bodies of work together makes it possible to examine abuse as simultaneously technological, relational, embodied and institutionally interpreted (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

The chapter proceeds in stages. Section 2.2 clarifies the relationship between domestic abuse, IPV and coercive control and establishes the legal context of England and Wales. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 examine the development of SSIPV research and

the specific recognition of GB men as victim-survivors. Section 2.5 sets out the integrated theoretical framework and identifies both the value and limitations of its component concepts. Sections 2.6 and 2.7 review TFA generally and the smaller body of evidence concerning GB men. Sections 2.8 and 2.9 distinguish help-seeking from the organisation of service provision, while Section 2.10 considers COVID-19 as a context that made the interdependence of digital and physical control especially visible. The chapter concludes by synthesising the literature and positioning HCC as an analytical proposition rather than a conclusion assumed in advance.

2.1.1 Scope and Approach of the Literature Review

This chapter is based on an iterative, conceptually driven narrative review rather than a formal systematic review. The core literature corpus was assembled during the development of the thesis and updated as the research questions and theoretical framework became more focused. EndNote records indicate that the principal collection and updating period extended from July 2021 to September 2024, with additional targeted updating during the revision of the thesis to incorporate recent scholarship, legal developments and policy guidance.

The review developed through targeted electronic searching and citation-led searching from key publications. Search concepts were adapted as the study progressed and included combinations of terms relating to same-sex intimate partner violence, LGBTQ+ domestic abuse, gay and bisexual men, sexual minority men, coercive control, controlling or coercive behaviour, technology-facilitated abuse, digital abuse, cyber abuse, digital dating abuse, digital coercive control, technology-facilitated coercive control, image-based sexual abuse, identity abuse, experiential power, help-seeking, policing, service responses and COVID-19. Terminological variation was necessary because domestic-abuse, criminological, public-health, psychological and technology studies use overlapping labels for related behaviours.

No single publication-date restriction was applied. Earlier scholarship was required to trace feminist domestic-abuse theory, coercive control, queer criminology and UK research on same-sex domestic abuse, while more recent work was prioritised when examining TFA, digital platforms, legal developments and service provision. Priority was given to peer-reviewed studies directly concerning GB men, male same-sex intimate relationships, coercive control and TFA. Where population-specific research

was limited, the review drew cautiously on broader LGBTQ+, sexuality-diverse or sexual-and-gender-minority samples and on research concerning heterosexual relationships where it made a significant conceptual or empirical contribution. Wider studies are identified according to their actual samples and are not treated as direct evidence of GB men's experiences.

UK evidence is prioritised when discussing domestic-abuse law, policy, policing, services and the relational framework developed through British research on LGBTQ+ domestic abuse. International scholarship is used more extensively to examine the development of TFA concepts, digital dating abuse, image-based sexual abuse and platform-mediated harm. Legal claims are limited primarily to England and Wales unless a source concerns another jurisdiction expressly.

The review aims for conceptual depth and relevance rather than the exhaustive coverage or reproducibility expected of a systematic review. Sources were selected according to their relevance to the research questions, methodological quality, conceptual significance and capacity to clarify the relationship betweenSSIPV, coercive control and digital technologies. Particular attention was paid to whether studies distinguished intimate from non-intimate perpetrators, whether GB men were analytically identifiable within broader samples and whether digital behaviours were examined relationally rather than treated as self-evidently coercive. The review is limited by inconsistent terminology, the frequent aggregation of different sexuality and gender groups and the relatively small body of research focused specifically on technology-facilitated coercive control within GB men's intimate relationships (Brown and Hegarty, 2018; Afrouz, 2023; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

The review supports four research questions:

1. How do gay and bisexual men describe and interpret technology-facilitated abuse in same-sex intimate relationships?
2. What forms of technology-facilitated abuse are identified by gay and bisexual men, and how are these situated within broader dynamics of coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces?

3. How do practitioners working across domestic-abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory and community settings understand the nature and impact of technology-facilitated abuse affecting gay and bisexual men?
4. How do age and different forms of digital socialisation relate to gay and bisexual men's perceptions of what constitutes abuse, control or "normal" behaviour within digitally mediated intimate relationships?

These questions organise the chapter around the interpretation of harm, the relational operation of power, professional recognition and variation within digital relationship cultures. They also establish the limits of the argument. The review does not assume that every GB man experiences technology in the same way, that every digital demand is abusive, or that age alone determines digital attitudes.

2.2 Conceptualising Domestic Abuse, Intimate Partner Violence and Coercive Control

Definitions of domestic abuse are not merely descriptive. They establish which behaviours are recognised as harmful, which relationships fall within institutional responsibility and who becomes intelligible as a victim-survivor or abusive partner. This is especially significant for GB men because their experiences have often been interpreted through frameworks developed primarily from research on heterosexual men's violence against women (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014).

Feminist activism and scholarship were fundamental to establishing domestic violence as a social and political problem rather than a private disagreement. Early feminist accounts demonstrated that violence against women was connected to structural gender inequality, male entitlement and the organisation of heterosexual intimacy rather than reducible to individual pathology or isolated conflict (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Pence and Paymar, 1993). These contributions remain indispensable. The limitation arises when one empirically significant configuration of abuse becomes the only culturally recognisable account of victimisation.

Donovan and Hester's public story captures this problem. It constructs domestic abuse as principally physical, positions a larger heterosexual man as the perpetrator and imagines a smaller heterosexual woman as the victim (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). The public story does not represent all heterosexual victim-survivors, who

frequently resist and manage abuse rather than occupying a passive role. It also creates difficulties for those in same-sex relationships because gender cannot be used as a straightforward indicator of who is exercising power. Conflict between two men may be interpreted as a fair fight or mutual aggression, while male victim-survivors may struggle to reconcile their experiences with an image of victimhood associated with femininity, weakness and passivity.

The legal framework in England and Wales is formally broader. Section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines domestic abuse where both parties are aged 16 or over, are personally connected and the behaviour is abusive. Abusive behaviour includes physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, and psychological, emotional or other abuse. The statutory definition is not restricted to heterosexual relationships. The Act did not, however, create the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour. That offence was introduced through section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015; the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 subsequently amended and extended its operation, including beyond cohabiting relationships.

Formal inclusion does not guarantee substantive recognition. Law and policy may apply regardless of the parties' genders while professionals and victim-survivors continue to rely on culturally gendered assumptions about what domestic abuse looks like. The relevant question is therefore not whether GB men can legally be recognised as victim-survivors, but whether the relational dynamics and consequences of abuse are identified accurately where they do not conform to the public story (Donovan and Hester, 2010, 2014; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

Coercive-control theory was crucial in moving domestic-abuse scholarship beyond an incident-based focus. Stark (2007) conceptualises coercive control as a patterned course of domination through which an abusive partner progressively restricts another person's autonomy, resources, everyday activities and capacity for independent action. It should not be reduced to psychological abuse or a list of behaviours. Its significance lies in the relationship between repeated acts, the pattern they establish, their cumulative impact and the consequences of resistance.

Stark's original account placed coercive control within the structural context of men's domination of women. That gendered account explains a substantial and serious

pattern of domestic abuse. It does not follow that coercive control is conceptually impossible in same-sex relationships. The COHSAR research demonstrated that patterned domestic abuse could occur across heterosexual and same-sex relationships and assessed conduct through its frequency, range, motives and impact rather than through gender or simple act counts (Hester and Donovan, 2009; Hester, Donovan and Fahmy, 2010; Donovan and Hester, 2014). Later scholarship has likewise acknowledged coercive control beyond an exclusively heterosexual configuration while retaining attention to its wider gendered context (Stark and Hester, 2019).

A relational approach is necessary because apparently identical acts may perform different functions. Checking a telephone once during an argument, repeatedly inspecting it under threat, and accessing it in an emergency are not analytically equivalent. Assessment must consider the wider course of conduct, the motives of each partner, the impact on autonomy, who establishes the terms of the relationship and what follows from non-compliance. This framework also guards against treating every harmful act by a victim-survivor as evidence of symmetrical abuse (Hester and Donovan, 2009; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Current statutory guidance on controlling or coercive behaviour recognises digitally facilitated tactics, including monitoring communication, demanding passwords, restricting telephone use, using smart devices and tracking location. TFA is therefore not entirely outside existing legal concepts. The continuing difficulty is whether apparently ordinary digital practices are connected to a cumulative pattern and whether professionals apply sufficient contextual enquiry when the parties are two men. A formally inclusive framework can still be interpreted through assumptions that physical violence is the principal indicator of seriousness or that conflict between same-sex partners is mutual (Home Office, 2023).

The distinction between coercive control and incident-based violence has generated debate. Critics have warned that the concept can become overly broad if every repeated harmful behaviour is described as coercive or if the seriousness of physical and sexual violence is displaced (Walby and Towers, 2018). The response is not to abandon coercive control but to specify its evidential requirements. A course of conduct must be analysed through its cumulative restriction of autonomy, the ability of

one partner to impose expectations and the consequences attached to non-compliance. This prevents coercive control from becoming a synonym for relationship dissatisfaction or any repeated conflict.

Risk assessment illustrates the same tension between formal categories and interpretation. DARA was developed for frontline police responses with greater attention to coercive and controlling behaviour, while DASH continues to inform specialist and multi-agency risk processes. Both include indicators relevant to TFA, such as fear, stalking, harassment, possessiveness, separation and control. Their limitation is not that every digital behaviour is absent, but that a checklist cannot establish relational meaning on its own. A demand for location sharing may be recorded, for example, without establishing whether it was imposed, what followed from refusal or how it connected to other restrictions. Risk assessment must therefore support rather than replace investigation, professional curiosity and safety planning (College of Policing, 2022; SafeLives, n.d.).

Terminology is used carefully throughout the thesis. Domestic abuse is used when discussing the legal, policy and service context of England and Wales. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is used when engaging with international scholarship and as a broader term for abuse between current or former intimate partners. Same-sex intimate partner violence identifies the relational context without suggesting that all LGBTQ+ experiences are equivalent. Technology-facilitated abuse functions as the broad term for abuse enabled, intensified or extended through digital technologies, while technology-facilitated coercive control refers more specifically to technologies used within an ongoing pattern of relational domination.

This conceptualisation avoids two errors. The first is to transfer frameworks developed through feminist research on heterosexual men's abuse of women to GB men without considering sexuality, masculinity and identity. The second is to treat same-sex abuse as wholly exceptional and disconnected from feminist knowledge. The approach adopted here retains the importance of gendered structures while examining power relationally through patterns, impacts, responsibility and the consequences of resistance.

2.3 Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

Research on SSIPV emerged partly in response to the exclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships from dominant accounts of domestic abuse. Early studies were important in establishing that IPV was not confined to heterosexual relationships and in challenging the assumption that men could occupy only the position of perpetrator (Island and Letellier, 1991; Turell, 2000; Greenwood et al., 2002). The field has since moved from demonstrating that SSIPV exists towards examining how power, coercion and recognition operate within relationships that do not correspond neatly to the heterosexual public story.

The term same-sex intimate partner violence identifies the relationship context in which both partners are of the same sex. It should not be used as a synonym for all LGBTQ+ domestic abuse. The distinction is particularly important for bisexual men, whose sexual identity cannot be inferred from the gender of a current or former partner. The focus of this thesis is gay and bisexual men in relationships with men; it does not imply that all bisexual men have same-sex partners or experience abuse in identical ways (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021).

Early SSIPV research was frequently prevalence-oriented. Estimates vary substantially because studies use different definitions, measurement instruments, recruitment settings, samples and reference periods. Much evidence derives from community or convenience samples, and some studies count discrete acts without examining motive, impact or position within a wider pattern (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2016; Rollè et al., 2018; Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021). Prevalence research demonstrates that abuse occurs, but it does not establish that apparently similar behaviours have identical meanings or consequences across relationships.

Same-sex relationships do not exist outside gendered structures. Gay and bisexual men continue to negotiate expectations concerning masculinity, emotional self-sufficiency, physical strength and sexual autonomy. These expectations can affect perpetration, victimisation and recognition. The absence of a heterosexual male-female pairing does not make gender irrelevant; it means that gender alone cannot determine who possesses relational power (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Goldenberg et al., 2016).

Methodological reviews of SSIPV research have also identified the consequences of importing instruments developed for heterosexual populations without examining their assumptions (Murray and Mobley, 2009; Baker et al., 2013). Measures may identify whether an act occurred but fail to capture identity-related tactics, the social consequences of disclosure or differences between conflict and coercive control. Conversely, instruments designed specifically for gay and bisexual men, such as the IPV-GBM scale, have improved attention to sexual-orientation-related abuse but still require interpretation within broader relational context (Stephenson and Finneran, 2013). No measurement instrument can determine the direction of coercive power without evidence of pattern, motive and impact.

Research with men in same-sex relationships has identified tensions around masculinity, sexual roles, jealousy, financial inequalities and expectations of relationship legitimacy (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Woodyatt and Stephenson, 2016). These findings show that gendered and sexual meanings continue to organise male-male relationships, but they do not support a single cultural explanation for SSIPV. Masculinity should be examined as a set of resources and expectations that partners may use differently rather than as an automatic cause of violence.

Minority-stress theory provides one account of the wider environment in which LGBTQ+ relationships develop (Meyer, 2003). External discrimination, expectations of rejection, concealment and internalised stigma may affect social support, identity disclosure and access to services. Minority stress should not be used as a causal explanation for domestic abuse or as an excuse for an abusive partner's behaviour. Structural marginalisation may shape the resources available within a relationship and the consequences attached to disclosure, but it does not make coercive control inevitable.

The COHSAR research provides a stronger method for identifying abuse relationally. By examining frequency, range, motive and impact, it distinguished patterned domination from isolated or situational conflict and demonstrated that coercive control could occur across differently gendered and sexual relationship configurations (Hester and Donovan, 2009; Donovan and Hester, 2014). This approach is especially important where both partners report harmful conduct. Measures that record shouting,

pushing, monitoring or repeated messaging by each partner cannot establish equivalent power without examining context and consequence.

Donovan and Barnes' concept of space for reaction addresses victim-survivors' resistance. A victim-survivor may fight back, retaliate, damage property or send hostile messages in an attempt to defend themselves or restore some equality. Such conduct may be harmful, but it is not automatically equivalent to the course of control directed against them. Identifying the primary abusive partner requires attention to the wider pattern, motives, impacts, relationship rules and the consequences experienced when either partner resists (Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Power may also operate through sexuality and unequal experience of LGBTQ+ identities and social spaces. An abusive partner may threaten disclosure, mobilise homophobic or biphobic assumptions, challenge a partner's sexual identity or present controlling demands as ordinary features of same-sex relationships. These dynamics do not replace coercive control; they provide identity-related resources through which it may be justified or enforced (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021).

The SSIPV literature therefore supplies substantial resources for analysing GB men's relationships. The remaining gap lies in its limited integration with TFA research. Digital practices may become part of relationship rules through demands for constant contact, transparency, password access or location visibility. They may also intensify identity abuse through threatened disclosure, manipulation of profiles or access to queer networks. The same relational questions remain essential: who establishes the expectation, whether consent can be withdrawn, what motive sustains the behaviour, what impact it has and what follows from non-compliance (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

2.4 Gay and Bisexual Men as Victim-Survivors of IPV

A dedicated body of research on GB men and IPV now exists, although studies may still subsume men within broad LGBTQ+ categories, combine gay and bisexual participants without examining differences, or use behavioural categories such as men who have sex with men without exploring sexual identity and relationship context (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021). GB men are situated within gendered structures in which men are commonly imagined as capable of violence but less

readily imagined as vulnerable to it. They may also experience identity-related pressures connected to sexuality, disclosure, community membership and the legitimacy of same-sex relationships.

The term victim-survivor is used to avoid presenting victimisation as a fixed or passive identity. It identifies the person against whom a pattern of abuse is directed while recognising that victim-survivors may resist, retaliate, conceal, seek help, remain in the relationship or return to it. These responses do not negate coercive control, and harmful conduct by a victim-survivor does not by itself establish mutual abuse (Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

2.4.1 Recognition and the Public Story

Research involving GB men demonstrates experiences of physical, sexual, psychological and coercively controlling abuse. The central difficulty is no longer proving that men can be victim-survivors but understanding how victimisation becomes recognisable to the person affected, informal networks and institutions. The public story can render abuse between men as a fight between equivalent parties or as relationship dysfunction rather than patterned domination (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014).

Physical size, masculine presentation or willingness to fight back do not establish relational power. A victim-survivor may be larger or socially confident while remaining subject to surveillance, intimidation, isolation or responsibility. An abusive partner may appear emotionally dependent or physically less imposing while retaining the capacity to establish the terms of the relationship and impose consequences when challenged. Assessment must therefore examine the relationship as a whole rather than relying on appearance or a single incident (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Research should also avoid constructing a reverse stereotype in which male victim-survivors are necessarily silent, ashamed or unable to identify abuse. Some GB men name abuse clearly and seek support; others identify particular behaviours as harmful without understanding the relationship as abusive. Recognition may develop gradually as separate incidents become intelligible as a pattern, particularly where control has been normalised as care, jealousy or commitment (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Huntley et al., 2019).

2.4.2 Identity Abuse, Experiential Power and Bisexuality

Identity abuse occurs where sexuality or another socially positioned identity becomes part of the tactic or contributes directly to its coercive effect. It may involve threatened outing, homophobic or biphobic degradation, invalidation of identity, isolation from LGBTQ+ networks or exploitation of the consequences attached to disclosure. A threat to disclose sexuality may have different effects depending on family relationships, employment, religion, immigration circumstances, housing and community context. The same act can therefore carry different coercive force across different social locations (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021).

Experiential power is narrower. It describes circumstances in which a partner with greater experience of being out, participating in LGBTQ+ relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities uses that knowledge to define what an authentic identity or normal same-sex relationship should involve (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). A less experienced partner may be told that controlling expectations or sexual demands are simply part of gay life and that discomfort reflects immaturity, ignorance or internalised stigma. Income, race, age, disability, immigration status and professional position may also become sources of power, but they are not automatically forms of experiential power and require separate intersectional analysis.

Bisexual men should not be treated as interchangeable with gay men. Bisexuality may be invalidated, treated as temporary or framed as evidence of inevitable infidelity. Within an abusive relationship, such assumptions may be used to justify monitoring, accusations, demands for proof of commitment or restrictions on contact. A bisexual man in a relationship with another man may also be read by services as gay, obscuring the role of bisexual identity in the abuse. These possibilities should not be universalised, but they demonstrate why bisexuality must remain analytically visible (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Intersectionality further prevents GB men from being treated as a homogeneous category (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Sexuality interacts with race, class, disability, age, religion, immigration circumstances and economic resources in shaping the consequences of abuse and the options available for resistance. The present study cannot support detailed comparison across every subgroup, but an intersectional orientation limits universal claims and directs attention to differentiated consequences.

Identity abuse may also work through positive as well as explicitly derogatory claims. An abusive partner may present himself as the person who can provide access to community, acceptance or an authentic gay relationship, making the victim-survivor's belonging appear dependent on compliance. The same relational resource can then be withdrawn through isolation, threats of exclusion or claims that no one else will understand or accept the victim-survivor. This demonstrates why identity abuse should not be reduced to homophobic insults. Its force may lie in the abusive partner's capacity to define belonging and to attach relational consequences to identity (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Digital environments can intensify these dynamics because visibility is distributed across different audiences. A person may be open on a dating platform but private at work, or open to friends but not to family. An abusive partner who can cross these boundaries may hold power that is not captured by a simple measure of whether the victim-survivor is "out". The relevant issue is control over the timing, audience and meaning of disclosure (Woulfe and Goodman, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Meechan-Rogers, Jones and Ward, 2021).

2.4.3 Masculinity, Practices of Love and Self-Recognition

Dominant constructions of masculinity associate men with strength, autonomy, emotional control and the capacity to defend themselves (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). These expectations may make victimisation appear inconsistent with being a man or encourage some men to manage abuse privately. A systematic review of male victim-survivors' help-seeking identified challenges to masculinity, fear of disclosure, commitment to the relationship and perceptions that services were unavailable or inappropriate as recurring barriers (Huntley et al., 2019). Masculinity is nevertheless plural and contextual. GB men may reproduce, negotiate or reject dominant expectations and may draw on masculinity as a resource for survival.

Practices of love also influence recognition. Monitoring may be interpreted as concern, jealousy as commitment or persistent contact as emotional need. Victim-survivors may feel responsible for an abusive partner's wellbeing or for protecting the relationship from wider stigma. Early research with abused gay and bisexual men identified love, hope for change and limited appropriate resources as factors in decisions to remain (Merrill and Wolfe, 2000). Such dynamics are not unique to GB men, but they may be

mediated by earlier experiences of stigma, a desire to protect the relationship and the relative scarcity of affirming models of same-sex intimacy.

Remaining in contact or returning to a partner should not be treated as evidence that abuse was not serious. Such actions may reflect relationship rules under which the victim-survivor has been made responsible for the partner and the survival of the relationship or may form part of an attempt to reduce immediate harm (Merrill and Wolfe, 2000; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

2.4.4 Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust

Help-seeking is a process involving recognition, disclosure, selection of a potential source of support, evaluation of risk and negotiation of the response received. Reviews of LGBTQ+ victim-survivors identify barriers including invisibility within domestic-abuse narratives, uncertainty about whether services are inclusive, fear of discrimination, concern about involuntary disclosure and assumptions that abuse between same-sex partners will be treated as mutual (Calton et al., 2016). A poor first response may close down further disclosure, while recognition and validation can enable subsequent help-seeking.

The gap of trust refers to the historically structured relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and formal institutions expected to provide protection and support, particularly policing and criminal justice (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2011; 2014). For gay men and men who have sex with men, this relationship is especially shaped by the historical criminalisation and policing of male same-sex sexuality, through which men could be positioned as potential offenders rather than potential victims. The concept is not a general label for interpersonal mistrust or conflict within social networks. Nor does it mean that every GB man distrusts all institutions. It directs attention to the conditions through which trust must be produced and to how previous contact, confidentiality, visible inclusion and the response to an initial disclosure can strengthen or undermine institutional confidence.

Informal networks are analytically distinct. Friends, relatives or community contacts may minimise abuse, encourage reconciliation or accept the abusive partner's account. These responses can reinforce control, but they are not the same as the gap of trust between LGBTQ+ communities and formal help providers (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Help-seeking research also shows that victim-survivors may move between informal and formal sources rather than following a linear pathway. Friends may validate the abuse but lack knowledge of specialist support; healthcare professionals may identify distress without naming domestic abuse; and police may offer immediate protection while failing to connect individual incidents to a pattern. Parry and O'Neal (2015) argue that help-seeking inSSIPV must be understood intersectionally because the credibility and accessibility of different sources vary across social positions. This reinforces the need to analyse not only whether support was sought, but what the victim-survivor expected from a source, what response was received and whether that response enabled or restricted further action.

A related issue is the assumption that LGBTQ+ specialist provision is always the preferred or safest option. Some GB men may value identity-specific expertise; others may prioritise anonymity, geographical distance or domestic-abuse specialism. Bisexual men may also be uncertain whether an LGBTQ+ service will recognise bisexuality rather than subsuming them under a gay identity. Trust therefore emerges through the interaction between organisational reputation, prior experiences, confidentiality and the practitioner's response rather than from service labels alone (Calton et al., 2016; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

2.4.5 Digital Mediation

Digital technologies add an important dimension without being inherently queer. Messaging, social media, shared accounts and location services are embedded in relationships across sexual identities. Their significance for GB men lies partly in how they intersect with visibility, identity and access to queer networks. For some men, digital platforms facilitate dating, friendship, sexual connection, identity exploration and community participation. The same infrastructures may give an abusive partner access to communication histories, location information, social networks and intimate material (Miles, 2017; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Not every request for contact, shared password or location visibility constitutes abuse. The key questions are whether the practice was freely negotiated, whether consent could be withdrawn, whether it formed part of an imposed relationship rule and what consequences followed from refusal. This provides the bridge from established GB-

men IPV research to the TFA literature reviewed below (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks for UnderstandingSSIPV and TFA

The theoretical framework brings feminist coercive-control scholarship, queer criminology, intersectionality and the relational analysis developed through UK research on LGBTQ+ domestic abuse into a layered approach. These traditions are not interchangeable. Feminist scholarship establishes the significance of patterned domination and restrictions on autonomy. Queer criminology examines the heteronormative assumptions through which relationships and victimisation become intelligible. Intersectionality directs attention to differentiated social consequences and resources. Donovan, Hester and Barnes provide the relational concepts through which power can be identified inside abusive relationships without inferring its direction from the genders of the partners (Stark, 2007; Ball, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Together, these perspectives make it possible to analyse TFA as relational, structural and sociotechnical. Technologies do not create coercive control independently of social relationships, and they are not neutral instruments whose meaning can be established by listing devices. Their abusive significance depends on how they are incorporated into relationship rules, what access they enable, what follows from resistance and how the resulting harm is interpreted (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

2.5.1 Feminist Coercive-Control Scholarship

Feminist scholarship transformed domestic violence from a private problem into a social and political issue connected to gendered inequalities and the organisation of heterosexual intimacy (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Pence and Paymar, 1993). It is not a singular or static body of theory, and feminist scholars have produced different accounts of gender, agency, violence, criminalisation and state intervention. The limitation relevant to this thesis arises where heterosexual men's abuse of women is allowed to function as the only intelligible model of domestic abuse.

Stark's theory of coercive control conceptualises abuse as a course of conduct that restricts autonomy, everyday activity, resources and independent action (Stark, 2007).

Its contribution is not simply to replace physical violence with psychological abuse, but to connect intimidation, surveillance, isolation, degradation, exploitation and constraint within a cumulative pattern. Although the original formulation centred men's coercive control of women, later scholarship and UK research have considered coercive control in same-sex relationships (Hester and Donovan, 2009; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Stark and Hester, 2019).

For the present study, the value of coercive-control theory lies in its focus on pattern, autonomy and consequence. Password access, repeated messaging or location sharing cannot be classified as coercive solely because technology is involved. Analysis must establish whether the behaviour forms part of a wider pattern, whether compliance can be withdrawn, whether refusal produces punishment or intimidation and whether the victim-survivor's freedom is restricted. The theory nevertheless requires relational elaboration when applied to GB men because gender remains significant but cannot automatically identify who establishes the terms of the relationship (Stark, 2007; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

2.5.2 Queer Criminology

Queer criminology examines how criminological knowledge and criminal justice institutions are organised through assumptions about sexuality, gender and legitimate intimacy (Ball, 2014; Buist and Lenning, 2016). It asks how categories of victim and perpetrator are produced, whose experiences they make visible and which forms of harm remain unintelligible.

Applied to SSIPV, a queer perspective challenges assumptions that relationships involving two men are necessarily equal and questions the association of victimhood with femininity, physical weakness and passivity. Male victim-survivors who respond physically, express anger or present as confident may fail to correspond to expectations of the ideal victim. Conversely, an abusive partner may present as vulnerable or dependent while retaining control over the relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2010, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Queer criminology also illuminates identity disclosure and visibility. Digital exposure is harmful not simply because information becomes public, but because sexuality may be disclosed differently across family, workplace, religious, cultural and community settings. Threatened exposure can therefore connect intimate control to wider social

and material consequences (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021).

There is, however, an analytical tension. If victim and perpetrator positions are treated as infinitely fluid, the asymmetry of coercive control can disappear. This thesis uses queering to destabilise assumptions about who can occupy each position, not to dissolve accountability. Positions are established through the organisation of the relationship, motives and impacts, responsibility for harm and the consequences of resistance. Queer analysis also avoids treating non-monogamy, unconventional intimacy or intensive communication as abusive merely because they differ from heterosexual norms. The question is whether terms are consensually negotiated and whether one partner can enforce compliance through harmful consequences (Ball, 2014; Buist and Lenning, 2016; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

2.5.3 Intersectionality

Intersectionality challenges single-axis accounts of gender, race, sexuality or class (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Collins and Bilge, 2016). It concerns the mutually constitutive operation of social structures rather than the addition of separate identity characteristics. For GB men, it directs attention to how sexuality and masculinity interact with race, class, age, disability, immigration position, religion and economic resources. These relations may affect the consequences of abuse, the resources available for resistance and the institutional responses received.

Intersectionality is equally relevant to TFA. Access to secure devices, private communication, housing, specialist support and technological knowledge is uneven. The same act of digital exposure may carry different consequences depending on employment, family dependence, immigration circumstances or community visibility. This thesis uses intersectionality as an analytical orientation rather than claiming comprehensive comparison across every subgroup represented in the data. Its function is to prevent universal claims and identify where the evidence cannot support detailed subgroup conclusions (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Collins and Bilge, 2016; Tanczer et al., 2018).

2.5.4 Relational Power in LGBTQ+ Domestic Abuse

The most direct framework for examining power withinSSIPV is provided by Donovan, Hester and Barnes. Their concepts build on feminist understandings of power while

refusing to assume that embodied gender determines each partner's position (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Identity abuse did not originate in their scholarship, but their work developed its application within the British context and extended attention beyond sexuality and gender to other minoritised identities (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). Identity abuse occurs where an abusive partner mobilises the meanings, inequalities or vulnerabilities attached to an identity as a mechanism of control. It may involve threatened outing, homophobic or biphobic degradation, invalidation of bisexuality or exploitation of identity-related stigma. Not every abusive act in an LGBTQ+ relationship is identity abuse; identity must form part of the tactic or its coercive effect (Woulfe and Goodman, 2021).

Experiential power is a specific form of identity-related power. It describes circumstances in which a partner with greater experience of being out, participating in LGBTQ+ relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities uses that experience to define what an authentic identity or normal LGBTQ+ relationship should involve. The less experienced partner may be told that controlling demands are ordinary features of queer intimacy or that resistance reflects immaturity or internalised stigma. Financial advantage, racial privilege, immigration security or occupational status may also produce relational inequalities, but they are not automatically experiential power (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

This thesis considers a cautious extension of experiential power to unequal familiarity with technologies and queer digital cultures. The extension applies only where greater digital experience is used to define the norms of intimacy, conceal abusive access or discredit a less experienced partner's interpretation. Digital skill used merely to conduct surveillance more effectively is not, by itself, experiential power. This distinction preserves the original meaning while allowing the concept to be tested against the empirical material.

Relationship rules provide the central mechanism for identifying relational power. Donovan and Hester (2014) identify two overarching rules. First, the relationship is for the abusive partner and operates on their terms. Second, the victim-survivor is made responsible for the abusive partner, the continuation of the relationship, the abusive behaviour and, where relevant, the household or children. These are not mutually

agreed norms. They are maintained through the abusive partner's willingness to use whatever harmful conduct is effective in securing conformity.

In digitally mediated relationships, the first rule may be expressed through expectations of constant availability, immediate responses, account access or continuous location visibility. The second may be expressed through accusations that the victim-survivor caused monitoring by being secretive, provoked harassment by failing to respond, or remains responsible for the abusive partner after separation. Relationship rules identify power by asking who establishes the terms of intimacy, who is made responsible and what happens when either partner fails to conform (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Practices of love describe the emotional processes through which relationship rules are normalised and sustained. Expressions of vulnerability, need, jealousy, care and commitment can position the victim-survivor as responsible for demonstrating love through compliance. Monitoring may be represented as concern, account access as trust and constant availability as commitment. Practices of love are the relational glue through which emotional labour, responsibility and coercion become connected. They help explain why victim-survivors may remain invested, continue providing care or experience themselves as stronger and more responsible than the abusive partner (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Space for reaction addresses victim-survivors' resistance within abusive LGBTQ+ relationships (Donovan and Barnes, 2020). Victim-survivors may retaliate, fight back, damage property or send hostile messages in attempts to defend themselves or restore some equality. Such actions can be used by abusive partners or interpreted by professionals as proof of mutual abuse. The concept does not assume that every act of resistance is justified or harmless. It requires that conduct be situated within the wider pattern of power, motive, impact and relationship rules. Resistance may remain harmful without being equivalent to the course of coercive control directed against the victim-survivor.

The gap of trust extends the analysis beyond the relationship. It identifies the historically structured distance between LGBTQ+ communities and formal institutions, particularly policing and criminal justice (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). It is analytically distinct from informal network conflict and from mistrust within the intimate

relationship. The concept helps explain why formal inclusion may not produce institutional confidence automatically.

The relational concepts are mutually connected rather than independent variables. Relationship rules identify the structure of power; practices of love help explain how responsibility and compliance are sustained; identity abuse and experiential power identify some of the resources through which those rules are legitimised; and space for reaction clarifies how resistance may appear within the same relationship. Their combined use avoids a behaviour-by-behaviour analysis in which outing, monitoring or hostile messaging is interpreted without reference to the organisation of the relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The framework also distinguishes relational power from technical capability. A partner may possess greater digital skill without exercising coercive control, while a less technically skilled partner may establish relationship rules through emotional, physical or economic pressure. Technology becomes theoretically significant when it is incorporated into the enforcement, extension or concealment of those rules. This distinction is essential to avoid equating digital expertise with perpetration or age with vulnerability (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Freed et al., 2017).

2.5.5 Critical Evaluation and Theoretical Extension

The relational framework is the strongest existing foundation for this thesis, but it was not developed specifically to explain TFA. Relationship rules identify who controls the terms of intimacy, but do not alone explain how those rules can become technically automated, remotely enforced or sustained across platforms. Practices of love explain emotional obligations supporting compliance, but require sociotechnical extension to account for continuous connectivity, persistent access and stored digital traces (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Experiential power captures inequalities in experience of being out and navigating LGBTQ+ relationships but should not absorb every form of digital expertise. Identity abuse explains how marginalised identities can be weaponised but cannot account for all TFA affecting GB men. Surveillance, harassment and account interference may operate without explicit reference to sexuality, even where consequences are shaped by it. Space for reaction is essential for challenging mutual-abuse narratives but cannot be presumed whenever someone reports fighting back; its use requires

evidence concerning the wider relationship and which partner could establish and enforce its rules (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021).

The framework also primarily explains power within and around intimate relationships. It requires supplementation by queer criminology and the gap of trust to explain institutional recognition, and by intersectionality to account for differentiated consequences. The thesis therefore adopts Donovan and colleagues' concepts because of their explanatory value while identifying their limits and specifying where digital technologies require additional conceptual work (Ball, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

A further critical issue concerns the relationship between structural gender inequality and relational analysis. Identifying power through relationship rules does not imply that intimate relationships are detached from gendered institutions. Masculinity shapes expectations of strength, sexual entitlement and emotional responsibility; law and services may recognise some presentations of victimhood more readily than others; and violence against women remains structurally patterned. The relational framework is used because it can identify the direction of control within a particular relationship, not because structural gender analysis is unnecessary (Stark, 2007; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Stark and Hester, 2019).

Similarly, queer criminology and intersectionality are not used as labels of inclusivity. Queer criminology generates questions about the categories through which evidence is interpreted, while intersectionality identifies how consequences and institutional access are organised through interacting structures. Their contribution is strongest where they change the analysis rather than appearing only in introductory statements (Ball, 2014; Buist and Lenning, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991).

2.5.6 The Integrated Framework and Hybrid Coercive Control

The integrated framework performs five functions. Feminist coercive-control scholarship identifies patterned domination, cumulative harm and restrictions on autonomy. Relationship rules and practices of love identify who establishes the terms of intimacy, who is made responsible and how compliance is emotionally sustained. Identity abuse and experiential power identify circumstances in which sexuality, disclosure or unequal relationship experience become resources of control. Queer

criminology examines why GB men's victimisation may be misrecognised within heteronormative institutions. Intersectionality examines how consequences and resources differ across social positions (Stark, 2007; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC) is developed from the interaction of these perspectives. It is a mid-level concept, not a universal theory replacing coercive control,SSIPV scholarship or existing TFA frameworks. HCC describes how coercive control may be enacted across interdependent digital and physical environments and how conduct undertaken digitally can produce embodied, social and material consequences. It also directs attention to movement across relational phases, including the continuation or intensification of surveillance and harassment after separation (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

The term hybrid does not suggest that online harm is less real than offline harm or that digital and physical abuse are separate domains. It identifies their practical interdependence. Information obtained digitally may produce physical confrontation; offline intimidation may secure account access; threatened exposure may affect employment or housing; and post-separation contact may maintain the abusive partner's presence despite geographical distance (Woodlock, 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Dragiewicz et al., 2018).

The framework guides the empirical analysis through a consistent set of questions: what relationship rule is being established or enforced; who is positioned as responsible; how technology facilitates or extends the conduct; what happens when the expectation is resisted; which identity-related or structural conditions shape its consequences; and how practitioners and institutions interpret the harm. HCC therefore links theory directly to the survey open-text corpus and practitioner interviews rather than operating as retrospective commentary.

The research questions map onto this architecture. RQ1 concerns recognition and is informed particularly by the public story, practices of love and queer criminology. RQ2 concerns forms and relational positioning and draws on coercive control, relationship rules, identity abuse and HCC. RQ3 examines practitioner interpretation through institutional recognition, organisational context and the gap of trust. RQ4 examines age and digital socialisation through intersectionality and the delimited extension of

experiential power. This mapping prevents the framework from operating as an abstract theoretical inventory and establishes how each component contributes to the empirical analysis.

2.6 Technology-Facilitated Abuse in Intimate Partner Relationships

Digital technologies are embedded within the formation, maintenance and dissolution of intimate relationships. Smartphones, messaging services, social media, location services, cloud storage, shared accounts and connected devices can support care and communication. They can also be used to monitor, restrict, threaten, harass or humiliate a current or former partner. TFA therefore describes a broad field of interpersonal harm rather than a single behaviour or device (Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Afrouz, 2023; Rogers et al., 2023).

Terminology remains inconsistent. Studies refer to cyber abuse, digital dating abuse, cyber dating violence, technology-facilitated domestic abuse, digital coercive control and technology-facilitated coercive control. Reviews identify substantial variation in definitions, populations and measures, with studies combining different forms of monitoring, harassment, aggression and control (Brown and Hegarty, 2018; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Afrouz, 2023). This thesis uses TFA as the broad organising concept and technology-facilitated coercive control where digital technologies form part of a repeated or continuous pattern of domination.

2.6.1 Forms and Relational Functions

TFA may involve surveillance and monitoring; unauthorised access to devices or accounts; restrictions on communication or technology use; repeated or threatening contact; location tracking; impersonation; disclosure of private information; interference with employment, finances or social relationships; and the creation, capture, distribution or threatened distribution of intimate material. These categories overlap. Account access may facilitate monitoring and impersonation, while location data may enable physical confrontation (Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Afrouz, 2023; Rogers et al., 2023).

Image-based sexual abuse includes the non-consensual creation, capture or distribution of intimate images and threats to distribute them (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017). It may be used to humiliate, punish, exploit or compel continued contact. The

term is preferable to revenge pornography because it does not narrow motivation to revenge and centres the sexual violation and coercion involved.

Behavioural categories cannot determine whether conduct forms part of coercive control. Location sharing, password access and frequent messaging may occur consensually. Their meaning changes where consent is pressured, cannot be withdrawn or is enforced through accusation, threat or punishment. Analysis must consider context, motive, impact, repetition and the consequences of non-compliance. A request for access becomes significant where it is incorporated into a relationship rule or where refusal is treated as evidence of disloyalty (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

The distinction between individual incidents and coercive patterns should not minimise the seriousness of one-off harms. A single distribution of intimate material, disclosure of sensitive information or act of account sabotage may produce severe consequences without forming part of a repeated course of control. TFA is therefore broader than technology-facilitated coercive control. The latter is one relational configuration within a wider field that also includes discrete but serious sexual, reputational and privacy violations (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017; Henry et al., 2020).

Research on young people's relationships illustrates the difficulty of interpretation. Monitoring and constant contact can be normalised within digitally saturated relationship cultures, yet their impact differs according to gender, relationship expectations and whether refusal is possible (Brown, Sanci and Hegarty, 2021). This reinforces the need to examine the meaning of conduct rather than assuming that familiarity makes it consensual or that prevalence makes it harmless.

2.6.2 Digital Coercive Control and Technology-Facilitated Coercive Control

Digital coercive control and technology-facilitated coercive control connect TFA to patterned domination. Harris and Woodlock (2019) foreground harmful and invasive technology-mediated conduct and its spatial characteristics. Dragiewicz et al. (2018) connect relational coercion to platform affordances and governance. These are overlapping rather than hierarchically ordered formulations. Both reject the treatment of digital behaviours as isolated incidents and locate technology within the organisation of an abusive relationship.

Technology may facilitate the first relationship rule through expectations of continuous availability, transparency or location visibility. It may facilitate the second by making the victim-survivor responsible for reassuring the abusive partner, responding immediately and preventing jealousy. Practices of love may normalise these expectations by framing monitoring as concern and access as trust. The issue is whether participation remains voluntary and whether refusal is possible without harmful consequences (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Dragiewicz et al., 2018).

TFA should not be described simply as old abuse using new tools or as entirely unprecedented. Technologies can extend established tactics of surveillance, isolation and intimidation while their persistence, scalability, searchability and connectivity alter how those tactics are experienced. Content can be reproduced rapidly, access can be maintained across linked accounts, and monitoring may continue with limited visible effort by the abusive partner (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020).

2.6.3 Affordances and Intimate Access

Platform affordances include persistent messaging, account linkage, location visibility, searchable histories, contact suggestions and rapid reproduction of content. These features do not determine abuse, but they create possibilities that may be appropriated within abusive relationships (Dragiewicz et al., 2018). Their significance is intensified by intimate access. Current or former partners may know passwords, recovery details, habitual locations, social networks and communication routines, or may retain previously legitimate access to devices and accounts (Freed et al., 2017).

This challenges cybersecurity models centred on unknown outsiders. Advice to change a password may be insufficient where accounts are linked, recovery details are shared or the abusive partner has access to another device. Technological safety cannot be separated from relational and physical safety. At the same time, platforms may support documentation, safety planning, specialist advice and contact with supportive networks. A sociotechnical analysis must therefore recognise both risk and resistance without treating technologies as inherently harmful (Freed et al., 2017; Tanczer et al., 2018).

Platform governance introduces a level of analysis beyond the individual abusive partner. Reporting mechanisms, default privacy settings, account-recovery systems,

location-sharing functions and content-moderation decisions can affect whether abusive access is easy to maintain or difficult to contest. Dragiewicz et al. (2018) emphasise the competing roles of platforms: they may facilitate coercion while also providing routes to evidence, support and intervention. This does not make platforms perpetrators in the same sense as abusive partners, but it demonstrates that the conditions of abuse are partly sociotechnical.

The growth of internet-connected domestic devices extends this concern. Smart speakers, cameras, thermostats and security systems can be used to monitor presence, manipulate the home environment or create uncertainty about access (Tanczer et al., 2018). Such practices show why TFA cannot be limited to social media or mobile communication. They also demonstrate how technical ownership and account administration can become material forms of relational power.

2.6.4 Spaciality and Post-Separation Abuse

Digital coercive control complicates the spatial organisation of domestic abuse. Harris and Woodlock (2019) use spacelessness to describe an abusive partner's capacity to produce a sense of reach or presence beyond immediate physical proximity. Woodlock's (2017) study similarly demonstrates how technology can create perceived omnipresence and facilitate stalking, humiliation and isolation.

Spacelessness does not mean geography becomes irrelevant. Remote contact can affect whether a victim-survivor feels safe at home, attends work or enters public space. Information obtained online may facilitate physical following or confrontation, while physical intimidation may secure digital access. Post-separation abuse illustrates this interdependence. Separation may reduce legitimate physical access while increasing attempts to regain informational, emotional or social access through persistent contact, account intrusion, impersonation or threatened disclosure (Woodlock, 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Afrouz, 2023).

Blocking contact and geographical distance can remain valuable safety strategies, but their effectiveness may be undermined by alternative accounts, linked devices, shared networks or public information. The resulting safety work - password changes, device replacement, evidence preservation and withdrawal from platforms - can transfer substantial time and cost to the victim-survivor. This movement across physical, informational and relational environments is central to HCC (Freed et al., 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Afrouz, 2023).

2.6.5 Impacts and Adaptation

The effects of TFA cannot be inferred solely from the apparent seriousness of an isolated act. Persistent uncertainty about monitoring can produce fear, hypervigilance and changes in everyday behaviour. Account interference may restrict access to money or employment information; impersonation may damage social or professional relationships; intimate-image threats may affect whether a person leaves or reports abuse; and location surveillance may alter physical movement (Henry et al., 2020; Afrouz, 2023).

Digital withdrawal may reduce exposure while producing secondary losses. Deleting accounts or changing numbers can interrupt access to friends, services, communities and personal history. Victim-survivors may therefore bear the cost of securing safety from conduct for which the abusive partner is responsible. They are not, however, technologically passive. Technologies can support evidence preservation, account security, help-seeking and supportive relationships. Responses should recognise resistance while avoiding the transfer of responsibility for stopping abuse onto the victim-survivor (Freed et al., 2017; Afrouz, 2023; Rogers et al., 2023).

The harms of image-based sexual abuse illustrate the relationship between digital persistence and embodied consequences. Victim-survivors describe shame, fear, loss of control and the continuing possibility that material may reappear or reach new audiences (McGlynn et al., 2021). The harm is not confined to viewing an image online; it can alter employment, relationships, movement and self-presentation. For GB men, intimate images may also disclose sexuality or sexual practices, but the analysis must establish those identity-related consequences rather than presume them.

Institutional responses can intensify harm where responsibility is shifted to the victim-survivor for creating an image, sharing a password or using a dating application. Such responses misunderstand consent as permanent and transfer accountability from the person who misused access. A relational TFA framework therefore requires attention to how institutions interpret prior consent, intimate access and the victim-survivor's efforts to regain control (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017; McGlynn et al., 2021; Freed et al., 2017).

A final conceptual issue concerns the evidential relationship between technical possibility and proven access. Victim-survivors may know that an abusive partner

possesses information without being able to establish how it was obtained. Shared accounts, location histories, social contacts and covert software can produce similar experiences of being watched. Practitioners and researchers should therefore distinguish the victim-survivor's experience of surveillance, the relational consequences of that experience and any technically verified mechanism. Lack of forensic confirmation does not mean that fear or restriction is unreal, but precise claims about methods should not exceed the available evidence (Freed et al., 2017; Tanczer et al., 2018).

TFA research also faces sampling and measurement limitations. Service-based studies may overrepresent cases in which abuse has been recognised and support has been accessed, while online surveys may recruit people with greater digital engagement. Behavioural measures can identify exposure to monitoring or harassment without establishing relational context. Qualitative studies provide richer accounts of meaning but are not prevalence evidence. These limitations are especially important when drawing conclusions about GB men from wider sexual-and-gender-minority samples (Brown and Hegarty, 2018; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Rogers et al., 2023).

2.6.6 Conceptual Synthesis

TFA is best understood as abuse facilitated, intensified or extended through digital technologies. Within intimate relationships, its significance derives from the interaction between technological access and relational power. Some acts are serious as individual incidents; others become coercive through repetition, cumulative effects and integration into relationship rules (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Rogers et al., 2023).

The literature leaves three areas requiring further development. Research centred specifically on GB men is limited compared with work on heterosexual women and broader sexual-and-gender-minority samples. Existing TFA frameworks do not always examine how relationship rules, practices of love, identity abuse and experiential power become digitally mediated. More attention is also needed to movement between digital and physical environments and across relationship phases. HCC responds to this point of integration without replacing existing TFA or coercive-control concepts

(Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Yang, Parent and Johnson, 2023; Rogers et al., 2023).

2.7 Existing Evidence of TFA Affecting Gay and Bisexual Men

Research examining TFA affecting GB men remains limited, but it is inaccurate to describe it as wholly absent. The evidence includes studies of digital harassment among sexuality-diverse adults, TFA among sexual and gender minorities and digital dating abuse among gay and bisexual men. Its principal limitation is fragmentation. Studies frequently combine different sexuality and gender groups, include intimate and non-intimate perpetrators, focus on younger samples or measure discrete behaviours without examining wider coercive patterns (Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Vogler, Kappel and Mumford, 2023; Yang, Parent and Johnson, 2023).

Powell, Scott and Henry (2020) examined digital harassment and abuse among sexuality- and gender-diverse adults using Australian and British data. The study included sustained harassment, sexuality-based abuse, unwanted sexual contact, image-based sexual abuse and reputational harm. Bisexual men reported the highest proportions for several behaviours in the matched male sample, although most differences were not statistically significant. The findings make bisexual men analytically visible but do not provide direct evidence of coercive control because perpetrators were not restricted to intimate partners.

Vogler, Kappel and Mumford (2023) similarly found higher experiences of several forms of TFA among sexual and gender minority adults in a nationally representative United States sample. Their categories included surveillance, communication interference, reputational harm, fraud and restriction of technological access. The study also included non-intimate perpetrators, illustrating the importance of distinguishing intimate-partner TFA from family, acquaintance, stranger or hate-based abuse.

A smaller literature focuses directly on digital dating abuse among sexual minority men. This work is important because it centres gay and bisexual men rather than treating them as a subgroup, but cross-sectional measures of victimisation and perpetration do not automatically distinguish coercive control from reciprocal conflict. Associations between minority stress and digital dating abuse should not be interpreted as evidence that minority stress causes abuse. Structural stigma may

affect relationship expectations, support and the resources an abusive partner can exploit, but responsibility remains with the person using abuse (Yang, Parent and Johnson, 2023).

The available studies also differ in how they define perpetrators and relationships. Population surveys can identify disparities between sexuality groups but may not determine whether the perpetrator was a current partner, former partner, family member, acquaintance or stranger. Digital dating-abuse studies are closer to the present focus but frequently involve younger samples and brief behavioural scales. Qualitative work can provide relational context but often combines lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and non-binary participants. The field therefore contains relevant evidence without yet offering a coherent account of GB men's technology-facilitated coercive control (Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Vogler, Kappel and Mumford, 2023; Yang, Parent and Johnson, 2023).

Research on LGBTQ+ image-based sexual abuse provides another relevant strand. Meechan-Rogers, Jones and Ward (2021) show that image-based abuse may intersect with sexuality, disclosure and community context. However, image-based sexual abuse should not be treated as synonymous with TFA or coercive control. It may be enacted by intimate or non-intimate perpetrators and may occur as a single violation or as part of a wider abusive relationship.

2.7.1 Identity, Disclosure and Digital Visibility

Digital technologies may facilitate identity abuse through threatened disclosure of sexuality, relationship information, intimate material or HIV-related information. Disclosure is not a simple binary between being out and closeted. A GB man may disclose differently across family, employment, friendship, cultural and religious settings. An abusive partner with intimate knowledge of these boundaries may threaten to move information between contexts without consent. Digital technologies increase the speed, reach and persistence of disclosure, but its coercive force depends on anticipated consequences (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Not every TFA behaviour involving a GB man is identity abuse. Account intrusion, location monitoring and repeated messaging may operate without explicit reference to sexuality. Identity abuse should be identified only where identity becomes part of the

tactic or contributes directly to its effects. This distinction prevents all TFA affecting GB men from being reduced to homophobia or outing (Woulfe and Goodman, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Bisexuality requires particular attention. Biphobic assumptions may present attraction to more than one gender as evidence of inevitable infidelity and justify surveillance or demands for reassurance. Existing findings justify further investigation, but do not demonstrate that bisexual men necessarily experience more intimate-partner TFA than gay men (Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021).

2.7.2 Digital Intimacy, Networks and Recognition

Digital technologies are part of ordinary intimacy. Couples may communicate frequently, share photographs or use location services consensually. Their presence does not establish abuse. The distinction lies in negotiation, withdrawal of consent and consequences. Relationship rules are useful here: expectations of immediate replies, device inspection or continuous location visibility become coercive where one partner can impose them and punish refusal (Brown, Sanci and Hegarty, 2021; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

For some GB men, digital platforms facilitate dating, sexual connection, friendship and identity exploration. Research on non-heterosexual men's use of location-based applications shows that digital and physical encounters are intertwined rather than separate (Miles, 2017). This does not mean all GB men depend on apps or inhabit a single close-knit community. Experiences vary by geography, age, race, class, disability, relationship status and patterns of use.

Where dating, friendship and community networks overlap, impersonation, false allegations or unauthorised disclosure may affect several areas of life at once. Restricting platform access may also isolate a person from contacts or identity-affirming spaces. These harms should be assessed through demonstrated consequences rather than assumed to produce universal reputational collapse (Miles, 2017; Meechan-Rogers, Jones and Ward, 2021; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Masculinity may influence recognition, but it should not be presented as a universal explanation for silence. Technology-facilitated conduct can be difficult to identify where it produces no visible injury and resembles ordinary communication. A man may

interpret repeated messaging as jealousy or password demands as insecurity until cumulative impact and consequences become apparent. The public story may also influence practitioners who focus on hostile messages by both partners without examining which partner established the controlling pattern or whether one partner's conduct constituted space for reaction (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Huntley et al., 2019; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

Research on digital visibility also cautions against describing queer platforms only as risky spaces. They can support identity exploration, sexual autonomy and community connection. Advice or analysis that treats withdrawal as the obvious response may reproduce assumptions that GB men's digital participation is frivolous or unsafe. The relevant question is how an abusive partner exploits access to spaces that may also be important resources for the victim-survivor (Miles, 2017; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Age and digital socialisation are similarly complex. Younger age cannot be equated with technological competence or with normalisation of surveillance, and older age cannot be equated with digital vulnerability. Digital socialisation concerns the relationship practices, expectations and platform histories through which people have learned to interpret communication, privacy and availability. It is therefore examined as a contextual and interpretive dimension rather than a deterministic generational divide (Brown, Sanci and Hegarty, 2021; Yang, Parent and Johnson, 2023).

2.7.3 The Specific Knowledge Gap

The evidence supports a precise rather than absolute gap. Sexuality- and gender-diverse populations experience multiple forms of digital harassment, but much research includes non-intimate perpetrators. A small body of work now examines digital dating abuse among gay and bisexual men. Existing studies rarely integrate TFA with relationship rules, practices of love, identity abuse, experiential power, space for reaction and institutional recognition (Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020; Vogler, Kappel and Mumford, 2023; Yang, Parent and Johnson, 2023; Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021).

This thesis therefore examines how GB men interpret potentially abusive digital conduct; how digital practices are situated within wider relational patterns; how identity and visibility affect meaning and consequence; how control moves between digital and

physical environments; and how practitioners recognise these dynamics. It does so through structured vignette classifications, a verified corpus of 200 open-text comments from GB men and 30 practitioner interviews. Survey participation is not treated as evidence of personal victimisation, and the study does not claim prevalence or a representative account of lived experience.

2.8 Help-Seeking and Institutional Recognition

Research focused specifically on help-seeking by GB men subjected to intimate-partner TFA remains limited. Relevant evidence is dispersed across LGBTQ+ IPV, male victim-survivor, institutional-response and digital-abuse research. Together, these literatures show that help-seeking involves more than a decision to disclose. It requires recognition of harm, evaluation of the risks of disclosure, identification of a credible source of support and negotiation of the response received (Calton et al., 2016; Huntley et al., 2019; Afrouz, 2023).

TFA complicates recognition because individual behaviours may resemble ordinary relationship communication. Repeated messaging, password requests or location sharing may initially be interpreted as jealousy, care or conflict. Their significance becomes clearer when connected to imposed expectations, cumulative restriction and harmful consequences for resistance (Brown, Sanci and Hegarty, 2021; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

2.8.1 Recognition, Disclosure and Confidentiality

A person must first interpret conduct as sufficiently harmful or illegitimate to warrant external support. This may be difficult where abuse does not correspond to the public story or where both men have used harmful behaviour. Masculine expectations of self-reliance may affect some men's understanding of vulnerability, although they should not be treated as universal (Donovan and Hester, 2010, 2014; Huntley et al., 2019).

Disclosure may carry sexuality-related risks. A GB man may be uncertain whether a service will understand the relationship or may need to reveal information previously kept private. TFA can make this more acute where abuse involves intimate images, dating applications, sexual communication, HIV-related information or threatened outing. A victim-survivor may fear moral judgement or that voluntary creation of an

intimate image will be mistaken for consent to its later distribution (Calton et al., 2016; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021; Meechan-Rogers, Jones and Ward, 2021).

Confidentiality is also a practical safety issue. The device used to search for support may be monitored, and calls, messages or browsing histories may become visible. Safe help-seeking depends on whether services can agree appropriate methods and times for contact and recognise that the victim-survivor may not control the technology through which support is accessed (Emezue, 2020; Freed et al., 2017).

2.8.2 Institutional Recognition and the Gap of Trust

Calton et al. (2016) identify stigma, limited recognition and systemic barriers within LGBTQ+ help-seeking. The gap of trust situates these concerns within the historically structured relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and formal institutions, including the legacy of the criminalisation and policing of male same-sex sexuality (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2011; 2014). Trust is not absent automatically, and specialist LGBTQ+ services are not inherently trusted. It can be strengthened or damaged through confidentiality, visible inclusion, community knowledge, referral pathways and the response to an initial disclosure.

Process-driven responses may apply formally identical procedures without sufficient attention to identities and relational context. Butterby and Donovan (2024) show how police responses can remain influenced by the public story, particularly where officers struggle to identify the primary abusive partner in same-sex cases. Standardisation can support consistency, but it becomes problematic where procedure replaces contextual enquiry. Hostile messages by both partners, for example, cannot be interpreted properly without examining the wider pattern and the possibility of resistance.

It is inaccurate to describe TFA as legally invisible in England and Wales. Current law and statutory guidance provide routes for addressing digitally facilitated controlling or coercive behaviour, stalking and harassment, unauthorised access to devices or accounts, and intimate-image abuse. The difficulty is that a course of conduct may be fragmented across different offences or treated as a series of minor incidents. Risk tools such as DARA and DASH contain questions relevant to coercion, stalking, monitoring and fear, but they cannot replace professional curiosity or the identification of the primary abusive partner (Serious Crime Act 2015; Domestic Abuse Act 2021;

Protection from Harassment Act 1997; Computer Misuse Act 1990; Sexual Offences Act 2003; Online Safety Act 2023; Home Office, 2023; College of Policing, 2022; SafeLives, n.d.).

Formal inclusion can coexist with practical barriers. A service may use gender-neutral language while forms, accommodation, referral criteria or professional assumptions remain organised around heterosexuality. Conversely, a service developed through work with women may possess strong coercive-control expertise and adapt it effectively for GB men. The analytical task is to identify what the service actually does rather than infer competence from its stated client group (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

Legal recognition may also fail to translate into a coherent victim-survivor experience. Digital monitoring, threatened disclosure, repeated contact and account interference may fall across coercive-control, stalking, harassment, communications, intimate-image and computer-misuse frameworks. Different agencies may record separate elements without constructing the course of conduct. The resulting fragmentation can require the victim-survivor to repeat, translate and technically explain the abuse while also preserving evidence and managing safety (Home Office, 2023; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Freed et al., 2017).

For GB men, institutional recognition additionally depends on whether professionals understand identity without stereotyping it. Practitioners need to ask about the consequences of disclosure and the role of platforms relevant to the individual, rather than assuming that all gay men use dating apps or that every same-sex case involves outing. Culturally competent enquiry is therefore specific and open-ended rather than based on a fixed catalogue of queer harms (Calton et al., 2016; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

2.8.3 Digital Safety Work

TFA can complicate help-seeking because technical changes may carry risk. Blocking an abusive partner, changing passwords or disabling location services may be useful, but can alert the abusive partner or prompt changes in tactics. Digital-safety advice should be incorporated into a wider relational and physical safety assessment rather than offered as a universal solution (Freed et al., 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Afrouz, 2023).

Evidence preservation creates a further tension. Messages, screenshots and device records may support legal action, but collecting and storing them can require continued exposure to threatening material and may be unsafe where accounts remain compromised. Victim-survivors may undertake extensive digital safety work, including replacing devices, creating accounts, reviewing linked services and repeatedly reporting content. These actions can transfer time, cost and responsibility to the person subjected to abuse (Freed et al., 2017; McGlynn et al., 2021; Afrouz, 2023).

Help-seeking should therefore be understood as an interaction between personal recognition, relational risk and institutional response. Barriers can arise before, during and after disclosure. They should not be universalised, but they demonstrate why effective support must connect digital conduct to patterns of coercive control, identity-related consequences and physical safety (Calton et al., 2016; Afrouz, 2023; Rogers et al., 2023).

2.9 Service Provisions and Organisational Responses

The preceding section examined help-seeking from the perspective of recognition and disclosure. This section turns to the organisation of support. LGBTQ+ by-and-for organisations, specialist domestic-abuse services, police, housing providers, healthcare professionals, counsellors and generic community organisations possess different remits, resources and forms of expertise. Service responses should not be collapsed into a single account of institutional failure.

Specialist LGBTQ+ organisations may possess strong knowledge of identity abuse, disclosure and the gap of trust but have limited resources or access to domestic-abuse pathways. Specialist domestic-abuse services may have extensive expertise in coercive control, stalking, post-separation risk and safety planning while varying in their understanding of GB men's relationships. Statutory organisations hold formal safeguarding and enforcement powers but may respond through procedures that do not capture relational context. The quality of a response therefore cannot be inferred from the organisational label alone (Donovan, Magić and West, 2022; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

2.9.1 Uneven Provision and By-and-For Expertise

Domestic-abuse provision in Britain developed substantially through feminist activism and the violence-against-women sector, generating indispensable knowledge about coercive control, advocacy and safety. The continuing need for specialist women's services should not be positioned as the cause of inadequate provision for GB men. The issue is whether an adequately resourced service ecology exists alongside that provision (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

Mapping undertaken by Donovan, Magić and West (2022) identified severe geographical and workforce gaps in specialist LGBTQ+ domestic-abuse provision at the time of the study. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's wider mapping similarly found that access to LGBTQ+ by-and-for provision was substantially lower than expressed demand. These data concern LGBTQ+ victim-survivors collectively and represent snapshots rather than a permanent inventory, but they demonstrate the scarcity and geographical concentration of specialist capacity.

By-and-for services are designed and delivered by and for a minoritised community. Their contribution lies in sustained knowledge of the communities they serve, structural barriers and the trust required for disclosure. LGBTQ+ victim-survivors may be less concerned that they will need to justify their identity or explain the legitimacy of the relationship. By-and-for status does not, however, guarantee comprehensive domestic-abuse or TFA expertise. An LGBTQ+ organisation may understand identity and discrimination while lacking specialist capacity in stalking, housing, criminal justice advocacy or digital security. Conversely, practitioners who do not share the victim-survivor's identity may provide informed and affirming support (Donovan, Magić and West, 2022; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

Effective provision therefore depends on partnership. A GB man subjected to account surveillance, threatened disclosure and post-separation harassment may require identity-affirming support, technical advice, housing advocacy, police engagement and legal information. Referrals should preserve the relational account of abuse rather than fragmenting it into separate problems of sexuality, technology and criminal conduct (Donovan, Magić and West, 2022; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022; Afrouz, 2023).

Uneven provision has consequences beyond the number of available services. Specialist organisations may hold knowledge that is not embedded across local referral networks, meaning that victim-survivors receive identity-affirming support without timely access to housing or criminal-justice advocacy, or vice versa. Short-term funding can also limit staff retention, training and the development of sustained partnerships. Service capacity should therefore be assessed through reach, stability, referral authority and the ability to support complex cases rather than by the existence of a helpline alone (Donovan, Magić and West, 2022; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

Remote national provision can reduce geographical inequality but cannot replace every local function. A monitored device may make telephone or online support unsafe, while housing, safeguarding and police advocacy often require engagement with local systems. The strongest model is therefore not a simple choice between national specialist and local generic provision but coordinated pathways through which specialist LGBTQ+ knowledge can influence local responses (Donovan, Magić and West, 2022; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022; Emezue, 2020).

2.9.2 Mainstream, Specialist and Statutory Practice

A simple opposition between competent LGBTQ+ services and incompetent mainstream services would reproduce the homogenisation this thesis challenges. Specialist domestic-abuse practitioners may recognise patterns of surveillance and post-separation persistence even where they have limited familiarity with queer platforms. LGBTQ+ practitioners may understand outing and identity invalidation but must still identify which partner is exercising coercive control. Statutory agencies possess powers that voluntary organisations do not, but may become overly process-driven (Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

Good practice involves identifying the pattern rather than treating each digital act separately; examining who establishes and enforces the relationship rules; distinguishing resistance from equivalent coercive control; assessing identity-related and material consequences; considering digital and physical safety together; explaining confidentiality; recognising post-separation continuation; and connecting the victim-survivor to appropriate support (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Home Office, 2023).

Poor practice may involve treating abuse between two men as mutual conflict without contextual enquiry, presuming that the larger or angrier partner is the abusive partner, reducing TFA to poor online behaviour, advising digital withdrawal without considering safety, moralising about intimate images or dating applications, or assuming that formally gender-neutral services need no adaptation. Institutional misrecognition should not be used as a synonym for every resource limitation. It occurs where available information is interpreted through assumptions that obscure the pattern or significance of abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Butterby and Donovan, 2024; Afrouz, 2023).

Healthcare and therapeutic services require particular differentiation. General practitioners, sexual-health professionals and counsellors may be among the first people to encounter anxiety, injury, sexual coercion or relationship distress. Their role in recognition and referral is important, but therapeutic validation does not replace risk assessment or safeguarding. Equally, an immediate police response may address criminal conduct without meeting longer-term emotional, housing or digital-safety needs. Evaluating service responses therefore requires attention to organisational remit as well as knowledge and attitude (Calton et al., 2016; Huntley et al., 2019; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Professional uncertainty should not automatically be equated with prejudice. A practitioner may recognise abuse but lack technical confidence, or understand the technology while misinterpreting the relational pattern. Good organisational systems allow practitioners to identify limits, seek supervision and refer effectively. Poor systems leave individual workers to improvise or place the burden of explanation on the victim-survivor (Butterby and Donovan, 2024; Afrouz, 2023).

The distinction between good and poor practice is therefore substantive rather than rhetorical. Good practice begins with language that does not presume the gender of either partner and continues through questions about pattern, fear, autonomy and consequences. It recognises that a physically confident man may be a victim-survivor, that anger may be a reaction rather than evidence of primary abuse, and that identity-related harms may have material consequences. It also explains confidentiality and information-sharing clearly, particularly where disclosure of sexuality or intimate

material is involved (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

Poor practice may be affirming in language but weak in analysis. A practitioner may use inclusive terminology while treating hostile conduct by both partners as symmetrical, advising the victim-survivor simply to stop using an application or failing to ask how post-separation contact is being maintained. Conversely, a practitioner with limited LGBTQ+ terminology may still provide an effective response if they identify the course of control, respect identity and secure appropriate specialist input. This distinction helps the empirical analysis avoid ranking sectors simplistically (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

2.9.3 Organisational Responses to TFA

Responding to TFA requires more than recognising particular applications. Practitioners need to ask whether accounts or devices are shared or linked; whether the abusive partner knows passwords or recovery information; whether location services or cloud accounts are active; whether the device used to seek help may be monitored; whether intimate images or identity-related information are being used coercively; and whether digital conduct connects to physical following, intimidation or post-separation abuse (Freed et al., 2017; Tanczer et al., 2018; Afrouz, 2023).

This does not require every practitioner to become a cybersecurity specialist. It requires sufficient knowledge to avoid unsafe assumptions, recognise when technical advice is needed and make appropriate referrals without separating the technology from the relationship. Training should be relationally and technologically informed. Device-specific training may date quickly, while coercive-control training alone may overlook how access is technically maintained (Freed et al., 2017; Tanczer et al., 2018; Afrouz, 2023).

Inclusive provision requires a common domestic-abuse foundation combined with identity-informed and intersectional competence. Visible LGBTQ+ inclusion can communicate accessibility, but branding or a policy statement is insufficient without changes to assessment, recording, safeguarding, confidentiality, referral and staff development. Cultural competence is best understood as continuing organisational capacity, reflective practice and knowledge of specialist pathways rather than a finite

set of facts about LGBTQ+ people (Calton et al., 2016; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

A TFA-informed response also needs to recognise that safety and evidence may conflict. Disconnecting an account can reduce access but remove information required for investigation; preserving messages can support a case but expose the victim-survivor repeatedly to threatening content. Services should support informed choices rather than impose a single technical sequence. The aim is not maximum digital security in isolation, but increased autonomy within a wider safety plan (Freed et al., 2017; McGlynn et al., 2021; Afrouz, 2023).

The same principle applies after separation. Services may regard the end of cohabitation as a reduction in risk while digital access, impersonation, account recovery or social-network contact continue. HCC directs attention to this movement across relational phases and encourages practitioners to ask how access has changed rather than whether the relationship has formally ended (Woodlock, 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

These distinctions provide the basis for Chapter 7, which compares practitioner accounts by organisational setting, professional role and type of specialist knowledge. Effective and limited responses are analysed separately rather than aggregated into a single narrative of institutional inadequacy.

The service literature therefore supports a model of connected specialisms rather than a universal or entirely separate LGBTQ+ system. Core domestic-abuse principles - pattern recognition, primary-perpetrator identification, autonomy, safety planning and post-separation risk - remain applicable. They require adaptation to identity, disclosure, bisexuality, digital access and the institutional histories that shape trust. This combination avoids both universalism, which assumes identical delivery is equitable, and exceptionalism, which presents GB men's experiences as disconnected from established domestic-abuse knowledge (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

2.10 Covid-19, Digital Dependency and the Reorganisation of Abuse and Support

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the spatial and technological organisation of intimate life. Restrictions on movement, remote working, closure of public spaces and expansion of digital services changed how people communicated, sought support and maintained social relationships. The pandemic did not create coercive control and should not be treated as a general cause of domestic abuse. It altered the opportunity structures through which existing patterns could be exercised (Piquero et al., 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Emezue, 2020).

Evidence concerning the overall effect on domestic abuse requires caution. International research often reported increases in recorded or reported domestic violence, but findings varied by setting, method and data source (Piquero et al., 2021). In England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics (2020) warned that changes in police, helpline and service data could not be attributed straightforwardly to COVID-19. Increased service contact may indicate escalation, delayed disclosure, reduced informal support or greater awareness, while reduced reporting may reflect fewer safe opportunities to seek help.

The pandemic also changed the meaning of service and police data. Increases in helpline contacts could reflect escalation, greater public awareness, reduced informal support or delayed disclosure, while decreases could reflect a lack of safe opportunities to communicate. Administrative datasets rarely recorded sexuality consistently and often combined intimate-partner abuse with other forms of domestic abuse. Claims about GB men must therefore be separated from general population trends and broad LGBTQ+ evidence (Office for National Statistics, 2020; McGowan, Lowther and Meads, 2021).

2.10.1 Restricted Mobility and Digital Dependency

Lockdown reduced everyday movements through which victim-survivors could create distance, access informal support or seek help privately. Public-health rules could be appropriated into relationship rules where one partner claimed authority over movement or contact. The distinction between legitimate health-related negotiation

and abuse remains whether arrangements were mutual, challengeable and free from punishment (Piquero et al., 2021; Emezue, 2020).

Lockdown also demonstrates that digital coercion and physical proximity are not opposites. Prolonged cohabitation could provide more opportunities to observe passwords, access devices or monitor remote conversations, while the same devices remained the principal route to support beyond the home. This interaction is central to HCC because it shows digital access and bodily proximity operating together (Emezue, 2020; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Digital dependency should be distinguished from device ownership. A person may possess a smartphone without private or secure use of it. An abusive partner may know passwords, receive shared notifications or observe calls directly. The relevant inequality concerns autonomous access. The same infrastructure may also support resistance through evidence preservation, remote counselling and contact with trusted people (Emezue, 2020; Freed et al., 2017).

2.10.2 LGBTQ+ Evidence and Remote Services

Evidence concerning LGBTQ+ people during the pandemic suggests that some experienced unsafe home environments, reduced access to affirming spaces and difficulties obtaining support, but UK research was limited and often combined different sexualities, gender identities and forms of family or partner abuse. It does not establish a uniform increase in intimate-partner TFA among GB men (McGowan, Lowther and Meads, 2021).

Domestic-abuse organisations expanded telephone, video and online provision. Remote support could reduce travel and extend geographical reach but could be unsafe where devices were monitored or privacy was limited (Emezue, 2020). Safe practice required checking whether communication was appropriate, agreeing safe methods and considering the digital traces left by contact. Remote and hybrid support remained relevant after formal restrictions ended.

For some LGBTQ+ people, the closure of community venues and return to family homes reduced access to affirming spaces, but this evidence frequently concerns family abuse rather thanSSIPV. It remains relevant to the wider context of identity and isolation but cannot be used as direct evidence of coercive control by a male partner.

For some GB men in intimate relationships, increased reliance on digital communication may have made the control of devices or accounts especially consequential; for others, technology expanded access to support and connection. The evidence supports attention to variation rather than a single pandemic experience (McGowan, Lowther and Meads, 2021; Emezue, 2020).

The pandemic's significance for this thesis is therefore analytical rather than causal. It revealed how physical confinement, digital access, identity and institutional availability can interact within the same course of control. Pandemic-related survey comments are treated as contextual and interpretive evidence, not as prevalence data or proof that COVID-19 intensified TFA for all GB men.

2.11 Summary and Theoretical Synthesis

This chapter has reviewed scholarship at the intersection ofSSIPV, coercive control and TFA. It has shown that GB men are not absent from domestic-abuse research. UK and international scholarship has documented same-sex IPV, recognition and help-seeking, and has developed relational accounts of power beyond a heterosexual perpetrator-victim template. The more precise gap lies in the limited integration of that knowledge with research on digitally mediated abuse and in the comparatively small body of work focused specifically on TFA within GB men's current and former intimate relationships (Callan, Corbally and McElvaney, 2021; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Powell, Scott and Henry, 2020).

Feminist scholarship remains fundamental because it established domestic abuse as patterned power rather than isolated private incidents. Stark's coercive-control framework provides a basis for analysing cumulative domination, surveillance, isolation and constraint. Gender and masculinity remain relevant structures, but they cannot be used mechanically to identify the abusive partner within relationships involving two men. Direction must be established through the organisation of the relationship, motives and effects, responsibility and the consequences of resistance (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Stark, 2007; Donovan and Hester, 2014).

The relational framework developed by Donovan, Hester and Barnes provides the principal means of undertaking that analysis. Relationship rules identify who establishes the terms of intimacy and who is made responsible. Practices of love

explain how care, commitment and obligation can sustain those rules. Identity abuse identifies where sexuality or another minoritised identity becomes part of the tactic or its coercive effect. Experiential power is retained in its specific sense and extended cautiously only where unequal digital experience is used to define normality, conceal access or invalidate a partner's interpretation. Space for reaction prevents resistance from being treated automatically as mutual abuse, while the gap of trust locates institutional confidence within the historical relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and formal services (Donovan and Hester, 2011; 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020; Woulfe and Goodman, 2021).

Queer criminology interrogates assumptions about legitimate intimacy, masculinity, victimhood and vulnerability without dissolving accountability. Intersectionality prevents GB men from being treated as homogeneous and directs attention to differentiated consequences, while acknowledging that the dataset cannot support comprehensive subgroup analysis (Ball, 2014; Buist and Lenning, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991).

The TFA literature demonstrates that technologies can facilitate surveillance, repeated contact, account interference, impersonation, image-based sexual abuse and reputational harm. Typologies alone cannot establish coercive control. The significance of password access, location sharing or persistent messaging depends on negotiation, withdrawal of consent, relational function and consequences. Online and offline harm are interdependent: digital information can produce physical confrontation, offline intimidation can secure digital access, and post-separation contact can sustain an abusive partner's presence (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020; Rogers et al., 2023).

The literature establishes five analytical commitments. Abuse must be examined as a patterned relational process. Power must be identified through relationship rules, responsibility, impact and resistance rather than presumed from gender. Technologies must be analysed through their relational functions. Sexuality and identity may shape mechanisms and consequences without making every tactic uniquely queer. Recognition is produced through interactions between victim-survivors, social networks, services, law and institutional narratives.

These commitments provide the conceptual architecture for Hybrid Coercive Control. HCC is positioned as an empirically grounded mid-level concept rather than a universal theory. It directs attention to how patterned control is organised across interconnected digital and physical environments, how it moves across relational phases and how digitally enacted conduct produces embodied, social and material consequences. At this stage it remains an analytical proposition whose explanatory value must be tested against the study's evidence.

Service and help-seeking research further demonstrates that recognition is not produced by theory or law alone. It depends on how victim-survivors interpret their relationships, how informal networks respond, whether services recognise same-sex coercive control and whether technological conduct is connected to its offline and post-separation consequences. The literature therefore supports neither a narrative of complete institutional exclusion nor an assumption that formal inclusion has resolved misrecognition. It points instead to uneven knowledge, provision and trust across organisational settings (Calton et al., 2016; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Butterby and Donovan, 2024; Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

COVID-19 reinforces the same theoretical conclusion. It did not create a new form of abuse, but made visible the capacity of coercive control to move through changing arrangements of home, work, communication and service access. Digital coercion can operate at a distance and in physical proximity; technology can be a mechanism of control and a resource for resistance. HCC is intended to hold these relationships together without treating technology as either peripheral or determinative (Piquero et al., 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Emezue, 2020).

The following chapter explains how this agenda was operationalised through a qualitatively driven mixed-methods design combining structured survey classifications, a verified corpus of 200 open-text comments from GB men and 30 semi-structured practitioner interviews. The survey examines interpretation and recognition and is not treated as evidence that all respondents experienced abuse personally. Practitioner interviews provide insight into professional understandings and organisational responses but are not substitutes for direct survivor interviews.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out and justifies the methodological approach used to examine technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) within gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships. The study is defined throughout this thesis as a qualitatively driven mixed-methods study. It combines an online survey with semi-structured interviews conducted with 30 practitioners working across domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, community, counselling, safeguarding and statutory contexts. The two components generated different but complementary forms of evidence concerning how TFA is perceived and interpreted, how digitally mediated behaviours acquire meaning within intimate relationships, and how practitioners and services recognise and respond to these harms.

The methodological approach is informed by queer criminology, with a specific victimological focus, and by feminist and intersectional approaches to knowledge production. These perspectives treat knowledge as situated and shaped by relations of power rather than as the neutral outcome of technical research procedures (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004; Browne and Nash, 2010). In this study, this required attention not only to what participants and practitioners said, but also to the categories through which abuse, victimhood, masculinity, sexuality and intimate relationships become recognisable. The research design was therefore intended to investigate meaning and interpretation as well as recorded patterns of response.

The online survey generated the wider empirical base of the study. It included vignette-based questions asking respondents to evaluate digitally mediated relationship behaviours and one optional open-text question through which respondents could explain their views in their own words. The survey was not designed to estimate the prevalence of TFA, establish causal relationships or produce statistically generalisable findings. Its closed-response elements are used descriptively to examine how behaviours were classified within the sample. Its open-text material is used interpretively to explore how respondents distinguished between care, jealousy, conflict, control and abuse. The primary analytic focus is the survey material provided

by respondents who identified as gay or bisexual men. A manually verified subset of 200 substantive free-text comments from gay and bisexual male respondents forms an important part of the evidence used in the substantive chapters; its derivation, inclusion criterion, processing, coding and thematic composition are explained in Sections 3.5 and 3.7.

The survey responses are not treated as though every respondent had personally experienced TFA. The vignettes principally captured perceptions of hypothetical relationship behaviours. Where respondents used the open-text field to describe personal experiences, witnessed experiences or examples concerning people known to them, these are identified and interpreted according to the content of the response rather than presumed from participation in the survey. This distinction is important because the study examines both the recognition of abuse and, where disclosed, accounts of how digitally mediated harm was experienced or observed. It also prevents the survey from being represented as a prevalence study or as a sample composed exclusively of identified victim-survivors.

The practitioner interviews generated a second and analytically distinct source of evidence. Practitioners were not interviewed as substitutes for victim-survivors and their accounts are not treated as transparent descriptions of gay and bisexual men's lived experiences. Instead, the interviews provide situated professional interpretations of how TFA is understood, assessed and responded to within different organisational settings. Practitioners' accounts are analysed in relation to their sector, role, professional experience and organisational context. This allows the thesis to identify differences between LGBTQ+ specialist provision, domestic abuse specialist provision, generic community or counselling services, and statutory responses rather than presenting institutional practice as homogeneous.

The two components are integrated through the research questions and during interpretation, while their evidentiary functions remain distinct. The survey provides descriptive and open-text material concerning recognition, normalisation, relational meaning, digital surveillance, visibility and separation. The practitioner interviews provide detailed accounts of professional knowledge, risk assessment, institutional constraints and service responses. Areas of convergence are considered alongside disagreement and tension. Practitioner accounts are therefore not used to confirm survey respondents' experiences automatically, and survey comments are not used

to make unsupported claims about the wider population. This approach provides breadth of perspective while retaining methodological caution concerning what each dataset can substantiate.

The study did not include follow-up interviews with survey respondents or a separate sample recruited specifically as victim-survivors. Consequently, the open-text comments cannot provide the biographical depth or opportunity for clarification associated with extended qualitative interviews. This is acknowledged as a methodological limitation. It also shaped the analytical discipline adopted in the thesis: claims about lived experience are made only where supported by the content of the open-text response, while broader claims about service practice are grounded principally in the practitioner interviews and relevant literature.

Methodology is understood here as more than a sequence of data-collection procedures. The decisions concerning recruitment, categorisation, interpretation and representation were shaped by the ethical and political challenges of researching violence involving a population whose experiences have often been marginalised within domestic abuse research. Attention is therefore paid to anonymity, the representation of open-text material, researcher positionality and the risk of imposing fixed meanings on ambiguous relationship practices. Verbatim survey quotations are distinguished from paraphrased accounts, and practitioner evidence is contextualised rather than presented as decontextualised professional authority.

The chapter proceeds by outlining the ontological and epistemological position of the research in Section 3.2. Section 3.3 explains the mixed-methods design and the distinct role of each dataset. Section 3.4 restates the research questions and maps them to the relevant sources of evidence and analytical strategies. Sections 3.5 and 3.6 describe the survey and practitioner interview components respectively, including recruitment, sampling and ethical safeguards. Section 3.7 provides a transparent account of the descriptive and thematic analytical processes, including the preparation and coding of the survey open-text corpus. Section 3.8 addresses ethical and emotional safety, while Section 3.9 considers the methodological limitations of the study. The chapter concludes in Section 3.10 by summarising how the design supports the empirical and theoretical aims of the thesis.

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

This study adopts a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, informed by feminist, queer and intersectional scholarship. The overarching disciplinary orientation is queer criminological, while the substantive focus is victimological: the study examines how technology-facilitated abuse is experienced, interpreted, recognised and responded to in gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships. This formulation is used throughout the thesis to avoid treating queer criminology and queer victimology as interchangeable methodological labels.

A constructionist ontology begins from the position that categories such as abuse, victimhood, perpetration, risk, consent and "normal" relationship behaviour do not possess fixed or self-evident meanings. Their meanings are produced and negotiated through language, intimate relationships, cultural expectations, professional practices and institutional frameworks (Butler, 1990; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). This is particularly important when studying technology-facilitated abuse because many of the behaviours under consideration including frequent messaging, password sharing, location access and monitoring of social media cannot be classified adequately through the behaviour alone. Their meaning depends on the relational context in which they occur, the degree of choice available, their cumulative impact and the consequences of refusing or withdrawing consent.

A constructionist position does not mean that violence and abuse are understood as merely linguistic or subjective phenomena. Digitally mediated conduct can produce material, embodied and enduring consequences, including fear, isolation, reputational damage, disruption to employment and housing, changes in physical movement and continued intrusion after separation (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018). The study therefore distinguishes between the socially constructed meanings through which harm becomes recognisable and the material effects through which that harm is lived. The fact that participants, practitioners or institutions may interpret a behaviour differently does not make all interpretations equally persuasive. Analysis remains attentive to power, patterns of conduct, relational context, impact and the consequences of non-compliance.

The corresponding epistemological position is interpretivist. Knowledge about abuse is understood as partial, situated and produced through particular social relations

rather than discovered from a neutral position outside them (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004). Survey respondents' comments are therefore treated as situated accounts of how digitally mediated relationship practices are understood, including where respondents describe personal or witnessed experiences. Practitioner interviews are similarly treated as professional interpretations shaped by organisational remit, training, sector, professional experience and the institutional categories available to them. Neither dataset is treated as providing direct and unmediated access to a single objective account of TFA.

I am also implicated in this process of interpretation. The decisions I made about which questions to ask, how responses were categorised, which extracts were selected and how themes were named all shaped the knowledge produced. Reflexivity therefore involved more than acknowledging my own identity or relationship to the research topic. It required sustained attention to how my assumptions, theoretical commitments and prior knowledge influenced the analytical process, as well as a transparent account of how interpretations were reached and alternative readings considered. In practical terms, this included distinguishing verbatim participant quotations from paraphrased accounts, maintaining a traceable coding process and avoiding claims that exceeded what the survey or practitioner data could substantiate.

Feminist epistemologies provide an essential foundation for this approach. Feminist research on domestic abuse established the importance of examining patterns of power and control rather than reducing violence to isolated incidents, and demonstrated how apparently private experiences are shaped by wider structural inequalities and institutional arrangements (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Stark, 2007). This thesis does not reject those insights because its focus is gay and bisexual men. Instead, it draws on feminist understandings of coercive control while questioning the assumption that power can be inferred automatically from a heterosexual gender binary. Gender and masculinity remain significant, but they are treated as relational and socially organised rather than as sufficient explanations of who holds power within a particular relationship.

Queer theory and queer criminology extend this analysis by examining how dominant assumptions about sexuality, gender, intimacy and victimhood shape what becomes intelligible as abuse (Browne and Nash, 2010; Ball, 2014). To queer a methodology is not simply to include LGBTQ+ participants within an existing research design. It

requires critical attention to the categories and norms through which relationships and harms are interpreted. In this study, this involves questioning assumptions that same-sex partners possess equal power because they share a gender, that conflict between two men must be mutual, or that digitally mediated control is less serious because it does not correspond to conventional images of physical domestic violence.

This queer orientation does not require the abandonment of stable analytical judgements or the celebration of ambiguity for its own sake. The purpose is not to make the categories of victim-survivor and abusive partner impossible to use. Rather, it is to identify how power operates when conventional gendered assumptions do not provide a reliable guide. This requires attention to who establishes the terms of the relationship, who is expected to take responsibility for maintaining it, what happens when expectations are challenged, and whose autonomy becomes progressively restricted. Donovan and Hester's concepts of relationship rules and practices of love are particularly valuable because they provide a relational account of power without assuming that gender alone determines the direction of abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014, pp. 130–141, 164–165).

Intersectionality further informs the study by recognising that sexuality does not operate independently from other social locations and inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989). Experiences of TFA and opportunities for recognition may also be shaped by race and ethnicity, age, social class, disability, HIV status, immigration position, degree of disclosure about sexuality and access to digital knowledge or resources. Intersectionality is therefore used as a sensitising commitment throughout the analysis rather than as a claim that every intersection could be examined equally within the available data. The demographic composition and limits of the sample constrain the extent to which comparisons between all groups can be made, and these limits are addressed explicitly later in the chapter.

The theoretical concepts used in the thesis are treated as sensitising and interpretive resources rather than as predetermined categories into which the data were forced. The analysis draws on identity abuse, experiential power, relationship rules, practices of love, the gap of trust and space for reaction, while preserving the distinctions between these concepts and their intellectual origins. Identity abuse did not originate in Donovan and colleagues' work, although their research developed its application within the British context and extended it beyond sexuality and gender. Experiential

power is initially understood as the use of greater experience of being out, participating in LGBTQ+ relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities to regulate or undermine a less experienced partner. Where this thesis considers whether such power may also operate through unequal digital knowledge, this is presented explicitly as an extension rather than as the original definition (Donovan and Hester, 2014, pp. 213–216; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

These ontological and epistemological commitments shaped the mixed-methods design. The closed-response survey material is used descriptively rather than as a neutral or comprehensive measurement of abuse. The vignettes examine how respondents classified contextualised behaviours, while the open-text responses provide insight into the meanings and qualifications attached to those classifications. The practitioner interviews explore how abuse is interpreted within professional and organisational settings. Quantitative description and qualitative interpretation are therefore combined not because they offer interchangeable forms of knowledge, but because they illuminate different aspects of recognition, relational meaning and institutional response.

The approach adopted can consequently be described as an empirically grounded queer-feminist interpretation of TFA. “Empirically grounded” here does not refer to Grounded Theory as a formal methodology. It means that theoretical development is required to remain traceable to the survey and interview evidence rather than being asserted independently of it. Likewise, affirming the materiality of harm means recognising that digitally mediated abuse can produce tangible consequences without requiring victim-survivors to conform to a fixed image of passivity, physical injury or complete powerlessness. This position enables the thesis to analyse the construction and misrecognition of victimhood while continuing to make defensible judgements about coercion, responsibility and harm.

3.3 Research Design

This study employed a qualitatively driven mixed-methods design, combining an online survey with semi-structured interviews with 30 practitioners. The design was qualitatively driven because the principal analytical emphasis was placed on meaning, interpretation and context. The survey contained structured items and vignette-based classifications, but the open-text responses and practitioner interviews provide the

central qualitative evidence used in the substantive chapters. The structured survey responses are used descriptively, where relevant, to contextualise how behaviours were classified within the sample; they are not used to estimate prevalence, establish causality or make statistically generalisable claims.

Mixed-methods research can bring different forms of evidence into a complementary relationship while recognising that each method produces knowledge under different conditions (Greene, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2010). Integration may occur through design, methods and interpretation rather than only through the production of a single combined dataset (Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2013). In this study, the purpose of combining methods was not to treat agreement between datasets as proof of a single objective account. Instead, the design enabled the research to examine TFA at two related but distinct sites of meaning-making: how digitally mediated relationship behaviours were interpreted by survey respondents, and how comparable harms were understood and responded to within professional and organisational settings.

The design was sequential and complementary. The online survey was conducted first. It generated demographic information, structured responses to vignette-based scenarios and an open-text field in which respondents could explain their classifications, raise issues not captured by the response categories, or describe relevant personal, witnessed or hypothetical examples. The survey findings subsequently informed aspects of the practitioner interview topic guide, including questions concerning recognition, normalisation, digital surveillance, separation, risk assessment and service responses. The interviews were not conducted with survey respondents and were not intended to explain individual survey answers. Rather, they examined how similar issues were interpreted within professional practice.

The survey generated 1,000 records. Within this broader dataset, 650 respondents identified as gay or bisexual men and formed the principal survey group relevant to the thesis. The survey was circulated primarily through UK-based networks and the research is situated within a UK context; the country-of-residence composition and any departures from the intended recruitment criteria are reported transparently in Section 3.5.3. The structured survey material is used cautiously and descriptively. The most substantial survey evidence used in the analysis is a manually verified subset of 200 substantive free-text comments from gay and bisexual male respondents. The derivation and composition of this subset, including the review of all 201 available

responses and the exclusion of one brief non-explanatory response from detailed thematic coding, are explained in Section 3.5.5

The open-text material occupies a particular position within the mixed-methods design. Although generated through a survey, these comments are not reduced to numerical variables alone. They are analysed thematically to examine how respondents understood and qualified digitally mediated relationship practices. At the same time, the comments differ from data generated through qualitative interviews. Respondents could not be asked follow-up questions, apparent ambiguities could not be clarified, and the level of detail varied considerably. The analysis therefore combines thematic interpretation with descriptive counts indicating how many of the 200 comments referred to each major theme. These counts establish the relative prominence of themes within the corpus but do not constitute prevalence estimates for the wider survey sample or the population of gay and bisexual men.

The practitioner strand consisted of 30 semi-structured interviews with individuals working across domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory, counselling, safeguarding and community contexts. The purpose of these interviews was to examine professional understandings of TFA, the organisational conditions shaping recognition and response, and differences between specialist and generic forms of provision. Practitioners were not treated as substitutes for victim-survivors or as neutral reporters of other people's experiences. Their accounts were analysed as situated professional knowledge, shaped by role, sector, training, organisational remit and experience. This distinction enables the analysis to compare different forms of professional recognition rather than presenting "the institutional response" as a single position.

The two datasets perform different evidentiary functions. Survey comments provide evidence about the meanings respondents attached to digital behaviours, including how they distinguished between intimacy, care, jealousy, conflict, control and abuse. Where a respondent explicitly disclosed a personal or witnessed experience, the comment may also provide a limited account of that experience. Practitioner interviews provide evidence about professional interpretation, organisational procedures, service constraints and institutional practices. A practitioner's observation cannot independently verify a survey respondent's account, just as a survey comment cannot

demonstrate how services generally operate. Claims are therefore matched to the dataset capable of supporting them.

Integration occurred at three points. First, at the design stage, emerging survey issues informed areas explored in the practitioner interviews. Second, at the analytical stage, themes identified in each dataset were considered alongside one another while the datasets remained separately coded and attributed. Third, at the interpretive stage, points of convergence, difference and contradiction were examined in relation to the research questions. For example, survey uncertainty about whether persistent contact constituted abuse could be considered alongside practitioners' discussions of recognition and risk, but any connection between these accounts was interpreted analytically rather than presented as direct corroboration.

This form of integration is better understood as complementarity than conventional triangulation. Agreement between respondents and practitioners can demonstrate that a concern appears across different sites of meaning-making, but it does not establish the objective accuracy or frequency of that concern. Disagreement is equally analytically significant. It may identify a gap between how harm is understood by respondents and how it is translated through professional frameworks. This is especially relevant to the thesis's concern with institutional misrecognition and with the conditions under which digitally mediated harm becomes legible as domestic abuse.

Survey respondents were not invited to participate in follow-up interviews. The survey was designed to be anonymous, and no contact details were retained through which respondents could be recontacted. This protected confidentiality and reduced risks associated with collecting identifying information in research concerning digital monitoring and intimate partner abuse. Follow-up survivor interviews were also not part of the final approved research design. The consequence is that the study cannot offer extended biographical accounts from victim-survivors or clarify the meanings of individual survey comments. This limitation is addressed by restricting claims to what respondents actually wrote and by distinguishing clearly between direct quotation, paraphrase and thematic interpretation.

The research design consequently provides access to breadth of response, concise participant-generated accounts and detailed practitioner perspectives, while retaining clear boundaries around what each form of evidence can demonstrate. Its value lies

not in producing representative estimates of TFA among gay and bisexual men, but in examining how digital behaviours acquire relational meaning, how some respondents described technology-mediated harm, and how these harms are recognised, interpreted or misrecognised within different professional contexts.

3.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by four research questions concerning the interpretation, relational operation and professional recognition of technology-facilitated abuse in gay and bisexual men's same-sex intimate relationships. The questions were developed through engagement with scholarship on same-sex intimate partner violence, coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse, queer criminology and victimology. They were subsequently refined to ensure alignment with the evidence generated by the online survey and practitioner interviews.

The research questions are:

1. How do gay and bisexual men describe and interpret technology-facilitated abuse in same-sex intimate relationships?
2. What forms of technology-facilitated abuse are identified by gay and bisexual men, and how are these situated within broader dynamics of coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces?
3. How do practitioners working across domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory and community settings understand the nature and impact of technology-facilitated abuse affecting gay and bisexual men?
4. How do age and different forms of digital socialisation relate to gay and bisexual men's perceptions of what constitutes abuse, control or "normal" behaviour within digitally mediated intimate relationships?

These questions retain the substantive aims established in Chapter 1, while their wording reflects the limits of the available evidence. Research Question 1 does not assume that every survey respondent had personally experienced TFA. Instead, it examines how gay and bisexual men interpreted the behaviours presented in the survey and how respondents explained these interpretations in the open-text field. Where an individual explicitly described personal or witnessed victimisation, that account is identified as such rather than inferred from survey participation.

Research Question 2 examines both the forms of conduct mentioned in the survey comments and the relational contexts through which those behaviours acquired meaning. The focus is therefore not only on identifying technologies or individual acts, but also on examining how practices such as monitoring, account access, persistent communication, restrictions on digital autonomy and post-separation contact were connected to wider patterns of control. Identity abuse is treated accurately as an established concept that was subsequently developed within British LGBTQ+ domestic abuse scholarship, rather than as a concept originating in Donovan and colleagues' work.

Research Question 3 addresses professional and organisational recognition. Its primary evidence comes from the 30 practitioner interviews. Practitioners' accounts are analysed in relation to their roles, sectors and organisational contexts, allowing differences between LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic abuse specialist, statutory and generic community responses to be identified. Survey comments concerning help-seeking or service encounters provide supplementary evidence only where respondents explicitly referred to such experiences.

Research Question 4 examines age and digital socialisation without presuming that age alone determines how TFA is understood. Age groups provide one means of comparing responses, but age is not treated as equivalent to digital knowledge, platform use or relationship experience. The analysis therefore combines descriptive comparison of relevant structured survey responses with age-disaggregated interpretation of the open-text corpus. These comparisons identify patterns within the sample; they do not establish that age causes particular attitudes or that the findings are statistically generalisable to gay and bisexual men more broadly. Table 3.1 maps each research question to the evidence and analytical strategy used to address it.

Table 3.1: Mapping of Research Questions to Datasets and Analytical Strategies

Research question	Primary evidence	Supplementary evidence	Analytical strategy and limits
RQ1: How do gay and bisexual men describe and interpret TFA?	Structured vignette classifications and the verified subset of 200 free-text comments from gay and bisexual male respondents	Practitioner observations concerning recognition, where relevant	Descriptive presentation of survey classifications and thematic analysis of open-text explanations. Survey participation is not treated as evidence of personal victimisation.

Research question	Primary evidence	Supplementary evidence	Analytical strategy and limits
RQ2: What forms of TFA are identified and how are they situated within wider coercive and relational dynamics?	Verified subset of 200 free-text comments from gay and bisexual male respondents	Practitioner interview accounts	Thematic coding of behaviours, meanings, relational context, consequences and online–offline connections. Counts indicate how many comments referred to each theme but are not prevalence estimates.
RQ3: How do practitioners understand the nature and impact of TFA affecting gay and bisexual men?	30 semi-structured practitioner interviews	Survey comments explicitly concerning help-seeking or service responses	Reflexive thematic analysis, with comparison by professional role, organisational sector and degree of LGBTQ+ or domestic abuse specialism. Practitioners are treated as situated professional actors, not proxies for victim-survivors.
RQ4: How do age and digital socialisation relate to perceptions of abuse, control and normality?	Age-disaggregated structured responses from the 200 respondents represented in the verified free-text subset, together with their comments	Practitioner reflections on age and digital cultures	Descriptive comparison across age groups and thematic examination of comments concerning digital norms, privacy, availability and platform use. Age is not treated as a proxy for digital competence, and no causal or population-level claims are made.

Note. TFA = technology-facilitated abuse; LGBTQ+ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other minority sexual and gender identities.

The mapping establishes which dataset is capable of answering each question and prevents evidence from one component being used to support claims that belong to another. The datasets nevertheless remain complementary. For example, respondents' uncertainty about whether a digital demand was caring or controlling can be considered alongside practitioners' discussions of risk and recognition. Such comparisons are used to identify convergence, tension or disagreement, rather than to suggest that one dataset validates the other.

The research questions also reflect the study's queer criminological orientation. This does not mean abandoning analytical coherence or treating ambiguity as an end in itself. Rather, it means avoiding assumptions that gender automatically identifies the victim-survivor or abusive partner, that conflict between two men is necessarily mutual, or that a digitally mediated behaviour possesses the same meaning in every relationship. The analysis instead considers relational context, patterns of behaviour, impact, freedom to refuse and the consequences of challenging an expectation. Together, the four questions move from interpretation and identification to relational context, professional recognition and variation across digital cultures. They provide the structure through which the survey and interview components are brought into dialogue while preserving the methodological limits of each.

3.5 Survey Design and Implementation

The online survey formed the first empirical component of the study's qualitatively driven mixed-methods design. Administered through Qualtrics, it was designed to examine how respondents interpreted digitally mediated behaviours within intimate relationships. It was not intended to estimate the prevalence of technology-facilitated abuse, identify a representative population of victim-survivors or establish whether respondents had personally experienced the behaviours presented. Instead, it generated structured evidence about how potentially controlling or abusive practices were classified, together with respondent-generated explanations of the meanings attached to those practices.

The survey was informed by feminist and queer methodological approaches that understand research instruments as shaping, rather than simply recording, the knowledge they produce (Harding, 2004; Browne and Nash, 2010). This required attention to the categories through which digitally mediated behaviour became recognisable as acceptable, controlling or abusive. The survey therefore combined structured vignette responses with an optional open-text question, enabling respondents both to evaluate the scenarios and to explain or qualify their judgements. The structured responses are used descriptively rather than as measurements of prevalence or personal victimisation. The open-text responses are used interpretively to examine how respondents discussed consent, privacy, intimacy, jealousy, monitoring and control. Where respondents introduced personal, witnessed or hypothetical examples, these are identified according to the content of the comment rather than inferred from survey participation. The precise construction and analysis of the open-text corpus are explained in Sections 3.5.5 and 3.7.

3.5.1 Development of the Instrument

The survey instrument contained four components: electronic consent, an eligibility check, demographic questions and eight scenario-based vignettes followed by one optional open-text question. Eligibility was restricted to adults aged 18 or over. Demographic items asked about age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity and country of residence. The identity questions used multiple response categories and opportunities for self-description where available, reflecting the importance of avoiding

unnecessarily restrictive classifications in research involving sexuality and gender (Tate et al., 2013; Bauer et al., 2017).

The eight vignettes presented digitally mediated behaviours within two relationship contexts. Four scenarios concerned Jason and Matthew, a male same-sex couple, and four concerned Charlie and Rachel, a heterosexual couple. The scenarios included undisclosed location tracking, unauthorised access to social media accounts, demands for photographic evidence of a partner's whereabouts, monitoring through indoor cameras, digitally mediated financial restriction, social-media surveillance and covert GPS tracking.

For each vignette, respondents were asked to indicate separately the extent to which they considered the behaviour to be normal, controlling and abusive. These were not mutually exclusive categories. Respondents could, for example, indicate agreement that a behaviour was controlling while expressing a different level of agreement that it was abusive. The format therefore allowed overlap and uncertainty in how the behaviours were interpreted. Definitions of normal, controlling and abusive were not provided before respondents completed the vignette questions. This was a deliberate design decision: vignettes can elicit judgements about contextualised situations while preserving space for participants to draw upon their own interpretive frameworks (Hughes and Huby, 2004). Behaviours such as location sharing, account access and frequent communication may carry different meanings depending on consent, relational expectations, frequency, impact and the consequences of refusal. Supplying fixed definitions could have directed respondents towards predetermined answers and obscured the interpretive boundaries the survey was intended to examine.

The instrument was informed by research on digital dating-abuse measures and technology-enabled coercive control (Reed et al., 2017; Freed et al., 2018; Brown and Hegarty, 2018; Cuomo and Dolci, 2021). It did not reproduce an existing validated prevalence scale. The vignettes were used to examine interpretations of contextualised relationship practices rather than to calculate a clinical score or establish whether a respondent had experienced abuse.

After completing all eight scenarios, respondents were presented with one optional open-text prompt inviting them to provide any additional views or opinions about the scenarios. General open questions at the end of a structured questionnaire can

elaborate closed responses and surface issues not anticipated by the researcher, although the resulting material must be interpreted with attention to optional participation and uneven response depth (O’Cathain and Thomas, 2004). Some comments explained the respondent’s classifications, while others discussed consent, relationship context or comparable personal, witnessed or hypothetical situations. Because the prompt did not specifically ask respondents to disclose victimisation, the resulting comments are not treated uniformly as survivor narratives. Their evidentiary status is determined by what each respondent actually wrote.

The open-text field yielded 201 responses from respondents verified as gay or bisexual men. One brief response, which characterised all scenarios only as a “toxic relationship” without further explanation, was retained in the source audit but excluded from detailed thematic coding because it did not contain substantive explanatory or contextual material. The resulting verified subset comprised 200 substantive free-text comments, each from a different respondent. Section 3.5.5 provides the complete derivation, identity checks, inclusion criterion and proportions, while Section 3.7 explains the coding process.

3.5.2 Sampling and Recruitment

Recruitment was undertaken through UK-based LGBTQ+ community networks, domestic abuse organisations and social media platforms. Recruitment materials were circulated in digital formats suitable for sharing through organisational mailing lists, social media accounts and community networks; copies are provided in Appendix E. The intended population was adults living in the UK, although the survey was accessible online and participation was based on self-selection rather than probability sampling.

The survey was made available to adults of different genders and sexual orientations because the original design was broader than the final thesis focus. It was intended to permit exploratory comparison of how digitally mediated relationship behaviours were interpreted across respondent groups and across vignettes involving a male same-sex couple and a heterosexual couple. This explains why recruitment was not restricted to gay and bisexual men at the outset. The public recruitment frame also enabled circulation without requiring prospective respondents to disclose either a particular identity or personal victimisation before accessing the survey. As the thesis was refined, its substantive focus narrowed to gay and bisexual men’s same-sex

intimate relationships. The survey analyses reported in Chapters 4–6 therefore use the gay and bisexual male survey subset; Chapter 7 uses practitioner interviews as its primary evidence, with survey comments used only where they explicitly concern help-seeking or service responses. Responses from other survey groups are not used to make comparative claims in this thesis.

The survey export contained 1,000 response records. Within the wider survey dataset, 650 respondents were identified as gay or bisexual men and formed the principal group relevant to the research questions. Survey participation was not treated as evidence that these respondents had experienced intimate partner abuse. The structured vignette responses primarily captured judgements about hypothetical behaviours, while personal or witnessed experiences were recognised only where respondents explicitly introduced them in the optional open-text field. The survey therefore constitutes a non-probability convenience sample drawn from the general adult population reached through the recruitment routes, rather than a sample selected because respondents were victim-survivors. No eligibility or selection criterion required respondents to report personal experience of intimate partner abuse. Participation in the survey, completion of the vignettes and submission of a free-text comment are consequently treated as evidence of respondents' classifications and interpretations unless a personal or witnessed experience was explicitly disclosed.

Recruitment followed a non-probability, self-selection approach. A snowball element was present insofar as organisations and individuals who received the recruitment material could share the survey link within their own digital and community networks. The term digital snowball sampling is used in this limited sense and does not imply that the researcher formally traced recruitment chains or participants' social connections. Online and network-based recruitment can be valuable for reaching geographically dispersed or potentially stigmatised populations, but it can also produce selection effects because participation depends upon encountering the survey, having internet access and choosing to respond (Wright, 2005; Browne, 2005; Baltar and Brunet, 2012).

No financial or material incentive was offered. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could leave the survey or skip questions without providing a reason. Recruitment materials described the general subject of the research and included information about the voluntary nature of participation, anonymity and the potentially

sensitive content of the survey. The survey did not request names, contact details or other information intended to identify individual participants.

The recruitment strategy produced a substantial but non-representative sample. Respondents were likely to be more digitally connected than gay and bisexual men who had limited internet access or were not connected to the community and organisational networks through which the survey circulated. Self-selection may also have increased participation among people with a prior interest in digital relationships, domestic abuse or LGBTQ+ issues. The resulting data are therefore used to examine patterns of interpretation within the sample and are not presented as representative of gay and bisexual men in the UK.

The survey was situated within a UK research context and recruited principally through UK-based networks. It is described as UK-centred rather than international. Legal and formal domestic-abuse policy implications are discussed specifically in relation to England and Wales, reflecting the jurisdictional scope of the legislation and institutional frameworks examined. Departures from the intended UK residence criterion are reported transparently in the demographic and limitations sections rather than used to redefine the study's geographical scope. The derivation of the verified subset of 200 free-text comments submitted by gay and bisexual male respondents is explained in Section 3.5.5. This subset is distinct from the wider survey export and from the use of structured vignette responses.

3.5.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey generated 1,000 response records, of which 650 respondents were identified as gay or bisexual men. These 650 respondents formed the broader survey group relevant to the thesis's focus on technology-facilitated abuse within male same-sex intimate relationships. The wider survey also included respondents of other genders and sexual orientations because recruitment was open to the general adult population and the instrument contained both same-sex and heterosexual relationship vignettes.

The principal qualitative survey material used in the substantive chapters is the verified subset of 200 substantive free-text comments submitted by gay and bisexual male respondents and linked to the demographic variables reported in Appendix D. It was not selected independently from the survey; it is a defined qualitative subset of the

broader convenience sample and cannot support population-level prevalence claims. Each comment came from a different respondent, so the subset also comprises 200 respondents for demographic description, but the unit of qualitative analysis is the comment. Of those respondents, 162 identified as gay (81.0%) and 38 as bisexual (19.0%). These categories were based on participants' self-identification within the survey. Their use for analytical organisation does not imply that gay and bisexual identities are internally uniform or that sexual identity alone determined respondents' understandings of digital intimacy and abuse.

The gay and bisexual male group was constructed from respondents' self-reported gender-identity and sexual-orientation fields in the survey export. Respondents were included where they identified as male and selected or self-described a gay or bisexual identity; sexuality was not inferred from the gender of a current or former partner or from the vignette scenarios they evaluated. Where respondents reported overlapping identities or used a self-description, the original record was checked individually and inclusion followed the respondent's own identification. Both cis and trans men were eligible for inclusion where they self-identified in this way, and bisexual men were retained as a distinct category rather than absorbed into a general gay-male group. The available numbers and consistency of gender-identity detail within the 200-comment subset did not support separate cis/trans subgroup analysis, and no such comparative claims are made.

The age distribution among the 200 respondents represented in the free-text subset was relatively broad. Forty-two respondents were aged 18–24 (21.0%), 68 were aged 25–34 (34.0%), 49 were aged 35–44 (24.5%) and 41 were aged 45 or over (20.5%). The 25–34 category was therefore the largest age group, although no single cohort constituted a majority of the subset. This distribution enabled cautious comparison of how respondents from different age groups discussed privacy, communication, digital availability and relationship expectations. Age is not treated as a direct measure of digital knowledge or as a causal explanation for particular attitudes. Any age-related differences reported in the findings are presented as patterns within the subset rather than as generalisable generational effects.

In relation to ethnicity, 138 respondents identified as White British or Other White (69.0%). Twenty-one identified as Black or Black British (10.5%), 19 as Asian or Asian British (9.5%), and 22 as Mixed or Other ethnicities (11.0%). Racially minoritised

respondents therefore constituted 31.0% of the 200 respondents represented in the free-text subset. This is a sizeable share within the subset and should not be characterised simply as underrepresentation or numerical absence. Because recruitment was non-probability, it would also be inappropriate to treat the figure as a representative comparison with population benchmarks. The absolute numbers within the Black, Asian and Mixed/Other categories were nevertheless too small and heterogeneous to support robust intersectional subgroup comparisons. Combining them into one broad category would conceal important differences within and between racialised groups, while the comments did not always contain sufficient contextual detail to examine how race or ethnicity shaped the relationship practices discussed.

The country-of-residence variable recorded 156 respondents living in England (78.0%), 14 in Wales (7.0%), 19 in Scotland (9.5%) and 11 in the category “Other” (5.5%). The sample was therefore predominantly resident in Great Britain, although it was not exclusively so. The study is consequently described as UK-centred rather than international in scope. Legal and policy implications are specified in relation to England and Wales where they concern legislation and institutional frameworks operating within that jurisdiction.

The demographic profile should be interpreted in light of the self-selecting and digitally mediated recruitment strategy. Participation depended upon access to the survey, internet use and willingness to respond to questions concerning intimate relationships and digital behaviour. The 200 respondents represented in the free-text subset are not statistically representative of gay and bisexual men in the UK. Demographic information is used to describe the respondents represented in the subset, support cautious within-sample comparisons and establish the limits of the claims made. A full numerical breakdown is provided in Appendix D. Demographic descriptors accompanying open-text extracts in the findings chapters are used only where they have been checked against the original survey record. Details may be broadened or omitted where a combination of characteristics could increase the risk of deductive identification.

3.5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical rigour underpinned the survey’s design and conduct. Informed consent was approached as an ongoing process rather than as a one-off procedural agreement, with clear information and participant control maintained throughout (Guillemin and

Gillam, 2004; Liamputtong, 2007). The survey was structured so that respondents could decline to answer individual questions or withdraw before submission, and support resources were provided at its conclusion. Data handling complied with GDPR and institutional requirements, with research materials stored on secure, access-controlled university systems. No names, contact details or other direct personal identifiers were requested from participants. The project received full ethical approval (Appendices A and B).

An administrative inconsistency was identified in the approved ethics application concerning the upper age criterion for survey participation. Section H4 recorded a minimum participant age of 18 and left the upper-age field blank, while Section H5 initially stated that survey participants would be over 18 but subsequently referred to an age range of 18–45. The implemented Qualtrics eligibility item admitted respondents aged 18 or over and did not include an upper-age filter. The available project records do not establish when or why the contradictory 18–45 wording was introduced into Section H5; the discrepancy is therefore reported as an unresolved drafting inconsistency rather than assigned a cause retrospectively. Respondents aged 45 and over were retained because their responses were collected through the live survey under the implemented 18-and-over criterion. The mismatch between the documentation and implementation is acknowledged as an administrative and methodological limitation in Section 3.9.

The approved research design did not include direct interviews with victim-survivors because of institutional concerns about the potential for distress and retraumatisation. Instead, the study combined an anonymous online survey with interviews conducted with practitioners. This decision reduced the opportunity to obtain extended survivor narratives and to ask follow-up questions about the open-text responses. It reflects a broader ethical tension between protecting participants from potential harm and ensuring that experiences which are frequently marginalised within research can be documented. The limitations arising from the absence of survivor interviews are addressed further in Section 3.9.

The decision not to offer financial or material incentives was intended to avoid creating pressure to participate in research concerning sensitive relationship experiences. Nevertheless, this decision may also have affected the composition of the sample. Participation required time, privacy, internet access and sufficient emotional capacity

to engage with scenarios concerning controlling and abusive behaviour. These resources are not distributed equally across gay and bisexual male communities, and the conditions of participation must therefore be recognised as part of the process through which the survey evidence was produced.

The representation of open-text material also required careful ethical consideration. Respondents were not presumed to be victim-survivors merely because they completed the survey or provided a comment. Personal or witnessed experiences were identified only where they were explicitly introduced in the response. Verbatim extracts are presented in quotation marks and were checked against the original survey material. Where paraphrasing was necessary to reduce the risk of deductive identification or to summarise a longer account, the material is presented as analytic prose rather than as a direct quotation. Potentially identifying details were removed, broadened or replaced with general descriptors.

Overall, the survey was designed to prioritise participant autonomy and minimise avoidable harm while enabling respondents to articulate their interpretations of same-sex intimate partner violence and technology-facilitated abuse. Ethical practice is understood here not only as procedural compliance, but also as an ongoing methodological responsibility concerning recruitment, interpretation, data management and the representation of participant-generated material (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

3.5.5 Survey Dataset Used in this Thesis

The survey generated 1,000 response records across participants of different genders and sexual orientations. Within this export, 650 respondents were identified as gay or bisexual men and formed the broader survey group relevant to the thesis. Of those 650 respondents, 201 submitted a response to the single optional open-text question (30.9%). One response was retained in the source audit but excluded from detailed coding because it characterised the scenarios only as a “toxic relationship” and provided no explanatory or contextual material. The verified subset used for thematic analysis therefore comprised 200 substantive free-text comments from 200 respondents, equivalent to 30.8% of the 650 gay and bisexual male respondents.

Responses were filtered using the recorded gender-identity and sexual-orientation variables. All 201 open-text responses submitted by respondents recorded as male

and gay or bisexual were reviewed; none was selected because it matched a preferred theme. The 200 included comments were extracted into a working spreadsheet and checked against the original Qualtrics export for respondent identifier, exact wording and the recorded identity variables. The sole exclusion criterion was the absence of substantive explanatory or contextual content. Three of the 200 records were marked as unfinished in the Qualtrics export but were retained because each contained the substantive free-text response and the demographic variables required to verify inclusion; inclusion did not depend upon completion of every survey item.

Each item in the verified subset represents one respondent and one response to the single optional open-text question presented after all eight vignettes. The 200 comments therefore came from 200 individual gay or bisexual male respondents rather than representing multiple comments from a smaller number of participants. They varied considerably in length and detail. Some respondents provided a brief explanation of how they had classified the vignette behaviours, while others discussed consent, privacy, jealousy, digital access, relationship expectations or comparable personal and witnessed experiences.

The verified free-text subset is not understood as a sample composed exclusively of identified victim-survivors. The open-text prompt invited respondents to offer views or opinions about the scenarios; it did not require disclosure of personal victimisation. Some respondents explicitly introduced their own experiences or experiences they had witnessed, while others discussed the scenarios in general or hypothetical terms. The analysis therefore distinguishes between comments expressing interpretations of the vignette behaviours and comments containing explicit personal or witnessed accounts. Survey participation, or completion of the open-text field, is not treated as evidence that abuse occurred in the respondent's own relationship.

The demographic profile of the 200 respondents represented in the free-text subset is reported in Section 3.5.3 and Appendix D. Of those respondents, 162 identified as gay and 38 as bisexual. The subset also included respondents across the four reported age groups and a range of ethnic backgrounds. These demographic variables were used to describe the composition of the subset and, where evidence permitted, to support cautious within-sample comparison. They were not used to make population-level claims or to suggest that the subset was statistically representative of gay and bisexual men in the UK. The 200 free-text comments are distinct from the structured

vignette responses. The vignette ratings generated descriptive information about the extent to which respondents regarded particular behaviours as normal, controlling or abusive. The free-text comments provided explanatory and contextual material concerning how respondents reached or qualified those judgements. The two forms of survey evidence are therefore related but not interchangeable. A structured classification indicates how a respondent rated a scenario, while the open-text response may illuminate the reasoning, uncertainty or relational assumptions underlying that judgement.

The comments were analysed through the structured thematic coding process described in Section 3.7. Each comment was assigned a primary code reflecting its principal analytical emphasis and, where appropriate, one or more secondary codes to capture overlapping issues. The coding framework attended to the behaviour described, the relational meaning attached to it, consent, consequences of non-compliance, connections to wider patterns of control and movement between online and offline harm. The analysis produced nine overarching thematic categories. Table 3.2 presents the number and proportion of unique comments in which each theme was identified. Because individual comments could contribute to more than one theme, the percentages are not mutually exclusive and do not total 100%.

Table 3.2: Themes Identified within the Verified Open-Text Corpus

Theme	Number of comments	Percentage of corpus
Digital access and surveillance	131	65.5%
Recognition, normalisation and relational meaning	121	60.5%
Identity, visibility and reputation	63	31.5%
Online–offline continuity and hybrid harm	56	28.0%
Experiential power and digital socialisation	30	15.0%
Help-seeking and the gap of trust	27	13.5%
Post-separation persistence and digital omnipresence	36	18.0%
Mutual-abuse narratives and misrecognition	13	6.5%
Sexual and image-based coercion	10	5.0%

Note: Percentages are calculated using the verified subset of 200 free-text comments as the denominator. Individual comments could be assigned to more than one theme; therefore, the percentages do not total 100%. The figures indicate the prominence of themes within this subset and should not be interpreted as prevalence estimates of technology-facilitated abuse among gay and bisexual men.

3.6 Interview Design and Implementation

The practitioner interviews constituted the second empirical component of the qualitatively driven mixed-methods design. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with UK-based practitioners whose work involved responding to domestic abuse, same-sex intimate partner violence, LGBTQ+ support, safeguarding, counselling or related forms of service provision. The interviews examined how technology-facilitated abuse affecting gay and bisexual men was understood, assessed and addressed within different professional and organisational contexts.

The interview data are not treated as substitutes for direct victim-survivor interviews. Practitioners could provide detailed accounts of professional practice, organisational procedures, risk assessment and recurring issues encountered through casework, but they could not provide unmediated access to the experiences of the people they supported. Their accounts are therefore analysed as situated professional interpretations shaped by role, training, sector, organisational remit and degree of specialism. This approach draws on situated knowledge and institutional scholarship, which recognise that professional knowledge is produced within organisational conditions rather than independently of them (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 2005; Lipsky, 2010).

This distinction is important to the study's analysis of institutional recognition. Practitioners working in specialist LGBTQ+ domestic abuse settings did not necessarily interpret TFA in the same way as practitioners in generic domestic abuse, statutory, counselling or community settings. Differences and similarities among practitioners are therefore retained analytically rather than collapsed into a single account of "professional practice." The interview sample and its organisational composition are described below and presented in greater detail in Appendix I.

3.6.1 Rationale for Interviewing Practitioners

The final approved study design did not include direct qualitative interviews with victim-survivors. Institutional concerns focused on the potential distress and safety implications associated with interviewing people about ongoing intimate partner abuse, particularly where digital monitoring or surveillance might still be taking place. The study therefore used an anonymous online survey to obtain respondent-generated material and practitioner interviews to investigate the professional and

institutional conditions through which TFA becomes recognised, assessed and acted upon.

Interviewing practitioners was not intended to compensate fully for the absence of survivor interviews. The two forms of participation generated different kinds of evidence. Survey respondents provided classifications and concise open-text explanations, including personal or witnessed accounts where these were voluntarily introduced. Practitioners provided accounts of professional interpretation, organisational decision-making, service pathways and the constraints affecting their responses. The limitations created by the absence of extended survivor interviews are acknowledged in Section 3.9.

Practitioner interviews were valuable because professional responses are not simply technical applications of established policy. Frontline workers interpret eligibility criteria, risk frameworks, referral thresholds and evidentiary requirements within organisational conditions that may both enable and restrict their practice (Lipsky, 2010). Their accounts therefore provided insight into how TFA involving gay and bisexual men was made legible or failed to become legible within different service environments.

Practitioners were approached neither as neutral authorities nor as representatives of a single institutional position. Their knowledge was understood as situated within particular professional histories and organisational cultures. A practitioner working in an LGBTQ+ specialist domestic abuse organisation might, for example, have access to different conceptual resources from a generic counsellor, statutory safeguarding worker or practitioner in a mainstream domestic abuse service. These differences became analytically important when examining recognition, mutual-abuse assumptions, risk assessment and the relationship between digital and physical harm.

3.6.2 Recruitment and Sampling

Practitioners were recruited through purposive sampling supplemented by a limited chain-referral or snowball element. Recruitment materials were circulated through relevant professional, domestic abuse and LGBTQ+ networks. Some recipients also forwarded the invitation to practitioners within their own networks. This approach was intended to identify participants with relevant professional experience rather than to construct a statistically representative sample.

In accordance with the approved inclusion criteria, participants were required to be adults based in the UK, to have at least one year of relevant professional experience and to work in a role or service that supported, assessed or otherwise responded to male victim-survivors of same-sex intimate partner violence. Practitioners whose work did not include male survivors or relevant same-sex domestic abuse cases were not eligible.

Thirty practitioners participated. They worked across a range of organisational settings, including:

- specialist LGBTQ+ domestic abuse and support services;
- generic domestic abuse organisations;
- generic LGBTQ+ services;
- statutory and safeguarding services;
- counselling, mental health and community organisations;
- housing, advocacy, helpline and policy settings.

For descriptive purposes, grouping each practitioner by the primary sector recorded in Appendix I produced nine participants in statutory or NHS settings, ten in voluntary-sector settings, six in explicitly LGBTQ+ services or charities, three in community-based organisations and two in national organisations or charities. These categories describe organisational location rather than mutually exclusive forms of expertise: a voluntary organisation could also deliver domestic-abuse support, while an LGBTQ+ service could combine community and specialist functions. The analysis therefore considered the recorded sector alongside each participant's role, professional experience and stated degree of LGBTQ+ or domestic-abuse specialism.

Their roles included safeguarding leads, counsellors, helpline practitioners, service managers, advocates, housing workers, policy workers, social workers and other casework or support positions. Participants also varied in their years of professional experience, contact with gay and bisexual male clients and degree of specialist knowledge concerning either domestic abuse or LGBTQ+ relationships. This variation enabled comparison across forms of professional knowledge. In particular, it allowed the analysis to examine whether LGBTQ+ specialism, domestic abuse expertise, statutory responsibilities or generic therapeutic practice affected how TFA was

understood. Variation was not treated as a problem to be removed from the sample; it was relevant to the research question concerning how institutional and professional settings shape recognition and response.

The sample was nevertheless self-selecting. Practitioners who agreed to participate may have had a stronger prior interest in LGBTQ+ inclusion, domestic abuse or technology-facilitated harm than those who did not respond. The findings therefore do not represent every practitioner or organisation in the UK. They provide detailed evidence about the understandings and practices articulated by these 30 participants within their respective professional contexts. Appendix I provides a participant-level summary of role, sector, years of experience and relevant demographic information. Participants were assigned identifiers from P01 to P30 within the analytic record. Quotations in the substantive chapters use sufficiently broad professional descriptors to preserve context without foregrounding the internal identifier, for example: (LGBTQ+ specialist service, eight years' experience, gay man). Descriptors are broadened or omitted where their combination could create a risk of deductive identification, reflecting the need to balance analytical context with participant confidentiality (Kaiser, 2009).

3.6.3 Interview Structure and Content

Semi-structured interviews were used to provide consistency across participants while allowing questions to be adapted to their professional roles and the issues they raised (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide was informed by the research questions, the literature review and issues emerging from the survey. It was not designed to require practitioners to respond to individual survey cases or to validate the survey findings.

The interviews addressed five interconnected areas:

1. Understandings of technology-facilitated abuse: how participants defined and recognised TFA and its relationship to coercive control.
2. Gay and bisexual men as victim-survivors: how sexuality, masculinity and assumptions about mutuality affected professional recognition.

3. Professional and organisational responses: the use of risk assessment, referral pathways, evidence requirements, safeguarding procedures and service thresholds.
4. Digital and relational context: how practitioners understood surveillance, persistent communication, location access, social media, image-based abuse and post-separation contact.
5. Professional reflection: uncertainty, emotional labour, organisational constraint, training needs and examples of effective or ineffective practice.

The guide was used flexibly. Participants were encouraged to explain how their role and organisational setting affected their interpretation of the issues. Follow-up questions sought clarification, contextual detail and examples from professional practice. Where a practitioner made a general claim for example, that digital abuse was sometimes assessed as lower risk follow-up questions explored the circumstances in which this occurred, the organisational pathway involved and whether different services responded differently.

Interviews were conducted remotely and lasted approximately 45–90 minutes. With participants' consent, they were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymised. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their transcript and request corrections or removals. Transcript review was offered as an ethical opportunity to exercise control over professional or sensitive disclosures; it was not treated as confirmation that the researcher's subsequent thematic interpretation was objectively correct. The interviews remained distinct from the survey data during data collection and initial analysis. Similar themes could arise across both components, but practitioners were not assumed to be discussing the same individuals, relationships or circumstances described in the survey comments. Integration occurred later through comparison of themes and research questions, as explained in Section 3.7. The complete semi-structured interview guide is provided in Appendix J.

3.6.4 Ethical and Practical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted under reference ETH2122-0733. Before taking part, practitioners received an information sheet describing the study, the interview process, the intended use of their data and the limits of confidentiality. Written consent was obtained, and consent was revisited verbally at the beginning of the interview.

Participants could decline to answer a question, pause the interview or withdraw in accordance with the conditions stated in the approved documentation. Although practitioners were recruited principally to discuss professional experience, the interviews concerned sensitive cases and potentially distressing forms of abuse. Participants could also be placed in a professionally vulnerable position when discussing organisational shortcomings, risk-assessment practices or disagreement with colleagues and partner agencies. Ethical attention therefore extended beyond protecting the identities of individual clients. It also required protection against the deductive identification of practitioners and organisations.

Participants were asked not to disclose names or unnecessary identifying information about clients. Any identifying details provided inadvertently were removed or generalised during transcription. Organisations are described through broad sectoral categories rather than named unless information was already public and its use posed no identification risk. Audio files, transcripts and consent records were stored securely in accordance with institutional data-protection requirements.

The interview schedule focused on professional practice; however, some practitioners voluntarily referred to their own lived experience or connected aspects of their personal identity to their professional understanding. These disclosures were not solicited as a separate form of survivor testimony, and participants were not reclassified as victim-survivor interviewees. Where such material was relevant to their professional interpretation, it was treated as part of their situated account and subjected to the same standards of consent, anonymisation and contextual caution as the remainder of the interview. The analysis does not assume that all LGBTQ+ practitioners possessed lived experience of abuse.

Questions were open-ended, and practitioners were not pressed to disclose more than they wished. Sensitive interviewing involves ethically significant moments that cannot be addressed solely through formal consent documents; the interviewer must remain attentive to hesitation, discomfort and changes in participants' willingness to continue (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Where appropriate, participants were reminded that they could pause, move to another topic or end the interview.

Any welfare-oriented conversation conducted after the formal interview and after the recording had ended was treated as post-interview care rather than research data. It was not transcribed, coded or quoted in the thesis. This maintained a boundary between material provided for analysis and informal conversation intended to support a responsible conclusion to the interview. No financial or material incentives were offered. The participant information sheet, consent form and recruitment materials are provided in Appendices F–H.

3.6.5 Reflexivity and Positionality

My positionality influenced access to participants, the conduct of the interviews and the interpretation of their accounts. As a queer researcher studying abuse in gay and bisexual men's relationships, I was sometimes positioned as an insider, particularly by participants working in LGBTQ+ settings or those who perceived a shared understanding of queer community contexts. Insider status can facilitate trust and reduce the need for participants to explain basic cultural references, but it can also produce assumptions of shared meaning and discourage clarification (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Berger, 2015). I did not experience the interviews as occupying a fixed insider or outsider position. Shared sexuality did not produce identical professional, classed, racialised or organisational experiences. Conversely, practitioners who did not identify as LGBTQ+ could possess substantial specialist domestic abuse knowledge that I did not share. Positionality was therefore relational and changed according to the participant, subject and institutional setting.

These dynamics affected what was said and how I interpreted it. For example, where a participant used language such as "toxic," "mutual" or "relationship conflict," my familiarity with critiques of mutual-abuse narratives created a risk that I would interpret the term immediately as evidence of misrecognition. Reflexive analysis required me instead to examine the surrounding account: what behaviour was being described, who established the relationship terms, what happened when those terms were challenged and whether the practitioner considered motive, impact and consequences. This prevented theoretical commitments from replacing close engagement with the participant's meaning.

Reflexivity was practised through:

- recording methodological and analytical decisions;

- writing notes after interviews about interactional dynamics and emerging assumptions;
- revisiting transcripts when an extract appeared to support an established theoretical argument too neatly;
- comparing accounts across practitioner sectors rather than treating a single quotation as representative;
- distinguishing participants' words from my analytical interpretation;
- and retaining contradictory or uncertain material rather than coding only evidence that supported the developing argument.

I am therefore implicated in the production of the interview evidence. I selected the questions, determined when to ask follow-up questions, constructed the coding framework and decided which extracts to include in the thesis. Acknowledging this does not remove the need for methodological discipline. Instead, it places responsibility on me to make the analytical process visible, preserve context around quotations and avoid presenting theoretical interpretation as though it were directly stated by participants.

Emotion was also part of the research process. Accounts of institutional failure, abuse and professional frustration sometimes produced emotional responses that could influence how particular interviews were remembered or prioritised. These responses were treated as prompts for reflexive examination rather than as evidence in themselves. Emotional resonance did not determine whether an account was analytically significant; claims were developed through comparison across the dataset, attention to divergent cases and examination of the organisational context in which each account was produced. This reflexive approach positions practitioners neither as disembodied experts nor as passive products of institutions. They are understood as actors who interpret, negotiate and sometimes challenge the organisational conditions in which they work. This provides the foundation for the comparison of specialist and generic practice developed in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.7 Data Analysis

The analysis reflected the study's qualitatively driven mixed-methods design. The structured survey responses, survey open-text comments and practitioner interviews

were initially analysed as distinct forms of evidence because each dataset was generated under different conditions and could support different kinds of claim. Integration occurred subsequently through the research questions and theoretical interpretation. This prevented numerical survey responses, short open-text comments and extended practitioner accounts from being treated as methodologically interchangeable. The analytical strategy combined three elements: descriptive analysis of the structured vignette responses, manual thematic analysis of the verified 200-comment open-text corpus, and reflexive thematic analysis of the 30 practitioner interviews. The purpose was not to use one dataset to validate another, but to examine how technology-facilitated abuse was interpreted across different sites: by gay and bisexual male survey respondents and by practitioners working within different professional and organisational contexts.

3.7.1 Analysis of the Structured Survey Responses

The structured vignette responses were analysed descriptively. For each scenario, respondents rated separately the extent to which they regarded the behaviour as normal, controlling and abusive. Because these categories were rated independently rather than selected as mutually exclusive alternatives, the analysis retained the possibility that a respondent could understand the same behaviour as both normalised and controlling, or controlling without categorising it unequivocally as abusive.

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe how the vignette behaviours were classified within the survey sample. These figures are interpreted as patterns of judgement produced within the survey rather than as measurements of the prevalence of TFA or personal victimisation. The vignettes asked respondents to evaluate hypothetical scenarios; they did not establish that the respondent had experienced or witnessed the behaviour concerned.

The final analysis does not use the structured survey responses to make statistically generalisable, causal or prevalence-based claims. Where structured responses are linked to the open-text material or disaggregated by age or sexual orientation, the denominator is the 200 respondents who supplied the verified subset of 200 free-text comments; any descriptive presentation using the broader group of 650 gay and bisexual male respondents is labelled explicitly with its own denominator. Chi-square tests and claims of statistical significance referred to in earlier drafts were removed from the revised thesis, and no inferential test results are reported. This reflects the

non-probability sampling design and the revised descriptive purpose of the structured data. The retained comparisons are descriptive within-sample comparisons and are not treated as evidence that demographic characteristics caused particular interpretations.

Age-disaggregated analysis was undertaken using the four recorded age categories: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44 and 45 years and over. Particular attention was paid to differences between the two younger groups (18–24 and 25–34) and the two older groups (35–44 and 45+) in how respondents interpreted the normality of digitally mediated relationship practices. For each vignette, the distribution of responses to the independently rated normal, controlling and abusive items was examined descriptively within each age group. Responses of 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly agree) were treated as agreement with the relevant descriptor for the purpose of presenting percentages. These structured patterns were subsequently interpreted alongside age-coded open-text material where relevant, while recognising that the single general open-text response could not be assumed to explain a respondent's rating of any particular vignette. The comparison was descriptive and interpretive within the verified 200-respondent analytic sample and was not used to infer a causal effect of age or to generalise to gay and bisexual men as a population.

The vignette results were considered alongside the open-text comments only where the relationship between the two forms of response could be traced. A numerical classification showed how a respondent rated a scenario, while the open-text material could provide insight into the reasoning, qualification or uncertainty attached to that classification. The open-text response was not assumed to explain every vignette rating because respondents were presented with one general comment box after completing all eight scenarios rather than a separate text box for each scenario.

3.7.2 Analysis of the Survey Open-Text Corpus

The open-text analysis was based on the verified subset of 200 substantive free-text comments submitted by gay and bisexual male respondents, as described in Section 3.5.5. Each comment constituted one unit of analysis and represented one respondent. Open-ended survey comments can elaborate structured responses and identify issues not captured by closed questions, but optional response and variable depth limit the inferences that can be made from them (O'Cathain and Thomas, 2004). The comments were not generated through extended qualitative interviews; their

brevity and the absence of follow-up therefore required particular caution when interpreting relational context, personal experience and ambiguous statements.

The comments were analysed manually using a structured coding spreadsheet. The manual approach enabled each coded item to remain linked to its survey record and demographic descriptors while providing a transparent record of the codes and themes assigned. The analytical findings were not produced automatically by qualitative data-analysis software, and no software-generated frequency report was treated as a substitute for interpretive analysis. Analysis began with repeated reading of all 200 comments to become familiar with their range, language and level of detail. During this stage, attention was paid to whether respondents were:

- evaluating the hypothetical vignette behaviours.
- discussing the importance of consent or relationship context.
- describing personal or witnessed experiences.
- identifying consequences or impacts.
- or making broader observations about digital intimacy, sexuality or abuse.

Personal victimisation was coded only where it was explicitly disclosed. A comment was not treated as a survivor account simply because the respondent described a vignette behaviour as controlling or abusive. Initial codes remained close to the content of each response. They identified the technology or behaviour discussed, the meaning attached to it, the relational circumstances in which it occurred, its perceived impact and any connection between online and offline conduct. Coding also attended to issues including consent, privacy, availability, surveillance, visibility, identity, sexual or image-based coercion, separation, resistance, help-seeking and professional recognition.

Each comment was assigned one primary code, representing its principal analytical emphasis. Where a comment contained more than one relevant issue, it was also assigned one or more secondary codes. The use of secondary coding was necessary because respondents frequently connected several dimensions of TFA within a single comment. For example, a comment concerning location tracking might simultaneously address normalisation, consent, practices of care and the restriction of movement through physical space.

The coding framework was refined iteratively. Codes that captured closely related ideas were combined, while broad codes were divided where they obscured analytically important differences. Definitions were recorded in a codebook to support consistent application across the corpus, and earlier comments were revisited whenever a definition changed. The final codebook contained 50 codes. Across the corpus, 584 coding references were recorded in total, including one primary code for each of the 200 comments and all secondary codes. These figures describe the coding process rather than the number of respondents or the prevalence of any behaviour.

The primary and secondary codes were subsequently organised into nine overarching themes:

1. Digital access and surveillance
2. Recognition, normalisation and relational meaning
3. Identity, visibility and reputation
4. Online–offline continuity and hybrid harm
5. Experiential power and digital socialisation
6. Help-seeking and the gap of trust
7. Post-separation persistence and digital omnipresence
8. Mutual-abuse narratives and misrecognition
9. Sexual and image-based coercion

The themes were developed through repeated comparison between coded comments, the research questions and the wider conceptual framework. They were not treated as mutually exclusive categories. A single comment could contribute to several themes where it addressed overlapping forms, meanings or consequences of TFA.

Theme frequencies were calculated by counting the number of unique comments in which each theme appeared through either a primary or secondary code. A comment was counted only once within a particular theme, even where several codes associated with that theme had been assigned. Because a comment could be counted under more than one overarching theme, the thematic percentages reported in Table 3.2 do not total 100%.

These counts indicate the relative prominence of issues within the verified 200-comment subset. They do not estimate the prevalence of behaviours or experiences among gay and bisexual men. For example, the finding that 131 comments referred to digital access and surveillance means that the theme was identified in 65.5% of the analysed comments. It does not mean that 65.5% of gay and bisexual men have experienced digital surveillance within an intimate relationship.

The use of numerical summaries reflects the origin of the material in a verified subset of 200 survey free-text comments. Expressions such as “frequently,” “many” and “several” are supported in the findings chapters by counts or proportions where appropriate. Numerical prominence was not treated as equivalent to analytical importance: themes appearing in fewer comments could remain significant where they revealed distinctive harms, institutional misrecognition or consequences obscured by frequency alone. Appendix M provides an illustrative extract of the open-text material and manual coding table, while the complete 200-item audit workbook is retained securely as part of the research record. Appendix N contains the codebook and manual frequency summaries, and Appendix O presents the thematic structure and cross-theme relationships.

3.7.3 Analysis of the Practitioner Interviews

Analysis began with repeated reading of the anonymised transcripts and the recording of initial observations concerning recurring issues, contradictions, professional assumptions and differences among sectors. Coding was undertaken across the complete interview dataset. Both semantic content what practitioners stated directly and more interpretive dimensions, including assumptions about victimhood, gender or evidence underpinning an account, were considered.

Initial interview codes included:

- definitions and recognition of TFA.
- digital and physical risk.
- professional confidence and uncertainty.
- mutual-abuse framing.
- evidence and credibility.
- help-seeking and disengagement.

- separation and continuing risk.
- service thresholds and referral pathways.
- organisational constraints.
- and examples of specialist or effective practice.

Codes were compared and grouped into candidate themes. These themes were reviewed against the full transcripts to determine whether they captured meaningful patterns without removing disagreement or contextual difference. Themes were then refined, defined and named before being used to structure the findings chapters.

The analysis did not treat the practitioners as a homogeneous professional group. Coding records retained information concerning participants' roles, sectors, experience and degree of LGBTQ+ or domestic abuse specialism. This enabled comparison between LGBTQ+ specialist domestic abuse services, generic domestic abuse organisations, generic LGBTQ+ services, statutory agencies, counselling settings and other community-based provision. This contextual comparison was particularly important where practitioners offered different interpretations of the same issue. For example, uncertainty about how to respond to digital abuse could reflect limited training within a generic counselling service, whereas a practitioner in a specialist domestic abuse organisation might recognise the same behaviour as part of an established pattern of coercive control. These differences were analysed as findings about institutional and organisational context rather than averaged into a single statement about "practitioners."

Reflexive thematic analysis does not assume that themes exist within the data independently of the researcher and can simply be discovered through neutral coding. I was actively involved in selecting, interpreting and organising the material. Consequently, inter-coder reliability was not used as the principal test of quality. Analytical rigour was instead supported through repeated engagement with the transcripts, maintenance of coding and decision records, comparison across participants and sectors, attention to contradictory cases and verification that quotations were presented with sufficient context. Where practitioners voluntarily introduced their own lived experience, the material was interpreted as part of their situated professional account rather than treated as a separate victim-survivor dataset.

The analysis also distinguished recorded interview material from post-interview welfare conversations, which were not treated as research data.

3.7.4 Integration of the Survey and Interview Findings

The survey and interview datasets were initially coded separately. Integration occurred after the principal themes within each dataset had been developed. This sequencing preserved the methodological differences between a short survey comment and an extended professional interview while enabling comparison across the research questions. It also located integration at the interpretive and reporting stages rather than implying that methodologically distinct materials had been merged into a single dataset (Fetters, Curry and Creswell, 2013).

Integration was conducted through a thematic matrix that mapped:

- the research question concerned.
- the relevant survey themes and counts.
- the practitioner themes.
- points of convergence.
- points of disagreement or tension.
- and the limits of the inference that could be made.

Convergence was identified where similar issues appeared independently across the two datasets. For example, survey comments concerning uncertainty about whether persistent communication constituted care or control could be considered alongside practitioners' discussions of professional recognition. This did not establish that practitioners were describing the same relationships as survey respondents. It demonstrated that uncertainty around recognition appeared at both relational and institutional levels.

Divergence was equally important. Where gay and bisexual male respondents described conduct as intrusive or harmful, but some practitioners framed comparable conduct as relationship conflict, the difference provided insight into institutional misrecognition. Conversely, practitioners in specialist services sometimes articulated more developed understandings of coercive control than were visible within short

survey comments. The analysis therefore avoided treating agreement as inherently more credible than disagreement.

The integration of the datasets is best described as complementarity rather than as triangulation intended to establish one objectively correct account. Each dataset was used to answer the aspects of the research questions for which it was suited. Survey comments supported claims about respondent interpretation and, where explicitly disclosed, limited personal or witnessed accounts. Practitioner interviews supported claims about professional knowledge, organisational practice and institutional response. Agreement, difference and contradiction were each treated as potentially informative rather than ranking convergence as inherently more valid.

3.7.5 From Thematic Analysis to Theoretical Development

The theoretical analysis developed through an iterative movement between the empirical material and the concepts discussed in Chapter 2. Concepts including identity abuse, experiential power, relationship rules, practices of love, space for reaction and the gap of trust were used as sensitising resources rather than as predetermined categories into which every response was placed.

The analysis first attended to what respondents and practitioners described. Theoretical concepts were then used to examine how those descriptions related to existing explanations of power and control in LGBTQ+ intimate relationships. Where an existing concept appeared useful, its original meaning was retained and stated accurately before being applied to the data. Where the findings suggested that a concept could be extended for example, by considering whether experiential inequalities could also involve digital knowledge this was presented explicitly as an extension rather than as the original formulation.

A concrete example concerns statements describing both partners as “toxic,” argumentative or equally responsible. Such language was not coded automatically as evidence of mutual abuse. The surrounding account was examined for information about who established the terms of the relationship, what happened when those terms were challenged, the motives and consequences of each person’s behaviour, and whether one partner’s actions represented an attempt to create space for reaction within an unequal relationship. This procedure enabled the analysis to distinguish mutuality as a narrative from evidence that power was genuinely symmetrical.

Similarly, behaviours such as frequent messaging, password sharing or location access were not classified as abusive solely on the basis of the behaviour itself. Analysis considered consent, repetition, impact, the freedom to withdraw agreement and the consequences of non-compliance. This relational approach connects the interpretation of digital practices to relationship rules and practices of love rather than treating technologies as inherently abusive.

The concept of Hybrid Coercive Control emerged through the repeated presence of several connected patterns across the datasets: the embedding of digital practices within everyday intimate relationships; the movement of control between online and physical environments; the material consequences of digitally mediated conduct; the persistence of access and surveillance across relational phases; and the continuation or escalation of control after separation. HCC is therefore presented as a mid-level theoretical concept developed from the interaction between the empirical themes and existing coercive-control scholarship, rather than as a claim generated independently of the data.

3.7.6 Reflexivity and Analytical Rigour

Reflexivity operated throughout data analysis. I recorded coding decisions, revisions to theme definitions and questions concerning alternative interpretations. Particular attention was paid to statements that appeared to support the theoretical argument especially neatly, because these carried a heightened risk of being removed from their original context or interpreted too confidently.

The analytical process was guided by the principle that every empirical claim should be traceable to its source. This involved:

- checking survey quotations against the original open-text corpus.
- distinguishing verbatim quotations from paraphrased accounts.
- recording the number of comments supporting survey themes.
- contextualising practitioner extracts by role and sector.
- retaining contradictory or uncertain cases.
- and removing or qualifying claims that the available data could not support.

Verbatim extracts are enclosed in quotation marks and reproduce the respondent's or practitioner's words, subject only to minor punctuation corrections and the removal or generalisation of identifying details. Paraphrased material is presented as analytic prose and is not attributed as direct speech. Composite or reconstructed statements are not presented as individual participant quotations. Analytical quality was pursued through transparency, contextualisation and the disciplined matching of claims to evidence rather than through claims of researcher neutrality.

3.8 Ethical and Emotional Safety

Sections 3.5.4 and 3.6.4 outlined the ethical procedures specific to the survey and practitioner interviews. This section draws together the broader principles that informed participant safety, the handling of sensitive disclosures and researcher wellbeing across the study. Ethical responsibility was understood as both procedural and relational. Formal approval, information sheets, consent procedures and data-protection measures established the parameters within which the research could proceed. However, research concerning domestic abuse also required ongoing judgement in what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe as "ethically important moments": situations arising during data collection and analysis that could not be resolved through approval documents alone.

The project received ethical approval from the Sociology and Criminology Research Ethics Committee at City St George's, University of London, under reference ETH2122-0733. The approval covered the online survey, practitioner interviews, data storage, analysis and dissemination. All participants received information concerning the study's aims, the voluntary nature of participation, the use of their data and the relevant limits of confidentiality.

In the online survey, consent was obtained electronically before respondents proceeded to the substantive questions. Respondents could leave the survey before submission and could decline to answer individual questions. Because the survey was anonymous and no contact information was collected, individual records could not reliably be located and removed after submission. This limitation was communicated through the participant-facing materials. Support information was provided at the conclusion of the survey, including details of relevant LGBTQ+-affirmative domestic abuse and mental health services.

The open-text field created the possibility that respondents might disclose sensitive personal or witnessed experiences even though the survey did not directly request victimisation narratives. Ethical responsibility therefore continued during analysis and representation. Personal experience was not inferred where it had not been explicitly disclosed. Directly identifying information contained within a response was removed or broadened, and demographic descriptors were reduced where their combination could increase the possibility of deductive identification (Kaiser, 2009). Verbatim extracts are enclosed in quotation marks, while ethically necessary paraphrases are presented as analytic prose rather than reconstructed participant speech.

The practitioner interviews raised different ethical issues. Participants were recruited to discuss their professional experience, but conversations about domestic abuse, institutional shortcomings and difficult cases could still produce discomfort, frustration or emotional fatigue. Sensitive qualitative research requires attention not only to the subject matter but also to the interaction through which participants are invited to recount it (Liamputtong, 2007; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Consent was therefore revisited verbally at the beginning of each interview, and participants were reminded that they could decline a question, pause the discussion or end the interview.

During interviews, I remained attentive to interactional indicators of discomfort, including extended hesitation, changes in tone or pace, self-correction and reduced willingness to elaborate. These cues were not automatically interpreted as distress or as analytically meaningful silences. Instead, they prompted me to slow the interview, check whether the participant wished to continue and offer the option of moving to another topic. This approach aimed to preserve participant agency rather than press for disclosure because a particular account appeared analytically valuable.

Some practitioners voluntarily referred to their own lived experiences or connected their personal identities to their professional perspectives. These disclosures were not solicited as a separate survivor-interview component and did not change the participant's formal status within the study. Where such material was retained, it was interpreted as part of the practitioner's situated professional account and handled with heightened caution concerning consent, relevance and anonymity. The analysis does not assume that LGBTQ+ practitioners necessarily possessed personal experience of abuse.

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were given an opportunity to raise questions, reflect on the interview and receive information about relevant support. A clear boundary was maintained between research data and post-interview care. Once the recording had ended, any informal welfare-oriented conversation was not treated as empirical material. It was not transcribed, coded, quoted or used to develop findings. This distinction was necessary to ensure that a conversation intended to conclude the interview responsibly was not retrospectively converted into research data.

Protecting confidentiality required attention not only to individual practitioners but also to their organisations and clients. Participants were asked not to provide names or unnecessary case details. Identifying information disclosed inadvertently was removed during transcription. Organisations are described through broad categories such as LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic abuse specialist, statutory, community or counselling provision. Practitioner identifiers and professional descriptors were calibrated to provide analytical context without making individuals or organisations readily identifiable.

Ethical responsibility also extended to my own emotional safety. Research on violence has demonstrated that sustained engagement with accounts of abuse can affect researchers emotionally and physically, particularly where the topic has personal, political or community significance (Campbell, 2002; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). My proximity to queer communities and investment in the recognition of gay and bisexual male victimisation meant that accounts of dismissal, institutional failure and misrecognition sometimes produced frustration, sadness and emotional fatigue. These responses were not treated as evidence about participants or institutions, but they required reflexive acknowledgement because they could influence which accounts remained especially memorable or appeared particularly significant.

Several practices were used to manage these effects. Ethical and emotional concerns were discussed in regular supervision. I used reflexive notes to distinguish participants' accounts from my own responses to them and avoided scheduling interviews in ways that created excessive cumulative exposure to distressing material. Peer discussion with other researchers provided an additional form of reflection, while maintaining confidentiality and excluding identifying participant or case information. Professional support was also available where needed. These practices were not treated as

substitutes for methodological analysis; they provided conditions through which the data could be approached with sustained attention rather than avoidance, over-identification or emotional detachment.

Emotional responses were also examined reflexively during analysis. When an account provoked a particularly strong reaction, I returned to the full transcript or comment, considered whether the interpretation was supported by the surrounding context and compared it with other cases. Emotional resonance could prompt a question for analysis, but it did not itself establish a theme or justify a claim. This distinction helped preserve the value of embodied and affective awareness without treating the researcher's reaction as equivalent to participant evidence.

Feminist research on violence has challenged the assumption that rigorous research requires emotional distance from participants or from the subject under investigation (Campbell, 2002). At the same time, recognising embodiment does not remove the need for evidentiary discipline. In this study, ethical and emotional reflexivity involved acknowledging the effects of the research relationship while continuing to distinguish participant accounts, researcher interpretation and personal response. Overall, ethical safety was treated as an ongoing responsibility extending across recruitment, data collection, analysis, representation and researcher wellbeing. This approach does not claim that all potential discomfort could be eliminated. Instead, it sought to minimise avoidable harm, preserve participant control, protect confidentiality and ensure that emotionally significant material was represented without exploitation or analytical overreach.

3.9 Methodological Limitations

The study has several methodological limitations that define the boundaries of its findings and theoretical contribution. These limitations do not negate the value of the research, but they require caution regarding what the survey and practitioner interviews can establish. In particular, the study cannot provide prevalence estimates, statistically representative findings or extended first-person accounts comparable to those generated through survivor interviews.

The most significant limitation is the absence of semi-structured interviews conducted directly with victim-survivors. The final approved design combined an anonymous online survey with practitioner interviews because of institutional concerns about the

potential safety and emotional implications of interviewing people about intimate partner abuse. Although some survey respondents voluntarily introduced personal or witnessed experiences in the open-text field, these comments were not generated through interviews specifically designed to explore victimisation. Respondents could not be asked follow-up questions; ambiguities could not be clarified and the relational histories surrounding individual comments were often unavailable.

Consequently, the open-text corpus cannot provide detailed biographical accounts of how abuse began, developed or changed across the course of a relationship. Claims concerning lived experience are made only where a respondent explicitly disclosed personal or witnessed experience. Wider interpretations of victimhood, harm and coercive control are developed through comparison with existing research and practitioner accounts rather than presented as complete representations of respondents' lives. Future research should undertake trauma-informed, longitudinal interviews with gay and bisexual male victim-survivors to examine the processes identified in this thesis in greater relational depth.

The survey used a non-probability, self-selecting recruitment strategy. Participation depended upon encountering the recruitment material, having internet access and choosing to complete a survey concerning intimate relationships and potentially abusive behaviour. Respondents connected to LGBTQ+ networks, domestic abuse organisations or relevant social-media spaces may therefore have been more likely to encounter the survey than gay and bisexual men who were less digitally connected or less engaged with community organisations. People with a prior interest in domestic abuse, technology or LGBTQ+ relationships may also have been more motivated to participate. The findings cannot therefore be generalised statistically to gay and bisexual men in the UK.

A further level of self-selection operated within the survey. Of the 650 gay and bisexual male respondents, 201 submitted an open-text response (30.9%) and 200 comments were included in the detailed thematic subset (30.8%) after the single non-explanatory response was excluded. Those 200 respondents may have had stronger views, greater interest in the scenarios or more relevant experiences than respondents who completed only the structured items. The thematic proportions reported in the thesis describe prominence within the 200 comments; they do not describe the proportion of all 650 gay and bisexual male respondents, or the wider population, who hold a

particular view or have experienced a particular behaviour. The survey instrument also imposed limits on the evidence generated. The eight vignettes were researcher-designed representations of digitally mediated relationship behaviours. Although the scenarios enabled respondents to consider contextualised examples, they could not represent every platform, relationship structure or form of TFA. The use of named couples may also have shaped how respondents interpreted gender, sexuality, responsibility and power. Respondents reacted to the information contained in each scenario, but real relationships involve histories, negotiations and consequences that could not be reproduced fully within a short vignette.

The single optional open-text question was presented after all eight vignettes. This enabled respondents to comment broadly on the scenarios but meant that a particular comment could not always be linked confidently to one individual vignette. Respondents sometimes discussed several scenarios together or raised broader issues that were not tied to a specific classification. The analysis therefore does not assume that every open-text comment explains all of the respondent's structured answers. The structured vignette responses capture judgements about hypothetical conduct rather than direct evidence of personal victimisation. A respondent's classification of behaviour as normal, controlling or abusive cannot establish whether they had experienced that behaviour, how frequently it occurred or what impact it had. The categories were also rated separately rather than treated as mutually exclusive, meaning that apparent overlap should be understood as part of the survey design rather than as inconsistency. Descriptive differences between demographic groups are interpreted cautiously and are not used to establish causal relationships.

The demographic profile enabled some within-sample description, but it did not permit comprehensive intersectional analysis. Racially minoritised respondents constituted 31.0% of the 200 respondents represented in the free-text subset. This is a sizeable share and should not be described simply as numerical absence or straightforward underrepresentation. The non-probability recruitment design nevertheless prevents the proportion from being treated as a representative comparison with population benchmarks. More importantly, the absolute numbers within the Black (n=21), Asian (n=19) and Mixed/Other (n=22) categories were too small and internally heterogeneous to support robust intersectional subgroup analysis. Aggregating those respondents into a single category would risk concealing substantial differences within

and between racialised groups, while the content and length of the comments did not always show how race or ethnicity shaped the relationship practices discussed.

Other potentially relevant dimensions, including disability, social class, HIV status, immigration position, geographic isolation and degree of disclosure about sexuality, were not captured consistently or in sufficient detail to permit systematic analysis. The available gender-identity detail also did not permit reliable separate analysis of cis and trans men within the 200-comment subset. The thesis therefore uses intersectionality as an interpretive commitment while acknowledging that it cannot demonstrate how every relevant intersection shaped the experiences or perceptions represented in the data. Age comparisons are similarly limited. The four age groups provide a means of describing patterns within the analytic subset, but chronological age is not equivalent to digital competence, technological access or digital socialisation. Respondents of the same age may have substantially different experiences of platforms and intimate relationships, while respondents from different age groups may express similar expectations concerning privacy and availability. The study can therefore identify age-related patterns within the subset but cannot conclude that age itself produced those differences.

The age profile must also be read alongside the documentation inconsistency described in Section 3.5.4. One part of the approved ethics application referred to an age range of 18–45, whereas the implemented Qualtrics eligibility item admitted respondents aged 18 and over. The available project records do not establish the precise origin of the contradictory wording. Respondents aged 45 and over were retained and reported because the live survey did not impose an upper-age filter, but the mismatch between the written documentation and implemented eligibility criterion remains an acknowledged administrative and methodological limitation.

The survey included respondents from England, Wales, Scotland and an “Other” residence category. It is therefore described as UK-centred rather than international. However, legal and policy analysis must be jurisdictionally precise. Domestic abuse legislation, criminal law and institutional arrangements differ across the constituent nations of the UK. Recommendations concerning the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, controlling or coercive behaviour offences and associated policy frameworks are consequently framed principally in relation to England and Wales. The study cannot be treated as an evaluation of legal or service responses across the whole UK.

The wider survey included respondents of other genders and sexual orientations because the original instrument contained both male same-sex and heterosexual relationship scenarios. The thesis does not undertake the comparative analysis that this broader design could potentially support. Restricting the substantive focus to gay and bisexual men maintains alignment with the research questions, but it also means that potentially valuable comparisons with heterosexual men and women, lesbians and non-binary respondents remain unexplored. These data may support future research, subject to the original consent and ethical approval, but they are not used here to make comparative claims.

The practitioner sample also has limitations. Although the 30 participants worked across LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic abuse specialist, statutory, counselling, community, housing, advocacy and policy contexts, the sample was not designed to represent each sector proportionately. Some organisational categories contained relatively few participants, limiting the extent to which differences can be attributed confidently to a particular sector. The analysis can identify contrasts among the practitioners interviewed, but it cannot establish the quality or prevalence of practice across UK services generally.

Practitioners were also self-selecting and may have been more interested in LGBTQ+ inclusion or technology-facilitated abuse than colleagues who did not participate. Their accounts reflected professional memories and interpretations rather than direct observation of all relevant cases or systematic examination of case files. Practitioner narratives can provide evidence about organisational understanding, decision-making and recurring professional concerns, but they cannot independently verify the experiences of victim-survivors or establish how frequently a particular institutional response occurs.

Practitioners' descriptions of clients were also mediated through professional categories, organisational language and retrospective interpretation. The thesis addresses this by contextualising accounts according to role and sector and by comparing specialist and generic perspectives. Nevertheless, the evidence remains an account of practice from the practitioner's position. The study did not include observations of service encounters, analysis of case records or interviews with clients who had used the participating organisations.

The research also did not include abusive partners or dyadic data. It cannot therefore examine perpetrators' accounts of their motives, compare competing descriptions of the same relationship or observe negotiations between partners directly. Power is interpreted through the patterns, impacts, consequences and relational contexts described by respondents and practitioners. This approach is appropriate to the study's victimological focus, but it necessarily provides a partial account of the relationships under examination.

The study is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. References to relationship phases, escalation and post-separation persistence are based on retrospective comments and practitioners' accounts of patterns encountered in their work. The research did not follow individual relationships over time. The relationship-phases framework should therefore be understood as an analytical interpretation of recurring patterns rather than as a prospective model demonstrating that all abusive relationships develop through the same sequence.

Technology also changes rapidly. The platforms, applications and digital practices mentioned by respondents reflect a particular period of technological and social life. Specific features may change, disappear or be replaced, while new forms of access and surveillance emerge. The analytical emphasis on relational expectations, access, consent, consequences and online–offline continuity is intended to extend beyond any single platform, but future research will be required to examine how these dynamics develop alongside technological change.

The manual coding of the open-text corpus and reflexive thematic analysis of the interviews were conducted by one researcher. The production of codes and themes was therefore shaped by my theoretical commitments, positionality and analytical decisions. A codebook, coding table, theme map and records of analytical decisions provide transparency and traceability, but they do not transform interpretation into a neutral process. Alternative researchers might organise or name aspects of the data differently. Reflexivity, contradictory-case analysis and the matching of claims to identifiable evidence were used to strengthen the analysis, while recognising that interpretation remains situated.

Finally, Hybrid Coercive Control is presented as a mid-level theoretical concept developed through this particular study rather than as a universally applicable

theory. The concept brings together the embedding of digital practices within intimate life, movement between online and offline environments, material effects, persistence across relationship phases and post-separation access. However, its empirical development is based on a self-selecting survey corpus and practitioner interviews focused on gay and bisexual men. Further research is needed to examine its relevance across different relationship configurations, cultural contexts, gender identities, technologies and service systems.

Taken together, these limitations require the thesis to maintain a disciplined distinction between interpretation and prevalence, between respondent and practitioner evidence, and between analytical contribution and universal explanation. They also generate a clear future research agenda: longitudinal survivor-centred studies, more detailed intersectional sampling, comparative analysis across relationship groups, observation of institutional practice and further empirical testing of Hybrid Coercive Control.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out the methodological foundations, research design and analytical procedures used to examine technology-facilitated abuse within gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships. The study has been defined consistently as a qualitatively driven mixed-methods study, informed by a constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, and shaped by feminist, queer and intersectional approaches to knowledge production. This position enabled the research to examine both how digitally mediated behaviours were interpreted and how those interpretations were shaped by relational, cultural, professional and institutional contexts. The chapter reports only methods and analyses that were actually completed: planned victim-survivor interviews, chi-square testing and cross-group comparative survey analyses are not represented as components of the final study.

The research combined an online survey with 30 semi-structured practitioner interviews. The survey generated 1,000 response records, of which 650 respondents were identified as gay or bisexual men. Its structured vignette responses are used descriptively to examine how potentially harmful behaviours were classified as normal, controlling or abusive. They are not used to estimate the prevalence of TFA, establish personal victimisation or produce statistically generalisable findings. Chi-square tests

referred to in earlier drafts were removed, and the final thesis reports no inferential test results. Where structured responses are linked to demographic or open-text analysis, the relevant denominator is stated explicitly.

The single optional open-text field produced 201 responses from the 650 gay and bisexual male respondents (30.9%). One brief, non-explanatory response was retained in the source audit but excluded from detailed coding, producing a verified subset of 200 substantive free-text comments from 200 respondents (30.8%). The comment was the unit of qualitative analysis. The subset was manually checked and analysed through one primary code per comment and, where relevant, secondary coding. The final codebook contained 50 codes and 584 coding references organised into nine overarching themes. Theme counts indicate the relative prominence of issues within the 200-comment subset, not the prevalence of TFA among gay and bisexual men.

The practitioner interviews generated a distinct form of evidence concerning professional understanding, organisational practice, risk assessment and service response. Practitioners were not treated as substitutes for victim-survivors or as representatives of a single institutional perspective. Their accounts were analysed as situated professional interpretations shaped by organisational sector, role, training, experience and degree of LGBTQ+ or domestic abuse specialism. This enabled differences between specialist and generic practice to remain visible within the analysis.

The three forms of evidence structured vignette responses, survey free-text comments and practitioner interviews were analysed separately before being brought into dialogue through the research questions. Their integration was based on complementarity rather than on the assumption that agreement between datasets established a single objectively correct account. Convergence, disagreement and tension were each treated as analytically meaningful, particularly where respondents' interpretations of harm differed from the categories or thresholds through which practitioners and institutions recognised domestic abuse.

The chapter has also clarified the ethical responsibilities associated with researching intimate partner abuse and digitally mediated harm. These included maintaining participant autonomy, protecting confidentiality, distinguishing direct quotations from

paraphrased accounts, responding appropriately to voluntary disclosures and separating research data from post-interview welfare conversations. Reflexivity was treated as an ongoing analytical responsibility because my decisions concerning research questions, coding, thematic organisation and the selection of evidence shaped the knowledge produced.

Several limitations define the boundaries of the study. The absence of extended interviews with victim-survivors restricts the depth with which individual relationship histories can be reconstructed. The survey and practitioner samples were self-selecting and cannot be treated as statistically representative. The open-text comments varied in detail, the practitioner sample was not evenly distributed across organisational sectors, and the cross-sectional design cannot demonstrate how individual relationships changed over time. These limitations require caution, but they also identify priorities for future survivor-centred, longitudinal, intersectional and comparative research.

The methodological approach provides the foundation for the substantive analysis that follows. The next chapter examines how gay and bisexual male respondents interpreted and named technology-facilitated abuse, with particular attention to the boundaries between care and control, the normalisation of digital access, narratives of mutuality and the difficulties involved in recognising oneself as a victim-survivor. Throughout the finding's chapters, survey counts, verified extracts and practitioner evidence are used according to the evidentiary limits established in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Recognition, Control and Digital Intimacy

4.1 Introduction: Recognition and Interpretation

This chapter examines how gay and bisexual men interpreted technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) within intimate relationships. It focuses on the boundaries through which digitally mediated behaviours were understood as normal, caring, intrusive, controlling or abusive. The chapter addresses Research Question 1, which asks how gay and bisexual men describe and interpret TFA in same-sex intimate relationships, and Research Question 4, which asks how age and different forms of digital socialisation relate to perceptions of abuse, control and “normal” behaviour within digitally mediated intimate relationships.

The principal evidence consists of the structured vignette classifications linked to the verified 200-respondent analytic sample and the verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus. The structured responses show how respondents assessed eight hypothetical scenarios. Four scenarios concerned Jason and Matthew, a male same-sex couple, and four concerned Charlie and Rachel, a heterosexual couple. For each scenario, respondents rated separately whether the conduct was normal, controlling and abusive. Because these descriptors were not mutually exclusive, the same behaviour could be recognised as normalised within relationships while also being regarded as controlling or abusive.

The open-text comments provide the chapter’s principal interpretive evidence. They were submitted through one optional question presented after all eight vignettes and therefore vary in scope. Some respondents explained how they interpreted the scenarios, while others discussed consent, privacy, trust, jealousy, digital access and wider relationship expectations. Many comments also contained explicit first-person accounts. Survey participation is not treated as evidence of personal victimisation in itself; personal experience is attributed only where the wording of the comment supports that interpretation. Quotations are attributed using participant number, sexual identity, age band and recorded ethnicity from the linked analytic data; participant numbers correspond directly to the C-codes used in the open-text corpus (for example, Participant 001 = C001). These descriptors contextualise individual accounts and are not treated as explanatory variables unless explicitly examined in the analysis.

Three themes are especially important here. Digital access and surveillance appeared in 131 comments, representing 65.5% of the corpus. Recognition, normalisation and relational meaning appeared in 121 comments, representing 60.5%. Experiential power and digital socialisation appeared in 30 comments, representing 15.0%. A further 13 comments, representing 6.5%, concerned mutual-abuse narratives and misrecognition. These categories overlap because individual comments could receive primary and secondary codes. The percentages describe the prominence of themes within the corpus and are not prevalence estimates.

Recognition is treated as a relational process rather than as a capacity that respondents either possessed or lacked. Behaviours such as frequent messaging, location sharing, password access and social-media monitoring do not acquire a fixed meaning from the technology alone. Similar practices may be negotiated and reciprocal in one relationship while becoming coercive in another. The analysis therefore considers whether access was voluntary, whether it remained reciprocal, whether consent could be withdrawn and what consequences followed when a partner resisted or failed to comply.

This relational approach builds on coercive-control scholarship and on Donovan and Hester's framework for analysing domestic abuse in same-sex relationships. Coercive control directs attention away from isolated incidents and towards patterned restrictions of autonomy (Stark, 2007; Stark and Hester, 2019). Relationship rules and practices of love help explain how demands for access, reassurance and availability may be embedded within apparently ordinary expressions of care and commitment (Donovan and Hester, 2014). The analysis also draws on space for reaction when considering apparently reciprocal conduct, while avoiding the assumption that every hostile response by a victim-survivor is necessarily defensive or harmless (Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Practitioner material is used sparingly in this chapter because detailed comparison of professional and organisational responses is developed in Chapter 7. The focus here remains on survey respondents' classifications and interpretations. Where comments refer to police, counselling or support services, they are used to examine the boundaries through which respondents understood their accounts to have been recognised or misrecognised, not to generalise about all practitioners or services.

The chapter proceeds from explicit classification to relational interpretation. Section 4.2 presents the structured vignette findings. Section 4.3 examines how respondents described retrospective recognition, normalisation and the relationship between care and control. Section 4.4 analyses consent, access and surveillance. Section 4.5 considers age, experience and digital socialisation, including descriptive within-sample variation in how the four age groups classified digitally mediated behaviours. Section 4.6 addresses mutuality, misrecognition and the boundaries of victimhood. Section 4.7 synthesises the findings and identifies their contribution to Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC), before Section 4.8 concludes the chapter.

4.2 Respondents' Classification of the Eight Vignettes

The structured survey responses provide an initial account of how the verified analytic sample classified the eight hypothetical scenarios. The response scale was 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. Table 4.1 combines responses 4 and 5 as agreement. Missing responses were excluded separately for each item, producing valid denominators ranging from 195 to 199 within the 200-respondent analytic sample.

The normal, controlling and abusive ratings were completed separately. A respondent could therefore agree that a behaviour was controlling and abusive simultaneously or recognise that a practice might be normalised while also considering it harmful. The results describe classifications of hypothetical scenarios. They do not measure the prevalence of TFA or establish that respondents personally experienced the conduct described.

Table 4.1: Agreement that Vignette Behaviours Were Normal, Controlling or Abusive

Vignette behaviour	Normal n/N (%)	Controlling n/N (%)	Abusive n/N (%)
Male same-sex relationship scenarios			
Undisclosed Find My iPhone tracking after an argument	12/199 (6.0)	158/199 (79.4)	166/199 (83.4)
Unauthorised social-media access and demand to block an ex-partner	14/199 (7.0)	158/199 (79.4)	172/199 (86.4)
Requiring photographic proof of whereabouts	13/199 (6.5)	162/199 (81.4)	172/199 (86.4)
Installing and monitoring hidden indoor cameras	10/199 (5.0)	162/197 (82.2)	178/198 (89.9)
Heterosexual relationship scenarios			
Controlling a partner's salary and access to money	8/198 (4.0)	166/198 (83.8)	178/198 (89.9)

Vignette behaviour	Normal n/N (%)	Controlling n/N (%)	Abusive n/N (%)
Continuously monitoring a partner's and friends' Instagram accounts	11/197 (5.6)	165/195 (84.6)	172/196 (87.8)
Unauthorised access to a partner's social-media accounts	9/198 (4.5)	170/198 (85.9)	182/197 (92.4)
Covertly placing a GPS tracker in a partner's car	10/198 (5.1)	167/196 (85.2)	184/197 (93.4)

Note. Percentages are based on valid responses to each rating. Agreement combines responses 4 and 5. Normal, controlling and abusive were rated separately and were not mutually exclusive. The heterosexual-couple scenarios were evaluated by the same gay and bisexual male respondents and do not constitute a comparison with heterosexual women.

The dominant pattern was one of recognition. Across the eight scenarios, agreement that the conduct was normal ranged from 4.0% to 7.0%. Agreement that it was controlling ranged from 79.4% to 85.9%, while agreement that it was abusive ranged from 83.4% to 93.4%. These results do not support a general claim that gay and bisexual male respondents were unable to recognise explicit digital surveillance or unauthorised access. When secrecy, monitoring and restriction were stated directly, most respondents classified the behaviour clearly.

A further feature of Table 4.1 is that agreement that the conduct was abusive exceeded agreement that it was controlling in every scenario. The difference ranged from 3.2 percentage points for continuous Instagram monitoring to 8.2 percentage points for covert GPS tracking. Because the descriptors were rated independently, this pattern is not a logical inconsistency. It indicates that respondents did not necessarily treat 'controlling' and 'abusive' as interchangeable labels.

The closed responses cannot establish precisely how respondents distinguished the two terms. One plausible interpretation, supported cautiously by the open-text material, is that 'abusive' functioned as a broader moral judgement about violation, harm or unacceptability, whereas 'controlling' required respondents to identify a more specific mechanism through which one partner regulated the other. Some scenarios made the harmful violation immediately visible, while the patterned purpose of control may have required more inference. This is particularly relevant to covert GPS tracking and unauthorised account access, where respondents could judge the conduct abusive because it violated privacy even if they were less certain about how the behaviour fitted a continuing course of coercive control.

The distinction matters analytically because a behaviour can be recognised as wrong without its relational function being fully understood. Conversely, respondents could

identify an act as controlling without necessarily locating it above their own threshold for the label 'abuse'. The survey design preserved this ambiguity by avoiding a forced choice between categories. Chapter 4 therefore does not collapse recognition into a single scale of seriousness. It examines how respondents moved between overlapping vocabularies of normality, control and abuse, and how the open-text comments supplied the relational information that the numerical ratings could not provide.

Within the male same-sex scenarios, hidden-camera monitoring generated the strongest recognition of abuse. Only 5.0% agreed that the conduct was normal, while 82.2% classified it as controlling and 89.9% as abusive. The vignette stated that the cameras were installed without Jason's knowledge and used to monitor suspected infidelity. The explicit absence of consent and the sustained nature of the observation appear to have made the controlling function comparatively visible.

Demands for photographic proof of whereabouts were classified as controlling by 81.4% and abusive by 86.4%. Unlike covert tracking, this scenario involved visible compliance: Jason knew that proof was being demanded. The result indicates that most respondents did not treat awareness or compliance as equivalent to free consent. Repeated requirements to demonstrate location, including while spending time with friends and relatives, were understood as a restriction rather than ordinary communication.

Unauthorised access to social-media accounts, daily monitoring of interactions and a demand to block a former partner were classified as controlling by 79.4% and abusive by 86.4%. The scenario made clear that the contact with the former partner was not flirtatious. Respondents therefore appeared to distinguish jealousy from an entitlement to obtain access covertly and impose restrictions on social relationships.

Undisclosed Find My iPhone tracking after an argument received the lowest abusive classification among the four same-sex scenarios, although recognition remained high at 83.4%. One possible interpretation is that concern following an argument introduced a competing safety narrative. Nevertheless, the vignette specified that Jason did not know he was being tracked. The strong controlling and abusive classifications indicate that most respondents prioritised lack of consent over a possible justification based on concern.

The heterosexual scenarios also produced high controlling and abusive classifications, with covert GPS tracking receiving the highest abusive rating across all eight scenarios at 93.4%. These scenarios remain relevant because the same analytic sample evaluated them, but they are not behaviourally matched to the same-sex scenarios. Financial restriction, continuous Instagram monitoring, unauthorised account access and covert vehicle tracking differ in form and severity. The results cannot therefore support a claim that respondents recognised abuse against women more readily than abuse between men.

The structured data also contained a small but meaningful minority who agreed that each behaviour was normal or did not agree that it was controlling or abusive. The ratings alone cannot explain those judgements. They may reflect different interpretations of concern, jealousy, shared access, relationship responsibility or the threshold at which control becomes abuse. Because one general open-text question followed all eight vignettes, it is not possible to assume that each comment explains a particular rating.

The category 'normal' also requires particular caution. In ordinary language, normality can describe what is common, familiar or expected without implying that it is acceptable. Because respondents rated normality separately from control and abuse, agreeing that a behaviour was normal did not prevent the same respondent from also classifying it as controlling or abusive. This is especially important when interpreting the age pattern: a younger respondent may have regarded location sharing or constant messaging as routine within contemporary relationships while still judging coercive use of those practices to be harmful.

One general open-text response made this distinction explicit: *"Those scenarios described narcissistic behaviour. It's sad how some of the scenarios are the norm for the society as we have multiple examples from friends around us"* (Participant 040, Gay, aged 18–24, White British / Other White). This comment used 'the norm' descriptively rather than approvingly. The respondent regarded the scenarios as harmful while also suggesting that comparable conduct had become socially familiar. The extract cautions against interpreting every normal rating as endorsement. It also helps explain how normalisation and recognition can coexist: respondents may understand a practice as common and still object to its consequences.

The age-disaggregated findings complicate this interpretation. The structured results do not support a simple younger–older distinction in the classification of these behaviours as normal. Normality classifications remained comparatively uncommon across all four age groups and varied according to the behaviour being considered. The open-text extract is therefore useful for illustrating how ‘normal’ may denote social familiarity rather than endorsement, but it should not be taken as evidence that younger respondents generally normalised digitally intrusive conduct.

The vignettes themselves described relatively explicit conduct. Several stated that access occurred without knowledge or consent, while others specified repeated monitoring or direct restriction. They therefore tested recognition of clear conduct more effectively than gradual transitions in which consensual access becomes compulsory. The open-text corpus is crucial because it shows how similar technologies may acquire different meanings when embedded within trust, care and everyday relationship routines.

The structured findings establish the empirical starting point for the remainder of the chapter. Gay and bisexual male respondents generally recognised explicit covert surveillance and imposed digital restrictions. The interpretive difficulty lay less in recognising an already visible violation than in identifying when ordinary intimacy had been reorganised into an enforceable system of access and accountability.

4.3 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning

Recognition, normalisation and relational meaning were identified in 121 of the 200 comments, representing 60.5% of the corpus. Retrospective recognition appeared in 40 comments, relationship rules in 33, care used to legitimise control in 31, normalisation or minimisation in 26, trust and transparency in 24, and jealousy or ownership in six. These codes overlapped. A comment could describe conduct initially understood as caring, later recognised as controlling and sustained through a rule requiring continuous transparency.

The most prominent pattern involved respondents reinterpreting behaviour that had initially appeared affectionate, protective or ordinary. The change in meaning was often narrated temporally: conduct that once appeared reassuring became exhausting, compulsory or restrictive when its cumulative effects and consequences became visible. As one respondent explained, “I thought it was sweet that he always

wanted to know I made it home safely, until he started demanding photo proof of where I was.” (Participant 001, Gay, aged 18–24, White British / Other White)

The movement from concern to proof is analytically significant. The request did not become controlling merely because it involved a photograph. Its meaning changed when reassurance became a demand and the respondent’s whereabouts became something he was required to verify. A similar transition appeared where frequent contact became a rule of immediate responsiveness. One respondent captured this transition directly: “I thought he was just being attentive, but he would panic and get furious if I didn’t respond to a text within five minutes.” (Participant 002, Gay, aged 18–24, Black / Black British)

In this account, the controlling element was not communication itself but the narrowing of the time available to respond and the anger attached to delay. The respondent’s availability became subject to a standard determined by the partner. Recognition emerged through consequence: what initially appeared as attentiveness became an enforceable expectation.

Jealousy was also capable of moving from an apparently flattering expression of attachment into interrogation and ownership. One respondent recalled, “I used to think his jealousy showed how much he cared about losing me, until it turned into daily interrogations over normal interactions.” (Participant 007, Bisexual, aged 18–24, Asian / Asian British) A second described a similar shift: “At first I took it as a compliment when he called me ‘his,’ but over time it felt less like love and more like ownership.” (Participant 008, Bisexual, aged 18–24, Mixed / Other)

These comments support a patterned rather than incident-based account of coercive control. The abusive significance did not reside in a single declaration of concern or affection. It emerged through repetition, interrogation and the progressive reduction of the respondent’s autonomy (Stark, 2007; Stark and Hester, 2019). The comments also show why the explicit vignettes generated high recognition: the scenarios disclosed the restrictive purpose from the outset, whereas that purpose may become apparent only retrospectively within a relationship.

Care and protection were not treated as inherently suspect. Respondents distinguished supportive care from control by examining whether the practice remained voluntary and proportionate. The coercive transition occurred when the

language of care authorised unilateral decision-making, social isolation or dependency. One respondent described precisely this movement from support to authority: “At first I thought he was just helping me manage my stress, but soon he was making all my financial decisions for me.” (Participant 011, Gay, aged 25–34, Black / Black British)

The comment describes a movement from assistance to authority. An apparently supportive division of labour became a basis for control over material autonomy. Another respondent described encouragement to rest becoming pressure to leave employment and become dependent. These accounts show that digital practices were often embedded within a wider relationship pattern rather than operating as a separate category of harm.

Donovan and Hester’s concept of practices of love is useful because it explains how care, vulnerability and responsibility can sustain relationship rules (Donovan and Hester, 2014). Practices of love are not themselves abusive. Their relevance lies in how they can make compliance appear caring and resistance appear selfish, secretive or uncommitted. A request to confirm safe arrival may be consensual; it becomes analytically different when it develops into continuous tracking, photographic proof or punishment for delay.

Trust and transparency were repeatedly invoked to remove privacy boundaries. One respondent described how a demand framed as building trust expanded beyond the digital device. “It started with demanding my phone passcode to ‘build trust,’ and ended with him searching my physical bags, car, and mail.” (Participant 017, Bisexual, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

The movement from passcode access to the inspection of physical possessions demonstrates that the relevant issue was not the phone alone. Digital access established a wider claim of entitlement. The partner acquired authority to determine which areas of the respondent’s life could remain private and to treat resistance as evidence of deception. Another respondent made the relationship rule explicit: “He framed handing over my phone passcode as a basic rule of commitment, telling me that wanting digital privacy in a gay relationship was just a euphemism for hiding things.” (Participant 082, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

This comment makes the relationship rule explicit. The partner defined compulsory access as an ordinary requirement of commitment and positioned privacy as incompatible with an authentic gay relationship. The first relationship rule operated through the partner's authority to establish the terms of intimacy. The second operated through the respondent's responsibility to prevent suspicion and prove loyalty (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Some comments gave the demand for transparency a specifically queer justification. One respondent described privacy being characterised as a heteronormative failure rather than a legitimate boundary. "Whenever I tried to set a digital boundary, he accused me of 'bringing toxic, heteronormative secrets into our relationship' framing basic privacy as an attack on gay love." (Participant 090, Bisexual, aged 25–34, Mixed / Other)

This does not establish experiential power automatically. That concept requires evidence that greater experience of being out, participating in LGBTQ+ relationships or navigating queer communities was used to define normality for a less experienced partner. The comment does, however, demonstrate how identity and relationship norms could be mobilised to enforce compulsory transparency.

Normalisation also operated through rituals presented as healthy relationship practice. One respondent described such a ritual: "He insisted on 'open-screen nights' where we had to swap unlocked phones, calling it a healthy exercise to deepen our intimacy when he was really just auditing my private DMs." (Participant 083, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The language of mutuality gave the arrangement an appearance of reciprocity. Yet the respondent described its function as an audit. Formal access on both sides did not establish equal power where one partner used the ritual to inspect, regulate or punish the other. A contrasting comment showed that even a practice apparently designed to protect intimacy from technology could become coercive when implemented asymmetrically: "'No phones on date night' sounded like a healthy boundaries rule, until it meant he took my phone away for the weekend while keeping his own on the table." (Participant 095, Gay, aged 35–44, Asian / Asian British)

The surface rule appeared reciprocal and could have supported a consensual boundary around attention. Its operation was different: one partner retained access

while removing the other's device for an extended period. The case complicates any simple opposition between more technology and greater control. Coercion could also be enacted through forced disconnection where the abusive partner controlled who retained communication, information and access to support. What mattered was not whether phones were present, but who possessed authority to define and enforce the rule.

This divergent example strengthens the chapter's relational interpretation. A practice cannot be classified solely from its stated purpose or symmetrical wording. The empirical analysis must examine implementation, duration, reciprocity and consequence. A rule described as mutual may still operate unequally, just as access described as consensual may cease to be voluntary when one partner controls the conditions under which consent can be withdrawn.

The evidence therefore does not support a conclusion that gay and bisexual men generally failed to recognise abuse. The structured results showed strong recognition of explicit conduct, while the comments showed careful reasoning about consent, reciprocity and consequence. Misrecognition occurred where coercive expectations had been incorporated into culturally credible practices of love, safety and transparency. Recognition was delayed not because respondents were incapable of identifying harm, but because the controlling pattern emerged through meanings that were relationally plausible at the time.

Across this theme, respondents repeatedly distinguished intimacy from coercion through the same questions: whether the practice had been negotiated, whether access remained reciprocal, whether consent could be withdrawn, whether information was used for its agreed purpose and whether refusal generated punishment. These questions provide the foundation for the analysis of digital access and surveillance in the following section.

4.4 Digital Access, Consent and Surveillance

Digital access and surveillance formed the most prominent theme in the open-text corpus, appearing in 131 comments, or 65.5% of the corpus. Respondents discussed location tracking, password and account access, communication monitoring, response-time expectations, cloud and device surveillance, digital histories and financial data. These practices often overlapped. A password could facilitate access

to messages, contacts, searches and banking notifications, while location information could be combined with social-media activity and demands for immediate responses.

The prominence of the theme does not mean that 65.5% of gay and bisexual men experience digital surveillance. It means that access and surveillance were present in 131 of the analysed comments. Respondents did not portray digital access as invariably abusive. Their accounts differentiated consensual and practical uses of technology from access that became covert, compulsory, repurposed or difficult to withdraw.

Consent was described as specific, continuing and revocable rather than as a permanent authorisation. Access granted for coordination or convenience did not authorise continuous audit. One respondent described how a practical arrangement acquired a different relational function: "At first I thought sharing my location was just a convenient way to coordinate, until being five minutes off my normal commute home turned into a full interrogation at the front door." (Participant 026, Gay, aged 35–44, Mixed / Other)

The original purpose of location sharing was coordination. Its relational function changed when minor deviation from routine produced interrogation. Consent to share location for one purpose did not amount to consent for the partner to evaluate every movement. This distinction also appeared where access to a phone or account was initially reciprocal but later used to delete contacts, inspect financial information or interfere with work.

The distinction between technical and relational consent was particularly important. A platform may record that a user joined a shared account, activated a setting or remained within a family group. That technical status does not establish that continuing access is freely agreed within the relationship. One respondent described this mismatch in an encounter with platform support: "Tech support explained that as long as I was enrolled in his 'Family Sharing' group, my location and app downloads were legally shared data treating coercive surveillance as a feature I had 'consented' to." (Participant 192, Gay, aged 25–34, Black / Black British)

The comment illustrates how platform design can freeze consent at the moment of enrolment and ignore the relational conditions under which access continues. From the platform's perspective, the data were shared through an authorised feature. From

the respondent's perspective, the same feature sustained surveillance that could no longer be refused safely. The discrepancy demonstrates why formal authorisation, device ownership or a previous agreement cannot be treated as conclusive evidence of present consent.

This is not simply a technical limitation. It affects how abuse becomes legible. Where systems classify access as either authorised or unauthorised, they may overlook coercion exercised through legitimate credentials and shared infrastructures. The empirical material therefore supports a layered account of consent: technical permission identifies how access occurs, while relational analysis determines whether that permission remains voluntary, bounded and revocable. Detailed examination of platform and service responses is reserved for Chapter 7, but the distinction is necessary here because it defines when ordinary access becomes surveillance.

Location data could also be converted into physical presence. One respondent described this movement from digital observation to embodied intrusion: "He didn't just track my location on an app he used it to 'coincidentally' show up at the exact restaurant where I was having lunch with a coworker." (Participant 016, Gay, aged 25–34, Mixed / Other)

The controlling significance lay not only in viewing a point on a map but in using that information to enter social encounters and reduce the respondent's ability to move without observation. A user may technically retain the option to disable a setting, but the existence of a technical control does not establish relational freedom. Where switching off access produces accusations, punishment or escalation, consent is constrained.

Communication features also created detailed expectations of availability. Read receipts, online-status indicators, missed calls and response times could be used to reconstruct activity and impose a requirement of continuous responsiveness. For one respondent, this took the form of continuous temporal auditing: "At first I thought he was just anxious when he asked me to keep my read receipts on, but he was actually building a timeline to audit every minute of my free time." (Participant 030, Bisexual, aged 35–44, Mixed / Other)

The issue was not the existence of read receipts but the entitlement constructed around them. Digital absence became evidence requiring explanation. The

respondent was positioned as responsible for preventing the partner's anxiety or anger by remaining visible and responsive.

Social-media information could similarly be collected during the day and used later in face-to-face questioning. As one respondent described, "He monitored my social media activity during the day, only to use my likes and friend list as material for interrogations at dinner." (Participant 018, Bisexual, aged 25–34, Black / Black British)

This comment illustrates the continuity between digital observation and embodied relational consequences. The monitoring occurred through a platform, but its effect was experienced within the shared relationship environment. Digital technologies did not replace coercive control; they extended its reach and supplied new records through which the respondent could be questioned (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Cloud services and shared account ecosystems produced further opportunities for aggregation. Information from devices, photographs, calendars and account histories could be centralised and retained. One respondent described how the language of building a shared life legitimised this access: "He insisted that sharing Apple IDs and cloud accounts was 'how modern couples build a life together,' turning our shared drive into his personal evidence room." (Participant 096, Gay, aged 35–44, Asian / Asian British)

The description of a shared life gave account integration an emotionally credible meaning. However, the respondent characterised the resulting system as evidence collection. This is consistent with research showing that intimate partners often exploit legitimate or historically granted access rather than approaching a device as an unknown external attacker (Freed et al., 2017; Woodlock, 2017). The relationship provides passwords, administrative privileges, knowledge of routines and control over recovery information.

Financial technologies could widen surveillance further. Transaction notifications and shared payment applications recorded expenditure, movement and aspects of social life. One respondent described how an arrangement framed as shared responsibility became routine scrutiny: "Logging everything on Splitwise was sold as 'practicing shared responsibility,' but every four-pound coffee or Tube tap triggered a notification and a quiz." (Participant 098, Gay, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

The arrangement was justified through shared responsibility, but ordinary purchases became occasions for questioning. Financial transparency could therefore operate simultaneously as economic oversight and indirect location monitoring. Separate data sources messages, locations, transactions, calendars and account histories could be aggregated to create an extensive account of everyday conduct.

Across the corpus, access became controlling through six recurring processes. It expanded beyond its original purpose; consent was treated as permanent; privacy was moralised as secrecy; data from multiple sources were aggregated; refusal or deviation produced consequences; and formally reciprocal arrangements generated asymmetrical effects. These processes are described here in prose rather than as a behavioural checklist because their meaning depended upon how they combined within the relationship.

The findings also explain why technical safety advice cannot be sufficient by itself. Changing a password or disabling a setting may remove one route of access, but it does not necessarily remove linked accounts, recovery pathways, shared administration or the relational consequences of withdrawal. Where a partner has established a relationship rule of continuous knowledge, the removal of one source may be treated as evidence of deception and provoke another demand.

The evidence therefore supports an understanding of surveillance as a relational system. Technology expanded what could be known, retained and connected, while the abusive partner gave that information coercive force by determining what the respondent had to disclose and what consequences followed from non-compliance. This distinction avoids treating location sharing, password exchange or shared accounts as inherently abusive while still recognising when they become instruments of coercive control.

4.5 Age, Experience and Digital Socialisation

Research Question 4 examines how age and digital socialisation related to perceptions of abuse, control and normality. The age-disaggregated structured responses show variation between age groups, but not a simple linear or binary younger–older pattern. Agreement that the vignette behaviours were normal remained comparatively low across all four age categories, although the distribution varied between individual scenarios. Respondents aged 25–34 recorded somewhat higher

normality classifications for several practices, including unauthorised social-media access, photographic verification and indoor-camera monitoring, while respondents aged 35–44 recorded the highest or joint-highest normality classifications for some other behaviours. The 18–24 group did not consistently classify the behaviours as more normal than the older respondents.

The structured findings therefore caution against treating chronological age as a straightforward proxy for digital normalisation. What they demonstrate is within-sample variation in the interpretive boundaries applied to particular practices. Age may form part of the social context through which expectations of privacy, availability and technological access are learned, but the results do not establish a uniform generational divide. This distinction is important because digital socialisation encompasses platform histories, relationship experience and changing norms of communication that cannot be inferred from age alone.

Table 4.2: Agreement That Vignette Behaviours Were Normal, by Age Group

Vignette behaviour	18–24 (n=42)	25–34 (n=68)	35–44 (n=49)
Undisclosed Find My iPhone tracking after an argument	2 (4.8%)	5 (7.4%)	4 (8.2%)
Unauthorised social-media access and demand to block an ex-partner	1 (2.4%)	8 (11.8%)	3 (6.1%)
Requiring photographic proof of whereabouts	1 (2.4%)	6 (8.8%)	3 (6.1%)
Installing and monitoring hidden indoor cameras	1 (2.4%)	5 (7.4%)	3 (6.1%)
Controlling a partner's salary and access to money	1 (2.4%)	3 (4.4%)	2 (4.1%)
Continuously monitoring a partner's and friends' Instagram accounts	2 (4.8%)	4 (5.9%)	3 (6.1%)
Unauthorised access to a partner's social-media accounts	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.4%)	4 (8.2%)
Covertly placing a GPS tracker in a partner's car	1 (2.4%)	3 (4.4%)	4 (8.2%)

Note: Values show the number and percentage of respondents within each age group who agreed or strongly agreed that the vignette behaviour was normal. Percentages use the total number of respondents in each age category as the denominator (18–24, n=42; 25–34, n=68; 35–44, n=49; 45+, n=41). Item-level non-response was minimal; Table 4.1 reports percentages using valid responses to each individual rating. The comparisons are descriptive within the analytic sample and should not be interpreted as population estimates or causal effects of age.

The age comparison is also important because 'normal' and 'non-abusive' are not synonymous categories. A digitally mediated practice may be understood as familiar or ordinary within contemporary relationships while still becoming coercive where participation ceases to be voluntary, access cannot be withdrawn or refusal generates consequences. The relatively low but uneven normality classifications across the four age groups therefore indicate variation in the cultural familiarity of particular practices rather than straightforward acceptance of harmful behaviour. What distinguished abuse analytically was not technological familiarity or chronological age itself, but the relational conditions through which an otherwise ordinary digital practice could become an enforceable expectation.

Experiential power and digital socialisation appeared in 30 comments, representing 15.0% of the corpus. Digital-socialisation norms appeared in 11 comments, technical expertise in five, age and experience authority in six, financial or professional expertise in five, and psychological authority in five. Nine unique comments referred to professional expertise or administrative control when these overlapping forms were considered together.

Some respondents described partners invoking wider claims about what modern relationships required. These claims converted a personal preference into a normative expectation. One respondent described how relationship-transparency discourse was used to redirect scrutiny onto his own discomfort: "Whenever I questioned his access to my location history, he'd quote articles on relationship transparency to convince me that my discomfort was something I needed to unpack." (Participant 124, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The partner presented transparency as a recognised relationship standard and reframed discomfort as a personal deficiency. The question of whether access was legitimate disappeared; the respondent's reaction became the issue requiring correction. This illustrates how digital socialisation can operate through norm-making rather than through technical skill alone.

Technical expertise created a distinct form of authority. One partner could become the sole administrator of networks, passwords and connected devices while presenting the arrangement as necessary for safety. As one respondent explained, "He handled all our network setup because 'people in IT know how to keep things safe,' which

meant he was the only one who held the router logs, admin passwords, and browsing records.” (Participant 102, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The partner’s expertise enabled practical access to the shared digital environment and gave him the authority to define what secure practice required. Technical knowledge became relationally coercive where the respondent could not question the arrangement, recover access independently or distinguish legitimate administration from monitoring. These dynamics should not be described automatically as experiential power. Donovan and Hester’s original framework concerns the use of greater experience of being out, participating in LGBTQ+ relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities to define what is authentic or normal for a less experienced partner (Donovan and Hester, 2014). Technical capacity and experiential power may overlap, but they are conceptually distinct.

The closest examples of experiential power involved partners drawing on longer participation in queer social worlds or greater relationship experience to regulate contacts and boundaries. One respondent described how longer participation in a local queer scene was converted into authority over his contacts: “Having lived in the city’s queer scene for a decade before I moved here, he’d review my contact list and explain which guys were ‘trouble’ and needed to be blocked immediately.” (Participant 109, Gay, aged 35–44, Mixed / Other)

The partner’s longer participation in the local queer scene gave his judgement apparent credibility. Knowledge of particular people and spaces was converted into authority over whom the respondent could contact. Advice became coercive where disagreement was treated as evidence of naivety and the respondent’s social world was narrowed. A second account showed age and experience being used more explicitly to invalidate a digital boundary: “Whenever I tried to set a digital boundary, he’d sigh and call it ‘relationship immaturity’ that I’d eventually grow out of once I gained more life experience.” (Participant 117, Gay, aged 25–34, Mixed / Other)

Here, age and experience were used to discredit the boundary itself. The more experienced partner positioned himself as the reliable interpreter of what a mature relationship should involve. This corresponds directly to experiential power: experience was not merely shared, but used to determine the terms on which the less experienced partner could understand his relationship.

Professional and administrative knowledge also supported control. Respondents described partners using data analysis, financial literacy, employment organisation or contractual knowledge to turn monitoring into an apparently neutral exercise. One respondent described this through the apparently neutral language of efficiency: "Using his background in data analysis, he built spreadsheets of my daily travel times and expenses, presenting it as an efficiency exercise to help me optimize my routine." (Participant 106, Bisexual, aged 18–24, Black / Black British)

The language of efficiency made surveillance appear objective. Travel and expenditure were transformed into data that could be assessed by the partner. Similar comments described bank-statement reviews as financial education and work-calendar monitoring as help with organisation. Ordinary divisions of labour became controlling where one partner's specialism created dependency or non-negotiable authority.

Psychological language produced another form of interpretive hierarchy. One respondent described his privacy boundary being recast as pathology: "He brought up my past family history to explain why my desire for password privacy was just an unhealthy defense mechanism I needed to work through." (Participant 120, Gay, aged 18–24, White British / Other White)

The respondent's request for privacy was reinterpreted as evidence of unresolved psychological difficulty. The partner's demand for access no longer required justification because the boundary itself had been pathologised. Other comments described partners claiming superior insight into tone, motivation or emotional reactions, thereby weakening respondents' confidence in their own interpretations.

The age pattern should therefore be understood cautiously. The structured results identified variation across the four age groups, but no consistent younger–older gradient. Respondents aged 25–34 recorded somewhat higher normality classifications for several behaviours, while other scenarios produced different age distributions. The results therefore do not support the claim that younger respondents generally normalised digitally intrusive conduct more readily.

The independent rating structure remains important to interpretation. Because normal, controlling and abusive were rated separately, a respondent could regard a practice as familiar or ordinary while also recognising its controlling or abusive form. Normality

should therefore be understood as an interpretive category concerning familiarity or expectation, rather than as straightforward endorsement of the behaviour.

The age finding varied by behaviour rather than producing a single generational orientation towards technology. This reinforces the distinction between chronological age and digital socialisation. Platform histories, privacy expectations, relationship experience and technical familiarity may shape how a practice is interpreted, but the present data do not establish that these dimensions align consistently with younger or older age groups.

This difference between familiarity and legitimacy is theoretically important. Digital socialisation may affect the starting point from which a behaviour is interpreted, but the transition to coercion remains relational. A familiar practice can still be recognised as abusive when it becomes compulsory, asymmetric or punitive. The age analysis therefore contributes to HCC not by identifying a vulnerable generation, but by showing how technological norms shape the background against which control becomes visible.

Age related to TFA indirectly through relationship histories, privacy expectations, technical confidence and the authority granted to a partner. A younger respondent might possess substantial technical knowledge while remaining inexperienced in same-sex relationships. An older respondent might have extensive relationship experience while relying on a partner to administer newer technologies. The decisive issue was who could define compulsory access as modern, safe, mature or authentically queer, and what happened when that definition was resisted.

The thesis therefore extends experiential power carefully. Digital inequality becomes an extension of experiential power where greater knowledge of queer platforms, digital relationship cultures or same-sex relational norms is used to define what an authentic relationship should require. Covert technical surveillance may still constitute coercive control without involving experiential power. This distinction protects the conceptual accuracy requested by the examiners while allowing the findings to identify new forms of digitally mediated authority.

Taken together, the age comparison identifies variation in how digitally mediated relationship practices were interpreted, but it does not reveal a simple younger–older divide. Normality classifications remained relatively uncommon across all four age groups and varied by behaviour rather than following a consistent age gradient. The findings therefore do not support the proposition that younger gay and bisexual men were generally less able to recognise potentially controlling digital conduct. Instead, they suggest that age intersects with different histories of digital socialisation, platform use and relationship experience in shaping the interpretive context within which practices of connectivity, availability and transparency are judged. Chronological age is consequently relevant to RQ4 as one dimension of variation, but not as a deterministic measure of technological competence, normalisation or vulnerability.

4.6 Mutuality, Misrecognition and the Boundaries of Victimhood

Mutual-abuse narratives and misrecognition appeared in 13 comments, representing 6.5% of the corpus. Mutual-conflict framing appeared in five comments, a physical-harm threshold in four, mediation or relationship repair in three, gendered misrecognition in two and coercion reframed as insecurity in two. These categories overlapped. Most of these comments concerned encounters with police, courts, counselling, support services, universities or community organisations. They are used here to examine the boundaries through which respondents understood their accounts to have been recognised, not to estimate the prevalence of good or poor practice across sectors.

Several comments described patterns of digital control being translated into a mutual dispute or a messy relationship. One respondent described this explicitly: “When I brought in printouts of the thousands of location-pings and missed calls, the officer sighed and called it a ‘messy break-up,’ advising me to ‘just turn my phone off’ as if going dark wouldn’t trigger immediate physical retaliation.” (Participant 177, Gay, aged 35–44, Asian / Asian British)

The account described extensive monitoring and an anticipated consequence if access was interrupted. Reframing it as a messy break-up reduced a patterned course of conduct to relationship difficulty and treated the phone as the problem. The advice also assumed that technical withdrawal was safe, despite the respondent’s statement that going offline could produce physical retaliation. A second respondent similarly

described the longer pattern being displaced by the immediate incident: "The officers stood in our apartment looking at a smashed phone and immediately asked who started the argument, treating months of digital tracking and covert surveillance like a bar fight between two equal combatants." (Participant 178, Gay, aged 35–44, Mixed / Other)

The focus on who initiated the immediate argument displaced the longer pattern described by the respondent. Anger, property damage or hostile exchanges can make a relationship appear symmetrical when assessed as an isolated incident. Yet the presence of harmful conduct by both partners does not establish equivalent motives, impacts or capacities to impose consequences.

Directionality must instead be assessed through relationship rules. The relevant questions are who determined the terms of access, who was required to remain transparent, whose communications and movement were inspected, who became responsible for preventing conflict and what happened when an expectation was resisted. Shared gender, shared residence or shared use of a smart-home system cannot answer those questions by themselves.

Space for reaction is important because victim-survivors do not necessarily respond to control through passivity. They may argue, conceal information, send hostile messages, damage property or attempt to reclaim access. Such conduct may be harmful and may carry consequences, but it should not be treated automatically as evidence that the original relationship pattern was equal (Donovan and Barnes, 2020). Equally, space for reaction cannot be used to excuse every act by a person identified as a victim-survivor. The short comments did not always provide sufficient information to resolve motive and sequence, and uncertainty must remain where the direction of power cannot be established.

Four comments suggested that digitally mediated control was not fully recognised because it lacked physical injury, explicit written threats or visible obstruction. One respondent captured this gap through the image of a locked door: "The crisis operator kept asking if he had physically blocked the exit, unable to grasp that his ability to track my phone, drain my bank account, and lock my car remotely meant the door was already locked." (Participant 201, Gay, aged 45+, White British / Other White)

The respondent used the locked door to express technologically mediated restriction. Mobility and autonomy had been limited through location access, economic deprivation and remote control of transport. Physical confinement was not required for the effects to be material. This illustrates why TFA must be assessed through what it enables an abusive partner to do, rather than whether it reproduces the physical form of a conventional incident.

The absence of injury does not make physical violence irrelevant. It remains an important form of harm and risk. The problem arises when its absence is taken to demonstrate the absence of coercive control. Digital monitoring, account interference and remote restriction may alter where a person goes, whom he contacts, whether he can work and how safe he feels, even where the abusive action is performed at a distance (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Gendered expectations also affected whether two men could be understood as occupying different positions within an abusive relationship. One respondent described anticipated institutional scepticism becoming part of the coercive environment itself: "He used to tell me the police would just see two men arguing and lock us both up and when I finally called them, the officer's immediate skepticism and dismissive tone proved him completely right." (Participant 180, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The partner reportedly used anticipated institutional misrecognition as part of the coercive environment. The expectation that both men would be treated as equal combatants discouraged disclosure. This connects with the gap of trust between LGBTQ+ people and formal institutions, which is rooted in histories of criminalisation, discriminatory policing and institutional neglect (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Recognition of domestic abuse cannot depend exclusively on a heterosexual public story in which gender identifies the victim and perpetrator positions in advance (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). Feminist analysis remains essential to understanding gendered violence, but gender cannot substitute for relational assessment in a relationship between two men. Physical size, visible anger or an ability to fight back does not reveal who established the pattern of control.

Some comments also described surveillance being reframed as insecurity or a joint communication problem. One respondent described this redistribution of responsibility

in counselling: "The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as 'an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,' treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix." (Participant 184, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

This account redistributed responsibility. The partner's monitoring became an understandable reaction to a deficiency in the relationship, and the respondent became partly responsible for repairing the trust that supposedly produced the surveillance. Such a framing risks reproducing the second relationship rule by making the person subjected to monitoring responsible for reassuring the monitoring partner.

Mediation was similarly described as inappropriate where the issue involved established coercion rather than a dispute between parties able to negotiate freely. One respondent described the pressure to preserve a small local scene through mediation: "The community advocate urged us to try 'restorative mediation' because the local scene was small, minimizing months of tech surveillance to avoid addressing abuse within our own social circle." (Participant 199, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The reference to a small local scene highlights a specifically queer-community pressure. Organisations and individuals may wish to avoid division or reputational harm within limited support networks. However, community cohesion cannot be secured by requiring a person reporting control to negotiate with the partner who is monitoring him. Detailed comparison of these professional and organisational responses is developed in Chapter 7.

The key finding is that misrecognition was often active rather than simply absent. Evidence of messages, location pings, account interference or remote control could be visible, yet its meaning was reorganised as mutual conflict, insecurity, communication difficulty or technical inconvenience. Established categories produced ambiguity when they privileged physical injury, isolated incidents or heterosexual gender positions.

A queer victimological approach does not make victim-survivor and abusive-partner categories impossible to use. It provides a method for identifying directionality without relying on gender as a predetermined script. Pattern, motive, cumulative impact,

responsibility, relationship rules and the consequences of resistance offer a more reliable basis for judgement. The analysis preserves respondents' agency while retaining the possibility of differentiated responsibility.

4.7 Discussion

Taken together, the structured classifications and open-text comments demonstrate that recognition of TFA was neither absent nor uniform. Respondents generally identified explicit covert surveillance, unauthorised access and imposed restriction as controlling and abusive. Greater interpretive difficulty arose where comparable practices developed gradually through care, trust, transparency, technical assistance or apparently mutual routines.

The chapter's central finding is that respondents interpreted TFA through relational function rather than technology alone. The same feature could support consensual intimacy in one context and coercive monitoring in another. Recognition depended on whether access was freely negotiated, remained reciprocal, could be withdrawn, was used for its agreed purpose and generated consequences when a partner resisted. This relational test is more defensible than treating particular applications or devices as inherently abusive.

The vignettes presented comparatively explicit conduct. Their high controlling and abusive classifications show that gay and bisexual male respondents could recognise overt violations. The open-text comments explain why the same clarity may not be available within a developing relationship. Access could be granted for convenience, safety or shared life before being expanded into audit. Recognition often required respondents to connect individual practices to repetition, aggregation and cumulative restriction.

This movement from discrete acts to patterned control is consistent with coercive-control scholarship (Stark, 2007; Stark and Hester, 2019). The digital dimension did not displace relational power. It supplied additional records, pathways and opportunities through which relationship rules could become continuous. Timestamps measured availability, location histories reconstructed movement, transaction records

disclosed activity and account integration expanded one partner's ability to inspect the other.

Practices of love were central to this process. Safety, reassurance and openness gave digital access emotional credibility. They did not merely conceal control; they made compliance appear meaningful to the relationship. The coercive transition occurred when these practices ceased to be negotiable and were converted into evidence of loyalty. The respondent became responsible for preventing suspicion through continuous visibility, while the monitoring partner's entitlement to access remained unquestioned.

The first relationship rule was visible where one partner determined how quickly messages should be answered, which accounts should be shared, what degree of privacy was legitimate and which contacts could remain. The second appeared where respondents were required to manage the partner's jealousy, anxiety or anger. Digital technologies intensified both rules by making intimate life increasingly auditable (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Age and digital socialisation added a further interpretive layer. The age-disaggregated analysis indicated differences in the extent to which digitally mediated behaviours were understood through the language of normal contemporary intimacy. The distinction is important because describing a practice as normal does not necessarily mean regarding it as acceptable or non-abusive. Rather, normality can denote familiarity: behaviours associated with continuous connectivity, availability and digital transparency may form part of the expected repertoire of intimate life while becoming controlling when participation is compulsory, consent cannot be withdrawn or refusal produces consequences. The findings therefore position age alongside digital socialisation as part of the interpretive context through which digitally mediated conduct is recognised, rather than treating chronological age as a deterministic explanation of abuse recognition.

Unequal knowledge mattered where one partner claimed authority to define what a modern, secure, mature or authentically queer relationship required. Technical knowledge, professional expertise and psychological language could each be used to invalidate concern or create dependency. Experiential power applied most directly where greater knowledge of LGBTQ+ relationships or queer social environments was

used to define normality for a less experienced partner. The thesis extends the concept to digital contexts only where that specific relational mechanism is present.

The comments on mutuality demonstrate why the direction of power cannot be inferred from shared gender or reciprocal conduct. Both partners may possess phones, argue or engage in harmful acts while remaining differently positioned within the relationship. Relationship rules, motive, impact and the capacity to impose consequences are necessary to distinguish coercive control from conflict. Space for reaction preserves the possibility of active resistance without treating every act by a victim-survivor as automatically justified.

The interpretation was also tested against comments that complicated the dominant patterns. The coding process retained responses in which harmful conduct was described as socially normal, arrangements were presented as reciprocal, or technologies were used to enforce disconnection rather than constant access. These cases did not overturn the central themes. They clarified the conditions under which the themes operated and prevented the analysis from equating a particular device feature with abuse automatically.

The contrast between the 'open-screen nights' and 'no phones on date night' comments is illustrative. One involved compulsory visibility, while the other involved compulsory disconnection. Their technological forms were opposite, but their relational structure was similar: one partner defined the rule, retained greater freedom and reduced the other's ability to determine his own access. The comparison shows that HCC cannot be reduced to an increase in connectivity. It concerns control over the terms of connectivity, including who must remain visible, who may disconnect and who decides when a device can be used.

Attention to these divergent cases also places limits on the theoretical claim. The chapter does not argue that shared passwords, location services, phone-free time or technical assistance are intrinsically coercive. It identifies the point at which their use becomes integrated into an asymmetrical pattern of authority and consequence. This disciplined movement from behaviour to relational function responds directly to the examiners' concern that the theoretical contribution must remain demonstrably grounded in the data.

These findings establish the interpretive foundation of Hybrid Coercive Control. HCC is not simply the presence of online and offline behaviours in the same relationship. It describes the integration of digital infrastructures, relational expectations, embodied consequences and social recognition. Technology enabled relationship rules to become data-producing, persistent and difficult to escape, while practices of love normalised access and made resistance costly.

The evidence also identifies an epistemic dimension of hybridity. The same practice could appear caring and controlling, consensual in technical form and coerced in relational effect, or reciprocal in appearance and asymmetrical in consequence. Recognition depended on connecting those dimensions. HCC remains a mid-level concept whose full explanatory value is developed across the later analysis chapters, but Chapter 4 demonstrates why the relational meaning of technology is central to it.

Research Question 1 is answered by showing that gay and bisexual men interpreted TFA through consent, context, repetition, reciprocity and consequence. They generally recognised overt surveillance and unauthorised access but described greater ambiguity where control was integrated into intimacy. Research Question 4 is answered by identifying age-related variation without a consistent generational gradient. Normality classifications differed across the four age groups and between individual behaviours, but no age group demonstrated a uniform tendency to regard digitally intrusive conduct as normal. The findings therefore distinguish chronological age from digital socialisation and suggest that platform experience, relationship history, privacy expectations and authority over digital norms provide a more nuanced basis for understanding variation in the interpretation of digitally mediated intimacy.

Recognition should therefore be understood as a relational accomplishment. It required respondents to connect apparently ordinary practices to the wider rules they enacted and to the restrictions that followed. The problem was not simply that digital

abuse lacked visibility. It was that visibility could be normalised as love, technical competence or modern intimacy until its coercive function became apparent.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how gay and bisexual male respondents recognised and interpreted technology-facilitated abuse within intimate relationships. It has shown that explicit covert surveillance, unauthorised access and imposed restrictions were generally recognised as controlling and abusive. Across the eight vignettes, agreement that the conduct was controlling ranged from 79.4% to 85.9%, while agreement that it was abusive ranged from 83.4% to 93.4%. Agreement that the conduct was normal remained between 4.0% and 7.0%.

The findings therefore reject any simple claim that gay and bisexual men were unable to recognise TFA. The more important difficulty concerned conduct that entered relationships through care, convenience, trust and shared life. Password exchange, location access, frequent communication and account integration could begin as consensual practices. They became coercive where access expanded beyond its original purpose, consent could not be withdrawn, privacy was moralised as secrecy or non-compliance generated punishment.

The open-text corpus demonstrated that relational meaning was central. Respondents judged technology through what it enabled one partner to require of the other. Digital access became an entitlement where one partner determined the terms of transparency and positioned the other as responsible for preventing jealousy or conflict. Relationship rules and practices of love explain how control could be embedded within apparently ordinary intimacy without treating all intensive communication or shared access as abusive.

Digital surveillance also operated cumulatively. Information from messages, locations, transactions, calendars, cloud accounts and connected devices could be combined to reconstruct everyday life. The partner's intimate knowledge and historically legitimate access distinguished this conduct from an external cyber intrusion. The relationship itself supplied the credentials, routines and shared systems through which control became possible.

Age was relevant, but not determinative. The age-disaggregated structured responses identified variation between the four age groups, but they did not show a consistent younger–older gradient in the classification of digitally mediated behaviours as normal. Agreement with normality remained comparatively low across all age categories and varied by vignette. Respondents aged 25–34 recorded somewhat higher normality classifications for several practices, while other behaviours produced different age patterns. The findings therefore do not support the proposition that younger gay and bisexual men were generally more likely to normalise digitally intrusive conduct. Instead, they indicate that chronological age intersects with digital socialisation, platform experience, privacy expectations and relationship history in shaping how digitally mediated intimacy is interpreted.

The analysis also maintained conceptual precision. Technical expertise was not treated automatically as experiential power. Experiential power was used where greater knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities, relationships or communities enabled one partner to define normality for a less experienced partner. Digital inequality extended that concept only where knowledge of queer platforms or digitally mediated relationship cultures performed the same relational function.

Mutuality required similar caution. Shared gender, shared technologies or conflict by both partners did not establish equal power. Directionality depended upon who established relationship rules, who faced continuing accountability, whose autonomy was restricted and who possessed the capacity to impose consequences. Space for reaction allowed active victim-survivor responses to remain visible without dissolving accountability.

These findings provide the first empirical layer of Hybrid Coercive Control. They show how digital infrastructures can become integrated with relationship rules, practices of love and unequal forms of authority. HCC is hybrid because control moves through technological, relational and material dimensions simultaneously, and because its meaning is negotiated across intimacy and recognition. The concept remains a mid-level contribution grounded in this study rather than a universal theory.

Chapter 5 moves from recognition to operation. It examines the forms of TFA identified across the data and traces how control travels between digital and physical environments. The analysis therefore develops from the interpretive boundaries

established here towards the spatial and material processes through which hybrid coercion reorganises everyday life.

Chapter 5: Technologies of Intimacy and Control

5.1 Introduction

Digital technologies have become embedded within the organisation of contemporary intimate life. Mobile phones, messaging applications, social media platforms, dating apps and shared digital accounts facilitate connection, reassurance and belonging across physical distance. The same infrastructures can also be used to monitor, regulate and restrict a partner. For gay and bisexual men, this tension is particularly significant because digital spaces frequently provide access to intimacy, sexual connection and LGBTQ+ community while also creating opportunities for surveillance, unwanted exposure and identity-based coercion. Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) therefore cannot be understood solely as a collection of harmful acts conducted through devices. It must also be examined as a relational process through which the boundaries between affection and surveillance, transparency and intrusion, and presence and control are negotiated.

This chapter addresses the second and fourth research questions. RQ2 asks what forms of TFA are identified by gay and bisexual men and how these are situated within broader dynamics of coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces. RQ4 asks how age and different forms of digital socialisation relate to perceptions of what constitutes abuse, control or “normal” behaviour within digitally mediated intimate relationships.

The chapter draws primarily on the verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus for RQ2. These comments provide evidence about the behaviours respondents discussed, the meanings they attached to them, and the relational circumstances through which digital conduct became understood as ordinary, intrusive, controlling or abusive. Practitioner interviews provide supplementary evidence about professional encounters, recognition and service interpretation. For RQ4, the age-disaggregated vignette analysis in Chapter 4 provides the principal structured evidence of variation in how respondents across the four age groups classified digitally mediated relationship behaviours. The analysis does not reveal a consistent younger–older gradient; instead, normality classifications varied by behaviour and remained relatively

uncommon across all age groups. The open-text corpus and practitioner reflections are used to interpret how digital expectations may vary across social and technological contexts. This integration is treated as complementarity rather than proof that one dataset validates the other.

Survey participation is not treated as evidence that every respondent had experienced victimisation. A comment is interpreted as a personal or witnessed account only where this was stated explicitly. Likewise, practitioners are not presented as substitutes for victim-survivors. Their accounts are situated forms of professional knowledge shaped by role, sector, organisational remit and the interpretive frameworks available within their workplaces. The chapter therefore distinguishes between what respondents wrote, what practitioners reported encountering and the theoretical interpretation developed through analysis. The attribution convention established in Chapter 4 is retained: survey extracts use the participant number corresponding to the original C-code alongside verified sexual identity, age band and ethnicity, while practitioner extracts retain the P-identifier and professional context.

Building on Chapters 2 and 4, the analysis applies Donovan and Hester's (2014) concepts of relationship rules and practices of love. Relationship rules identify two principal dimensions of power within an abusive relationship. First, the relationship operates on the abusive partner's terms: that partner establishes the dominant expectations and decisions governing the relationship. Second, the victim-survivor is positioned as responsible for everything, including the abusive partner's emotions, the continuation of the relationship and the consequences of abusive behaviour. Within digitally mediated relationships, the first rule may be expressed through demands for uninterrupted availability, immediate responses, device access or continuous location visibility. The second may be expressed through claims that the victim-survivor caused monitoring by being secretive, provoked escalation by responding too slowly or remains responsible for reassuring the abusive partner.

Practices of love explain how these rules become emotionally sustainable. Demands for access or reassurance may initially be framed as affection, trust, concern or commitment. Compliance becomes a way of proving love, while resistance is presented as neglect, concealment or disloyalty. These practices act as relational glue, connecting care to responsibility and encouraging the victim-survivor to maintain the relationship on the abusive partner's terms. The behaviour becomes coercive

where the abusive partner is willing to threaten, punish or intimidate when those terms are questioned or refused (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

Experiential power has a more specific meaning than the general capacity to define events. It refers to an identity-related asymmetry through which a partner with greater experience of being out, participating in same-sex relationships or navigating LGBTQ+ communities claims authority over what constitutes an authentic identity or a normal LGBTQ+ relationship (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). This chapter extends that insight cautiously to technological and queer-digital experience. Greater familiarity with platforms or privacy systems may contribute to experiential power where it is combined with identity authority and used to present intrusive access as normal, conceal how monitoring is conducted or undermine a less experienced partner's interpretation. The extension is not treated as a replacement for the concept's original formulation.

The chapter also develops the online–offline nexus as a central dimension of Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC). The nexus does not simply mean that abuse occurs in digital and physical settings. It describes how information, threats, restrictions and consequences move between them. Digital monitoring may regulate movement in the home; information gathered online may be used in a face-to-face confrontation; an embodied history of intimidation may give force to a message; and online exposure may affect employment, housing, family relationships or community participation. Research on technology-facilitated coercive control similarly emphasises that digital media extend and reorganise relational power rather than constituting a wholly separate category of harm (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019; Woodlock, 2017).

HCC is used here as a mid-level conceptual framework. It describes how technological infrastructures, embodied conduct, affective expectations and wider inequalities interact within particular patterns of control. It does not claim that technology creates abuse independently or that all digital conflict constitutes coercive control. Its analytical value lies in explaining how apparently minor practices may accumulate, travel across settings and restrict autonomy through the interaction of relational and technological power.

The analysis proceeds through five substantive stages. Section 5.2 examines mobile communication, shared devices and networked domestic technologies as sites of everyday entrapment. Section 5.3 moves into social media, dating applications and queer digital publics, examining visibility, reputation and identity. Section 5.4 considers how COVID-19 intensified physical and technological proximity. Section 5.5 examines age, digital socialisation, outness, racialisation, migration status, HIV-related stigma and professional recognition. Section 5.6 brings these findings together through HCC and the online–offline nexus, before Section 5.7 answers RQ2 and RQ4 and identifies the chapter’s contribution.

5.2 Technologies of Everyday Entrapment

Digital technologies are embedded within the ordinary organisation of intimate relationships. Mobile phones, messaging applications, shared accounts and networked household devices enable partners to remain connected, coordinate daily life and express care. The same technologies can become mechanisms through which availability, privacy and movement are regulated. Within the verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus, digital access and surveillance appeared in 131 comments (65.5 per cent), while recognition, normalisation and relational meaning appeared in 121 comments (60.5 per cent). Because comments could receive more than one thematic code, these categories overlap. They indicate prominence within the corpus and are not prevalence estimates of victimisation among gay and bisexual men.

The coercive significance of these practices did not arise from technology alone. Messaging frequently, sharing a location or allowing a partner to use a device may form part of consensual intimacy. What distinguished consensual sharing from coercive regulation was the absence of meaningful choice, the consequences attached to refusal and the connection between the practice and wider expectations of loyalty, transparency or obedience. A request became controlling where it operated as a demand, where access was asymmetrical or where resistance produced interrogation, threats, punishment or intensified monitoring.

The incremental reinterpretation of persistent communication was especially clear in the survey material: “At first I thought his constant text check-ins meant I was always on his mind, but I soon realized he was using my phone screen to invade my workplace and dictate my mood from afar” (Participant 029, Gay, aged 18–24, Mixed / Other) The movement from “cute” to “exhausting” identifies a process rather than a single abusive event. Attention was initially interpreted as care. Repetition then transformed reassurance into obligation, requiring the respondent to remain continuously available. This progression is consistent with research showing that digitally mediated control is often embedded within ordinary communication and becomes legible through cumulative effects rather than a single dramatic incident (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Woodlock, 2017).

Practitioners described a comparable process. A caseworker in an LGBTQ+ service explained that one client understood constant communication as evidence of love, while his partner expected replies every few minutes and responded to delay with accusations: “He said, ‘We talk all day, that’s how I know he loves me.’ But what that meant was that his partner expected replies every five minutes, even during work hours. If he didn’t respond, he’d get messages like, ‘Who are you with?’ or ‘You must be busy with someone else.’ It became this 24/7 performance of reassurance.” (P12, caseworker, LGBTQ+ service, four years’ experience, gay man)

The coercive element was not the volume of communication alone. It was the conversion of responsiveness into a relationship rule enforced through suspicion. The abusive partner set the required rhythm of contact, while the victim-survivor became responsible for preventing jealousy and regulating the partner’s emotional response. A delayed reply became a relational failure for which the victim-survivor was held accountable.

This process demonstrates how practices of love sustain the rules of an abusive relationship. Requests for check-ins can carry genuine meanings of care, but they become disciplinary where love must be demonstrated through uninterrupted accessibility. Refusal is then interpreted as disloyalty rather than as the exercise of a boundary. The controlling partner’s willingness to escalate when reassurance is withheld reveals that the relationship is operating on his terms (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Practitioners also described more intensive forms of digital microregulation in which clients were required to provide visual or locational proof throughout the day. A counsellor recalled a client who sent a nightly photograph to confirm that he was at home: "One of my clients said his boyfriend wanted to know when he got home, so he'd send a picture of himself on the sofa every night. Eventually, he realised that the boyfriend would comment on things in the background: 'Why is that wine glass there?' 'Who were you with earlier?' That's when he realised it wasn't just care." (P01, counsellor, voluntary LGBTQ+ service, ten years' experience, gay man)

The photograph initially provided reassurance but gradually became investigative material. The client was required not only to confirm his location but to expose his surroundings to inspection. Details in the background were removed from context and transformed into evidence. Digital traces do not interpret themselves; they acquire meaning through the relationship. Read receipts, timestamps, profile activity and photographs may appear objective, but the controlling partner can assign them a meaning that the victim-survivor is then required to disprove.

Location sharing illustrates the same distinction. Live-location functions may be used consensually for safety or coordination. They become coercive where access is continuous, where deviations from expected routines prompt accusations or where disabling the feature generates retaliation. In such circumstances, the technology does not physically prevent movement, but it makes movement subject to explanation and therefore narrows practical autonomy. This combination of visibility and anticipated consequences is central to digital coercive control (Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

The interaction between technology and embodied control was especially visible within shared homes. Smart speakers, tablets, doorbell cameras, calendars and streaming accounts were often introduced as technologies of convenience. Yet their integration created additional routes for observation. A caseworker described a client's account of smart speakers within the home: "We have Alexa in every room, and I thought it was cute that he wanted us connected. But then I started noticing that whenever I was on a call, he'd comment later about what I'd said. He was listening in without me realising. Eventually, he'd use that to start arguments, saying, 'I heard you talking to your ex.'" (P03, caseworker, LGBTQ+ charity, eight years' experience, bisexual man)

This account demonstrates digital coercion in physical proximity. Technology was not used merely to overcome distance; it expanded the partner's capacity to observe while both men occupied the same home. Information gathered through the device then entered face-to-face arguments. The digital and embodied components were mutually reinforcing, showing why a division between "online" and "offline" conduct fails to capture the operation of control.

Access to passwords and accounts also acquired symbolic meaning. A counsellor in the statutory sector described clients who understood complete access as proof that committed partners had no secrets: "Clients often said things like, 'We share everything, so there are no secrets.' But that meant he had no digital autonomy. He couldn't have private messages or even browse online without feeling watched. It became part of the relationship rule: love meant no privacy." (P27, counsellor, statutory sector, 12 years' experience, gay man)

The moralisation of transparency made privacy difficult to defend. Withholding a password could be represented as proof of infidelity; while asking for personal space could be framed as emotional withdrawal. Consent to access was therefore not a single decision. It had to remain reversible. Where withdrawal was treated as a breach of love, technical permission ceased to demonstrate continuing relational consent.

Same-sex relationships could make this inequality harder to identify where access appeared reciprocal. Couples might both possess passwords, both share locations or both inspect activity. Yet behavioural symmetry did not establish equality of power. A project manager in an LGBTQ+ charity explained: "They'd say, 'We're equal, we both do it.' But when we unpacked it, one of them was terrified of saying no, because refusing would start an argument or risk the partner outing him online. So yes, they both shared, but one didn't have a choice." (P19, project manager, LGBTQ+ charity, nine years' experience, gay man)

This distinction is illuminated by Donovan and Barnes' (2020) concept of space for reaction. LGBTQ+ victim-survivors may resist, retaliate or use harmful conduct while attempting to create room for autonomy or re-establish some equality. A victim-survivor may inspect a partner's device in response to repeated accusations, send hostile messages during an escalation or continue replying because disengagement

is expected to provoke further harm. Such actions may remain harmful, but their occurrence does not establish that both partners exercise equivalent control.

The relevant questions are who established the relationship rules, who feared the consequences of refusal, what function each action performed and who retained the capacity to impose cumulative restrictions. Two partners may both send messages or inspect devices while only one determines whether the other can communicate, move or disengage. Space for reaction preserves the victim-survivor's agency without collapsing resistance into equal responsibility for the course of abuse.

The language of equality has particular political significance in relationships between men. Equality is a relational ideal and a claim through which same-sex relationships have sought recognition. Yet an assumption of inherent equality can obscure asymmetries in economic resources, technological knowledge, outness, immigration position or community credibility. The absence of gender difference does not produce an absence of power.

Digital access could also enable identity-based coercion because phones and accounts hold intimate images, health information, sexual conversations and contact details for family or colleagues. An outreach coordinator described threats involving private photographs and HIV status: "One client's ex threatened to post private photos on Instagram if he ever left. Another said he'd message the family WhatsApp group to tell them about his HIV status. That kind of digital threat is devastating. It's not just about humiliation; it's about losing control over your story." (P06, outreach coordinator, community organisation, five years' experience, gay man)

The threat involved more than monitoring conduct. It gave the abusive partner authority over how identity and intimate information might be disclosed. The effect depended on offline audiences and consequences: family relationships, employment, health stigma and community participation. Digital access therefore expanded control over narrative autonomy, understood as the capacity to determine what information about oneself is shared, with whom and on what terms.

Taken together, the survey theme counts and practitioner accounts show that everyday technologies became coercive where privacy was made morally suspect, accessibility became compulsory and resistance carried consequences. Messaging platforms, location services and shared devices could become infrastructures through

which one partner established the authority to question, interpret and regulate the other. Their cumulative impact extended beyond the screen, shaping movement, communication and participation in social life.

5.3 Visibility and Control in Digital Public Spaces

Technology-facilitated control was not confined to private devices or the shared home. Social media platforms, dating applications and digitally networked queer communities extended relational power into spaces where identity, desirability, reputation and belonging became visible. For gay and bisexual men, these environments may provide recognition and connection unavailable in other settings. The same visibility can be used for monitoring, compulsory disclosure, humiliation and reputational control.

Identity, visibility and reputation appeared in 63 of the 200 verified comments (31.5 per cent), while sexual and image-based coercion appeared in 10 comments (5 per cent). These figures indicate thematic prominence within the corpus, not the proportion of gay and bisexual men who have experienced outing or image-based abuse. They nevertheless establish visibility as a distinct site of relational control.

Practitioners described an expectation of public intimacy through which relationships had to be continually demonstrated online. Posting photographs or tagging a partner can be consensual practices of affection. Within coercive relationships, they became obligations requiring visible proof of commitment. A policy officer from a national charity explained: “Clients would say things like, ‘He wants me to post us together so people know I’m taken,’ which sounds romantic. But then, when they split, that same person threatens to post private messages or photos. Visibility becomes the weapon. It’s how he keeps control.” (P13, policy officer, national charity, eight years’ experience, heterosexual woman)

Public recognition and threatened exposure were therefore connected. A display initially framed as affirmation could establish the abusive partner’s entitlement to regulate how the relationship appeared. Social-media activity then became subject to scrutiny: who had been followed, which photographs had been liked and whether a post received a sufficiently affectionate response. A counsellor described a client who eventually deleted his accounts to avoid conflict: “For one of my clients, every argument started with social media: ‘Why didn’t you comment on my post?’ or ‘Why are you following him?’ It was like every click became evidence. Eventually, he deleted

all his accounts just to avoid trouble.” (P21, counsellor, voluntary sector, five years’ experience, gay man)

Withdrawal reduced immediate conflict but also restricted friendship, community and self-expression. The consequence was therefore material and social, even though the regulatory practice occurred through a platform. The victim-survivor adapted his participation in public life to manage anticipated retaliation.

Dating applications created a related but distinct terrain. Platforms such as Grindr, Scruff and Tinder can facilitate sexual connection, friendship and access to community, particularly where offline opportunities are limited. Their online-status and proximity features also make presence continuously observable. Within coercive relationships, simply appearing online could be interpreted as proof of infidelity. A community practitioner described a partner who repeatedly captured profile activity: “I had a client whose partner would screenshot his Grindr profile whenever he logged on and send it to him saying, ‘So this is what you’re doing tonight?’ Even if he was just browsing. It became constant interrogation.” (P26, practitioner, community-based service, nine years’ experience, bisexual man)

The screenshot appeared to offer objective proof, but it could show only that a profile was visible or active. It did not establish the meaning of the activity. The abusive partner imposed an interpretation and required the client to disprove it. Mutually negotiated expectations around exclusivity or app use are legitimate; coercion emerges where one partner monitors activity, defines ambiguous platform data as guilt and attaches consequences to that interpretation.

Across social media and dating applications, control involved narrative authority: the capacity to determine how the relationship and the individuals within it were represented. Screenshots could be selected and removed from context, posts could depict the victim-survivor as unstable or unfaithful, and indirect messages could establish a public account of separation before the victim-survivor disclosed abuse. Digital records appeared factual while their circulation remained controlled by the person choosing what others would see.

The management of visibility became particularly coercive where it involved outing or the disclosure of intimate or health information. A survey account involving threatened publication of photographs and location data showed how family discovery could carry

significant consequences: “He kept taking untagged photos of us in public and threatening to upload them with exact location check-ins, casually reminding me how much I had to lose if my family found out.” (Participant 127, Gay, aged 25–34, White British / Other White) A related survey account linked threats to leak private health records with a help-seeking response that treated privacy-protecting technology as suspicious: “When I brought printouts of his threats to leak my private health records, the intake worker asked why I was using encrypted messaging apps in the first place, implying my desire for privacy was inherently suspicious.” (Participant 200, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The coercive force of these threats lay in anticipated social interpretation. The abusive partner’s power derived from access to information, knowledge of the audiences that mattered and the capacity to remove disclosure from the victim-survivor’s control. Biomedical developments do not eliminate the reputational consequences of HIV stigma, just as public identification as gay or bisexual does not remove the harm of exposing intimate images or sexual communications.

Sedgwick’s (1990) analysis of the closet remains relevant because disclosure is selective and contextual rather than a single transition from secrecy to openness. A person may be out to friends but not relatives, employers or members of a religious community. Digital platforms can collapse these audiences, enabling information intended for one setting to travel into another. The harm therefore involves loss of control over context as well as the content disclosed.

Practitioners reported that mainstream responses sometimes reduced these threats to unwanted communication. A social worker described advice to block the abusive partner: “When clients told mainstream agencies their partner threatened to post their nudes or out them online, the response was often, ‘Just block him.’ That shows a complete misunderstanding of what that threat means. It’s not just harassment; it’s identity violence.” (P15, social worker, statutory sector, 16 years’ experience, gay man)

Blocking may stop contact through one account but cannot recover material already possessed by the abusive partner or prevent circulation through alternative accounts and shared networks. It also does not address anticipatory fear. Scholarship on technology-facilitated sexual violence similarly emphasises that threatened

distribution can be coercive before any image is shared because possession itself becomes leverage over sexual, relational and social autonomy (Henry and Powell, 2018; Powell and Henry, 2017).

Dating applications could also be used for impersonation and reputational manipulation. A health-service liaison described a partner altering another man's Grindr profile to make sexual statements he had not chosen: "He'd log into Grindr on his partner's phone and change his profile to say things like, 'Looking for bareback sex now' or 'Cumdump slut'. It was done to shame him, to damage his reputation in the community." (P17, health service liaison, NHS, 12 years' experience, gay man)

This conduct did more than misrepresent sexual preferences. It repositioned the victim-survivor within a networked sexual community, exposed him to contact he had not chosen and altered how others might interpret him. The profile became a form of seized identity.

Control also operated through indirect public narratives. An independent sexual violence adviser described posts that avoided naming the victim-survivor but were recognisable to shared contacts: "We've seen cases where the abuser posts vague tweets or memes like, 'Some people can't handle rejection,' and everyone in their circle knows who it's about. It's a way of socially isolating the victim without ever naming them." (P09, independent sexual violence adviser, voluntary sector, 11 years' experience, gay man)

The indirectness provided deniability while still transmitting a narrative. The victim-survivor could struggle to challenge a post in which he was not named, even though shared contacts understood the reference. Reputation was regulated through suggestion, and the social network became part of the coercive environment.

These findings demonstrate that visibility was not simply a background condition of queer intimacy. It became a resource that could be demanded, withheld, manipulated or threatened. Compelled visibility required the victim-survivor to display the relationship or remain observable as proof of commitment. Controlled visibility gave the abusive partner authority over what information circulated and how the victim-survivor was represented. Both restricted narrative autonomy.

The online–offline nexus is evident because digital exposure produced consequences within families, workplaces and communities. The credibility of an online threat often

depended on the abusive partner's offline knowledge of vulnerabilities and social networks. Technology did not create a separate arena of harm; it enabled relational power to circulate across intimate, communal and institutional settings.

5.4 COVID-19 and Digital Control

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the spatial, temporal and technological organisation of intimate life. Lockdown measures restricted movement, reduced access to social and professional networks and increased reliance on digital systems for communication and work. International research identified increased reports of domestic abuse during periods of pandemic restriction, although patterns varied across settings and data sources (Piquero et al., 2021). Within this study, the pandemic is not treated as the origin of new forms of control. It is analysed as a context that intensified existing practices by compressing physical and digital proximity.

The verified open-text corpus did not include a separate structured measure of pandemic-related victimisation, and unsupported subgroup percentages have therefore been removed. COVID-19 and working-from-home conditions appeared within comments coded under broader themes, particularly online–offline continuity and hybrid harm, which appeared in 56 comments (28 per cent). These comments cannot establish the prevalence of lockdown-related abuse but show that pandemic conditions formed part of some respondents' interpretations.

The collapse of routine distance was captured succinctly in one survey account: "We were in each other's faces 24/7" (Participant 114, Gay, aged 18–24, White British / Other White). On its own, this comment does not establish coercive control; rather, its analytical significance lies in illustrating the disappearance of ordinary intervals of separation that might otherwise provide temporary relief, privacy or autonomy. Practitioner evidence helps situate this loss of distance within a wider context of surveillance and confinement. An outreach officer described the contradiction between public-health messaging and the realities of unsafe homes, recalling that "everyone was told to stay home, stay safe, but for some men, home was where the surveillance lived" (P20, outreach officer, statutory sector, 13 years' experience, gay man). Read together, these accounts show how pandemic restrictions could intensify the conditions within which monitoring operated by reducing opportunities for physical

separation while simultaneously increasing dependence on shared domestic and digital spaces.

Practitioners described a form of hyper-proximity in which both physical and digital co-presence became difficult to interrupt. Work, commuting and social activities had previously provided temporary distance. Lockdown removed many of these breaks. A caseworker recalled: "One client said, 'I used to get a break when he went to work. But during lockdown, he was always there, on the sofa, watching me. Even when he was in another room, he'd text to ask what I was doing.'" (P28, caseworker, voluntary sector, six years' experience, heterosexual woman)

Digital communication did not compensate for distance in this account; it intensified control within physical proximity. Messaging reproduced scrutiny across the home, while knowledge that the partner was nearby gave each message an embodied immediacy. This demonstrates the online–offline nexus as an interaction rather than a sequence of separate acts.

Public-health language could also be appropriated to legitimise restriction. A statutory counsellor explained: "He'd say, 'I'm just keeping you safe from the virus,' when what he meant was, 'I don't want you talking to anyone.' COVID became the perfect excuse for isolation." (P27, counsellor, statutory sector, 12 years' experience, gay man) The broader moral authority attached to safety allowed isolation to be framed as responsible partnership. Resistance could be portrayed as selfish or dangerous. The pandemic therefore supplied controlling partners with a socially legitimate vocabulary through which existing restrictions could be intensified.

Technology also became more deeply embedded in practical domestic coordination. Passwords provided for grocery orders; shared locations used for authorised walks and access to remote-working systems could expand beyond their original purpose. An outreach coordinator described this incremental shift: "Clients would say, 'He needed my password so he could order groceries while I was working,' but then he started checking my emails. Or 'We shared locations so we could meet for our walks,' and suddenly he was tracking me all day." (P06, outreach coordinator, community organisation, five years' experience, gay man)

The initial access appeared practical and specific. Its expansion into email checking or continuous tracking demonstrates how temporary permission could be transformed

into a general entitlement. Because the original arrangement was reasonable within pandemic conditions, the point at which it became coercive was difficult to identify.

Heightened digital contact was also culturally normalised. Video calls and persistent messaging were widely used to manage isolation, making frequency alone an inadequate indicator of harm. A domestic abuse practitioner explained: "It was so hard to help clients see the line. Everyone was using tech to stay close. So when a partner wanted to FaceTime constantly, it didn't seem odd. It seemed loving." (P30, domestic abuse practitioner, voluntary sector, eight years' experience, gay man)

The relevant distinction was whether contact remained negotiable. Frequent video calls could provide companionship; they became coercive where participation was compulsory, where the camera was used to inspect the person or surroundings, or where failure to answer produced punishment. The pandemic made these conditions harder to assess because intensive contact had become socially expected.

Lockdown also weakened informal systems of witnessing. Friends and colleagues could no longer observe changes through ordinary face-to-face contact, and digital communication was often monitored. A domestic abuse advocate reported: "A lot of my clients said they couldn't reach out because their partner was always there. Even if they messaged a friend, he'd ask to see their phone. The isolation wasn't just physical. It was digital too." (P02, domestic abuse advocate, statutory sector, six years' experience, heterosexual woman) Possessing a phone did not therefore guarantee a private route to support. Calls could be overheard, histories inspected and notifications questioned. The loss of external witnessing also strengthened the abusive partner's authority to define events within the home.

Practitioners were concerned that some practices persisted after restrictions ended. A housing advocate described shared phone access continuing because it had become habitual: "Even after restrictions lifted, clients said things like, 'We still share our phones because it's what we got used to.' The line between togetherness and control got blurred and never went back." (P08, housing advocate, statutory sector, 14 years' experience, gay man) This is a process of habituation rather than proof that every pandemic practice was abusive. Repetition could transform a temporary arrangement into a relationship rule. Once continuous accessibility had become familiar, a request for renewed privacy could be interpreted as withdrawal or concealment.

The pandemic material therefore develops HCC by showing how coercive patterns adapt to wider social conditions. Physical confinement, technological dependency, emotional obligation and institutional assumptions operated together. COVID-19 accelerated existing dynamics and recalibrated what could appear ordinary, but the coercive meaning of each practice remained dependent on consent, power and consequences.

5.5 Recognition and Difference in Digital Control

Technology-facilitated abuse does not become recognisable in the same way for all gay and bisexual men. The meanings attached to messaging, passwords, location access and visibility are shaped by age, digital experience, outness, racialisation, migration status, HIV status and access to institutional credibility. These factors affect both the consequences of resistance and the likelihood that a disclosure will be recognised. Recognition is therefore socially situated rather than a neutral response to a fixed technological act.

The age-disaggregated vignette analysis in Chapter 4 provides the primary structured evidence for RQ4. It identified descriptive variation between the four age groups, but not a consistent younger–older gradient. Agreement that the vignette behaviours were normal remained comparatively low across all age categories and varied according to the behaviour being considered. Respondents aged 25–34 recorded somewhat higher normality classifications for several practices, while other scenarios produced different age patterns. The comparison therefore does not establish that younger respondents generally normalised digitally intrusive conduct, nor that age causes a particular interpretation. Chronological age is not treated as equivalent to digital socialisation: platform use, relationship history, employment, class and individual technological experience may all shape what appears ordinary or expected within digitally mediated intimacy.

Practitioners nevertheless perceived differences in the language used by some clients. A support worker described younger clients treating constant connectivity as a baseline of intimacy: “The under-thirties saw 24/7 communication as totally normal. They’d say, ‘We’re just always online together.’ For them, being reachable wasn’t control. It was just how relationships work now.” (P05, support worker, voluntary sector, nine years’ experience, gay man) An independent sexual violence adviser

described stronger privacy expectations among some older clients: “When I spoke to older gay men, they often said things like, ‘He’s on my phone too much,’ or ‘I don’t like sharing my location.’ There was more resistance to the idea that love means being permanently visible.” (P09, independent sexual violence adviser, voluntary sector, 11 years’ experience, gay man)

These observations are not treated as representative of every younger or older man. Younger clients may possess substantial technical competence while finding it difficult to identify coercion normalised as intimacy. Older clients may articulate clearer privacy boundaries while experiencing technical dependency or uncertainty about how access is maintained. Digital competence and recognition of coercion are distinct.

A national trainer described the challenge of questioning normalised practices without pathologising consensual intimacy: “If someone doesn’t see what’s happening as control, it’s almost impossible to challenge it. When constant messaging and sharing are normalised, even asking someone to reflect on it can sound like you’re pathologising love.” (P22, trainer, national organisation, 11 years’ experience, lesbian woman) The analytical distinction is therefore not between digitally intensive and digitally restrained relationships. It is between practices open to mutual negotiation and practices whose meaning is controlled by one partner. Continuous contact becomes coercive where one partner establishes the required level of availability and imposes consequences for disengagement.

Degree of outness further shaped the consequences of digital visibility. Gay and bisexual men may disclose their sexuality selectively across friends, relatives, workplaces or religious communities. A partner with access to photographs, messages or contact lists can threaten to collapse these audiences. An advocacy worker described outing threats as paralysing because clients anticipated consequences beyond the platform.

Structural stigma could also be incorporated into the relationship as a claim of protection. A community counsellor recalled a client who understood message checking as protection from exposure: “One client said, ‘He checks my messages because he wants to protect me from people outing me.’ There’s this twisted logic where the person causing the harm is also seen as the shield.” (P16, counsellor, community-based service, ten years’ experience, bisexual man) External vulnerability

became part of the internal justification for surveillance. The controlling partner presented himself as protection against a danger he was simultaneously capable of intensifying.

Racialisation and migration status also shaped the credibility and coercive force of digital threats. This was particularly evident where an abusive partner could invoke institutional insecurity beyond the relationship itself. C036 described being warned that reporting the abuse would result in his partner challenging the legitimacy of their relationship and contacting immigration authorities: *“He told me if I ever reported him he’d say our relationship wasn’t real and contact immigration. I didn’t know if he could, but I couldn’t take the risk”* (gay or bisexual male survey respondent, C036). The threat did not need to be legally realistic to regulate behaviour. Its force lay in uncertainty and in the potential severity of the consequences, allowing the abusive partner to mobilise anticipated institutional vulnerability as an additional source of control.

Racialised expectations could operate similarly by shaping how digital evidence was expected to be interpreted by others. C055 explained: *“As a man of colour, I already feel watched. When he said he’d post screenshots and say I was violent, I believed people would side with him”* (Participant 055, Gay, aged 45+, Black / Black British). Here, the coercive significance of the screenshot extended beyond its digital content. Selectively presented material could acquire credibility through racialised assumptions about aggression, meaning that the threat depended partly upon the social meanings attached to the person represented. Crenshaw’s (1991) account of intersectionality is useful precisely because this dynamic cannot be understood by simply adding racism to an otherwise complete account of digital abuse. Racialised institutional and social expectations helped constitute why the threatened disclosure was credible in the first place.

Practitioner evidence reinforced this concern about racialised misidentification. A statutory caseworker recalled that some clients anticipated that disclosure would confirm stereotypes rather than secure recognition of victimisation: *“A few clients said, ‘If I tell people he hit me or hacked me, they’ll just think that’s what Black men do.’ So they stay quiet”* (P24, caseworker, statutory sector, eight years’ experience, heterosexual woman). Recognition, disclosure and institutional validation are therefore distinct processes. A man may recognise coercion while simultaneously

judging that reporting carries a risk of racialised disbelief, counter-allegation or perpetrator misidentification. Anticipated misrecognition can consequently become part of the controlling environment itself.

Migration-related dependency could also be intensified through control over digital and administrative infrastructures. A senior practitioner described a client whose partner managed bills, Wi-Fi and online visa processes before excluding him from those systems when he attempted to leave. The client reportedly said, *"I don't exist anywhere anymore"* after being locked out of every account (P10, senior practitioner, statutory sector, 15 years' experience, heterosexual man). Digital exclusion in this account affected much more than technological access: it disrupted communication, housing arrangements and aspects of legal and administrative presence. Technological dependency should therefore not be reduced to an individual lack of digital skill. It can be relationally produced where one partner accumulates control over credentials, information and essential administrative systems.

The weaponisation of health-related information revealed a comparable interaction between digital access and wider stigma. A health-service liaison described clients whose partners threatened to circulate screenshots of medication or clinic reminders, characterising this as *"a modern form of blackmail: 'If you leave, everyone will know'"* (P17, health service liaison, NHS, 12 years' experience, gay man). The coercive force of the threat derived not from HIV as a clinical condition but from the continuing social consequences attached to unwanted disclosure. Digital systems increased the speed, reach and potential audience of that disclosure, while the abusive partner retained control over when, where and to whom the information might travel. Intersectional analysis therefore requires attention to the institutions, communities and audiences into which information may circulate, rather than focusing only on the device or platform through which it is transmitted.

These accounts concerning race, migration and HIV status were not numerically dominant within the corpus and should not be treated as representative of all men occupying these positions. Their analytical importance lies elsewhere: they demonstrate that apparently similar technological acts may acquire substantially different coercive force depending upon the wider inequalities, institutional dependencies and forms of stigma within which they operate.

Professional interpretation was itself uneven. Some practitioners recognised retrospectively that heteronormative assumptions had shaped their initial interpretation of digitally mediated conduct. A service coordinator reflected that when a man described his partner demanding passwords, she initially thought, *“Well, that’s how gay couples work, they’re open,”* before recognising the need to *“unlearn that bias”* (P18, service coordinator, voluntary sector, six years’ experience, heterosexual woman). The assumption that openness was intrinsic to gay male relationships effectively converted intrusion into cultural normality. Password demands could therefore be minimised not because their coercive potential was invisible in principle, but because they were interpreted through assumptions about how gay relationships were expected to operate.

A support worker articulated the corresponding need to understand coercion from within the relational dynamics of same-sex relationships rather than mechanically comparing them with heterosexual scripts: *“It’s not about comparing gay abuse to straight abuse. It’s about understanding what control looks like when there’s no script for it”* (P05, support worker, voluntary sector, nine years’ experience, gay man). The phrase *“no script”* should not be taken to mean that same-sex relationships lack norms or expectations. The data instead revealed powerful relationship rules concerning equality, openness, masculinity, loyalty and transparency. The difficulty was that mainstream frameworks did not always recognise how those norms could themselves become coercively organised. Queer criminology is useful here because it draws attention to the assumptions through which particular victims, relationships and forms of harm become institutionally intelligible (Ball, 2016).

This difficulty can also be understood as a form of epistemic misrecognition. Where established interpretive frameworks continue to centre heterosexual and visibly gendered relationship dynamics, queer forms of coercion may appear more ambiguous or less credible. Medina’s (2013) work on epistemic injustice is therefore relevant because the problem concerns the unequal conditions under which an experience becomes recognisable as knowledge. The issue is not that practitioners or victim-survivors are incapable of understanding harm, but that the interpretive resources available to them may be poorly aligned with the relationships and technologies through which that harm is organised.

Recognition became more effective where practitioners reconstructed patterns rather than assessing isolated acts. A password demand acquired different meaning when connected to repeated accusations, threats of outing or fear of refusing access. Reciprocal location sharing likewise changed meaning where only one partner could withdraw without punishment. This pattern-based approach is central to HCC because it reconnects technological practices to relationship rules, unequal consequences and wider structures of vulnerability. Rather than asking whether a particular digital act is inherently abusive, it asks how access, refusal, interpretation and consequence operate together within the wider configuration of control.

5.6 Discussion

The preceding analysis demonstrates that TFA among gay and bisexual men cannot be understood adequately as a list of digital behaviours. Messaging, password access, location sharing and online visibility acquired coercive meaning through the wider relationship. The central question was not whether a technology was used, but who set the conditions of its use, whether consent could be withdrawn and what consequences followed resistance.

HCC provides a mid-level framework for interpreting this configuration. It does not propose that technology has created an entirely new form of coercive control. Rather, it specifies how technological infrastructures, embodied conduct, emotional obligation and structural inequalities may interact to extend the reach, continuity and interpretive force of control. This builds on Stark's (2007) emphasis on cumulative restriction of liberty while adapting the analysis to relationships in which a heterosexual gender hierarchy cannot be assumed.

The online–offline nexus is a central dimension of HCC. Digital information may trigger an embodied confrontation; fear produced through prior offline conduct may compel compliance with a message; and an online disclosure may alter housing, employment or community participation. The nexus therefore identifies circulation between domains rather than simply the co-existence of digital and physical incidents.

Relationship rules explain how control became organised. Demands for responsiveness, access and public affirmation operationalised the first rule that the relationship would function on the abusive partner's terms. Accusations that delay

caused jealousy or that privacy provoked conflict enacted the second rule that the victim-survivor was responsible for the partner, the relationship and the abuse. Practices of love connected these rules to attachment by making compliance a test of care (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Experiential power contributes a more specific account of identity authority. A partner with greater experience of being out, navigating LGBTQ+ relationships or participating in queer communities may claim the authority to define what is authentic or normal. The data support a cautious technological extension where platform expertise was combined with identity authority: for example, where a more experienced partner described surveillance as simply what gay couples do or used technical knowledge to undermine the other partner's interpretation. Technical competence alone is not experiential power; its coercive significance depends on how it is mobilised within identity and relationship asymmetries (Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The analysis also clarifies the relationship between reciprocity and power. Apparent two-way behaviour cannot be treated as automatic evidence of mutual abuse. Space for reaction directs attention to conduct used in resistance and to attempts to create room for autonomy. The distinction depends on pattern, fear, motive, consequence and who retains the capacity to enforce the relationship rules. This avoids both romanticising harmful resistance and converting all conflict into false equivalence.

The moralisation of digital care was another mechanism of HCC. Accessibility, transparency and immediate response were treated as evidence of being a loving partner. Boundaries were cast as suspicious. The concept describes an empirical process rather than invoking a separate moral-economy framework: digital care became moralised when the victim-survivor's worth was assessed through compliance with the abusive partner's technological expectations.

Digital coercion also reorganised presence. Technology could intensify control within a shared home through smart devices or maintain a credible sense of presence across platforms when the abusive partner was absent. Harris and Woodlock (2019) identify spacelessness as a distinctive feature of digital coercive control, while Woodlock (2017) demonstrates how technology can create a sense of perpetrator omnipresence. The present findings extend this insight by showing how omnipresence is shaped by queer social networks, identity disclosure and shared digital publics.

Visibility formed another organising mechanism. Control involved not only observing a partner but managing how he was observed by others. Compelled visibility required public proof of the relationship or continuous accessibility. Controlled visibility involved deciding what information would circulate and how the victim-survivor would be represented. Both restricted narrative autonomy, particularly where outing, HIV disclosure or intimate images were available as leverage.

The intersectional findings show why technological affordances do not produce uniform harm. A screenshot, profile or health notification may carry different consequences according to race, migration position, outness, employment and community context. Technology provides routes of circulation, but existing structures give the threat its force. HCC is therefore irreducibly relational and structural rather than technologically determinist.

Practitioner knowledge was likewise shaped by organisational location. Practitioners in LGBTQ+ specialist or LGBTQ+ domestic abuse settings were generally more likely to connect dating-app monitoring, outing threats and visibility control to identity abuse. Some practitioners in generic or non-specialist settings initially approached comparable conduct as harassment, communication difficulty or relationship conflict. This was not an absolute division, and domestic abuse expertise outside LGBTQ+ services could support sophisticated recognition. The variation nevertheless demonstrates the value of knowledge combining domestic abuse expertise with familiarity with queer identities, digital cultures and community networks.

Treating practitioners as situated interpreters does not diminish their expertise. It recognises that professional categories are produced within organisational remits and service histories. The same account may become legible as stalking, safeguarding, relationship counselling or domestic abuse depending on where it is heard. HCC therefore has implications not only for identifying behaviours but for the institutional pathways through which those behaviours are translated.

The legal context also requires precision. Controlling or coercive behaviour was criminalised in England and Wales through section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 established a broader statutory framework and amended the offence, including its application beyond the former cohabitation limitation. The analytical issue raised by this chapter is therefore not formal legal

exclusion of post-separation conduct, but the practical difficulty of reconstructing cumulative technologically mediated behaviour as a patterned course of control (Serious Crime Act 2015; Domestic Abuse Act 2021).

Assessment should consequently move beyond asking whether a particular technology was involved. Practitioners need to establish who controls access, whether permission remains reversible, what happens when a boundary is asserted and how digital conduct connects to embodied intimidation or identity-related threats. Technical safety measures may be necessary, but they are insufficient where changing a password or disabling a feature risk alerting the abusive partner or leaves the wider relational pattern intact.

The conceptual contribution of HCC is to describe how coercive power may be assembled across bodies, devices, relationships and institutions. Its hybrid character does not arise simply because abuse occurs online and offline. It arises because digital and embodied forms of power become mutually constitutive: digital information shapes offline encounters, embodied fear compels digital compliance, and structural inequalities give intimate threats credibility. This framework does not replace feminist theories of coercive control or claim universal application. It uses queer criminological analysis to identify how control operates where gender difference does not provide a complete script. It remains grounded in the limits of this study: a verified open-text corpus and practitioner accounts rather than longitudinal victim-survivor interviews. Its value is explanatory rather than predictive.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how TFA was embedded within the organisation of intimacy among gay and bisexual men. It has shown that mobile communication, shared devices, social media, dating applications and networked domestic systems did not acquire coercive significance solely from their technical functions. Their meaning depended on consent, reciprocity, relational context and the consequences of refusal.

In answer to RQ2, the verified corpus and practitioner accounts identified interconnected forms of TFA including persistent communication, unauthorised access to messages and devices, password pressure, location monitoring, surveillance through dating applications, scrutiny of social-media activity, smart-home

monitoring, intimate-image threats, outing, HIV-status disclosure, impersonation and reputational manipulation. These forms were not experienced or interpreted as isolated digital incidents. They operated cumulatively and moved across domestic, public and institutional spaces.

The relationship rules framework clarified why apparently caring practices could become coercive. The abusive partner established the terms of accessibility and transparency, while the victim-survivor was made responsible for providing reassurance and preventing escalation. Practices of love connected compliance to care. The point at which a practice became coercive was visible in the response to resistance: whether the victim-survivor could withdraw access, delay a reply or establish privacy without punishment.

The chapter also demonstrated that visibility was a specific terrain of control. Gay and bisexual men's access to digital community and identity affirmation could become a vulnerability where a partner controlled intimate information or overlapping social networks. Outing and health-status threats restricted the victim-survivor's authority over the timing, audience and meaning of disclosure. Control therefore involved narrative power as well as surveillance. COVID-19 intensified these dynamics by reducing ordinary distance and increasing reliance on digital communication. Pandemic conditions did not create coercive control, but they provided new justifications for restriction, weakened external witnessing and allowed temporary forms of access to become habitual relationship expectations.

In answer to RQ4, the findings identified age-related variation in how digitally mediated relationship practices were interpreted, but not a consistent generational divide. The structured analysis showed that normality classifications remained comparatively low across all four age groups and varied by behaviour rather than following a uniform younger–older gradient. This does not make age analytically irrelevant. Rather, the findings suggest that chronological age operates alongside different histories of digital socialisation, platform use, privacy expectations and relationship experience. Practitioner accounts sometimes described stronger generational contrasts in expectations of connectivity and privacy, but these are treated as situated professional observations rather than as confirmation of a fixed age effect. Age therefore provides one dimension of interpretive variation, not a complete measure of technological knowledge, relationship experience or capacity to recognise abuse.

Taken together, these findings develop HCC as a mid-level conceptual framework. HCC explains how technological infrastructures, embodied conduct, relationship rules and wider inequalities can work together to restrict autonomy. The online–offline nexus is central because harm travels across spaces that services and legal categories may treat separately. Digital control becomes materially consequential through its effects on movement, employment, family, community and access to support, while embodied fear gives digital demands their force.

The chapter's contribution is therefore not to claim that all digitally mediated intimacy is dangerous. It is to show why analysis must distinguish negotiated closeness from compelled accessibility and technical permission from continuing consent. Recognition requires reconstruction of pattern, power and consequence rather than reliance on the apparent normality or reciprocity of a single act. Chapter 6 turns specifically to separation and continuity. While this chapter has established that technological infrastructures can preserve relational access beyond immediate physical presence, the next chapter examines how shared accounts, stored information, platform visibility and networked contact may sustain or escalate control after a relationship has formally ended.

Chapter 6: Separation, Continuity, and Technology-Facilitated Abuse

6.1 Separation as an Analytic Lens

Separation is not treated in this chapter as a single moment at which an intimate relationship ends and autonomy is automatically restored. Domestic abuse research and practice recognise that attempted separation and the period following departure may be marked by continuing or escalating risk. Digital technologies complicate this process further because access to a person, their information and their everyday routines may survive the withdrawal of physical proximity. Shared accounts, stored credentials, cloud archives, platform visibility and networked devices can preserve forms of access that were established during the relationship and can be repurposed when one partner attempts to disengage (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

This chapter therefore approaches separation as a relational process through which existing claims to access, knowledge and emotional responsibility are contested. The central issue is not simply whether contact continues after a relationship has ended. It is whether a former partner accepts the withdrawal of relational entitlement: the loss of an assumed right to know where the other person is, inspect his communications, demand a response, influence his social relationships or determine how he is represented to others. Post-separation technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) becomes visible where digital systems are used to resist that withdrawal and to preserve a capacity to intrude, monitor, punish or compel engagement.

The chapter principally addresses RQ2: what forms of technology-facilitated abuse are identified by gay and bisexual men, and how are these situated within broader dynamics of coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces? It develops the analysis in Chapter 5 by examining what happens when the relationship rules that organised digitally mediated intimacy are challenged by attempted or completed separation. Chapter 5 showed how expectations of availability, transparency and access could become embedded in ongoing relationships. Chapter 6 examines how those expectations may persist after their relational legitimacy has been withdrawn.

The verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus provides the primary survey evidence. Two related coding levels are reported in this chapter. Table 3.2 records the nine overarching themes applied across the complete corpus. A later focused review undertaken for the Chapter 6 revision used broader inclusion criteria so that comments could be retained where separation, reaction or help-seeking appeared as a relationship stage, secondary context or consequence. Table 6.1 makes the relationship between these coding levels explicit.

Table 6.1: Relationship between overarching corpus themes and the focused Chapter 6 extraction

Analytical focus	Overarching theme in Table 3.2	Focused Chapter 6 extraction	Reason for difference
Post-separation	36 comments (18.0%)	36 comments (18.0%)	The focused Chapter 6 review retained the same 36 comments while examining separation as a relationship stage, context and consequence in greater analytical depth.
Mutuality and reaction	13 comments (6.5%)	38 comments (19.0%)	Broader review included resistance, retaliation, boundary-setting, counter-allegation and space for reaction.
Help-seeking and response	27 comments (13.5%)	40 comments (20.0%)	Broader review included formal and informal responses, non-reporting and service outcomes coded secondarily.

Note: Each figure counts unique comments once within the relevant category. Categories overlap, so totals do not sum to 200. The focused extraction supports Chapter 6 evidence selection and does not replace the overarching theme frequencies or estimate prevalence.

Practitioner interviews provide supplementary evidence about separation-related cases, professional interpretation and organisational response. Their accounts are treated as situated professional knowledge rather than as direct substitutes for victim-survivor testimony. Practitioners encountered cases through different institutional settings and therefore saw different aspects of the problem. LGBTQ+ specialist practitioners could be particularly attentive to outing, shared queer networks and identity-based threats, while statutory or generic services might encounter the same pattern through categories such as stalking, harassment, safeguarding or relationship conflict. Detailed comparison between service settings is reserved for Chapter 7. Here, practitioner material is used to illuminate how the separation dynamics identified in the survey comments may be encountered and interpreted in practice. The attribution convention established in Chapters 4 and 5 is retained here: survey extracts use the participant number corresponding directly to the original C-code alongside verified

sexual identity, age band and ethnicity, while practitioner extracts retain the P-identifier and professional context. These demographic descriptors contextualise the qualitative evidence and are not treated as explanatory variables unless explicitly examined in the analysis.

Donovan and Hester's (2014, pp. 130–141, 164–165) relationship rules provide the principal relational framework for this analysis. In an abusive relationship, the first rule is that the relationship operates on the abusive partner's terms. The second positions the victim-survivor as responsible for the abusive partner, the relationship and the consequences of abuse. Separation challenges both rules. The person attempting to leave withdraws from the abusive partner's authority to determine the terms of contact and rejects continuing responsibility for reassurance, emotional regulation or the preservation of the relationship. Persistent messaging demands for explanations, threats framed as emotional crisis and monitoring of new contacts can be understood as attempts to re-establish those rules after their legitimacy has been contested.

Practices of love remain relevant because post-separation demands may still be expressed through the language of care, closure, concern or responsibility. A former partner may claim that he needs one final conversation, deserves an explanation or is contacting the victim-survivor because he remains worried about him. Such claims are not inherently abusive. Their coercive significance depends on whether the other person can refuse without being subjected to punishment, surveillance, exposure or escalation. The analysis therefore avoids treating continued contact as abusive solely because it follows separation. It examines who controls whether contact continues, whether boundaries can be enforced and what happens when the victim-survivor attempts to become unavailable. This application follows Donovan and Hester's account of practices of love as the emotional work through which responsibility and relationship rules are sustained (2014, pp. 136–137, 164–165).

Donovan and Barnes' (2020, pp. 23–25) concept of space for reaction is also central. Blocking a number, muting notifications, changing a routine, concealing location information or retaining a tracking application for evidence may all be responses to continuing control. These actions should not be treated automatically as proof of mutual abuse or equivalent digital conduct. Their meaning must be assessed within the wider pattern: who established the expectations, who is attempting to create

distance, whose autonomy is restricted and who retains the capacity to impose consequences.

The chapter develops Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC) as a mid-level conceptual framework by bringing time more explicitly into the online–offline nexus. HCC is not used to claim that all post-separation conflict is coercive control or that technology operates independently of the relationship. Its value lies in explaining how relational power can survive physical departure through persistent access to devices, data, platforms and social audiences. Separation functions as an analytical test of whether control depended on cohabitation or continued through technological and social infrastructures.

The analysis proceeds from the survey corpus to practitioner accounts and then to a relationship-phases heuristic. Section 6.2 examines the post-separation patterns identified in the survey comments. Section 6.3 considers practitioner encounters with separation and escalation. Section 6.4 organises the evidence through a non-linear heuristic of relational ambivalence, attempted separation and post-separation reconfiguration. Section 6.5 examines identity abuse and unequal resources, while Section 6.6 addresses apparent mutuality through space for reaction. Section 6.7 considers help-seeking and formal recognition. Section 6.8 synthesises the findings through the temporal reach of HCC, and Section 6.9 answers RQ2 while acknowledging the chapter's evidential limits.

6.2 Separation in the Survey Open-Text Corpus

The post-separation theme in Table 3.2 appeared in 36 of the 200 comments (18.0 per cent). The focused Chapter 6 review retained these 36 comments for more detailed analysis of attempted separation, post-separation persistence and the consequences of disengagement. These 36 comments referred to attempted separation, immediate post-break-up contact and longer-term forms of digital access or interference. The behaviours discussed included repeated contact through new numbers or alternative platforms, continued monitoring of social-media and location information, residual control over shared accounts and smart-home systems, access to stored cloud data, impersonation, exposure of addresses, interference with employment or income, and threats involving private images or identity-related

information. This count supports the focused evidence map used in this chapter and is not a prevalence estimate.

A central pattern concerned the former partner's refusal to accept that separation had removed his entitlement to information and explanation. The persistence of post-separation accountability was particularly clear in C176, where new contacts remained subject to the former partner's scrutiny: "Even after we split, he insisted I owed him explanations for my new online contacts, claiming my post-breakup behavior proved he was right not to trust me all along." (Participant 176, Gay, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

The significance of this account lies not only in continued communication but in the persistence of a relationship rule. The former partner continued to position the respondent's social life as subject to his interpretation and approval. New online contacts were treated as evidence that retrospectively justified earlier suspicion, while the respondent remained responsible for explaining his conduct after the relationship had ended. Separation had formally removed the basis for that accountability, but the demand reproduced the earlier relationship on the former partner's terms.

This illustrates why post-separation TFA should not be reduced to unwanted messages considered individually. A single request for an explanation may be ambiguous. Within a wider pattern, repeated demands can preserve a relationship of compulsory accountability. The question is whether the recipient is free not to respond. Where silence or refusal leads to circumvention, threats or physical appearance, the communication becomes part of a course of control rather than an unresolved conversation.

Several comments showed that blocking did not create a reliable boundary. The limits of blocking became visible in C105, where technological circumvention was paired with evidence of physical proximity: "Whenever I tried to block him on WhatsApp, he would create a new number and send pictures of the front of my house." (Participant 105, Gay, aged 18–24, Black / Black British)

Blocking was an attempt to withdraw consent to contact and create space. The response combined technological circumvention with evidence of physical proximity. The photographs did not merely communicate that a new number had been created; they demonstrated that the former partner knew where the respondent lived and could

observe the home. The online message therefore acquired force through an offline threat. This movement between platform contact and physical presence is central to the online–offline nexus. The digital act was consequential because it altered the respondent’s understanding of safety within his home.

The comment also demonstrates why apparent reciprocity must be interpreted carefully. Blocking, muting or changing communication settings may appear within an incident-based account as one partner taking action against the other. Yet these practices may constitute space for reaction: attempts to establish a boundary within a pattern where disengagement is not being accepted (Donovan and Barnes, 2020). The relevant asymmetry lies in who is attempting to end contact and who retains the capacity to overcome that decision.

A second pattern concerned the persistence of administrative and infrastructural access. Physical separation did not necessarily remove permissions embedded within shared technologies. C068 showed how control over a shared smart-home system survived a change of physical locks: “Even after I changed the front door locks, he retained master access to our smart home hubkilling the Wi-Fi and dropping the thermostat remotely whenever I stopped responding to his texts.” (Participant 068, Bisexual, aged 35–44, Asian / Asian British)

Changing the locks was a conventional physical safety measure, but it did not remove the former partner’s administrative authority over the networked home. Control over the Wi-Fi and heating allowed him to alter material conditions inside the property without entering it. The conduct therefore cannot be understood as merely “online”. Digital credentials became a means of acting upon the home, while the timing of the interference connected it directly to demands for communication. The respondent’s non-response was met with a technologically mediated penalty.

This is an example of infrastructural persistence. Access originally established during the relationship remained technically active after the relational consent underpinning it had been withdrawn. The distinction between technical permission and continuing consent is crucial. Being recorded as the primary account holder, administrator or member of a shared digital household does not demonstrate that access remains consensual after separation. Research on technology-facilitated coercive control similarly shows how ordinary platform features and shared-device arrangements can

extend surveillance and interference across distance (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Stored information created a related form of persistence. C135 described an extensive archive retained after the relationship had ended: "He downloaded all my iCloud backups, so he has ten years of my photos, texts, and notes even though we broke up." (Participant 135, Gay, aged 45+, White British / Other White)

The relationship had ended, but the former partner retained an extensive archive of the respondent's personal life. The harm did not depend on continuous access to the live account. Once copied, the data could not be recalled through a password change. Stored communications, photographs and notes preserved a capacity for future scrutiny, exposure or manipulation. Separation therefore did not produce informational closure.

This account broadens the meaning of post-separation presence. A former partner may remain present not only by sending messages but through possession of accumulated data. Cloud backups collapse the temporal boundary between past and present: information shared or stored during the relationship remains available for later use. The victim-survivor may consequently regulate future behaviour in anticipation of what could be disclosed. The coercive effect can therefore continue even when no immediate threat has been made.

A third pattern involved the conversion of digital visibility into physical and reputational danger. In C069, impersonation after separation connected private images to the respondent's home address: "The nightmare didn't end with the breakup; he created fake profiles using my private photos on location-based apps, pinning my exact apartment address to invite strangers over." (Participant 069, Gay, aged 25–34, Mixed / Other)

The fake profiles seized control over the respondent's identity, sexual presentation and location. The harm was not confined to reputational misrepresentation. By attaching the apartment address and inviting strangers to attend, the former partner used a digital profile to generate physical risk at the respondent's home. The conduct combined impersonation, location exposure and the mobilisation of other platform users. Technology expanded the number of people through whom the former partner could intrude without needing to appear himself.

The comment also demonstrates the significance of queer digital environments. Location-based applications can provide access to connection and community, but their visibility and proximity features can be weaponised. Private images and location data allow a former partner to manipulate how someone is perceived within sexual and social networks. This is consistent with research showing that technology-facilitated sexual and image-based abuse can restrict autonomy through threatened or actual circulation, even when the perpetrator is physically absent (Powell and Henry, 2017; Henry and Powell, 2018).

Post-separation interference also produced economic consequences. Platform systems themselves could become intermediaries of harm, as C149 showed through repeated reporting of a business account until it was suspended: “He reported all my business Instagram posts as spam until my account got suspended, cutting off my income.” (Participant 149, Bisexual, aged 18–24, White British / Other White)

The platform’s reporting system became a tool of economic abuse. The former partner did not need direct access to the account; repeated reports were sufficient to activate an automated enforcement process. The resulting suspension affected the respondent’s livelihood. This shows that post-separation TFA may operate through the rules and moderation systems of third-party platforms as well as through direct contact or account intrusion.

The material consequence is important. Digital abuse is sometimes minimised where it leaves no visible physical injury, but the suspension of a business account can restrict income, professional identity and financial independence. The platform becomes an intermediary through which the abusive partner’s actions produce offline deprivation. HCC captures this interaction because the harm is generated through the combined operation of relational intent, technological architecture and economic dependency.

Across these comments, separation exposed a conflict over the right to become unreachable, private and autonomous. Former partners continued to demand explanations, circumvented blocks, retained administrative control, possessed historical data and manipulated platform visibility. The behaviours varied, but they shared a refusal to recognise the withdrawal of access. In Donovan and Hester’s (2014) terms, the first relationship rule persisted where the former partner continued

to impose the terms on which contact, visibility or access would occur. The second persisted where the respondent was made responsible for replying, explaining, preventing escalation or absorbing the consequences of the former partner's conduct.

The survey evidence also demonstrates that post-separation control was hybrid in more than a descriptive sense. Online conduct shaped conditions inside the home, brought strangers to a physical address, altered access to income and generated fear of physical appearance. Conversely, knowledge obtained during embodied intimacy addresses, routines, family contacts, private photographs and administrative credentials gave digital threats their force. The online and offline elements were mutually constitutive.

These comments do not support a single or universal post-separation trajectory. Some described escalation at the point of attempted separation, while others concerned access that remained unnoticed or difficult to remove after the relationship had ended. Nor do they establish that every unwanted message from a former partner constitutes coercive control. The analytical distinction lies in pattern, entitlement and consequence: whether boundaries are accepted, whether access remains consensual, whether refusal can occur safely and whether digital conduct restricts the victim-survivor's practical autonomy.

The evidence therefore supports treating separation as a process of contested disentanglement rather than a clean temporal boundary. Ending the relationship may remove the formal basis for access without removing the technological systems through which that access is exercised. The following section turns to practitioner accounts to examine how these patterns were encountered professionally, including the difficulties involved in distinguishing post-separation coercive control from harassment, relationship conflict or isolated digital incidents.

6.3 Practitioner Accounts of Separation and Escalation

The practitioner interviews provide supplementary evidence about how post-separation technology-facilitated abuse was encountered and interpreted within professional settings. They do not establish the frequency of these experiences among

gay and bisexual men, nor are they treated as substitutes for victim-survivor testimony. Instead, practitioners are approached as situated interpreters whose accounts were shaped by role, organisational remit, domestic abuse knowledge, LGBTQ+ cultural competence and familiarity with digital forms of harm. This distinction is particularly important in Chapter 6 because the same pattern of conduct could become legible as domestic abuse, stalking, harassment, relationship conflict or a technical problem depending on the service through which it was encountered. Following feminist situated-knowledge and institutional scholarship, these professional accounts are treated as partial and located forms of knowledge produced through role, training, organisational remit and institutional routines, rather than as context-free descriptions of abuse (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 2005; Lipsky, 2010).

Across the interviews, practitioners repeatedly described attempted separation as a point at which existing control became more visible or was intensified through digital means. A caseworker in an LGBTQ+ service summarised this pattern as follows: “For a lot of the men I work with, it’s when they leave that things really kick off. The relationship ends, but the control doesn’t. It just moves online.” (P12, caseworker, LGBTQ+ service, four years’ experience, gay man)

The significance of this account lies in the distinction between the ending of the relationship and the ending of access. Practitioners described former partners using messages, social media, dating applications, account credentials and shared digital systems to contest the victim-survivor’s withdrawal. Separation was therefore not interpreted as the cause of abuse. Rather, it disrupted an existing arrangement in which one partner had claimed authority over contact, information or emotional availability. Digital escalation represented an attempt to preserve those claims after their relational legitimacy had been withdrawn.

Practitioners also challenged the practical assumption that physical separation necessarily produced meaningful distance. A social worker in the statutory sector explained: “There’s still this idea that if they’re not living together and there’s no physical contact, the risk has dropped. But with phones, apps, location sharing, that’s just not how it works anymore.” (P15, social worker, statutory sector, 16 years’ experience, gay man)

This observation should not be read as a claim that all statutory responses adopt a 'clean break' model. It identifies a recurring difficulty reported by some practitioners: assessment processes could recognise cohabitation, physical approach and explicit threats more readily than technologically maintained access. The online–offline nexus complicates any straightforward distinction between contact and distance. Location data can shape physical movement; messages can activate fear established through earlier embodied conduct; and remote control of household or financial systems can affect the material conditions of life after departure (Woodlock, 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

A related concern involved safety advice that transferred the burden of disengagement to the person experiencing abuse. A counsellor in a voluntary LGBTQ+ service described the practical consequences of advising clients to withdraw from platforms: "We end up telling people to block, delete, come off social media, but that's basically asking them to disappear from their own lives to be safe." (P01, counsellor, voluntary LGBTQ+ service, ten years' experience, gay man)

Blocking, changing numbers or deleting accounts may be necessary components of an individual safety plan, but practitioners recognised that these measures were not cost-free. They could restrict access to friends, community, employment, dating and identity-affirming spaces. They could also be ineffective where the abusive partner created alternative accounts, used payment platforms or contacted shared networks. The data therefore caution against treating technical withdrawal as a complete response. A technically available safety action may be relationally dangerous, socially isolating or materially impractical.

Some practitioners located the problem within assessment frameworks organised around discrete incidents. A support worker in the voluntary sector explained: "We're trained to look for incidents assaults, threats, breaches. When it's constant messaging or online stuff, it's harder to know where it fits." (P05, support worker, voluntary sector, nine years' experience, gay man)

A project lead in an LGBTQ+ service similarly observed that digitally mediated conduct could be treated as secondary even where it produced the client's continuing sense of entrapment: "It can end up being seen as background noise to the 'real' abuse, even

though for the client it's what's making them feel trapped." (P29, project lead, LGBTQ+ service, 11 years' experience, gay man)

These accounts identify an evidential and conceptual mismatch. A stream of messages, status checks, log-in attempts or indirect posts may appear minor when separated into individual acts, while their cumulative function is to keep the victim-survivor responsive, visible and uncertain. Coercive-control analysis requires the reconstruction of pattern, purpose and consequence rather than an exclusive focus on the apparent seriousness of each technological act (Stark, 2007; Dragiewicz et al., 2018).

Practitioners also described uncertainty where both former partners continued to communicate. A service coordinator in the voluntary sector distinguished surface reciprocity from the direction of power: "When both people are messaging each other, it can look mutual on paper. But when you dig into it, one person's trying to get space and the other just won't let go." (P18, service coordinator, voluntary sector, six years' experience, heterosexual woman)

This distinction anticipates the detailed discussion of mutual-abuse narratives in Section 6.6. Replying, negotiating or attempting to de-escalate does not necessarily indicate equal investment in continuing the contact. The relevant questions concern who asserted the boundary, whose refusal was ignored, what consequences followed non-response and which person retained the capacity to impose continuing restrictions. Donovan and Barnes' (2020) concept of space for reaction is important here because it preserves the possibility that victim-survivors act, respond or retaliate without treating all visible interaction as equivalent coercive power.

The interpretation of these patterns was also affected by assumptions about same-sex relationships. A caseworker in an LGBTQ+ charity explained: "We're still not great at recognising coercive control without gender as a shortcut. With two men, people expect equality, so control gets missed." (P03, caseworker, LGBTQ+ charity, eight years' experience, bisexual man)

The absence of a heterosexual gender configuration could therefore be misread as the absence of structured inequality. Practitioner accounts instead pointed to power organised through access to technology, economic resources, outness, community standing, housing, migration status and the capacity to make threats credible. These

factors do not replace gendered analysis; they identify the additional relational and structural locations in which power must be assessed in same-sex relationships.

Finally, practitioners acknowledged limits in their own technological knowledge. A caseworker in the voluntary sector stated: "Sometimes the client knows more than we do about how the tech works. We're trying to catch up while the abuse is already happening." (P28, caseworker, voluntary sector, six years' experience, heterosexual woman)

This is best understood as a professional knowledge gap rather than as experiential power. Experiential power has a specific meaning concerning greater experience of being out, same-sex relationships and LGBTQ+ communities used to regulate a less experienced partner (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). The difficulty described by P28 concerned institutional and technical capacity: whether professionals could identify how access had been obtained, understand the interaction between platforms or offer safety guidance without increasing risk.

This difficulty should not be overstated as the complete absence of relevant indicators in contemporary risk-assessment frameworks. Current guidance and assessment practice can elicit fear, isolation, attempts to leave, repeated contact, stalking and harassment, all of which may be digitally mediated. The more substantial issue is whether those indicators are pursued with professional curiosity and interpreted as part of a relational pattern in a same-sex male relationship, rather than treated as disconnected technical incidents (Home Office, 2023). Detailed examination of risk-assessment practice is reserved for Chapter 7.

Differences across organisational settings were subtle rather than absolute. LGBTQ+ specialist practitioners more readily connected post-separation contact to outing, shared queer networks and identity abuse, while statutory and generic practitioners more often described evidential thresholds, incident categories and practical safety advice. Domestic-abuse expertise outside LGBTQ+ specialist provision could nevertheless support sophisticated pattern recognition, and LGBTQ+ knowledge did not automatically confer technical or risk-assessment expertise. The comparison therefore supports the value of provision that combines domestic-abuse knowledge with LGBTQ+ cultural competence, without treating any sector as uniformly effective or deficient.

Taken together, the practitioner accounts support a process-based interpretation of separation. They suggest that digital escalation was often encountered when a victim-survivor attempted to withdraw access or redefine the terms of contact, while professional recognition remained uneven because the conduct crossed technological, relational and institutional categories. These accounts supplement the survey evidence by identifying recurrent practice problems, but they do not establish a uniform response across sectors. Their principal contribution to this chapter is to show how post-separation control was interpreted within professional encounters and why the same pattern could be recognised, minimised or fragmented depending on the conceptual resources available. The following section uses a relationship-phases heuristic to organise the temporal movement identified across the survey comments and practitioner accounts without converting that movement into a universal or linear model.

6.4 Relationship Phases as an Analytic Heuristic

The relationship-phases heuristic is used to organise the temporal patterns identified through iterative comparison of the focused survey comments and practitioner accounts, following the iterative analytical process described in Section 3.7.5. It is a researcher-generated analytic device rather than a participant category, predictive model or claim that abusive relationships develop through a fixed sequence. Some accounts contained elements of more than one phase, while others began with severe control or did not describe the earlier relationship at all. The heuristic is therefore intended to make continuity and change visible without imposing linearity on experiences that were often unstable, overlapping and retrospective.

The analysis distinguishes three broad phases: relational normalisation and contested boundaries; attempted separation and escalation; and post-separation continuity and reconfiguration. These phases are connected by a central question: what happens when access or authority previously claimed within the relationship is questioned, restricted or withdrawn? The heuristic develops Donovan and Hester's (2014) relationship-rules framework by tracing how the abusive partner's terms and the victim-survivor's assigned responsibility may be maintained or contested over time.

The first phase concerns relational normalisation and contested boundaries. Digital access may initially be introduced through practices associated with trust, openness

or care. The relevant issue is not that sharing passwords, locations or online visibility is inherently abusive, but whether these arrangements remain negotiable and whether either partner can withdraw consent without punishment. The problem of contested boundaries was especially visible in C090, where a request for digital privacy was recast as a betrayal of gay intimacy: "Whenever I tried to set a digital boundary, he accused me of 'bringing toxic, heteronormative secrets into our relationship' framing basic privacy as an attack on gay love." (Participant 090, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

This comment illustrates how a relationship rule can be moralised through a queer relational vocabulary. The respondent's boundary was not debated as a practical preference; it was represented as evidence that he was importing secrecy and failing to practise an authentic form of gay intimacy. The first relationship rule the relationship operating on the abusive partner's terms was expressed through a claimed entitlement to access. The second the victim-survivor being made responsible for the relationship and its difficulties was expressed through the suggestion that his request for privacy damaged gay love. Practices of love gave the rule emotional force by attaching openness to commitment and privacy to betrayal. This analysis uses the two-rule formulation set out by Donovan and Hester (2014, pp. 130–141, 164–165), rather than treating relationship rules as ordinary couple norms.

Practitioners described similar retrospective recognition. A domestic abuse advocate in the voluntary sector observed: "A lot of men say, 'I thought it was just what relationships are like now.' It's only later that they question it." (P14, domestic abuse advocate, voluntary sector, eight years' experience, gay man)

Retrospective questioning does not mean that every digitally intensive relationship contained an identifiable early stage of abuse. It shows that separation or boundary conflict could alter the meaning assigned to earlier practices. Conduct that had been interpreted as mutual closeness could be re-evaluated when access became compulsory or when withdrawing permission produced consequences.

The second phase concerns attempted separation and escalation. Raising the possibility of ending a relationship directly contests the abusive partner's authority to determine its terms. The focused comments showed that this challenge could be met through identity-based threats, image distribution, emotional pressure or expanded

contact. At attempted separation, identity-based leverage became explicit in C073, where the prospect of ending the relationship triggered an outing threat: “The moment I brought up breaking up, he threatened to send screenshots of our private DMs and my private notes to my conservative family and boss to ‘out me on his terms.’” (Participant 073, Gay, aged 25–34, Black / Black British)

The phrase ‘on his terms’ makes the struggle over relational authority explicit. The threatened disclosure sought to preserve control by transferring the cost of leaving into family and employment settings. It also demonstrates why separation cannot be analysed as a private interaction between two individuals: digital information can move quickly into audiences whose responses affect material safety, belonging and livelihood.

The same shift from consensual intimacy to coercive leverage was evident in C063, where private images exchanged within the relationship were redistributed when separation was attempted: “It started with exchanging private photos on encrypted apps, but the moment I tried to end things, he uploaded them to a shared drive and texted the link to my family with the message: ‘Think carefully about your next move.’” (Participant 063, Gay, aged 45+, White British / Other White)

The abusive meaning of the images did not arise from their consensual creation or exchange. It arose from the later removal of consent, their redistribution and their use to alter the respondent’s decision. The digital act therefore operated as embodied and social coercion: the threat of family exposure was used to restrict the practical freedom to leave. This is an especially clear example of the online–offline nexus because a digital repository and messaging system carried consequences into family relationships and the respondent’s future conduct.

Practitioners interpreted escalation at the point of leaving as an attempt to restore challenged control. A project manager in an LGBTQ+ charity explained: “The leaving point is huge. That’s when control is challenged, and that’s when it often ramps up especially online.” (P19, project manager, LGBTQ+ charity, nine years’ experience, gay man)

This account supports the heuristic while also requiring caution. Separation did not always produce escalation, and the practitioner data cannot establish how frequently it occurred. Its analytical significance is that it identifies a recurring mechanism: when

the victim-survivor withdraws from the relationship rules, the abusive partner may use technological access, stored information or emotional obligation to make that withdrawal costly.

The third phase concerns post-separation continuity and reconfiguration. Once a relationship had formally ended, contact could migrate across platforms and use functions not ordinarily understood as communication channels. C214 showed how a payment service could be repurposed to circumvent blocking: “When I finally blocked him, he started sending small amounts of money via PayPal just so he could attach abusive messages in the payment notes.” (Participant 214, Bisexual, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

The payment itself was incidental. The platform was repurposed as a route around a boundary. This demonstrates why post-separation persistence cannot be reduced to the number of messages sent on a single application. Control was reconfigured through the wider digital infrastructure available to the former partner. The conduct also illustrates space for reaction: blocking was an attempt to create distance, not evidence that both parties were equally engaged in continuing the interaction.

Post-separation continuity did not mean that abuse remained unchanged. The survey material showed reconfiguration through residual account access, copied cloud data, dating-app impersonation, business-account reporting and the use of shared systems. Some practices were continuous with earlier monitoring; others emerged specifically because the relationship had ended. HCC is useful here because the controlling pattern was sustained through the interaction of technological infrastructures, prior relational knowledge, identity-based leverage and anticipated offline consequences. The framework’s temporal value lies in showing how the configuration of control can change while its restrictive function persists.

The phases should not be interpreted as separate compartments. A senior practitioner in the statutory sector cautioned: “It’s not like they move neatly from one stage to the next. People can be in bits of all of them at once.” (P10, senior practitioner, statutory sector, 15 years’ experience, heterosexual man) This caution is consistent with the data. Emotional responsibility associated with the ongoing relationship could continue after separation; post-separation threats could retrospectively transform the meaning of earlier sharing; and attempts to leave could be repeated, reversed or delayed. The

heuristic therefore maps contested access rather than a single journey from intimacy to freedom.

Used in this limited way, the relationship-phases heuristic contributes three points to the chapter's argument. First, it makes visible the process through which negotiated digital intimacy can become a relationship rule that one partner is unable to revoke safely. Second, it identifies attempted separation as a challenge to the abusive partner's claimed entitlement rather than as the cause of abuse. Third, it shows that post-separation TFA may involve both continuity and innovation: previously granted access can persist, while new platforms and audiences are recruited to preserve control.

The heuristic also guards against an incident-based reading of the comments. A message, shared photograph, payment note or account setting acquires analytical significance through its place within the wider pattern: what preceded it, which boundary it contested, what consequences it threatened and how it affected the respondent's autonomy. This process-oriented approach provides the foundation for the following sections. Section 6.5 examines how identity, reputation and unequal resources shape the coercive force of post-separation conduct; Section 6.6 distinguishes apparent reciprocity from resistance and space for reaction; and Section 6.7 considers the formal help-seeking encounters through which these patterns were recognised or misrecognised.

6.5 Identity Abuse, Visibility and Unequal Post-Separation Resources

Section 6.4 showed that attempted separation could transform information, images and public relationship traces accumulated during intimacy into post-separation leverage. This section develops that finding by examining identity abuse, controlled visibility and unequal access to social, technological and institutional resources. Identity abuse is not treated as a concept originating in UK scholarship. Rather, Donovan and Hester's (2014, pp. 213–216) work provides an important UK application of a concept developed within earlier North American LGBTQ+ domestic abuse literature, showing how sexuality, gender identity and community belonging can be used to threaten, isolate or regulate a partner. In digitally mediated relationships, these

processes may be intensified because private information can be copied, retained and circulated rapidly across audiences.

Separation can increase the coercive value of identity-related information because the abusive partner may retain knowledge and material while losing the socially accepted basis for continuing access. The issue is not simply privacy in an abstract sense. It concerns who controls the timing, audience and interpretation of disclosure. A former partner may know which relatives, colleagues, neighbours or community members have access to different parts of the victim-survivor's life. Digital platforms make it possible to collapse those audiences and to remove disclosure from the person to whom the information belongs. Sedgwick's (1990) account of the closet remains relevant here because being "out" is contextual rather than absolute: disclosure to one audience does not establish consent to disclosure everywhere.

Controlled visibility could be built through practices initially framed as queer authenticity. C091 described public relationship posting becoming leverage when separation was attempted: "He insisted on pushing me to post our relationship publicly under the banner of 'living authentically without fear,' but then used our shared online digital footprint as leverage when I wanted to leave." (Participant 091, Gay, aged 18–24, Asian / Asian British)

The comment demonstrates how a practice presented as identity affirmation could contribute to coercion when it ceased to be negotiable. Publicly acknowledging a relationship is not inherently controlling. The coercive process arose because one partner claimed authority to define visibility as the authentic or courageous way to conduct a gay relationship, while the shared digital footprint later became a resource through which leaving could be made costly. The first relationship rule that the relationship operates on the abusive partner's terms was expressed through the demand for public visibility. The second that the victim-survivor is made responsible for the relationship was invoked through the implication that reluctance represented fear, secrecy or failure to live authentically (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

This account also illustrates the careful use of experiential power. Donovan and Hester (2014, p. 152) use the concept to describe an identity-related asymmetry in which a partner with greater experience of being out, navigating same-sex relationships or participating in LGBTQ+ communities claims authority over what constitutes a

legitimate identity or a normal relationship. The invocation of “living authentically” may perform that function where it is used to invalidate another partner’s boundaries. Experiential power should not, however, be treated as a general synonym for technological competence, social influence or institutional confidence. Those resources may strengthen coercion, but they remain analytically distinct unless they are mobilised through claimed authority about LGBTQ+ identity or relationship experience (Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The physical consequences of controlled visibility were especially clear in C078, where dating-platform impersonation was linked directly to the respondent’s home: “After I finally left, he created fake profiles using my private photos across both queer and mainstream dating apps, setting the location to my apartment to deliberately out me to neighbors and invite strangers over.” (Participant 078, Gay, aged 35–44, Mixed / Other)

The conduct combined impersonation, sexualised representation, outing and address exposure. It did not merely communicate false information online. It altered how the respondent could be seen by neighbours and strangers and invited unknown people into proximity with his home. The digital profile therefore became a means of producing physical risk. Its coercive force derived from the interaction between platform affordances, private images obtained through the relationship, knowledge of the respondent’s address and the social consequences of unwanted sexual visibility. This is a direct example of the online–offline nexus: digital impersonation reorganised safety within the respondent’s residential environment.

Research on technology-facilitated sexual violence has similarly shown that image-based and identity-based harms cannot be reduced to the moment of distribution. Possession, threatened circulation and the uncertainty of future reuse can constrain conduct before and after material is shared (Powell and Henry, 2017; Henry and Powell, 2018). The present data extend that analysis by showing how queer dating infrastructures can be used simultaneously as audiences, instruments of impersonation and routes through which strangers are directed towards an offline location.

Practitioners also emphasised that selective disclosure remained coercively significant even where clients were generally open about their sexuality. A caseworker in an

LGBTQ+ service explained: "Outing is still one of the most powerful tools after separation. Even when someone's 'out', there are always spaces where they're not." (P12, caseworker, LGBTQ+ service, four years' experience, gay man)

This observation does not establish how frequently outing occurred, but it identifies why a binary distinction between "out" and "closeted" is inadequate for assessment. People manage disclosure differently across families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, religious communities and online networks. A threat can therefore be coercive even when the information is known within some settings. The relevant issue is whether the victim-survivor retains authority over context and audience.

Post-separation identity abuse also extended beyond sexuality to reputation, employment and economic security. C139 described technical impersonation directed at an employer: "He spoofed my phone number and sent horrible messages to my boss so I would get fired." (Participant 139, Gay, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

This account demonstrates reputational and economic coercion through technical impersonation. The abusive partner did not simply communicate negatively about the respondent; he attempted to make the communication appear to originate from him. The threatened or intended consequence was loss of employment. The harm therefore moved from a digital act into livelihood, professional credibility and financial security. Such conduct also shows why technological knowledge should be analysed as a practical advantage rather than automatically labelled experiential power. Number spoofing may require technical familiarity, but its function here was impersonation and economic sabotage, not the exercise of authority derived from greater experience of LGBTQ+ identity or relationships.

Unequal resources shaped the capacity to enact and resist these harms. Retained passwords, copied images, account-administration rights, platform knowledge, shared networks and confidence in communicating with employers or authorities could all influence the practical balance of power after separation. HCC is useful because these resources did not operate independently. Technical access gained during intimacy interacted with personal knowledge, identity-based vulnerability and anticipated institutional responses. The result was not simply continued communication but an

extended capacity to affect where the victim-survivor could live, work, socialise and present himself.

The focused comments do not support systematic claims that a particular identity group experienced these processes more frequently than another. The original chapter's broad claims about bisexual men, age groups and ethnic differences have therefore not been retained without verified comparative evidence. Instead, the analysis remains at the level supported by the comments: sexuality, selective disclosure and social reputation could become resources of coercion, but their significance depended on the audiences and inequalities present in each account.

Identity abuse should consequently be understood as integral to post-separation control rather than as an additional category appended to technological abuse. Digital infrastructures increased the abusive partner's capacity to govern how the victim-survivor might be represented, discovered or believed. Separation removed the formal relationship but did not remove stored information, shared audiences or the power to circulate a competing account of the victim-survivor. These findings prepare the ground for Section 6.6, because responses to such threats replying, blocking, concealing information or monitoring for evidence can appear reciprocal when removed from the coercive context that produced them.

6.6 Contesting Mutual Abuse Narratives and Making Space for Reaction

The overarching theme of mutual-abuse narratives and misrecognition in Table 3.2 appeared in 13 of the 200 comments (6.5 per cent). The broader Chapter 6 focused review retained 38 comments (19 per cent) relevant to mutuality, resistance or retaliation. This broader category was deliberately inclusive: it captured comments in which respondents acted, responded, set boundaries, retaliated, gathered evidence or described uncertainty about the direction of power. It must therefore not be reported as 38 examples of mutual abuse. The focused subcodes overlapped: 21 comments were identified as potentially involving space for reaction, 17 referred to an attempt to create distance, nine included a retaliatory or hostile response, eight were coded as having an unclear direction of power and three were marked as potentially bidirectional harmful conduct. These are comment counts, not prevalence estimates.

The distinction matters because digital records make interaction visible while often concealing the conditions under which it occurred. A message history may show both parties replying. It may not show that one person was responding to threats, attempting to prevent escalation or trying to establish a boundary. Behavioural reciprocity is therefore not equivalent to relational symmetry. Donovan and Barnes' (2020, pp. 23–25) concept of space for reaction provides a way of recognising that LGBTQ+ victim-survivors may act, resist or retaliate within abusive relationships without assuming that every action is harmless or that both partners exercise equivalent coercive power.

Apparent reciprocity requires context. In C124, the respondent's reply followed a threat to distribute private images rather than a voluntary continuation of contact: "I responded to his text just to stop him from posting the private photos he threatened to leak." (Participant 124, Bisexual, aged 45+, White British / Other White)

At the level of a message log, this exchange could appear reciprocal. Within the respondent's account, however, the reply was compelled by threatened exposure. The contact performed a safety function: it attempted to prevent further harm. This does not mean that every response made under pressure is necessarily benign, but it demonstrates why the existence of a reply cannot establish consent to contact or equal responsibility for maintaining the interaction.

Other comments concerned blocking or disengagement. The coercive significance of blocking was visible in C025, where closing the digital channel intensified fear of physical confrontation: "Blocking his number didn't give me peace it just made me terrified of when he would physically show up to demand an answer." (Participant 025, Gay, aged 18–24, White British / Other White)

Blocking was an attempt to create space, not an aggressive equivalent to the former partner's conduct. The respondent anticipated that the withdrawal of digital access would lead to physical confrontation. This expectation gave the messages coercive force even after the technical channel had been closed. The online–offline nexus is therefore central to interpreting the action: a digital boundary was constrained by fear of an embodied consequence.

That online–offline escalation was even more explicit in C061, where switching off the phone was followed by physical appearance at the home: "Powering off my phone was

supposed to give me space to breathe, but ignoring the digital barrage only accelerated things from endless missed calls to him pounding on my front door at midnight” (Participant 061, Gay, aged 25–34, Black / Black British)

The respondent’s non-response was followed by physical appearance at the home. Treating the situation as mutual communication conflict would obscure the direction of the boundary: one person attempted to disengage while the other refused that disengagement. It would also obscure the relationship rules being asserted. The abusive partner continued to act as though he was entitled to an answer, while the respondent was positioned as responsible for preventing escalation by remaining available.

Practitioners recognised how surface-level interaction could produce uncertainty. A counsellor in the voluntary sector observed: “When both people are still messaging each other, it can look like they’re both involved in the behaviour. It’s not always clear who’s doing what to whom.” (P21, counsellor, voluntary sector, five years’ experience, gay man)

The uncertainty identified here is analytically legitimate. Same-sex relationships should not be forced into a predetermined victim–perpetrator script, and the possibility of bidirectional harmful conduct should not be denied. The problem arises when uncertainty is resolved automatically through a presumption of equality. A practitioner in a community-based service described this tendency: “With two men especially, there’s this assumption that it’s equal that it’s just a toxic relationship rather than abuse.” (P26, practitioner, community-based service, nine years’ experience, bisexual man)

An equality presumption can flatten differences in fear, motive, persistence and consequence. Two men may both send angry messages while only one monitors the other’s movements, retains intimate material or appears at his home when contact is refused. Conversely, a claim to victimisation should not immunise any person’s conduct from examination. The analytical task is to reconstruct the course of conduct rather than infer power from gender, identity or a single action.

The survey comments also demonstrated forms of resistance that involved modifying the respondent’s own digital behaviour. C245 described deliberate self-censorship intended to reduce an ex-partner’s interest: “I deliberately acted boring on social media

so he would lose interest and stop stalking me.” (Participant 245, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

This was not reciprocal surveillance. It was self-censorship undertaken to manage anticipated monitoring. The tactic preserved some platform access while narrowing the respondent’s self-presentation. Although it demonstrates agency, it also reveals the cost of that agency: the respondent altered his participation in digital social life to influence the stalker’s behaviour. Space for reaction should therefore not be romanticised as freedom. It identifies room for action within constraint.

Other forms of resistance involved retaining technology for evidential purposes. C248 described keeping a tracking application to document repeated physical proximity: “I kept the tracking app on my phone because it was the only way to prove to my lawyer how often he drove past my house.” (Participant 248, Bisexual, aged 18–24, Mixed / Other)

The presence of the tracking application cannot be interpreted without its function. In the respondent’s account, it was preserved to document repeated physical proximity and support legal preparation. The same technological form may therefore have different meanings depending on who controls it, why it is used, whether consent is present and what consequences it produces. An act-based approach that codes all tracking as equivalent would miss this relational distinction.

Assessing apparent mutuality requires attention to at least six questions. First, who established the expectations governing contact, access and accountability? Second, who attempted to withdraw or create distance? Third, what happened when a boundary was asserted? Fourth, what were the motives and anticipated consequences of each action? Fifth, which conduct produced fear, surveillance or restriction across multiple areas of life? Sixth, who retained the capacity to stop without provoking escalation? These questions draw together relationship rules, practices of love and space for reaction (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The Coral Project Power and Control Wheel provides a practice-oriented way of organising this relational assessment where the genders and sexual identities of the partners do not supply a reliable shortcut to the direction of abuse (Donovan, Barnes and Nixon, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). Its attention to relationship rules, impacts, motives and space for reaction is consistent with the questions applied here.

The focused Chapter 6 evidence also suggests a necessary digital update: assessment should make explicit platform circumvention after blocking, residual account and device access, the use of digital evidence by victim-survivors, and escalation between messages, location data and physical appearance. Such an extension would retain the Wheel's relational purpose while making technology-facilitated routes of control and resistance more visible.

This approach avoids two opposite errors. The first is false equivalence: treating any response, retaliation or hostile message as proof that abuse was mutual. The second is automatic exoneration: assuming that every action by a person identified as a victim-survivor was defensive or inconsequential. Space for reaction does not classify conduct in advance. It requires the researcher or practitioner to locate the conduct within the wider pattern of power, restriction and consequence.

Digital evidence can make this task both easier and harder. Messages, location records and account activity may document persistence, but screenshots can be selective and sequences may omit the threat or history that made a response intelligible. The apparent neutrality of a digital record should therefore not replace contextual assessment. As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated, platform data acquire meaning within relationship rules and wider social inequalities rather than functioning as self-explanatory proof.

These issues extend into help-seeking. Respondents who replied, gathered evidence or used evasive tactics could anticipate being described as equally involved. Section 6.7 examines how formal services may mutualise a patterned course of control and applies the gap of trust specifically to relationships between LGBTQ+ people and formal institutions.

6.7 Help-Seeking, Formal Recognition and the Gap of Trust

The overarching help-seeking and gap-of-trust theme in Table 3.2 appeared in 27 of the 200 comments (13.5 per cent). The broader Chapter 6 focused review retained 40 comments (20 per cent) relevant to help-seeking, reporting or service responses, including comments where an organisational or informal response appeared as a secondary context or outcome. Thirty-seven concerned formal organisations or professionals and three concerned informal networks. This broader, overlapping

category supports the focused institutional evidence map; it does not replace the overarching theme frequency or measure the quality of services generally.

The comments showed that help-seeking frequently involved a struggle to communicate pattern and consequence. Respondents described bringing messages, location records, account histories and other digital evidence to professionals, yet the material was sometimes interpreted as relationship conflict or as technically trivial conduct. The interpretive burden of digital evidence was stark in C177, where a large body of monitoring data was reduced by police to a “messy break-up”: “When I brought in printouts of the thousands of location-pings and missed calls, the officer sighed and called it a ‘messy break-up,’ advising me to ‘just turn my phone off’ as if going dark wouldn’t trigger immediate physical retaliation.” (Participant 177, Gay, aged 45+, Asian / Asian British)

The officer’s response separated the digital evidence from the respondent’s account of physical risk. Thousands of pings and calls were reduced to an untidy relationship ending, while responsibility for stopping the conduct was transferred to the respondent. Switching off the phone was treated as a neutral technical solution even though the respondent anticipated that becoming unreachable would provoke embodied retaliation. The advice therefore failed to reconstruct the online–offline nexus and reproduced the second relationship rule by making the victim-survivor responsible for managing the former partner’s conduct.

A related incident threshold appeared in C181, where an AirTag was treated as insignificant until the former partner physically appeared: “The cybercrime officer told me that finding an AirTag hidden in my jacket wasn’t a crime until my ex actually showed up at my door, treating active digital stalking like a minor inconvenience.” (Participant 181, Gay, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

The hidden tracker already enabled knowledge of movement and could alter the respondent’s sense of safety, even before the former partner arrived at the home. Requiring a visible physical event before recognising the seriousness of the conduct fragmented a developing course of control into separate technical and embodied incidents. This is precisely the kind of evidentiary problem identified in research on digital coercive control, where individual acts may appear minor even though their

cumulative function is surveillance and restriction (Woodlock, 2017; Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

Misrecognition also occurred in therapeutic settings. C184 showed daily inspection of messages being reframed as a mutual “trust deficit” rather than assessed as a question of coercive entitlement: “The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as ‘an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,’ treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix.” (Participant 184, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The language of a mutual “trust deficit” displaced attention from who claimed entitlement to inspect the messages, whether that inspection could be refused and what consequences followed resistance. The respondent was positioned as jointly responsible for resolving surveillance imposed by the partner. This illustrates how institutional mutualisation can reproduce an abusive relationship’s internal allocation of responsibility. A framework centred on communication quality may be appropriate for consensual relationship conflict, but it becomes problematic where one partner’s autonomy is subordinated to the other’s demands.

Heteronormative assumptions could obstruct recognition at the point of entry to domestic abuse support. C197 described an intake encounter in which a male former partner did not fit the expected template: “The domestic violence advocate paused when I gave my ex’s name and asked if there was ‘a female partner involved,’ making me realize their intake forms didn’t even have a category for what I was experiencing.” (Participant 197, Gay, aged 18–24, Black / Black British)

The difficulty here was not merely insensitive wording. The intake process appeared to rely on a gendered template that made a male former partner difficult to record as an abusive partner. Queer criminological analysis is important because administrative categories do not simply describe victimisation; they shape whether an account can enter an institution as recognisable domestic abuse (Ball, 2016). The comment does not demonstrate the practice of all domestic abuse services, but it shows how heteronormative assumptions can become an immediate barrier to disclosure.

Practitioners themselves recognised that digitally distributed abuse could be difficult to communicate and assess. A senior practitioner in the statutory sector explained: “When it’s not physical, and it’s spread across different platforms, it can be really hard

for clients to explain and for services to grasp.” (P10, senior practitioner, statutory sector, 15 years’ experience, heterosexual man)

This comment identifies an interpretive burden placed on the person seeking help. The victim-survivor may need to connect messages, platform activity, account permissions, embodied encounters and anticipated consequences into a coherent narrative for an organisation whose forms or thresholds separate them. The problem is not an absence of evidence but the absence of an institutional frame capable of interpreting dispersed evidence as a patterned course of control.

Generic safety advice could also conflict with continuing practical dependencies. C241 described threats delivered through a family-calendar platform that remained necessary for custody arrangements: “The support worker told me to block him, but he uses the family calendar app to send threats, and I need that for custody arrangements.” (Participant 241, Bisexual, aged 25–34, Asian / Asian British)

Blocking was not a complete or cost-free option because the platform supported continuing responsibilities. The advice assumed that the abusive channel could be removed without affecting parenting coordination. It therefore treated the technology as an optional communication tool rather than part of a necessary social infrastructure. The example illustrates why digital safety planning must consider what the platform enables in the victim-survivor’s wider life, what is lost by disengaging and whether withdrawal may produce escalation.

These findings build on a longer history of UK research showing that LGBTQ+ victim-survivors may anticipate disbelief, rely first on friends or therapeutic support, and struggle to recognise mainstream domestic-abuse services as relevant to their relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2011; Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). The Chapter 6 comments show continuity in those barriers while identifying a contemporary digital burden: victim-survivors may also have to translate messages, location records, platform settings and account histories into an institutional narrative of patterned coercive control.

The gap of trust is applied here in its specific sense: the historically shaped distance between LGBTQ+ communities and formal help-providers, including police and domestic-abuse services, which can make institutional engagement appear risky or unlikely to produce recognition (Donovan and Hester, 2011; 2014; Donovan and

Barnes, 2020). It is not used as a general label for uncertainty, community gossip or disappointment with friends. Informal minimisation may reinforce abuse and discourage disclosure, but it is analytically distinct from the gap of trust between marginalised communities and formal institutions.

The comments show how the gap can be reproduced through contemporary encounters. Advice to switch off a device, assumptions that abuse requires physical arrival, mutual-conflict framings and gendered intake categories may confirm expectations that formal services will not understand the harm. Medina's (2013) account of epistemic injustice is relevant because the respondent's difficulty lies not only in being disbelieved but in communicating an experience for which the institution may lack an adequate interpretive framework. Repeated misrecognition can then shape future non-disclosure, self-management and withdrawal from services.

This section does not attempt the full organisational comparison undertaken in Chapter 7. Its contribution is narrower: post-separation TFA can make help-seeking unusually demanding because the person must establish that dispersed digital actions form a relational pattern, explain why apparently ordinary technologies carry coercive meaning and challenge assumptions that separation has already restored safety. The chapter now turns from these encounters to a synthesis of what separation reveals about the operation and temporal reach of HCC.

6.8 Discussion

This chapter has used separation as an analytic lens rather than as a chronological aftermath. Across the focused survey material and practitioner accounts, attempted withdrawal exposed a recurring struggle over who retained the right to contact, monitor, question, represent and affect the other person. Separation mattered because it challenged the abusive partner's established entitlement to access and the victim-survivor's assigned responsibility for maintaining the relationship. Persistent contact was therefore not significant simply because it occurred after a breakup. Its significance lay in the attempt to preserve relationship rules after the relationship's formal legitimacy had been withdrawn.

The first contribution concerns separation as the withdrawal of relational entitlement. During the relationship, access to messages, locations, images and emotional labour could be normalised through practices of love. Transparency was presented as trust,

availability as commitment and reassurance as care. Separation unsettled those meanings. When one partner attempted to become unreachable or private, the response revealed whether access had been mutually negotiated or treated as an entitlement. Demands for explanations about new contacts, appeals to provide closure and escalation following blocking all sought to restore the rule that the relationship would continue on the abusive partner's terms. The victim-survivor was simultaneously positioned as responsible for the former partner's distress and for preventing retaliation by remaining responsive (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

This interpretation avoids treating emotional appeals as inherently abusive. Distress, grief and requests for conversation may be ordinary features of separation. They become coercively significant where refusal is not respected, where contact is multiplied across platforms, where intimate information is used as leverage or where non-response triggers punishment. The relevant distinction is therefore not between emotional and instrumental conduct, but between negotiable communication and communication enforced through consequences. The moralisation of post-separation care can conceal that distinction by representing continued availability as evidence of decency and disengagement as cruelty.

The second contribution concerns infrastructural persistence. Separation may end cohabitation and intimate commitment without ending the technical permissions, stored data and shared systems established during the relationship. Smart-home administration, cloud backups, payment services, family calendars, banking permissions and platform accounts can preserve access after consent has been withdrawn. Dragiewicz et al. (2018) argue that digital platforms can facilitate coercive control through their design and governance, while Woodlock (2017) and Harris and Woodlock (2019) show how technology produces persistent presence across space. The present findings demonstrate that this persistence is also historical: data and permissions accumulated during intimacy can remain usable after the relationship ends.

Infrastructural persistence produced material rather than merely virtual consequences. Remote access affected heating, connectivity and conditions inside the home. Fake dating profiles exposed residential locations. Spoofed communications threatened employment. Account and platform policies could leave a former partner's access intact. Persistent messages altered movement, sleep and social participation because

the recipient anticipated physical escalation or public exposure. The online–offline nexus therefore describes a chain of effects in which digital actions shape embodied safety, livelihood, housing and community participation.

This analysis also clarifies why responsibilising advice is inadequate. Blocking, deleting accounts or leaving platforms may reduce one route of contact but can remove access to work, community, parenting coordination or evidence. It may also alert the abusive partner that an entitlement is being withdrawn and produce escalation. Safety planning must therefore assess the relational and infrastructural consequences of a technical action rather than assume that platform disengagement restores autonomy. The costs of safety should not be transferred automatically to the person experiencing abuse.

The third contribution is the temporal development of HCC. Chapters 4 and 5 showed how control could be assembled through relationship rules, practices of love, technological access, embodied intimidation and structural inequalities. Chapter 6 demonstrates that this assemblage may persist and reconfigure across relationship phases. The hybrid character of the control lies not only in the simultaneous use of digital and physical means, but in the capacity of information and access acquired at one time to exercise power later. Separation therefore suggests that HCC has temporal as well as spatial reach.

HCC remains a mid-level conceptual framework rather than a claim that all post-separation contact follows a universal trajectory. The relationship-phases heuristic was used to organise recurrent processes of normalisation, attempted withdrawal and reconfiguration, not to predict every relationship. The focused comments were brief and retrospective, and the practitioner accounts were mediated through professional experience. The data cannot establish the prevalence of post-separation TFA or determine how often one phase leads to another. The framework's value is explanatory: it identifies mechanisms through which control can outlast cohabitation and formal intimacy.

Identity abuse was one of those mechanisms. Shared photographs, knowledge of selective outness, queer community networks and digital relationship histories could be converted into post-separation leverage. Experiential power was relevant only where greater experience of being out, same-sex relationships or LGBTQ+

communities was used to define what constituted authentic identity or normal relationship conduct. Technological skill, social standing and institutional confidence could also produce inequalities, but they were analysed as distinct resources rather than folded into experiential power. This correction preserves the specificity of Donovan and Hester's concept while showing how identity authority may interact with digital infrastructures (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The analysis of mutuality further demonstrates the importance of temporal and relational context. Digital records can show that both parties communicated, monitored or gathered information, but they do not automatically reveal why. Space for reaction directs attention to actions undertaken to create distance, prevent exposure, document abuse or manage anticipated escalation. It does not declare those actions harmless. Instead, it asks who established the relationship rules, whose conduct generated fear and restriction, and who could disengage without punishment (Donovan and Barnes, 2020). This avoids both false equivalence and the erasure of victim-survivor agency.

Formal recognition formed the final part of the pattern. When dispersed acts were treated as isolated technical matters, mutual conflict or ordinary breakup behaviour, institutions could reproduce the fragmentation on which the control depended. The gap of trust was not simply an attitude held by LGBTQ+ service users; it could be renewed through encounters in which gendered assumptions, physical-harm thresholds or generic advice failed to recognise digitally mediated patterns. Chapter 7 examines these institutional processes in detail. The contribution of the present chapter is to show what is lost when post-separation TFA is detached from the relationship history and from the consequences of contested withdrawal.

The legal position in England and Wales also requires precision. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 created the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship. Section 68 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 subsequently removed the former cohabitation requirement for ex-intimate partners and family members; the amendment came into force on 5 April 2023 and is not retrospective. The problem identified in this chapter is therefore not the complete legal exclusion of post-separation coercive control, but the practical task of evidencing dispersed digital actions as a repeated or continuous course of behaviour and connecting them to their serious effect (Serious Crime Act 2015, s. 76; Domestic Abuse Act 2021, s. 68; Home Office, 2023).

Taken together, the findings refine HCC around three interdependent propositions. First, coercive control may continue as an attempt to resist the victim-survivor's withdrawal of relational entitlement. Second, digital infrastructures preserve information, permissions and routes of access capable of producing offline consequences after separation. Third, recognition depends on reconstructing the temporal pattern linking earlier intimacy, attempted disengagement and later acts. Separation is therefore not external to the analysis of coercive control. It is a point at which the architecture of control may become especially visible.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how TFA persisted, adapted and acquired new meanings during and after separation in gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships. It has treated separation as a process through which established expectations of access, visibility and emotional responsibility are contested rather than as an endpoint that automatically restores safety.

In answer to RQ2, the focused open-text material identified persistent multi-platform contact, circumvention after blocking, residual access to accounts and smart-home systems, retention of cloud data, location monitoring, impersonation, intimate-image and outing threats, reputational manipulation, employment and financial interference, and the use of necessary shared platforms to maintain contact. These practices were situated within wider coercive dynamics because they attempted to preserve access, accountability and influence after the victim-survivor had tried to withdraw them.

The analysis showed that the harms were hybrid in both form and consequence. Digital monitoring shaped physical movement and feelings of safety; remote access altered conditions within the home; online impersonation exposed residential locations; reputational attacks affected employment and community standing; and the anticipation of embodied retaliation made messages and platform activity coercively meaningful. The separation material therefore strengthens the online–offline nexus by demonstrating that digitally enacted conduct can reorganise offline life even without continuing cohabitation.

Relationship rules and practices of love explained how post-separation control could be framed as care, closure or emotional need. The abusive partner continued to claim the right to an answer, an explanation or reassurance, while the victim-survivor

remained positioned as responsible for managing distress and preventing escalation. The point at which contact became coercive was visible in the response to refusal: whether boundaries were respected or circumvented, and whether withdrawal triggered threats, exposure, sabotage or physical appearance.

Identity abuse extended this control into the governance of visibility and reputation. Material and knowledge accumulated during intimacy could be used to threaten disclosure, seize digital identity or manipulate how the victim-survivor was understood by family, neighbours, employers and queer communities. The chapter retained experiential power only for situations in which greater LGBTQ+ identity or relationship experience was used to define what was authentic or normal; technological knowledge and institutional familiarity were treated as separate resources.

The chapter also rejected the automatic classification of visible reciprocity as mutual abuse. Responses, blocking, evidence gathering and strategic self-presentation could constitute space for reaction within an unequal pattern. Their meaning depended on motive, fear, consequence and who retained the capacity to enforce continuing access. At the same time, the analysis did not assume that every victim-survivor action was harmless or defensive. It required contextual assessment rather than a predetermined conclusion.

Help-seeking comments demonstrated that post-separation TFA could be difficult to translate into formal institutional categories. Digital evidence was sometimes fragmented into technical incidents, reduced to a messy breakup or recast as mutual communication difficulty. The gap of trust was applied specifically to relationships with formal help-providers and to the ways contemporary encounters could reproduce expectations of misrecognition. Detailed comparison of organisational tools, training and service remits is reserved for Chapter 7.

These conclusions must be read within the limits of the evidence. The chapter draws on a focused extraction from the verified 200-comment open-text corpus and on practitioners' mediated professional accounts. The comments are brief and retrospective, and the thematic counts indicate mentions within the analysed material rather than prevalence among gay and bisexual men. The chapter cannot establish a typical post-separation trajectory, determine causal differences between demographic groups or substitute for longitudinal victim-survivor interviews.

Within those limits, the chapter develops HCC as a mid-level framework with temporal as well as spatial explanatory value. Separation operates as a stress test of control: it removes the accepted basis for intimate access while revealing the technological, relational and social resources through which that access may be preserved. HCC therefore describes not merely abuse that occurs online and offline, but a pattern in which earlier intimacy supplies data and permissions, digital infrastructures extend presence, embodied and social consequences enforce compliance, and institutional fragmentation can impede recognition.

Chapter 7 now shifts from the relational and temporal organisation of post-separation TFA to the institutional conditions under which such harm is assessed and governed. Drawing principally on the practitioner interviews, it examines how service remits, assessment tools, training and professional categories shape recognition of the online–offline nexus and the capacity to respond to gay and bisexual male victim-survivors.

Chapter 7: Institutional Responses to Technology-Facilitated Abuse

7.1 Introduction and Practitioners Landscape

The preceding analysis has shown that technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) in gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships cannot be understood as a separate category of "online behaviour". Digital surveillance, persistent contact, impersonation, image-based abuse, outing threats and interference with accounts acquired their coercive force through their relationship to wider patterns of entitlement, responsibility, fear and restriction. Chapter 6 further demonstrated that these patterns could persist and reconfigure after separation. Chapter 7 shifts the analytical focus from the organisation of abuse within intimate relationships to the professional and organisational settings through which those experiences become recognisable, actionable or dismissed.

The chapter addresses Research Question 3: how do practitioners working across domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory and community settings understand the nature and impact of technology-facilitated abuse affecting gay and bisexual men? Its primary evidence is the 30 semi-structured practitioner interviews. The interviews provide situated accounts of professional interpretation, organisational practice, referral, risk assessment, evidentiary expectations and institutional constraint. They are not treated as substitutes for victim-survivor interviews or as transparent accounts of what all gay and bisexual men experience. The verified survey open-text corpus has a supplementary role. Twenty-seven of the 200 comments, or 13.5 per cent, were coded under the narrower overarching theme of help-seeking, reporting or service response. These comments illuminate how particular encounters were understood by respondents; they do not establish the prevalence or overall quality of institutional responses. The attribution convention established in Chapters 4–6 is retained here: survey extracts use the participant number corresponding directly to the original C-code alongside verified sexual identity, age band and ethnicity, while practitioner extracts retain the P-identifier and professional context. These demographic descriptors contextualise the qualitative evidence and are not treated as explanatory variables unless explicitly examined in the analysis.

The practitioner sample was deliberately heterogeneous. Participants worked across specialist LGBTQ+ domestic-abuse and support services, generic domestic-abuse organisations, generic LGBTQ+ services, statutory and safeguarding contexts, counselling and mental-health settings, housing, advocacy, helpline, community, health and policy roles. This variation is not treated as noise within the dataset. It is central to RQ3 because professional understanding is shaped by the interpretive resources, powers, thresholds and referral pathways available within particular settings. A practitioner may possess strong LGBTQ+ cultural knowledge but limited domestic-abuse risk expertise; another may understand coercive control but have little confidence concerning queer digital life; a statutory practitioner may have formal authority while operating within restrictive evidentiary or procedural requirements.

Table 7.1 groups the participants for analytical comparison. The categories are broad and do not imply that every practitioner within a group shared the same knowledge or practice. Some roles cross organisational boundaries, and specialist competence cannot be inferred from a service label alone. The table therefore provides a map of professional location rather than a hierarchy of effectiveness.

Table 7.1: Broad analytical grouping of practitioner settings

Broad grouping	Participants	Illustrative roles/settings	Principal analytical relevance
LGBTQ+ specialist provision	6	LGBTQ+ voluntary services and charities; casework, advocacy, counselling and management	Identity abuse, selective visibility, community context and the gap of trust
Statutory, safeguarding and health settings	9	Police liaison, social work, housing, outreach, casework, counselling and NHS liaison	Formal powers, thresholds, safeguarding procedures and evidentiary requirements
Voluntary domestic-abuse and support settings	10	Domestic-abuse advocacy and management, ISVA, counselling, helpline, casework and support	Coercive-control knowledge, safety planning, referral and crisis prioritisation
Community-based settings	3	Outreach and counselling roles	Relational support, accessibility and referral across service boundaries
National policy and training settings	2	Policy and training roles	System-level knowledge, workforce development and commissioning

Note: Categories are broad analytical groupings derived from Appendix I. Some roles cross boundaries, and group membership does not imply uniform competence or practice.

Practitioner accounts are analysed as situated knowledge. Their interpretations were produced through professional training, organisational remit, prior casework, institutional routines and the conceptual language available within their setting (Haraway, 1988; Lipsky, 2010). This position avoids two opposing errors. The first would treat practitioners as neutral authorities capable of verifying victim-survivors' realities. The second would reduce institutional failure to individual ignorance or prejudice. The analysis instead examines how committed practitioners can recognise harm while still being constrained by triage systems, referral boundaries, evidence requirements, limited digital expertise or heteronormative assumptions embedded within routine practice.

The chapter also distinguishes more effective, partial and misrecognising practice. More effective practice was evident where practitioners reconstructed a course of conduct, connected digital actions to embodied and social consequences, recognised identity abuse, asked what happened when access was refused and contextualised apparently reciprocal behaviour. Partial practice involved recognition of distress without a clear pathway for intervention, or pragmatic advice that addressed immediate access while transferring substantial safety work to the victim-survivor. Misrecognition occurred where digitally mediated conduct was treated as peripheral, as ordinary relationship conflict or as equal mutual abuse without examining power and consequences. These categories refer to practices articulated in the interviews, not to fixed types of practitioner or organisation.

A further ethical distinction is necessary. Practitioners were recruited and analysed in their professional capacity. Where a participant drew incidentally on personal experience, that material was treated as part of the situated account through which professional understanding was expressed; it was not converted into a separate victim-survivor dataset or used to establish patterns of victimisation. Identifying detail was minimised, and the analysis retains only the professional relevance of such disclosure.

The chapter proceeds in seven further stages. Section 7.2 compares how TFA was recognised across professional contexts. Section 7.3 examines whether practitioners connected online conduct to embodied, spatial, identity-based and post-separation consequences. Section 7.4 analyses risk assessment, evidence and professional curiosity, correcting the earlier claim that contemporary tools contain no relevant

indicators. Section 7.5 addresses masculinity, apparent mutuality and the identification of the abusive partner through relationship rules and space for reaction. Section 7.6 examines organisational constraint, specialist provision and possibilities for more effective practice. Section 7.7 synthesises these findings through the gap of trust, epistemic recognition and the governance of hybrid harm. Section 7.8 answers RQ3 directly and states the limits of the evidence.

7.2 Recognising TFA Across Professional Contexts

Practitioners did not generally describe TFA as wholly unknown. The more consistent problem was uneven conceptual integration. Digital conduct was often recognised as distressing, but its status within domestic-abuse work varied according to the practitioner's organisational setting, case priorities and understanding of coercive control. The distinction was not simply between knowledgeable and unknowledgeable practitioners. It concerned whether digitally mediated conduct was treated as a central part of the abusive pattern, an ancillary feature of a more familiar case or an issue the victim-survivor was expected to manage personally.

One counsellor in an LGBTQ+ voluntary service described this hierarchy directly: "We do see a lot of things that are happening online, but it's often hard to know where that sits. It's not like someone's turned up at the door or assaulted them. It's more... constant messages, checking locations, that sort of thing. And that can feel less urgent when you're dealing with crisis cases" (P01, counsellor, voluntary LGBTQ+ service, ten years' experience, gay man)

The account recognises persistent messaging and location checking as harmful while placing them below incidents of physical arrival or assault within a crisis-oriented hierarchy. The point is not that the practitioner denied abuse. Rather, organisational urgency appeared to be calibrated through visible and immediate physical danger. TFA could consequently be acknowledged without being prioritised. This is a form of partial recognition: the conduct is legible as distressing but not fully integrated into the case's assessment of coercion and risk.

Advice about blocking, privacy settings and account withdrawal further illustrated this partial recognition. An outreach officer in a statutory setting explained: "A lot of the time it comes down to digital boundaries. We'll say, 'Have you blocked them? Have you changed your settings?' Because there's only so much we can do if it's all

happening online” (P20, outreach officer, statutory sector, 13 years’ experience, gay man)

Blocking and security changes can be necessary components of safety planning. The limitation lies in treating them as complete solutions without examining the wider system in which the technology operates. Blocking may remove a communication route while threatening access to work, community, evidence, parenting coordination or support. It may also signal withdrawal of access and trigger escalation. Advice becomes responsibilising when the burden of restoring safety is transferred to the victim-survivor without attention to the abusive partner’s circumvention, retained permissions or offline capacity to impose consequences.

The supplementary survey evidence demonstrates why this distinction matters. The practical limits of blocking were especially visible in C241, where the same platform was both necessary for continuing family arrangements and used to transmit threats: “The support worker told me to block him, but he uses the family calendar app to send threats, and I need that for custody arrangements.” (Participant 241, Bisexual, aged 25–34, Asian / Asian British)

The comment does not establish that blocking advice is generally inappropriate. It shows that apparently simple technical guidance can be impractical where a platform has become part of necessary social infrastructure. Effective digital safety work therefore requires enquiry into what the system enables, what would be lost by disengagement and whether an alternative communication or evidence pathway can be established.

Other practitioner accounts demonstrated a more integrated recognition of digitally mediated coercion. A statutory counsellor described how shared-device access could become a relationship rule under which privacy itself was treated as suspicious: “Clients often said things like, ‘We share everything, so there are no secrets.’ But that meant he had no digital autonomy. He couldn’t have private messages or even browse online without feeling watched. It became part of the relationship rule love meant no privacy.” (P27, counsellor, statutory sector, 12 years’ experience, gay man)

This account moves beyond naming a digital behaviour. It identifies the relational meaning through which access was normalised and the consequence for autonomy. It therefore illustrates stronger professional recognition: the practitioner connected the

technological practice to an imposed expectation about love and transparency rather than asking only whether both partners had shared passwords.

LGBTQ+ specialist knowledge could make some identity-based and relational dynamics easier to recognise. An advocacy worker described clients approaching the service tentatively: “A lot of men come to us asking, ‘Is this abuse?’ rather than saying it is. They’re testing whether they’ll be taken seriously.” (P25, advocacy worker, LGBTQ+ charity, ten years’ experience, gay man)

The observation is consistent with the gap between disclosure and recognition identified in earlier UK research (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). An LGBTQ+ specialist setting may reduce the initial burden of explaining sexuality, selective outness or queer community context. It does not follow, however, that every LGBTQ+ service possesses domestic-abuse or digital-safety expertise, or that every client will experience it as trustworthy. Specialist cultural knowledge is one component of effective practice rather than a guarantee.

The interviews also suggested that domestic-abuse expertise could supply a stronger understanding of pattern, fear and restriction, but might be applied through gendered assumptions or limited digital confidence. Conversely, generic counselling or community services could offer sustained relational support while lacking clear safeguarding or referral pathways. The most effective professional understanding therefore appeared to require an intersection of three capacities: knowledge of coercive control, competence concerning LGBTQ+ relationships and identity abuse, and the ability to understand how platforms, accounts and devices reorganise access. No single organisational label supplied all three automatically.

The comparison also revealed different forms of partial competence. LGBTQ+ specialist practitioners could recognise the significance of selective disclosure, queer community standing and the absence of a culturally available victim script, yet some accounts indicated uncertainty about formal domestic-abuse thresholds or the technical architecture of surveillance. Domestic-abuse specialists were often better equipped to identify patterned control and escalation, but this knowledge could be weakened where assessment relied implicitly on a heterosexual public story or where male victim-survivors were presumed to possess equal physical and technological capacity. Statutory practitioners could mobilise safeguarding, housing or criminal-

justice pathways, although their decisions were more visibly shaped by evidentiary requirements and organisational thresholds. Counselling and community practitioners could provide continuity and detailed relational understanding but sometimes approached surveillance through communication or trust frameworks that redistributed responsibility across the couple. These distinctions are not absolute findings about sectors; they identify the kinds of interpretive resource each setting could contribute or fail to supply. They also explain why cross-sector referral alone is insufficient. A referral may move a case from one form of knowledge to another while losing the relational history already disclosed. More effective practice requires information-sharing, consultation and continuity capable of combining specialist resources around the same course of conduct.

Table 7.2 summarises the practice distinction developed from the interviews. It does not rank organisations. It identifies the analytical questions through which practice became more or less capable of recognising TFA.

Table 7.2: Continuum of professional recognition identified in the interviews

Dimension	More effective recognition	Partial or constrained recognition	Misrecognising practice
Relational pattern	Connects separate digital acts to an ongoing course of control	Records acts individually without reconstructing their relationship	Treats conduct as ordinary online conflict or breakup behaviour
Online–offline connection	Assesses effects on movement, home, work, identity and embodied safety	Acknowledges distress but waits for physical escalation	Assumes digital harm is less serious because it occurs through a device
Identity context	Explores selective outing, reputation and community consequences	Uses inclusive language but does not assess identity-based leverage	Assumes being generally 'out' removes outing risk
Apparent mutuality	Examines rules, motives, fear, resistance and consequences	Recognises uncertainty but lacks a structured method	Treats reciprocal messages or actions as proof of equal abuse
Safety planning	Balances security changes with access, evidence, community and escalation risks	Offers blocking or account changes as the main response	Transfers responsibility for stopping abuse to the victim-survivor
Risk and evidence	Uses structured tools with contextual enquiry and professional curiosity	Recognises limitations but follows thresholds mechanically	Requires visible injury or explicit threat before taking digital conduct seriously

The comparison changes the chapter's central claim. The evidence does not support a single account of "institutional blindness" applying uniformly across all settings. It

supports a more differentiated conclusion: recognition was shaped by the interaction between practitioner knowledge, service remit, organisational resources and the frameworks through which evidence and risk were interpreted. Institutional response was therefore uneven, with examples of perceptive relational analysis, constrained partial support and misrecognition present across the sample.

7.3 Connecting Online and Offline Harm in Practice

A central difference between stronger and weaker professional responses concerned whether digitally mediated conduct was connected to its embodied, spatial, economic and identity-based consequences. Some accounts positioned “online” behaviour as contextual information surrounding the main face-to-face abuse. Others understood technology as one of the infrastructures through which physical movement, privacy, employment, housing and social participation were regulated.

A helpline practitioner described a common organisational distinction: “We’ll note what’s happening online, of course, but it’s usually seen as part of the bigger picture rather than the main issue. The main concern tends to be what’s happening face to face.” (P23, helpline operator, voluntary sector, seven years’ experience, gay man)

This distinction may be practically understandable in services required to prioritise immediate physical danger. Its weakness is that it can fragment a coercive course of conduct into a principal offline case and secondary digital details. Location tracking, account access or repeated messaging may be the mechanisms through which an abusive partner identifies where the victim-survivor is, disrupts sleep, reaches him after blocking or establishes that refusal will not be accepted. Their seriousness is not contingent on a later assault, even where the possibility of physical escalation increases their coercive force.

A domestic-abuse service manager expressed the threshold more starkly: “If someone’s turning up at their workplace or their home, that’s when it becomes a real concern. If it’s just messages or tracking online, it’s harder to justify that level of response.” (P11, domestic-abuse service manager, voluntary sector, nine years’ experience, lesbian woman)

The phrase “just messages or tracking” shows how digital form can obscure coercive function. Tracking already concerns physical movement, while persistent messages

may produce vigilance, sleep disruption or withdrawal from everyday activity. An integrated assessment would ask what the messages communicate, how frequently they occur, what information the sender possesses, what happens when contact is refused and how the recipient's behaviour changes. The relevant division is not online versus offline but conduct that can or cannot be connected to a pattern of restriction and anticipated consequence.

Practitioners who reconstructed the infrastructure of abuse offered a different account. A community-based counsellor described post-separation access to a shared smart-home system: "He'd moved out, but his ex-still had access to the shared Google Home. He could see when the lights were turned on or when music was playing. It sounds small, but it made the client feel like he could never really get away." (P16, counsellor, community-based service, ten years' experience, bisexual man)

The analytical significance lies in the practitioner's refusal to treat the individual functions as trivial. Lights and music became indicators of presence within the home, preserving the former partner's capacity to monitor activity after separation. The technology affected the client's embodied experience of domestic space. This is stronger practice because it interprets an apparently minor technical permission through its relational history and cumulative impact.

The survey comments offered parallel evidence about the cost of fragmented interpretation. That loss of context was especially clear in C177, where extensive digital records were presented to the police: "When I brought in printouts of the thousands of location-pings and missed calls, the officer sighed and called it a 'messy break-up,' advising me to 'just turn my phone off' as if going dark wouldn't trigger immediate physical retaliation." (Participant 177, Gay, aged 45+, Asian / Asian British)

The comment connects digital persistence, anticipated physical escalation and institutional advice. The officer's response, as understood by the respondent, separated the evidence from the consequence that made switching off unsafe. The conduct was reframed as relationship messiness, and the responsibility for ending it was placed on the person being monitored. This is not evidence about policing generally, but it exemplifies the interpretive loss produced when digital acts are not reconstructed as part of an online–offline course of control.

Identity abuse also required integrated interpretation. Threats of outing, non-consensual image distribution or impersonation may be enacted through platforms while producing consequences within families, workplaces, neighbourhoods and queer communities. LGBTQ+ specialist practitioners were often better placed to recognise that a person could be open about his sexuality in one setting and vulnerable to disclosure in another. Yet the interviews did not justify a simple specialist/mainstream binary. Some non-LGBTQ+ practitioners demonstrated strong awareness, while some specialist practitioners described resource pressures or uncertainty concerning technology. The relevant professional capacity was the ability to ask how audiences, identities and infrastructures were connected in the particular case.

Identity abuse is reserved here for the abusive partner's use of sexuality, disclosure, stigma or other identity-related vulnerability as a tactic or consequence of control. A service's failure to recognise that tactic may compound harm, but it is analysed as institutional misrecognition rather than redescribed as identity abuse by the institution.

Separation provided a further test. A housing advocate described the assumption that risk had diminished once partners no longer lived together: "Once they're no longer living together, it's sometimes assumed things are safer, unless there's evidence the ex-partner is actually showing up." (P08, housing advocate, statutory sector, 14 years' experience, gay man)

Chapter 6 showed that digital access, stored information and platform routes could survive the relationship. An integrated professional response would therefore treat separation as a change in the configuration of risk rather than evidence of its disappearance. The assessment should include retained administrative rights, shared accounts, cloud data, location permissions, payment platforms, online impersonation and the possibility that blocking may displace contact into physical spaces.

Effective practice was consequently relational and infrastructural. It asked not only what device or application had been used but how access was obtained, whether consent remained current, which audiences could be reached, what happened when a boundary was asserted and what material areas of life were affected. This approach avoids technological determinism: platforms do not cause coercive control, and the same function may support intimacy, safety or abuse. The professional task is to

determine how a function is embedded within relationship rules and what consequences follow from its use.

The findings therefore refine the online–offline nexus developed in Chapter 5. At the level of professional practice, the nexus is not merely a theoretical statement that digital and physical harms overlap. It is an interpretive requirement. Where practitioners connect the domains, they can identify cumulative harm and design safety responses around the person’s whole social and technological environment. Where organisations divide them, evidence is fragmented, risk may be downgraded and the victim-survivor is left to manage the relationship between the domains alone.

7.4 Risk Assessment, Evidence, and Professional Curiosity

Risk assessment was a major site through which professional interpretation became organisational action. The original chapter described DASH as though it contained no meaningful capacity to identify digital, coercive or post-separation conduct. That claim is not sustainable. The SafeLives DASH checklist and guidance include questions concerning fear, isolation, separation, stalking, harassment, repeated contact and escalation, while the College of Policing’s Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) was developed to strengthen police identification of coercive and controlling behaviour. The problem identified by the interviews is therefore not the complete absence of relevant indicators. It concerns how questions are asked, how answers are contextualised and whether completion of a process substitutes for professional curiosity (College of Policing, 2022; SafeLives, n.d.; SafeLives, 2025).

A support worker described the limitations of risk tools from his practice perspective: “The problem is that the tools are designed around physical incidents. If there’s no assault, no threats you can clearly point to, it’s very hard for it to score highly, even if the person feels constantly unsafe.” (P05, support worker, voluntary sector, nine years’ experience, gay man)

This quotation is retained as evidence of a practitioner’s experience of implementation, not as an objective description of every current tool. The practitioner’s account indicates that visible incidents and explicit threats could dominate scoring or referral,

while cumulative monitoring and fear were difficult to translate into the organisational decision. The distinction matters: revising a checklist alone will not solve interpretive practices that isolate behaviours, infer low risk from the absence of injury or fail to connect digital evidence to restriction.

Professional curiosity changes the assessment from a search for a qualifying incident into reconstruction of a course of conduct. Where a client reports repeated messages, the relevant questions include who initiated the contact, whether the person requested that it stop, whether new platforms were used after blocking, what information the sender demonstrated, whether contact affected sleep or movement and what the client believed would happen if he did not respond. Where tracking is disclosed, the assessment should examine consent, access history, physical proximity, device administration and whether the victim-survivor has altered routines because he believes he is being monitored.

A physical-event threshold was described in C181, where institutional recognition was experienced as being deferred until the former partner appeared in person: "The cybercrime officer told me that finding an AirTag hidden in my jacket wasn't a crime until my ex actually showed up at my door, treating active digital stalking like a minor inconvenience." (Participant 181, Gay, aged 25–34, White British / Other White)

The comment cannot determine the officer's complete legal assessment, but it demonstrates the respondent's experience of a physical-event threshold. The tracker had already generated a capacity to monitor movement and a reason for fear. Waiting for appearance at the home fragmented the technological act from the potential physical use of the information. Home Office guidance on controlling or coercive behaviour instead requires attention to patterns, impact and the cumulative context in which individual acts acquire meaning (Home Office, 2023).

Evidence presented a related difficulty. Digital abuse can generate extensive records, but volume does not guarantee intelligibility. A voluntary-sector caseworker explained: "We'll sometimes advise clients to keep screenshots, to log what's happening, but there's also a sense that unless it's very explicit or threatening, it's unlikely to go anywhere. So, you're asking people to collect all this evidence without being able to guarantee it will actually help." (P28, caseworker, voluntary sector, six years' experience, heterosexual woman)

The evidence burden can become a form of safety work. Victim-survivors are asked to preserve messages, record times, understand platform settings and maintain devices in their current state while living with the abuse those records document. Effective practice should therefore make evidence collection proportionate, explain its purpose, protect access to material and avoid implying that the victim-survivor's account is inherently insufficient without a complete technical archive.

Digital records can also mislead when treated as self-explanatory. A screenshot may show two people messaging without showing the earlier threat, the relationship rule governing reply or the anticipated consequence of silence. Location records may show mutual sharing while concealing that only one partner could withdraw permission safely. Professional curiosity is therefore contextual rather than simply technological. It asks what the record means within the relationship and whose autonomy it restricts.

Gender and sexuality influenced this process. A national policy practitioner observed: "There's still that underlying question of, 'How bad can it really be?' Especially when it's two men and it's online. It doesn't always trigger the same response." (P13, policy officer, national charity, eight years' experience, heterosexual woman)

The comment points to a compound credibility problem. Same-sex male victimisation may not correspond to the public story of domestic abuse, while digital conduct may not correspond to expectations of visible injury. Process-driven equality using the same checklist in the same way for every case does not necessarily produce equitable recognition where the interpretive assumptions surrounding the questions remain cis-heteronormative (Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

More effective risk practice therefore requires neither abandonment of structured tools nor unbounded practitioner discretion. Structure can support consistency, while professional curiosity supplies relational meaning. The evidence supports four linked requirements: use gender-neutral and identity-aware enquiry; connect digital conduct to fear, restriction and physical consequences; assess post-separation access and escalation; and examine the direction of power where both partners have acted. Organisational supervision should support these judgements rather than treating deviation from a numerical threshold as professionally unsafe.

The chapter's claim is accordingly narrower and more defensible than the original. Contemporary risk frameworks contain questions capable of eliciting aspects of TFA.

Their effectiveness depends on practitioner competence, contextual follow-up, organisational thresholds and the ability to identify coercive pattern without using gender, injury or a single incident as shortcuts. Risk assessment is therefore a site of interpretation and governance, not merely a neutral measurement of danger.

A more developed professional-curiosity approach would follow the disclosure from behaviour to pattern, impact and organisational action. The first task is descriptive: establish the technologies, accounts, permissions and communication routes involved without assuming that their everyday character makes them harmless. The second is relational: identify how access was obtained, whether it was mutually negotiated, whether consent could be withdrawn and what followed when the victim-survivor attempted to create distance. The third is consequential: connect the conduct to fear, changes in movement, sleep, employment, community participation, identity management and anticipated physical escalation. The fourth is directional: examine who imposed the rules of access, who was required to account for himself and whose actions progressively reduced the other's options. Only then should the information be translated into a structured risk process, referral or evidentiary plan. This sequence matters because premature categorisation can determine what is subsequently noticed. If the case enters the system as "online arguments", later messages may be read as further conflict; if it is understood as circumvention following refused access, the same evidence may indicate escalation. Professional curiosity is therefore not an optional interpersonal quality added after assessment. It is the method through which digitally dispersed material becomes capable of being assessed at all.

7.5 Identifying Abusive Partners: Masculinity and Apparent Mutuality

Same-sex male cases were frequently described as difficult because visible interaction appeared reciprocal. Both partners might send messages, access accounts, argue online or report the other. The difficulty is genuine: similarity of conduct can complicate the identification of the abusive partner, and the data do not support a presumption that every case contains a simple or unambiguous victim–perpetrator division. The analytical failure occurs when uncertainty is resolved automatically through symmetry, neutrality or the assumption that two men possess equal power.

A senior statutory practitioner expressed the uncertainty: "With two men, it can be harder to untangle who's doing what. You often see things going both ways, especially online, so it doesn't always fit that clear victim–perpetrator picture." (P10, senior practitioner, statutory sector, 15 years' experience, heterosexual man)

This account should not be dismissed as practitioner ignorance. It identifies a limitation of act-based assessment. Digital records make both parties' actions visible, while motives, fear and the consequences of non-compliance may remain hidden. The appropriate response is not to restore a gendered shortcut but to undertake a relational assessment of power.

Donovan and Hester's relationship rules provide that relational basis. The first rule is that the abusive relationship operates on the abusive partner's terms. The second positions the victim-survivor as responsible for the abusive partner, the relationship, the abuse and its consequences (Donovan and Hester, 2014). In practice, these rules direct attention to who defines acceptable access, who must provide explanations, who can refuse contact without punishment and who is required to prevent escalation. They are not general expectations of equality and reciprocity, as the original chapter suggested.

Experiential power is relevant only where a partner with greater experience of being out, same-sex relationships or LGBTQ+ communities uses that experience to define what is authentic, normal or expected for a less experienced partner. It is not a description of practitioners' technological familiarity, professional seniority or organisational authority. Those matters are analysed instead as digital competence, professional knowledge and institutional power.

A project manager in an LGBTQ+ charity demonstrated this form of enquiry when discussing apparently mutual password and location sharing: "They'd say, 'We're equal, we both do it.' But when we unpacked it, one of them was terrified of saying no, because refusing would start an argument or risk the partner outing him online. So yes, they both shared, but one didn't have a choice." (P19, project manager, LGBTQ+ charity, nine years' experience, gay man)

The practitioner did not infer coercion from the technological act alone. He examined whether consent could be withdrawn and what consequences followed refusal. The apparent symmetry of sharing concealed asymmetry in choice. This is a clear example

of stronger practice because the direction of power was established from relational evidence rather than gender or the surface form of the behaviour.

Masculinity could nevertheless influence which interpretation appeared plausible. A counsellor in an LGBTQ+ voluntary service observed: “There’s sometimes an assumption that men can handle it, that they’re more robust. When it’s two men, it can feel less clear-cut that one is being victimised.” (P01, counsellor, voluntary LGBTQ+ service, ten years’ experience, gay man)

The assumption of male resilience can reduce attention to fear, psychological restriction and the cost of resistance. It can also combine with a stereotype of technological competence, under which a man is expected to secure his own devices or leave a platform. These expectations obscure the relational problem: technical knowledge does not remove the consequences of blocking, outing, physical pursuit or economic interference.

Institutional neutrality was another response to uncertainty. A voluntary-sector caseworker explained: “We’re very careful not to take sides, especially with same-sex couples. We try to stay neutral and support both parties where possible.” (P28, caseworker, voluntary sector, six years’ experience, heterosexual woman)

Impartial procedure is not inherently inappropriate, particularly before sufficient information is available. The risk is that neutrality becomes refusal to analyse power. Offering equivalent support to both parties may expose the victim-survivor to further monitoring, enable the abusive partner to shape the institutional narrative or treat resistance as equivalent to patterned control.

The supplementary survey material illustrates institutional mutualisation. C184 shows how daily inspection of messages could be reframed as a shared relationship problem: “The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as ‘an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,’ treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix.” (Participant 184, Gay, aged 35–44, White British / Other White)

The phrase “trust deficit” transferred responsibility from the partner imposing surveillance to the couple as a unit. A communication framework can be useful in consensual conflict, but it becomes unsafe when one partner claims unilateral entitlement to inspect and the other cannot refuse without consequence. The

professional task is to determine whether there is a relationship problem negotiated by two people or a rule enforced by one.

Donovan and Barnes's concept of space for reaction is crucial here. Victim-survivors may reply, monitor for evidence, retaliate, defend themselves or use harmful conduct in attempts to resist an abusive partner. Such action is not automatically harmless, but neither does it establish equal coercive power. Space for reaction requires attention to motive, pattern, impact and the wider restriction of autonomy (Donovan and Barnes, 2020, p. 23). It also cautions against the ideal-victim expectation that a credible victim-survivor must remain passive and perfectly compliant.

The Coral Project Power, Control and Space for Reaction Wheel provides a practice-oriented method for following the direction of power where gender and sexuality do not identify the abusive partner (Donovan, Barnes and Nixon, 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020). Its relevance to TFA can be developed through six questions: who established the rules governing digital access and accountability; who attempted to withdraw or create distance; what followed when a boundary was asserted; what motive and anticipated consequence accompanied each action; whose conduct produced fear or restriction across areas of life; and who could stop acting without provoking escalation. Digital adaptation should additionally consider platform circumvention, residual administrative access, impersonation, evidence gathering and the movement between digital contact and physical appearance.

Applied to practice, this approach requires practitioners to resist treating the most recent screenshot as the beginning of the case. A counter-allegation, hostile reply or act of monitoring may only become intelligible when placed within the preceding sequence of demands, threats and failed attempts to disengage. The practitioner should therefore construct a chronology that records not only what each person did but the relationship between actions: a boundary is asserted, access is circumvented, a threat is made, a reply is sent to prevent exposure, or evidence is gathered because earlier disclosure was not believed. This chronology can reveal whether conduct that appears bidirectional performs different functions. One person may use technology to extend entitlement and impose consequences, while the other uses it episodically to create safety, document abuse or regain limited control.

The analysis must still remain open to evidence of harmful or coercive action by both parties. Space for reaction is not an automatic defence, and the Power, Control and Space for Reaction Wheel is not a device for assigning innocence in advance. Its value lies in requiring practitioners to distinguish the existence of action from the possession of coercive power. In digital cases, that distinction is especially important because platforms preserve decontextualised traces of reaction more readily than they preserve fear, coercion or the consequences that made reaction appear necessary.

This approach avoids two errors. False equivalence treats every reply, retaliatory message or act of evidence gathering as proof of mutual abuse. Automatic exoneration assumes that every action by a person identified as a victim-survivor was defensive or inconsequential. A relational assessment instead reconstructs the course of conduct and remains capable of identifying bidirectional harm where the evidence supports it.

The findings suggest that practitioners did not need a new gender-neutral typology so much as conceptual tools for asking better questions. Relationship rules, practices of love and space for reaction can assist practitioners in identifying who sets the terms, who carries responsibility and whose autonomy is progressively closed down. Their value lies precisely in avoiding reliance on gender presentation while retaining the possibility of asymmetry and accountability.

7.6 Organisational Constraints and Specialist Provision: Implications for Practice

Practitioner understanding did not translate automatically into organisational capacity. Several interviewees described recognising the seriousness of TFA while lacking time, specialist referral pathways, technical support or authority to provide a proportionate response. This distinction is important because an analysis limited to misrecognition would overlook practitioners who understood the harm but could not mobilise an effective pathway.

A helpline operator described the gap between recognition and available intervention: “You can hear how distressed someone is, you can see that it’s affecting every part of their life, but when you look at what you’re actually able to offer, it can feel very limited. There’s this sense of knowing it’s serious but not having the tools to respond in a way

that matches that.” (P23, helpline operator, voluntary sector, seven years’ experience, gay man)

This is appropriately described as moral distress only in a limited sense: the practitioner articulated an understanding of what the client required alongside an organisational inability to provide it (Banks and Gallagher, 2009). The concept should not be used as a general synonym for workload pressure or frustration. Its analytical value lies in distinguishing lack of recognition from inability to act on recognition.

Training was one source of constraint. A trainer in a national organisation observed: “A lot of our training still feels very analogue. It’s about incidents, physical harm, that sort of thing. The tech side is mentioned, but it’s not really unpacked, especially not in relation to same-sex relationships.” (P22, trainer, national organisation, 11 years’ experience, lesbian woman)

The problem described is not simply absence of a list of technologies. Platform functions change rapidly, and training organised around named applications will date quickly. More durable training would examine relational functions: how intimate access is acquired, how consent changes, how monitoring is automated, how identity and reputation are threatened, how contact migrates across platforms and how digital actions produce embodied consequences. Same-sex-specific material is necessary because practitioners must identify power without relying on a male-perpetrator/female-victim shortcut.

Resources shaped the time available for this interpretive work. A caseworker in an LGBTQ+ service explained: “When you’re constantly firefighting, you have to make decisions about where to focus your energy. And unfortunately, if something isn’t scoring highly on risk, it’s harder to justify spending the time it really needs.” (P12, caseworker, LGBTQ+ service, four years’ experience, gay man)

The account shows how risk scores and workload can interact. A practitioner may understand that the digital pattern is serious while being required to prioritise cases that cross an organisational threshold. The consequence is not only less support for an individual client. It narrows the opportunity to collect context that might have changed the assessment in the first place.

Practitioner reflexivity created possibilities for change. A project lead in an LGBTQ+ service stated: “I think we’re behind the game when it comes to tech abuse, full stop.

And when you add in sexuality, gender, all of that, it just makes the gaps bigger.” (P29, project lead, LGBTQ+ service, 11 years’ experience, gay man)

This recognition is significant because it refuses to idealise specialist provision. LGBTQ+ services may possess identity knowledge and greater awareness of the gap of trust while still lacking digital expertise, stable funding or domestic-abuse capacity. Generic domestic-abuse organisations may possess stronger safety and risk infrastructures while requiring greater LGBTQ+ competence. Statutory services may have formal powers but operate through evidentiary and process constraints. Effective provision therefore depends on combinations of expertise and on referral relationships capable of preserving continuity.

The case for LGBTQ+ by-and-for provision remains strong. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s mapping has documented severe inequalities in access to specialist support and the particular importance of services rooted in the communities they serve (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022). For gay and bisexual male victim-survivors, by-and-for provision can reduce the burden of explaining selective outness, queer social networks, HIV-related stigma, dating-app cultures and assumptions of mutuality. It can also signal that male and same-sex victimisation is anticipated rather than treated as an administrative exception.

By-and-for provision should not be presented as a complete solution. Specialist organisations require stable funding, domestic-abuse expertise, confidentiality safeguards, accessible referral routes and digital-safety capacity. Nor should mainstream organisations displace responsibility by referring every LGBTQ+ client elsewhere. A more defensible practice model combines specialist availability with mainstream accountability. Partnerships should enable consultation and referral without requiring the victim-survivor to repeat the entire account or lose access to statutory powers and local services.

A sustainable model would operate less as a sequence of disconnected referrals and more as a partnership architecture. An LGBTQ+ specialist service might provide consultation on identity abuse, selective visibility and community context; a domestic-abuse specialist might lead coercive-control assessment and safety planning; a statutory agency might provide safeguarding or legal powers; and a digital-safety specialist might advise on devices, accounts and evidence preservation. The victim-

survivor should not be required to coordinate these elements personally or repeat a traumatic account at each organisational boundary. With appropriate consent and confidentiality safeguards, a lead practitioner could maintain the relational chronology while drawing on other expertise.

This model would also reduce the risk that a technically focused intervention overlooks outing or community consequences, or that culturally competent support cannot secure practical protection. Commissioning arrangements are central to whether such coordination is possible. Short-term funding and narrow output measures can privilege easily recorded contacts over sustained casework, consultation and follow-up. By-and-for provision therefore requires more than symbolic inclusion within a referral directory. It requires stable capacity to undertake complex work and formal recognition that specialist knowledge contributes to risk interpretation rather than serving only as an optional source of emotional support.

The interviews support a three-part model of effective organisational response. First, organisations require relational competence: the capacity to recognise coercive pattern, relationship rules and space for reaction. Second, they require cultural competence concerning LGBTQ+ identities and social worlds, including selective disclosure and the public story of domestic abuse. Third, they require digital competence sufficient to assess access, permissions, data retention, platform migration and evidentiary implications. Where any one component is absent, the response may remain partial.

Practical improvement should therefore extend beyond awareness training. Services need digital-safety pathways, access to technical consultation, supervision for complex mutuality assessments, clear protocols for evidence preservation, and partnerships between LGBTQ+ and domestic-abuse specialists. Risk tools should be accompanied by prompts concerning online–offline consequences and post-separation access. Intake systems should not assume the gender of the abusive partner, and service information should make inclusion visible before disclosure.

The supplementary survey evidence also shows why visible inclusion matters. C197 described an intake interaction in which the service appeared unable to record a male former partner: “The domestic violence advocate paused when I gave my ex’s name and asked if there was ‘a female partner involved,’ making me realize their intake forms

didn't even have a category for what I was experiencing." (Participant 197, Gay, aged 18–24, Black / Black British)

The example is not representative of every service, but it demonstrates how an administrative category can communicate exclusion before substantive assessment begins. Organisational change therefore includes forms, language, websites, confidentiality information and referral protocols, not only individual practitioner attitudes.

The evidence ultimately supports neither practitioner blame nor institutional exoneration. Practitioners exercised judgement within conditions they did not fully control, but organisations and commissioners shape those conditions. The relevant question is whether systems make relational, LGBTQ+-competent and digitally informed practice possible, routine and sustainable rather than dependent on exceptional individual knowledge.

7.7 Discussion

The central finding of Chapter 7 is not that institutions uniformly fail to recognise TFA. It is that recognition is unevenly produced through the interaction of professional knowledge, organisational remit, risk processes, evidence practices and dominant narratives of victimhood. Some practitioners reconstructed digital conduct as part of coercive control and connected it to identity, bodily safety and post-separation persistence. Others recognised distress but lacked an effective organisational pathway. Misrecognition occurred where digital form, male victimhood or visible reciprocity displaced analysis of power and consequence.

This finding extends established UK research rather than claiming that same-sex domestic abuse or institutional barriers have previously been ignored. Donovan and Hester (2010, 2011, 2014) identified the public story, barriers to recognition and the gap of trust long before the current proliferation of networked devices. Donovan and Barnes (2020) further demonstrated the importance of space for reaction and the danger of interpreting LGBTQ+ relationships through mutual-abuse narratives. The contemporary contribution of this study is to show how those established problems are reorganised through digitally dispersed evidence. Victim-survivors and practitioners

must connect messages, account access, location data, platform histories and embodied consequences into a pattern that institutions can recognise.

The gap of trust is especially important. It refers here to the historically structured relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and formal help-providers, including policing, criminal justice and domestic-abuse services (Donovan and Hester, 2011; 2014). It is not a synonym for community gossip, reputational harm or minimisation by friends. The practitioner accounts and survey comments indicate how contemporary encounters can reproduce the gap: gendered intake assumptions, advice that transfers safety costs to the victim-survivor, mutual-conflict framings and physical-event thresholds may confirm an expectation that formal services will not understand the harm.

Trust was nevertheless relational and contingent rather than wholly absent. A visible LGBTQ+ remit, practitioner validation, clear confidentiality and contextual enquiry could make engagement more credible. Conversely, a specialist label without resources or an effective pathway might provide recognition without protection. The findings therefore resist a binary between trusted community services and distrusted mainstream institutions. The relevant issue is whether inclusion is demonstrated through the response to disclosure and whether organisational capacity follows recognition.

Institutional response also has epistemic consequences. TFA can already be difficult to name because the same technologies support ordinary intimacy, work and social life. Where a service describes monitoring as a messy breakup, a trust problem or low-level online conflict, that interpretation can intensify the victim-survivor's uncertainty about his own experience. Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice is useful because the harm concerns both credibility and interpretation: a person may be treated as less believable, or the institution may lack the conceptual resources to understand the pattern he is describing.

Misrecognition can be traced through a pathway rather than treated as an isolated poor interaction. Digitally dispersed conduct is disclosed; the conduct is divided into individual incidents; the absence of injury or an explicit threat reduces assessed urgency; reciprocal messaging is interpreted as mutual conflict; generic blocking advice transfers responsibility; and the victim-survivor disengages or continues self-

managing the risk. The institutional response does not cause the intimate abuse, but it affects whether the pattern is documented, interrupted or allowed to continue without effective intervention.

The reverse pathway is also visible. A practitioner asks what happens when access is refused, connects the digital behaviour to fear and restriction, recognises identity-based consequences, distinguishes space for reaction from equal control, supports proportionate evidence gathering and coordinates an appropriate referral. The chapter's contribution is strengthened by retaining this possibility. Institutional practice is not only a site of blindness; it can also be a site of recognition and interruption.

Placing the two pathways side by side clarifies how institutional practice affects the trajectory of harm. In the misrecognition pathway, disclosure is fragmented, the victim-survivor is required to produce increasing quantities of evidence, apparently reciprocal contact is mutualised and technical withdrawal is presented as the principal solution. The immediate organisational outcome may be closure, low-risk classification or referral elsewhere; the relational outcome may be continued access, further self-monitoring and reduced willingness to disclose again. In the recognition pathway, dispersed information is assembled into a chronology, identity and post-separation context are explored, space for reaction is distinguished from equal control and safety planning preserves access to work, community and evidence wherever possible. The organisational outcome may still be constrained, and recognition does not guarantee protection, but the victim-survivor's account enters the system as a coherent pattern rather than as a collection of minor incidents. This comparison demonstrates why institutional response is part of the governance of hybrid harm. Institutions do not determine whether the abuse occurred, but they shape which features acquire official significance, whose interpretation becomes authoritative and whether the course of conduct remains visible across time and organisational boundaries.

This distinction clarifies the relationship between institutions and Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC). The original chapter risked treating bodies, technologies and institutions as equivalent domains through which the abusive partner enacted control. The revised argument is more precise. HCC describes a relational configuration in which coercion moves across digital, embodied, emotional, identity-based and social domains. Institutions are not automatically part of the abusive relationship and should not be equated with the abusive partner. They mediate the visibility, credibility and

trajectory of hybrid harm. Their practices can interrupt the configuration or fragment it in ways that leave its relational logic unrecognised.

This institutional mediation has three dimensions. First, it is interpretive: practitioners decide whether digital conduct is peripheral, mutual or coercive. Second, it is procedural: tools, thresholds and referral pathways determine what action follows. Third, it is distributive: organisational resources shape who receives sustained support, technical assistance or specialist advocacy. These dimensions help explain why two disclosures of similar conduct may produce different outcomes without assuming that the underlying abuse is objectively different.

Masculinity and sexuality were central to that mediation. The public story can make male victimhood appear less plausible and same-sex relationships more symmetrical. Process-driven equality may then reproduce inequality by applying routine procedures without investigating how identity, outness or relationship rules affect risk (Butterby and Donovan, 2024). Queer criminology contributes here not by making the positions of victim-survivor and abusive partner unknowable, but by questioning the normative shortcuts through which institutions assign those positions.

The sector comparison suggests that effective recognition requires intersections of expertise. LGBTQ+ specialist practitioners were often able to identify identity abuse, selective visibility and the gap of trust. Domestic-abuse specialists could provide stronger conceptual resources concerning pattern and risk. Statutory practitioners possessed powers and safeguarding routes unavailable to many voluntary services. Counselling and community settings could offer relational continuity. The strongest practice combined these resources or established partnerships across them. The weakest practice assumed that one form of competence compensated for the absence of the others.

Organisational constraint remains part of the explanation. Limited time, high caseloads, unstable specialist provision and uncertainty concerning technical evidence can reduce the space for professional curiosity. Yet constraint should not become a reason to lower expectations. The interviews themselves contained reflexive accounts of the problem and examples of relationally informed assessment. These demonstrate that alternative practice is conceptually possible and provide a basis for training, commissioning and supervision.

The evidence is subject to important limits. The practitioner sample was purposive and self-selecting, and participants may have possessed greater prior interest in LGBTQ+ inclusion or domestic abuse than the wider workforce. The interviews captured professional accounts rather than direct observation of organisational practice. Practitioners may describe intended practice, exceptional cases or retrospective interpretations. The supplementary survey comments are brief and cannot establish service effectiveness or institutional prevalence. Sector differences are therefore analytical patterns within this sample, not statistically generalisable comparisons.

Within those limits, RQ3 can be answered with greater precision. Practitioners understood TFA through different combinations of domestic-abuse knowledge, LGBTQ+ competence, digital understanding and organisational authority. Recognition was strongest where they connected technology to relationship rules, identity and embodied restriction, and weakest where conduct was fragmented into incidents or treated through assumptions of male resilience and mutuality. Organisational systems shaped whether that understanding could be translated into action. Institutions consequently governed the legibility and trajectory of hybrid harm without becoming identical to the intimate coercion itself.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter examined how 30 practitioners working across LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic-abuse, statutory, voluntary, counselling, community, health, housing, advocacy, helpline, training and policy settings understood and responded to TFA affecting gay and bisexual men. Practitioner interviews formed the primary evidence for RQ3, while 27 verified survey comments concerning help-seeking, reporting or service response provided supplementary evidence about particular encounters.

In answer to RQ3, practitioners generally recognised that digital conduct could be harmful, but differed in whether they understood it as an integral component of coercive control, a secondary feature of a more familiar case or an issue the victim-survivor could manage through technical withdrawal. Stronger practice connected platform activity to fear, movement, identity, livelihood and post-separation access. Partial practice validated distress while relying on limited pathways or transferring substantial safety work to the victim-survivor. Misrecognition occurred where online

conduct was minimised, where male resilience was presumed or where apparent reciprocity displaced assessment of power.

The organisational comparison did not produce a simple hierarchy. LGBTQ+ specialist provision could reduce the burden of explaining identity and recognise selective outing or community context, but specialist services could remain constrained by funding, digital expertise or limited formal powers. Domestic-abuse and statutory settings could offer risk knowledge and intervention routes while still applying physical-harm thresholds or heteronormative assumptions. Effective practice required the combination of coercive-control expertise, LGBTQ+ cultural competence and digital understanding, supported by referral relationships and organisational resources.

The chapter corrected the earlier critique of risk assessment. DASH, DARA and associated guidance contain questions capable of eliciting fear, stalking, harassment, repeated contact, separation and coercive control. The difficulty lies in implementation: whether practitioners ask contextual questions, reconstruct a course of conduct and identify the primary abusive partner without using gender or injury as shortcuts. Structured tools and professional curiosity are therefore complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Relationship rules and space for reaction provided a non-heteronormative method of analysing apparent mutuality. Practitioners needed to ask who established the terms of access and responsibility, who attempted to create distance, what followed refusal and whose conduct generated cumulative restriction. The Coral Project Power, Control and Space for Reaction Wheel offers a practical basis for this enquiry and can be extended cautiously to include platform circumvention, residual access, digital evidence gathering and online–offline escalation.

The gap of trust was located specifically in the relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and formal help-providers. Contemporary misrecognition can reproduce that historical distance, while visible inclusion, confidentiality, validation and effective referral can begin to reduce it. By-and-for LGBTQ+ provision is therefore important but should be supported through stable resources and partnerships rather than treated as a substitute for mainstream institutional responsibility.

The evidence does not permit claims about all practitioners, organisations or victim-survivors. The sample was self-selecting, interview accounts were professionally

mediated and the survey comments were concise. The chapter nevertheless demonstrates that institutional recognition is not a binary condition. It is an organisational accomplishment produced through knowledge, interpretation, procedure and resources.

The practical implication is that improvement cannot be reduced to adding a short technology module or an LGBTQ+ inclusion statement to otherwise unchanged systems. Organisations need procedures that preserve relational context across assessment, evidence gathering and referral; supervision that supports practitioners to make defensible judgements about apparent mutuality; and commissioning that sustains both by-and-for expertise and mainstream responsibility. The findings therefore support an integrated response in which coercive-control analysis, queer cultural competence and digital safety are treated as mutually necessary components of professional practice.

The chapter also refines HCC. Institutions do not constitute an additional abusive domain equivalent to the intimate partner's coercion. They mediate whether hybrid patterns across digital, embodied, identity-based and social life are recognised, documented and interrupted. Chapter 8 draws together this institutional contribution with the findings on recognition, digital intimacy and post-separation persistence to state the thesis's theoretical, methodological and practical conclusions.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction and Scope

This thesis examined how technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) is interpreted, organised and responded to in relation to gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships. It began from two connected problems. Digital technologies have become integral to intimacy, communication, identity, community participation and everyday administration, yet their role in coercive control is still liable to be treated as secondary to physical violence. At the same time, gay and bisexual male victimisation remains uneasily positioned within a public and institutional story of domestic abuse organised around a male perpetrator and a female victim (Donovan and Hester, 2010; 2014). The thesis therefore asked not only what digitally mediated conduct might be harmful, but how that harm becomes recognisable within relationships, survey interpretation and professional practice.

The study used a qualitatively driven mixed-methods design. The UK-centred online survey generated 1,000 adult response records, of which 650 were from respondents who identified as gay or bisexual men. The live survey implemented an 18+ eligibility rule; the inconsistency between that rule and an 18–45 reference in the ethics paperwork is documented transparently in Chapter 3. The final detailed analysis used the verified 200-respondent analytic sample for linked structured and demographic analysis and the verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus for qualitative interpretation. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners working across LGBTQ+ specialist, domestic-abuse, statutory, voluntary, counselling, community, health, housing, advocacy, policy and training settings. The structured survey material, open-text comments and practitioner interviews performed different evidentiary functions. They were brought into dialogue to examine classification, meaning-making and professional interpretation, not to validate one another as though each represented the same phenomenon.

The survey was exploratory and interpretive rather than representative. It was not designed to estimate the prevalence of TFA, intimate partner violence or service failure among gay and bisexual men. Completion of a vignette or open-text question was not treated as evidence that a respondent had personally experienced abuse. The

analysis distinguished hypothetical classification, general commentary and explicit first-person or witnessed accounts. Theme counts refer to the number of comments in which a theme appeared and can overlap because a single comment may contain several analytically relevant features. Practitioner interviews provide evidence about professional sense-making and organisational context, not unmediated access to victim-survivors' lives.

The thesis makes a queer criminological contribution with clear victimological implications. Its central concern is the politics of recognition: how power, harm and responsibility are interpreted where technologies are ordinary features of intimate life and where gender cannot function as a reliable shortcut for identifying victimisation. Queer criminology is used here not to render categories of victim-survivor and abusive partner permanently indeterminate, but to question the normative assumptions through which those categories are assigned and to examine how sexuality, masculinity, identity and institutional history shape credibility (Ball, 2016).

Four research questions organised the study. The first examined how gay and bisexual men described and interpreted TFA without assuming that survey participation established personal victimisation. The second identified forms of TFA and situated them within coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces. The third examined practitioner understandings across domestic-abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory and community settings. The fourth examined how age and different forms of digital socialisation related to perceptions of normal, controlling and abusive behaviour. The analysis chapters progressively answered these questions: Chapter 4 focused on recognition and interpretation; Chapter 5 on technologies of intimacy, visibility and the online–offline nexus; Chapter 6 on separation, continuity and space for reaction; and Chapter 7 on professional and organisational recognition.

This concluding chapter consolidates those answers without introducing new empirical claims. Section 8.2 answers the four research questions directly. Section 8.3 identifies the principal empirical contributions. Section 8.4 states the theoretical contribution and defines Hybrid Coercive Control (HCC) as a mid-level conceptual framework. Section 8.5 reflects on the methodological contribution and limitations, including the rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence since data collection. Section 8.6 translates the findings into implications for services, commissioners, police, criminal

justice, platforms and law. Section 8.7 sets out explicit new research questions and future directions. Section 8.8 concludes with the significance and boundaries of the thesis's contribution.

8.2 Answers to the Research Questions

Table 8.1 provides the shortest direct account of how the thesis answers its research questions. The answers are deliberately bounded by the design. They distinguish structured survey classification from open-text interpretation, and they reserve claims about professional and organisational practice for the practitioner interviews. The table is followed by a fuller synthesis of what each answer contributes.

Table 8.1: Direct answers to the research questions

Research question	Principal answer	Primary evidentiary basis and limit
RQ1: How do gay and bisexual men describe and interpret technology-facilitated abuse in same-sex intimate relationships?	Recognition was contextual rather than behaviourally automatic. Digital access, checking, location sharing and expectations of availability could be understood as intimacy, care or normal connectivity, but became controlling or abusive where consent was constrained, refusal produced consequences, or one partner established the terms of transparency and responsibility. The verified comments also showed retrospective reinterpretation, uncertainty and explicit personal disclosures, without permitting all survey participation to be treated as evidence of victimisation.	Structured vignette classifications and the verified 200-comment open-text analytic corpus; practitioner observations used only as supplementary context.
RQ2: What forms of technology-facilitated abuse are identified by gay and bisexual men, and how are these situated within broader dynamics of coercive control, identity abuse and movement between online and offline relational spaces?	The study identified surveillance and account access, persistent contact, identity and visibility abuse, impersonation, sexual and image-based coercion, reputational and economic interference, post-separation circumvention and online-offline consequences. Their significance lay in the relationship rules, practices of love, unequal resources, identity-related vulnerability and consequences of resistance through which technological functions were organised as coercive control.	Verified 200-comment corpus, with focused post-separation, mutuality/reaction and help-seeking analyses; practitioner accounts as supplementary evidence.

Research question	Principal answer	Primary evidentiary basis and limit
RQ3: How do practitioners working across domestic abuse, LGBTQ+ specialist, statutory and community settings understand the nature and impact of technology-facilitated abuse affecting gay and bisexual men?	Professional recognition was uneven and depended on the interaction of domestic-abuse expertise, LGBTQ+ cultural competence, digital understanding and organisational authority. Stronger practice reconstructed a relational course of conduct and connected digital actions to embodied, identity-based and social consequences. Partial or misrecognising practice fragmented evidence, relied on physical-harm thresholds, transferred safety work to the victim-survivor or treated visible reciprocity as mutual abuse.	Thirty semi-structured practitioner interviews; 27 verified survey comments concerning help-seeking, reporting or service response used as supplementary evidence.
RQ4: How do age and different forms of digital socialisation relate to gay and bisexual men's perceptions of what constitutes abuse, control or "normal" behaviour within digitally mediated intimate relationships?	The age-disaggregated within-sample analysis identified variation across the four age groups, but not a consistent younger–older gradient. Agreement that the vignette behaviours were normal remained comparatively low across all age categories and varied by behaviour. Respondents aged 25–34 recorded somewhat higher normality classifications for several practices, while other scenarios produced different age patterns. The findings therefore do not support a simple generational divide. Age is relevant as one dimension of variation in the interpretation of digital intimacy, but it does not establish technological competence, digital socialisation or capacity to recognise coercion.	Age-disaggregated structured vignette analysis from the verified 200-respondent analytic sample, interpreted alongside relevant open-text material and situated practitioner observations. The comparison is descriptive within the sample and does not establish a causal age effect, population-level generational difference or equivalence between chronological age and digital socialisation.

Note: Open-text theme counts indicate the number and proportion of verified comments mentioning a theme. They are not estimates of victimisation prevalence. Practitioner accounts are situated professional interpretations rather than direct survivor evidence.

In answer to RQ1, the thesis found that recognition depended on relational context rather than on a fixed list of technologies or behaviours. Vignette classifications and open-text comments showed that respondents could understand the same general practice for example, location sharing, device access or persistent communication as normal, controlling and abusive in different circumstances. This was not simply inconsistency. It reflected the distinction between a technological function and the relationship rule through which that function was organised. Access became coercively significant where it was demanded rather than negotiated, where privacy was represented as disloyalty, where the victim-survivor was made responsible for

reassurance and where refusal produced punishment or escalation (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

The findings also demonstrate that recognition may be retrospective. Practices accepted as intimacy during a relationship could be reinterpreted after separation, once the expectation of continuing access lost its consensual basis. The comments contained general judgements, witnessed examples and explicit disclosures, but they did not support an assumption that all respondents were victim-survivors. The contribution of RQ1 is therefore interpretive: it identifies how consent, responsibility, practices of love and the consequences of refusal shape the threshold between ordinary digital intimacy and abuse.

In answer to RQ2, the thesis identified an interrelated field of conduct rather than a catalogue of isolated tactics. Digital access and surveillance appeared in 131 of the 200 verified comments (65.5 per cent); recognition, normalisation and relational meaning in 121 comments (60.5 per cent); identity, visibility and reputation in 63 comments (31.5 per cent); and explicit online–offline continuity or hybrid harm in 56 comments (28 per cent). Sexual and image-based coercion appeared in ten comments (5 per cent). These proportions describe the analytic corpus and do not estimate how commonly gay and bisexual men experience these forms of abuse.

The forms included monitoring, account access, password demands, location tracking, multi-platform persistence, impersonation, outing threats, reputational manipulation, intimate-image abuse, economic and employment interference, and the use of platforms or smart systems to affect physical space. Chapter 6 further identified post-separation persistence as an overarching theme in 36 comments (18.0 per cent), mutual-abuse narratives or misrecognition in 13 comments (6.5 per cent), and help-seeking or the gap of trust in 27 comments (13.5 per cent).

The answer to RQ2 is consequently relational and processual. TFA was situated within the first relationship rule, through which the relationship operated on the abusive partner's terms, and the second, through which the victim-survivor was assigned responsibility for the partner, the relationship and the consequences of abuse (Donovan and Hester, 2014). Practices of love could make compliance with transparency, availability and emotional labour appear meaningful or caring. Identity-related vulnerabilities could be mobilised through selective disclosure, community

position and reputational threat. The online–offline nexus described how digital acts produced embodied, domestic, economic and social consequences. Separation exposed the temporal reach of this configuration because permissions, data and audiences accumulated during intimacy could remain available after the relationship ended.

In answer to RQ3, practitioners did not generally deny that digital conduct could be harmful. Their understanding varied according to the combination of domestic-abuse expertise, LGBTQ+ cultural competence, digital knowledge and organisational authority available within their setting. Stronger responses reconstructed a course of conduct, asked what happened when access was refused, connected digital behaviour to fear and restriction, recognised selective outing and contextualised apparently reciprocal interaction. Partial responses validated distress but relied on blocking, referral or limited organisational pathways. Misrecognition occurred where digital form was treated as evidence of lesser seriousness, where physical arrival was required before risk became actionable, or where the conduct of two men was presumed equal without analysis of motive, history or consequences.

The organisational comparison did not produce a simple hierarchy. LGBTQ+ specialist services could reduce the burden of explaining identity and community context but might lack stable resources, digital-safety capacity or formal powers. Domestic-abuse and statutory settings could supply risk knowledge and intervention pathways while still reproducing physical-harm thresholds or gendered assumptions. Counselling and community services could provide relational continuity but sometimes recast surveillance as communication difficulty. The answer to RQ3 therefore concerns combinations of competence and institutional capacity, not the inherent quality of one sector.

In answer to RQ4, the age-disaggregated analysis identified variation in how digitally mediated relationship practices were interpreted but did not reveal a consistent generational gradient. Agreement that the vignette behaviours were normal remained comparatively low across all four age groups and differed according to the behaviour under consideration. Respondents aged 25–34 recorded somewhat higher normality classifications for several practices, while other scenarios produced different age distributions. These findings do not indicate that younger gay and bisexual men generally regarded digitally intrusive conduct as more normal or were less able to

recognise control or abuse. Rather, they suggest that chronological age forms one part of the interpretive context within which expectations of connectivity, availability, transparency and privacy are understood. Digital socialisation cannot be reduced to age alone, but encompasses platform histories, relationship experience and changing norms of technologically mediated intimacy.

Taken together, the answers show why TFA cannot be understood solely through behaviour lists, technical literacy or a binary separation between online and offline life. Recognition depends on the organisation of power within the relationship, while professional response depends on the organisation of knowledge within institutions. The central empirical and theoretical task of the thesis has been to make those organising relationships visible.

8.3 Principal Empirical Contributions

The first empirical contribution is a focused UK account of how gay and bisexual men interpret digitally mediated intimacy and control. Existing research has established the importance of technology in domestic abuse and stalking (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris and Woodlock, 2019). The present study adds an interpretive layer by showing how ordinary functions acquire different meanings through consent, relational expectations and identity. The finding is not that connectivity is intrinsically abusive. It is that technologies can stabilise an expectation that love requires uninterrupted access, and can make withdrawal from that expectation visible to the partner who benefits from it.

This contribution is especially important for same-sex male relationships because power cannot be inferred reliably from gender composition. The vignette and comment material demonstrated that equality could be asserted at the level of form both partners share passwords, both send messages, both monitor locations while choice, fear and consequences remained unequal. Relationship rules made that inequality visible by asking who established the terms and who was made responsible. The analysis therefore contributes evidence to an established UK literature that has challenged the assumption that abuse between people of the same gender is necessarily mutual or symmetrical (Donovan and Hester, 2010 ; 2014; Donovan and Barnes, 2020).

The second empirical contribution concerns digital visibility as a terrain of coercion. The comments showed that sexuality, intimacy, photographs, dating profiles,

employment identities and community reputations could be connected across platforms and audiences. The coercive significance of outing did not depend on a person being wholly closeted. Disclosure remained contextual, and a former partner could exploit the uneven distribution of safety across family, workplace, neighbourhood and community settings. Sedgwick's (1990) account of the closet remains relevant because disclosure is repeated and audience-specific rather than completed once and for all.

The findings also show that identity abuse cannot be reduced to offensive language or prejudice. Digital identity and reputational control could affect where a person felt able to live, work, date or participate socially. Fake profiles, impersonation and the threatened or actual circulation of intimate material could alter how others encountered the victim-survivor and could invite strangers into physical proximity. Technology therefore increased the speed and audience of identity-based coercion while drawing its force from existing social inequalities rather than creating them independently (Powell and Henry, 2017; Henry and Powell, 2018).

The third empirical contribution concerns the online–offline nexus. Digital actions were not experienced only as communications viewed on screens. They changed movement, sleep, domestic space, work, economic security and anticipation of physical encounter. Smart-home access could affect conditions inside the home; location tracking could reorganise travel; persistent messaging could enforce availability; and impersonation could threaten employment or residential safety. The study therefore supports the argument that digital coercive control is spatially expansive and materially consequential (Harris and Woodlock, 2019).

The fourth contribution is the analysis of separation as the contested withdrawal of relational entitlement. The chapter-level focused review demonstrated that separation was not simply a date after which abuse continued. It challenged claims to access, knowledge, explanation and emotional care that had been established during the relationship. Digital infrastructures enabled an abusive partner to resist that withdrawal by migrating across platforms, retaining administrative permissions, using stored data or mobilising public relationship traces. The relationship-phases heuristic organised recurring patterns of normalisation, attempted withdrawal and reconfiguration while remaining explicitly non-linear and researcher-generated.

This analysis also preserves victim-survivor agency without converting action into evidence of equal abuse. Blocking, replying, evidence gathering, self-censorship or retaliation could represent space for reaction within a constrained field (Donovan and Barnes, 2020). Their meaning depended on motive, pattern and consequence. The empirical contribution is not a categorical claim that reactive conduct is harmless. It is evidence that digital records can make interaction visible while concealing why an interaction occurred and who could stop without punishment.

The fifth contribution is a differentiated account of practitioner and organisational recognition. The interviews showed perceptive practice, constrained partial practice and misrecognition. Some practitioners connected digital actions to identity, fear and post-separation risk. Others understood the distress but lacked a route proportionate to it. Misrecognition arose where evidence was fragmented into isolated incidents, where a male victim-survivor was presumed resilient, or where visible reciprocity was treated as sufficient proof of mutuality. These findings extend earlier UK research on the public story and the gap of trust by identifying a contemporary evidentiary problem: technologically distributed conduct must be reconstructed across accounts, platforms and time before it can become institutionally legible (Donovan and Hester, 2010, 2014; Butterby and Donovan, 2024).

The practitioner analysis also provides evidence against a homogeneous concept of institutional blindness. Organisational setting mattered, but no sector automatically supplied good practice. Effective recognition required the interaction of coercive-control expertise, LGBTQ+ cultural knowledge, digital understanding and organisational authority. This finding supports the importance of LGBTQ+ by-and-for provision while also requiring mainstream services to retain responsibility and develop competent partnerships rather than treating referral as a complete response (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

Across these contributions, the thesis does not claim that gay and bisexual men's TFA is wholly unique or that earlier research failed to identify coercive control in LGBTQ+ relationships. Its empirical originality lies in bringing verified survey classification and open-text interpretation into dialogue with differentiated practitioner accounts, and in using that evidence to show how digital infrastructures interact with established dynamics of relationship power, identity and recognition.

8.4 Theoretical Contribution: Hybrid Coercive Control

The theoretical contribution is best understood through a distinction between concepts the thesis adopts, concepts it applies or extends, and the mid-level framework it develops. Stark's (2007) account of coercive control provides the foundation for understanding patterned restriction of autonomy. Donovan and Hester's (2014) relationship rules and practices of love are applied to digitally mediated intimacy and separation. Identity abuse is drawn from earlier LGBTQ+ domestic-abuse scholarship and its UK development; it is not treated as a concept originated by Donovan and Hester. Experiential power retains its specific meaning as identity-related authority based on greater experience of being out, same-sex relationships or LGBTQ+ communities. Donovan and Barnes's (2020) space for reaction is applied to digitally visible resistance and apparent reciprocity. HCC is the thesis's own synthesising contribution.

Hybrid Coercive Control is defined here as a mid-level conceptual framework describing how coercive control is organised through interconnected digital, embodied, emotional, identity-based and social mechanisms, with technologies functioning as infrastructures through which relational entitlement can be established, enforced and preserved across time and space. The term hybrid does not mean that an online form of abuse is simply added to an offline form. It describes a configuration in which technological functions, relationship rules and material consequences become mutually dependent.

The first proposition of HCC is relational integration. A technological action does not carry a fixed coercive meaning. Meaning depends on the rule under which it occurs: who is entitled to access, who must remain available, whether consent can be withdrawn and what consequence follows refusal. Practices of love can legitimise the rule by making compliance with transparency or emotional labour appear evidence of trust. HCC therefore keeps the intimate relationship at the centre of analysis rather than treating technology as an autonomous cause.

The second proposition is infrastructural integration. Devices, accounts, permissions, stored data, shared administration and platform affordances can stabilise a relationship rule beyond a face-to-face interaction. They make access repeatable and, in some cases, automated. The same infrastructure can outlast cohabitation and

formal intimacy. This proposition explains why technical permission cannot be equated with continuing consent and why safety planning must examine the full system rather than an individual message or application.

The third proposition is spatial and material integration. Digital conduct can produce bodily fear, alter movement, affect domestic conditions, expose identity, damage employment or reorganise community participation. The online–offline nexus is therefore not an assertion that two separate spaces occasionally overlap. It is the practical process through which information and action in one domain acquire consequences in another. HCC captures these chains of consequence without collapsing every digital act into physical violence.

The fourth proposition is temporal continuity. Data, intimate images, platform connections and knowledge accumulated at one stage of a relationship can be mobilised later. Separation may remove the socially accepted basis for access while leaving the infrastructure of access intact. The abusive partner can then use persistence, circumvention, exposure or retained permissions to contest withdrawal. This proposition gives HCC temporal as well as spatial reach and explains why post-separation abuse may represent reconfiguration rather than residue.

Formal institutions occupy a different position. They do not ordinarily constitute an equivalent domain of intimate coercion and should not be described as exercising the abusive partner's relationship rules. They mediate whether hybrid patterns are recognised, documented, interrupted, fragmented or allowed to remain institutionally illegible. This distinction preserves accountability for the abusive relationship while recognising that evidentiary rules, professional interpretation and service capacity affect the trajectory of harm. Institutions may compound misrecognition, but they are not automatically part of the perpetrator's coercive apparatus.

HCC is neither a grand theory nor a claim that all technologically mediated relationships follow one trajectory. It is grounded in a specific study of gay and bisexual men in the UK and requires testing in other populations and designs. It does not imply that technology itself causes abuse, that all relationships are equally digitised or that digital conduct is always more harmful than non-digital conduct. Its value is explanatory: it identifies how relational, infrastructural, spatial and temporal mechanisms can combine to restrict autonomy.

The framework also offers a way to analyse technological change without tying the theory to a fixed list of applications. This is important because the technological environment has changed rapidly since data collection, most visibly through the mainstream availability of generative artificial intelligence. Ofcom has observed that generative tools can make realistic synthetic images, audio and video easier to create with relatively modest technical skill (Ofcom, 2024a). Synthetic intimate images, cloned voices, fabricated communications, automated impersonation and AI-generated profiles may intensify identity abuse, reputational coercion, counter-allegations and uncertainty about the authenticity of evidence.

The study did not collect empirical evidence about generative AI and cannot establish how such tools are being used in gay and bisexual men's relationships. The theoretical relevance is prospective and bounded. AI does not necessarily alter the underlying relationship rules through which coercive control operates: an abusive partner may still claim authority over visibility, demand accountability or impose consequences for withdrawal. It may, however, increase the speed, scale, plausibility, accessibility and deniability with which those rules are enforced. HCC is sufficiently flexible to generate questions about these developments without treating them as findings of the present study.

The theoretical contribution is therefore not a claim of technological novelty. It is a relational account of how longstanding dynamics of coercive control are reorganised through infrastructures that preserve access, connect audiences and produce consequences across time and space. This contribution extends coercive-control scholarship while remaining anchored in the queer criminological problem of whose harm is recognisable and through which normative frameworks.

8.5 Methodological Contribution and Limitations

The methodological contribution lies in using complementary forms of evidence to examine different sites of recognition. Structured vignette classifications captured how respondents evaluated scenarios without requiring personal disclosure. Linked survey items enabled descriptive within-sample analysis. The verified open-text corpus captured brief explanations, ambiguities and explicit disclosures. Practitioner interviews examined professional interpretation, organisational language and perceived constraints. The value of the mixed-methods design was therefore

complementarity rather than the search for one account that could be treated as objectively validated by the others.

The vignette method was particularly useful for separating recognition from self-identification as a victim-survivor. Respondents could evaluate controlling or abusive dynamics in hypothetical relationships even where they did not disclose personal experience. At the same time, scenario wording and available response options necessarily shaped interpretation, and vignette classifications cannot reproduce the complexity or emotional conditions of an actual relationship. The findings concern judgements made within the instrument rather than direct observations of behaviour.

The open-text material added interpretive depth, but it remained an optional single-field response. Comments varied in length, specificity and relationship to personal experience. They could reveal uncertainty or provide a concise disclosure, but they did not allow follow-up questions, clarification or reconstruction of a full chronology. The verified 200-comment corpus was therefore analysed as a bounded body of text rather than as 200 full victim-survivor narratives. The transparent manual process documented in the corpus table, codebook, frequency summary and theme map supports auditability but does not remove the interpretive role of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

The practitioner interviews supplied richer contextual accounts but remained professionally mediated. Participants described cases, organisational routines and their own interpretations retrospectively. The study did not observe practice directly, audit case files or compare organisational outcomes. The purposive and self-selecting sample may have attracted practitioners with greater interest in LGBTQ+ inclusion or TFA than the wider workforce. Sector comparisons identify patterns within the sample rather than statistically generalisable differences between service types.

The absence of in-depth interviews with gay and bisexual male victim-survivors is a significant limitation. It restricts the thesis's ability to explore chronology, emotional meaning, resistance, institutional engagement and change over time in the depth that longitudinal qualitative research could provide. The anonymous survey reduced some disclosure and safety risks, but the choice should not be presented as inherently superior to direct interviewing. Future survivor-led research should develop safe designs capable of generating fuller relational accounts.

The survey used non-probability recruitment and cannot represent gay and bisexual men in the UK. The verified analytic corpus and linked sample support accurate analysis of the included respondents, not population inference. Uneven subgroup sizes limited intersectional comparison. The categorical age bands enabled descriptive comparison across the four age groups, but the resulting pattern was neither linear nor reducible to a younger–older divide. Normality classifications remained comparatively low across all age categories and varied by behaviour, meaning that chronological age cannot be treated as a direct measure of digital socialisation, technological competence or capacity to recognise abuse. The age categories also constrain analysis of later-life experience and cannot disentangle age from cohort, platform use, relationship history, privacy expectations or other forms of digital experience. The age findings should therefore be understood as descriptive within-sample variation rather than as evidence of a causal or population-level generational effect. The study also could not examine geographical variation, rural isolation or service availability systematically.

The thesis adopted a reflexive queer criminological orientation. The researcher's cultural proximity to queer social and digital life contributed sensitivity to practices that may be normalised or dismissed, but it did not provide experiential equivalence or automatic epistemic authority. Reflexivity was used to limit claims, distinguish direct evidence from interpretation and interrogate the categories through which harm was made legible (Haraway, 1988). It does not remove the possibility that other researchers or participants would interpret the material differently.

A further limitation is temporal. Data were collected approximately two years before the final revision of the thesis, during a period of rapid change in generative AI, platform governance and intimate-image law. The study captured surveillance, impersonation, image-based abuse, identity manipulation and evidentiary uncertainty before widespread public access to tools capable of generating convincing synthetic text, images, audio and video. It therefore cannot make claims about the prevalence, forms or impact of AI-facilitated abuse within the study population.

This limitation does not make the findings obsolete. The relational mechanisms identified entitlement to access, control of visibility, reputational threat, post-separation persistence and institutional difficulty assessing digital evidence provide a grounded basis for future enquiry. The rapid development of AI instead illustrates why theories

and methods should focus on functions and power relationships rather than remain attached to particular applications. It also reinforces the need for longitudinal research and for research instruments to be updated as technological affordances and legal categories change.

Finally, the study does not claim that its conceptual framework is exclusive to gay and bisexual men. The population through which HCC was developed is analytically significant because same-sex male relationships expose the limits of gendered shortcuts and make identity-based and community dynamics especially visible. Transferability to other populations must nevertheless be demonstrated rather than assumed. The thesis's methodological contribution is a transparent, bounded account of how mixed evidence can support conceptual development without converting partial data into universal claims.

8.6 Implications for Policy, Practice, Platforms and Law

The findings support practical and policy change, but they do not point to one universal intervention. TFA is produced through relationships, infrastructures and social contexts; responses therefore require coordination across domestic-abuse services, LGBTQ+ organisations, statutory agencies, commissioners, criminal justice and technology platforms. Recommendations should preserve the central finding that a technical action has to be interpreted through the relationship and its consequences.

For domestic-abuse and LGBTQ+ services, digital safety should form part of routine coercive-control assessment rather than a specialist add-on activated only after a device compromise is confirmed. Enquiry should include shared accounts, passwords, administrative permissions, data backups, location services, smart-home systems, payment platforms, image possession and the migration of contact across applications. Practitioners should ask how access was established, whether consent remains current and what occurs when the victim-survivor attempts to withdraw it.

Safety planning should not assume that blocking, deleting an account or leaving a platform is neutral or cost-free. Digital services may be necessary for employment, education, community, healthcare, parenting coordination and evidence preservation. Withdrawal can deepen isolation or trigger escalation. A proportionate plan should balance security changes with social access, practical dependency, the preservation

of evidence and the risk associated with making a boundary visible to the abusive partner.

Services also require competence concerning identity and visibility. An openly gay or bisexual man may remain vulnerable to disclosure in particular settings, and digital audiences can collapse family, work, neighbourhood and community contexts. Intake and risk assessment should examine selective outness, sexual and intimate images, dating profiles, HIV-related information, community standing and reputational threats without assuming that sexuality is either wholly hidden or wholly public. Inclusive language and forms should make male and same-sex victimisation administratively possible before a disclosure is made.

For commissioners and policymakers, the findings support stable LGBTQ+ by-and-for provision and structured partnerships between LGBTQ+ specialists, domestic-abuse services, statutory agencies and digital-safety expertise. By-and-for provision can reduce the burden of explaining identity and community context, but it should not be expected to compensate for mainstream institutional exclusion or unstable funding. Commissioning should support consultation, shared training, continuity and lead-practitioner models so that victim-survivors are not required to coordinate expertise or repeat their accounts across disconnected services (Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 2022).

Risk assessment should be improved through implementation and professional curiosity rather than through the unsupported claim that existing tools contain no relevant indicators. The SafeLives DASH checklist and the College of Policing DARA framework can elicit fear, separation, isolation, stalking, harassment, repeated contact and coercive behaviour. Their effectiveness depends on whether practitioners connect answers into a course of conduct, explore online–offline consequences and assess direction of power without relying on gender or injury as shortcuts (College of Policing, 2022; SafeLives, 2025).

Where both parties have acted, professional assessment should use relationship rules, motive, chronology, impact and space for reaction. The Coral Project Power, Control and Space for Reaction Wheel offers a relevant practice basis for identifying who establishes the terms, who attempts to create distance and whose conduct generates cumulative restriction (Donovan, Barnes and Nixon, 2014; Donovan and

Barnes, 2020). A digital application should consider platform circumvention, residual administrative access, evidence gathering, impersonation and movement from online contact to physical appearance.

For police and criminal justice agencies, digital evidence should be interpreted as part of a repeated or continuous course of behaviour rather than as a set of self-explanatory screenshots. Evidence plans should reconstruct relationship history, permissions, requests to stop, changes in platform, identity consequences and material effects. Volume alone should not determine credibility, and a visible physical event should not be required before location monitoring or repeated circumvention becomes relevant. The Home Office statutory guidance already emphasises context, pattern, technology-facilitated domestic abuse and the need to look beyond an individual report (Home Office, 2023).

The legal position in England and Wales must be stated accurately. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 created the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship. Section 68 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 subsequently removed the former cohabitation requirement for ex-intimate partners and family members; the amendment came into force on 5 April 2023. Post-separation conduct is therefore not wholly excluded from the offence. The practical challenge is identifying and evidencing a repeated or continuous pattern with a serious effect where conduct is distributed across technologies, audiences and time (Serious Crime Act 2015; Domestic Abuse Act 2021; Home Office, 2023).

The findings also have implications for technology platforms and product design. Shared-account and household systems should provide transparent records of administrators and permissions, accessible separation processes and clear warnings when one person retains control after another leaves a relationship. Services should make it easier to document account changes, preserve evidence without continued exposure, report impersonation and prevent rapid multi-account circumvention. Location and smart-home products should treat revocation and household separation as foreseeable safety scenarios rather than exceptional support cases.

Platform responsibilities are increasingly relevant to generative AI. Ofcom has clarified that the Online Safety Act 2023 applies to AI services only insofar as they fall within the Act's regulated service categories, including user-to-user services, search

services and services that publish pornographic content. AI-generated material shared by users on a user-to-user service is treated as user-generated content, while stand-alone chatbot outputs may fall outside the Act depending on how the service functions (Ofcom, 2024b, 2026). Platforms and model providers should therefore consider how their systems can be used for non-consensual intimate images, cloned identity, impersonation and automated harassment, and should support rapid reporting, traceable provenance and evidence preservation without placing the full burden on the person targeted.

The legal landscape has also changed since data collection. In England and Wales, sharing or threatening to share an intimate image without consent can include AI-generated images. From 6 February 2026, sections 66E and 66F of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, inserted by section 138 of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, criminalised intentionally creating, or requesting the creation of, a purported intimate image of an adult where the person depicted does not consent and the defendant does not reasonably believe that they consent. From 29 June 2026, section 99 of the Crime and Policing Act 2026 inserted sections 66I–66L into the Sexual Offences Act 2003, creating offences relating to making, adapting, supplying or offering to supply generators of purported intimate images. These developments are important, but criminalisation alone will not resolve the relational and evidentiary problems identified by the thesis. Practitioners and justice agencies still need to understand how synthetic material is used to impose relationship rules, threaten identity and undermine credibility (Online Safety Act 2023; Data (Use and Access) Act 2025; Crime and Policing Act 2026; Home Office, 2026; Ofcom, 2026).

Finally, reducing the gap of trust requires demonstrated practice rather than inclusive statements alone. Formal institutions should communicate confidentiality clearly, recognise same-sex male victimisation, avoid treating reciprocal action as automatic mutual abuse and provide a coherent route from disclosure to action. Trust is unlikely to be restored through expectations that marginalised victim-survivors adapt to fragmented systems. It depends on institutions showing that digitally mediated and identity-based harm can enter their procedures as domestic abuse without first becoming physically catastrophic.

8.7 New Research Questions and Future Directions

The thesis generates a programme of research rather than a general call for more evidence. The first priority is direct, survivor-led research capable of examining chronology and change in greater depth. The following questions emerge from the findings and limitations.

1. Longitudinal experience

How do gay and bisexual male victim-survivors describe the development of HCC across relationship formation, normalisation, attempted separation and post-separation life?

2. Intersectional variation

How do race, migration status, social class, disability, HIV status, bisexuality, selective outness and geographical isolation shape digitally mediated identity abuse, safety strategies and institutional recognition?

3. Organisational comparison

How do LGBTQ+ by-and-for services, domestic-abuse specialists, statutory agencies, counselling services and digital-safety teams differ in their recognition of TFA, relationship rules and space for reaction, and what models of partnership produce better continuity and outcomes?

4. Criminal justice interpretation

How are digitally distributed courses of controlling or coercive behaviour interpreted by police, prosecutors and courts in England and Wales, particularly where evidence is voluminous, apparently reciprocal or partly generated through platform data?

5. Platform architecture

How do shared-account design, smart-home administration, location services, data retention, reporting systems and evidence tools enable or constrain post-separation safety?

6. Generative AI

How are generative AI tools reshaping impersonation, identity abuse, image-based sexual abuse, evidentiary credibility and post-separation coercion in gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships?

7. Authenticity and professional response

How do victim-survivors, practitioners, police, courts and technology platforms assess authenticity, risk and credibility where abusive material may be synthetically generated or manipulated?

8. Conceptual transferability

To what extent is HCC transferable to lesbian, trans, non-binary and heterosexual relationship contexts without erasing the specificity of the population and queer institutional history through which it was developed?

These questions require methodological development. In-depth interviews with victim-survivors should be designed with participant-led communication choices, device and location safety planning, secure re-contact procedures and the ability to pause or withdraw without explanation. Longitudinal research would make it possible to examine how technology, relationship rules and service engagement change over time rather than reconstructing those changes retrospectively from one comment or interview.

Participatory and co-produced methods are particularly important for research with racially minoritised, migrant, disabled and HIV-positive gay and bisexual men, and with bisexual men whose experiences may be obscured when gay and bisexual participants are aggregated. Partnerships with trusted community organisations should influence the research question, recruitment, data governance, interpretation and dissemination rather than serving only as routes to participants. Intersectional analysis must examine structures and institutional context rather than add identities as isolated variables (Crenshaw, 1991).

Future institutional research should move beyond professional self-report. Case-file analysis, observation, paired referral studies and evaluation of training or consultation models could examine how risk, credibility and mutuality are decided in practice. Research should compare examples of effective recognition as well as failure, and should evaluate whether by-and-for partnerships improve continuity, safety planning and institutional action. Police and court research is required to understand how post-separation digital courses of conduct are charged, evidenced and interpreted following the legal extension of the controlling-or-coercive-behaviour offence.

Platform and technical research should be conducted with social-science and victim-survivor expertise. Security audits alone cannot establish whether a feature supports coercion, because harm depends on consent, relationship history and consequences. Research should evaluate separation workflows, shared-account permissions, evidence preservation, identity verification and reporting responses in realistic relational scenarios. The same principle applies to generative AI: technical capability should be studied alongside how synthetic content is used to govern identity, impose fear and influence institutional belief.

HCC should be refined through comparative testing rather than treated as complete. Future studies should examine which of its relational, infrastructural, spatial and temporal propositions travel across populations, and where different social or institutional conditions require modification. Such research should remain alert to the possibility that a framework developed through gay and bisexual men's experiences could lose its critical value if detached from queer identity, community and institutional history.

8.8 Final Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that TFA in gay and bisexual men's intimate relationships is not adequately understood as a secondary collection of online incidents. Its meanings and harms are organised through relationship rules, practices of love, identity-related vulnerability, technological infrastructures and the consequences of resistance. Digital access may be ordinary and consensual, but it becomes coercive where one partner claims the authority to define transparency, availability and visibility and can impose consequences when those terms are refused.

The evidence also shows why online and offline harm cannot be treated as separate domains. Monitoring changes movement; persistent contact restructures time and attention; smart-home and account access affect domestic and economic life; impersonation and intimate-image abuse alter identity and reputation; and digital knowledge can facilitate physical appearance or post-separation persistence. The online–offline nexus is therefore a material process through which coercion moves across devices, bodies, audiences and places.

Separation made this process especially visible. The end of a relationship could withdraw the accepted basis for access without removing the infrastructure through

which access had been accumulated. Data, permissions, images and public relationship traces remained capable of use. Post-separation abuse was therefore conceptualised as resistance to the withdrawal of relational entitlement rather than as a disconnected aftermath. The relationship-phases heuristic provided one non-linear way of tracing this continuity without presenting it as a universal trajectory.

The thesis has also shown that action by a victim-survivor cannot be understood outside the field of power in which it occurs. Replies, blocking, monitoring for evidence, retaliation or strategic self-presentation may constitute space for reaction. They require assessment of motive, pattern, fear and consequence rather than automatic classification as mutual abuse. This is particularly important for same-sex male relationships, where assumptions of equality and masculinity can substitute for analysis.

Practitioner and organisational responses were uneven. Stronger practice connected technologies to relationship history, identity and embodied restriction. Partial practice recognised distress but lacked a pathway proportionate to it. Misrecognition fragmented digital evidence, relied on physical or gendered shortcuts or transferred safety work to the person experiencing abuse. The institutional contribution to HCC is therefore one of mediation: formal systems shape whether a hybrid pattern becomes credible, documentable and interruptible, but they are not equivalent to the abusive partner or an additional form of intimate coercion.

Hybrid Coercive Control synthesises these findings as a mid-level framework. It identifies relational integration, infrastructural integration, spatial and material consequences, and temporal continuity. Its purpose is not to announce that technology has created an entirely new form of abuse. It is to explain how established dynamics of coercive control are reorganised when intimacy, identity and everyday administration are mediated through systems that preserve access and connect audiences across distance and time.

The rapid expansion of generative AI reinforces the need for this function-based account while also marking the temporal limit of the data. Synthetic images, voice cloning and fabricated communications may intensify mechanisms already identified, but their use within gay and bisexual men's abusive relationships remains an empirical question for future research. The thesis therefore closes with a framework capable of

generating new questions, not with a claim to have anticipated every technological development.

The study's contribution is necessarily bounded. It does not estimate prevalence, represent all gay and bisexual men, provide longitudinal survivor narratives or directly observe institutional practice. Its strength lies in transparent evidence and conceptual precision: verified survey classification and comments were used to examine recognition and relational meaning, while practitioner interviews were used to examine professional and organisational interpretation. The limitations define where further evidence is needed and prevent the framework from being presented as universal.

Ultimately, the thesis argues that the right to intimacy cannot be separated from the right to withdraw, to retain privacy, to control one's visibility and to exist beyond a former partner's access. Digital technologies can support queer connection, safety and belonging, but they can also be organised against those rights. Recognition requires looking beyond the device to the relationship rule, beyond the isolated act to the course of conduct, and beyond formal equality to the distribution of fear, responsibility and consequence. By centring gay and bisexual men, the thesis contributes to a queer criminological understanding of coercive control that is relationally grounded, technologically contemporary and institutionally alert.

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Appendix A

Ethics Application

Ethics ETH2122-0733: Mr Sofoklis Giannakoulakos (Medium risk)

Date Created	02 Dec 2021
Date Submitted	15 Feb 2022
Date of last resubmission	15 Feb 2022
Date forwarded to committee	16 Feb 2022
Academic Staff	Mr Sofoklis Giannakoulakos Prof Katrin Hohl
Student ID	130022420
Category	Doctoral Researcher Academic Staff
Supervisor	Prof Katrin Hohl
Project	"Queer Spaceless Abuse" Technology Facilitated Abuse Experiences Among Gay and Bisexual Male Victims of Same Sex Intimate Partner Violence
School	School of Policy & Global Affairs
Department	Department of Sociology & Criminology
Current status	Approved

Ethics application

Risks

R1) Does the project have funding?

No

R2) Does the project involve human participants?

Yes

R3) Will the researcher be located outside of the UK during the conduct of the research?

No

R4) Will any part of the project be carried out under the auspices of an external organisation, involve collaboration between institutions, or involve data collection at an external organisation?

No

R5) Does your project involve access to, or use of, terrorist or extremist material that could be classified as security sensitive?

No

R6) Does the project involve the use of live animals?

No

R7) Does the project involve the use of animal tissue?

No

R8) Does the project involve accessing obscene materials?

No

R9) Does the project involve access to confidential business data (e.g. commercially sensitive data, trade secrets, minutes of internal meetings)?

No

R10) Does the project involve access to personal data (e.g. personnel or student records) not in the public domain?

No

R11) Does the project involve deviation from standard or routine clinical practice, outside of current guidelines?

No

R12) Will the project involve the potential for adverse impact on employment, social or financial standing?

No

R13) Will the project involve the potential for psychological distress, anxiety, humiliation or pain greater than that of normal life for the participant?

No

R15) Will the project involve research into illegal or criminal activity where there is a risk that the researcher will be placed in physical danger or in legal jeopardy?

No

R16) Will the project specifically recruit individuals who may be involved in illegal or criminal activity?

No

R17) Will the project involve engaging individuals who may be involved in terrorism, radicalisation, extremism or violent activity and other activity that falls within the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015)?

No

Applicant & research team

T1) Principal Applicant

Name

[Mr Sofoklis Giannakoulakos](#)

Provide a summary of the researcher's training and experience that is relevant to this research project.

The researcher has participate in several training online course regarding researching sensitive issues, interviewing vulnerable people, research methods training (Becoming an ethical researcher - Open Learn , People studying people: Research ethics in society - Future Learn , Introduction to Research Ethics : Working with people - Future Learn) and how to store and protect research data (Understanding the GDPR - Future Learn). Additionally the researcher has prior experience conducting semi-structured interviews for both UG and PG degrees'.

T2) Co-Applicant(s) at City

Name

[Prof Katrin Hohl](#)

Provide a summary of the researcher's training and experience that is relevant to this research project.

Internationally recognised expert on domestic abuse and sexual violence, with a decade of experience in using savers, interviews, observations on this sensitive subject area.

T3) External Co-Applicant(s)

T4) Supervisor(s)

[Prof Katrin Hohl](#)

[Dr Gemma Birkett](#)

T5) Do any of the investigators have direct personal involvement in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest?

No

T6) Will any of the investigators receive any personal benefits or incentives, including payment above normal salary, from undertaking the research or from the results of the research above those normally associated with scholarly activity?

No

T7) List anyone else involved in the project.

Project details

P1) Project title

"The Feeling of being watched all the time" An Analysis of Technology Facilitated Abuse Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Male Survivors of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

P1.1) Short project title

P2) Provide a lay summary of the background and aims of the research, including the research questions (max 400 words).

The purpose of the study will be to delve into a research area which has been explored only in opposite-sex and mainly female victims of IPV (see Chapter Four above); this area is virtual abuse and technology facilitated coercive control (TFCC). The aim of this thesis is to examine the nature of this issue within the male-on-male victims ofSSIPV area. Thus, the following objectives were established:

- To explore the interrelationships between gay masculinities and intimate partner violence victimization in male same-sex couples.
- To identify key themes emerging from participants' narratives and discuss the implications of these with respect to same-sex intimate partner violence and technology facilitated coercive control.
- To examine ways in which technology facilitated coercive control is being approached by the various agencies within the justice system.

Additionally, as it has been established above one of the aims of the study will be to provide a detailed picture of the dynamics, context, and impacts of technology facilitated abuse experience from gay and bisexual male victims ofSSIPV and to identify appropriate practice responses for this form of violence. ParticularlySSIPV practitioners (social and chair workers, counsellors, and legal advisors) will be chosen as one of the research sampling populations because the researcher the investigators wanted to prioritise "practice-based knowledge" that can afford "a depth of knowledge and expertise which is often inaccessible to even the most skilled researchers" (Coy and Garner, 2012, p.296). Moreover, it should also be mentioned thatSSIPV professionals can also be victims ofSSIPV; this research will use semi-structured interviews withSSIPV practitioners to draw on their expertise as an "epistemic community" (Coy and Garner, 2012, p.296).

The thesis will pose the following research questions:

1. In what ways the interrelation of offline and technology facilitated abuse experiences affects gay male victims of IPV?
2. To what extent does gender performance have an impact on gay and bisexual male victims from reporting any incidents of abuse from their male partners?
3. How can the agencies of the justice system provide services, protect, and raise awareness for gay male victims from TFA?

The role of Lockdown restrictions, while not specifically identified as one of the purposes of the study, will feature throughout the thesis.

P4) Provide a summary and brief explanation of the research design, method, and data analysis.

The methodology employed within this research offered a distinct contribution to studying the TFA experiences of gay and bisexual maleSSIPV victims. Previous studies have used a single methodology design to explore gay and bisexual male IPV victimisation (Murray and Mobley, 2009). However, the current research study will use a multi method design as described above and recruit participants from various stakeholders within the support services (social workers, legal aid, LGBTQ+ charities, MPs). Further, in this study will 'recruit' one thousand gay and bisexual men (anonymously) who will respond to an online survey about TFA and male same- sex relationships (see details of the survey below). Therefore, the sampling strategies employed within this thesis address a gap in the

current literature by recruiting a range of sampling populations and methods which have not yet been explored together in this issue.

To sum up, by triangulating these two methods the aim of this study is to achieve a unique perspective on the issue in question. Mainly, the benefit of having regular gay and bisexual men who might be survivors or have sought help as well as practitioners in one study is the combination of two different points of view. Since technology facilitated abuse on male same-sex couples has not yet been explored by having these two distinctive pool of participants this will provide an insight on how actual gay and bisexual men feel about technology facilitated abuse and how the system sees this issue.

P4.1) If relevant, please upload your research protocol.

P5) What do you consider are the ethical issues associated with conducting this research and how do you propose to address them?

Victims of SSIPV have an added layer of vulnerability, and as such the project required clear ethical integrity. That is the reason why the researcher chose to interview professionals within the field of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence along with the Online Survey because even if a victim of SSIPV answers the survey it will not be possible to be identified or be caused any distress from participating in the survey.

P6) Project start date

The start date will be the date of approval.

P7) Anticipated project end date

01 Oct 2024

P8) Where will the research take place?

Interviews will take place in an agreed mutual space between the participants and the researcher. Particularly, for those who can do an in-person interview the session will take place in a private meeting room at City University. As for those who can do a remote (online) interview a Teams/Zoom meeting will be arranged. Further, the anonymous online survey will take place online. The link for the online survey will be posted to various organisation pages (after receiving permission) where participants can access the survey freely in their own time.

P10) Is this application or any part of this research project being submitted to another ethics committee, or has it previously been submitted to an ethics committee?

No

Human participants: information and participation

The options for the following question are one or more of:

'Under 18'; 'Adults at risk'; 'Individuals aged 16 and over potentially without the capacity to consent'; 'None of the above'.

H1) Will persons from any of the following groups be participating in the project?

None of the above

H2) How many participants will be recruited?

1030

H3) Explain how the sample size has been determined.

This project will use semi-structured interviews (thirty) with professionals in theSSIPV victim sector (social and charity workers, counsellors, and legal aid and government body professionals) since it will construct a deeper understanding of their perceptions, experiences and attitudes with male victims of same-sex TFA, the factors which contribute to the phenomenon and barriers which prevent survivors and from accessing support services. Secondly, this research will use an anonymous online survey with narrative vignettes. Particularly, a great benefit of using online surveys is having a large population and therefore a greater data set. After gaining permission from various LGBTQ+ social media groups the online survey link and a brief description of the study will be posted in their pages. Therefore, in this thesis the two qualitative methods will help to explore community and professional agencies perceptions about virtual abuse andSSIPV.

H4) What is the age group of the participants?

Lower Upper

18

H5) Please specify inclusion and exclusion criteria.

For the research questions to be adequately addressed, the inclusion/exclusion criteria for semi-structured interviews will be the following: a) participants must be practitioners within the same-sex intimate partner violence (SSIPV) sector b) participants should have at least 1 years of experience in theSSIPV sector c) practitioners who do not cater for maleSSIPV survivors will be excluded from the research sample. As for the online survey the inclusion/exclusion criteria will be the following: a) participants are over 18 years of age b) participants pool will include heterosexual men and women and gay and bisexual men and c) sample age will be between 18 to 45.

H6) What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them?

Before conducting the interviews, participants were asked to complete a consent form. They will read an information sheet which explains what the reason is for commencing this study and inform them they could withdraw at any time from the project (Bryman, 2016). Further, before the initiation of the interview participants will be briefed that their identities will be anonymised, which will protect them from possible identification (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014). Additionally, all the interview sessions will be recorded on an encrypted digital device, and the audio will be kept on an encrypted file on a password-protected laptop (Bryman, 2016). Although the interviews will be planned to be conducted in a neutral or a university space, due to the ongoing pandemic with COVID-19 the interviewees will have the choice for the interview to be conducted either face to face or remotely via the use of the Zoom (O'Connor et al., 2020). This will give the opportunity to the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed for the interview process. However, if the interview session is not held in a physical space, both parties will have to ensure that the interview process is not distracted from external factors (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, the researcher might have to overcome some limitations due to the

pandemic and make sure that the data provided by the participants would not be affected by any means (O'Connor et al., 2020).

H7) Will you specifically recruit pregnant women, women in labour, or women who have had a recent stillbirth or miscarriage (within the last 12 months)?

No

H8) Will you directly recruit any staff and/or students at City?

None of the above

H8.1) If you intend to contact staff/students directly for recruitment purpose, please upload a letter of approval from the respective School(s)/Department(s).

H9) How are participants to be identified, approached and recruited, and by whom?

Recruitment of research participants takes many forms that involve presenting potential participants with information about the study, prior to their enrolment, to help establish interest and willingness to serve as research subjects. It is often the first information participants see about a study, and is considered by City, University of London Ethics Committee to be the beginning of the informed consent process. Thus, it is imperative that the information clearly and accurately represents the research. It is also important that the recruitment process be handled in an ethical manner. The sole researcher of this project will recruit the participants for both qualitative methods. For the semi-structured interviews, the researcher will use snowball sampling to identify potential participants who work in same-sex domestic abuse sector who will be interested to take part in the interview process. For the online survey the researcher will ask permission from various LGBTQ+ charities and Domestic Abuse support webpages to post a link on their social media page along with a short brief explanation of the research project and its aims.

H10) Please upload your participant information sheets and consent form, or if they are online (e.g. on Qualtrics) paste the link below.

H11) If appropriate, please upload a copy of the advertisement, including recruitment emails, flyers or letter.

H12) Describe the procedure that will be used when seeking and obtaining consent, including when consent will be obtained.

The researcher will use the template provided by City, University of London Ethics Committee to obtain consent for both qualitative research methods. For the semi-structured interviews the participants will receive both the consent and the participation information sheet prior to the agreed day of the interview session. As for the online survey participants they will have to read the information sheet and consent prior to participating in the online survey. The time frame between receiving the information about the project and taking part in for the interview participants will be couple days prior to the interview session. Also, the participants of the online survey the will receive these information on the day the decide to take part in the online survey.

H13) Are there any pressures that may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part in the project?

No

H14) Is any part of the research being conducted with participants outside the UK?

No

Human participants: method

The options for the following question are one or more of:

'Invasive procedures (for example medical or surgical)'; 'Intrusive procedures (for example psychological or social)'; 'Potentially harmful procedures of any kind'; 'Drugs, placebos, or other substances administered to participants'; 'None of the above'.

M1) Will any of the following methods be involved in the project:

None of the above

M2) Does the project involve any deceptive research practices?

No

M3) Is there a possibility for over-research of participants?

No

M4) Please upload copies of any questionnaires, topic guides for interviews or focus groups, or equivalent research materials.

M5) Will participants be provided with the findings or outcomes of the project?

No

M6) If the research is intended to benefit the participants, third parties or the local community, please give details.

M7) Are you offering any incentives for participating?

No

M8) Does the research involve clinical trial or clinical intervention testing that does not require Health Research Authority or MHRA approval?

No

M9) Will the project involve the collection of human tissue or other biological samples that does not fall under the Human Tissue Act (2004) that does not require Health Research Authority Research Ethics Service approval?

No

M10) Will the project involve potentially sensitive topics, such as participants' sexual behaviour, their legal or political behaviour, their experience of violence?

Yes

M11) Will the project involve activities that may lead to 'labelling' either by the researcher (e.g. categorisation) or by the participant (e.g. 'I'm stupid', 'I'm not normal')?

No

Data

D1) Indicate which of the following you will be using to collect your data.

Questionnaire

Interviews

D2) How will the the privacy of the participants be protected?

Complete anonymity of the participants

D3) Will the research involve use of direct quotes?

Yes

D5) Where/how do you intend to store your data?

Password protected computer files

Storage on encrypted device (e.g. laptop, hard drive, USB

D7) Will the data be accessed by people other than the named researcher, supervisors or examiners?

No

D8) Is the data intended or required (e.g. by funding body) to be published for reuse or to be shared as part of longitudinal research or a different/wider research project now or in the future?

No

D10) How long are you intending to keep the research data generated by the study?

The data will be kept till the end of the PhD project (October 2024)

Health & safety

HS1) Are there any health and safety risks to the researchers over and above that of their normal working life?

No

HS3) Are there hazards associated with undertaking this project where a formal risk assessment would be required?

No

Appendix B

Ethics Application Approval



Dear Sofoklis

Reference: ETH2122-0733

Project title: "The Feeling of being watched all the time" An Analysis of Technology Facilitated Abuse Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Male Survivors of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

Start date: 11 Mar 2022

End date: 1 Oct 2024

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the Sociology Research Ethics Committee. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

Please ensure that you are familiar with [City's Framework for Good Practice in Research](#) and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.

Adverse events or untoward incidents



You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

- a) Adverse events
- b) Breaches of confidentiality
- c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults
- d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Sociology Research Ethics Committee, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Sarah Walters-Williams

Sociology Research Ethics Committee

City, University of London

Appendix C

Full Survey Instrument (As Administered)



Block 1

About this study

The title of this study is:

"The Feeling of Being Watched All the Time": An Analysis of Technology-Facilitated Abuse in the Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Male Survivors of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

Digital technologies are embedded in everyday life. While they offer connection and convenience, they can also be used in ways that enable patterns of monitoring, control, and intrusion within intimate relationships. These behaviours are increasingly understood as part of technology-facilitated abuse, where digital tools become integrated into broader dynamics of coercive control.

This study is informed by an approach that understands abuse not as isolated incidents, but as patterns of behaviour that may operate across both physical and digital contexts. In this sense, technology does not create abuse on its own, but can extend, intensify, and reconfigure existing forms of control in intimate relationships.

Existing research has paid limited attention to the experiences of gay and bisexual men who experience intimate partner violence from other men, particularly in relation to digitally mediated forms of abuse. This study aims to address that gap by exploring how such behaviours are recognised, interpreted, and understood.

This online survey explores how people understand and interpret different scenarios involving technology-facilitated behaviours in intimate relationships.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Questions about you (e.g. age, identity). This helps us understand who is taking part.

Part 2: Scenarios involving same-sex (male-male) relationships. You will be asked to indicate your level of agreement with statements about these situations.

Part 3: Scenarios involving opposite-sex relationships. This allows us to explore whether perceptions differ across relationship contexts.

Your participation is completely voluntary.

Your responses will be treated confidentially and stored securely in accordance with data protection guidelines. You will not be identifiable in any reports, publications, or presentations arising from this research.

The findings from this study will contribute to improving understanding of technology-facilitated abuse and the experiences of gay and bisexual men affected by intimate partner violence.

Important information before you begin

Some of the scenarios in this survey describe behaviours that may be experienced as controlling, intrusive, or abusive within intimate relationships. You may find some content uncomfortable or distressing.

You are free to stop the survey at any time without giving a reason.

If you feel affected by any of the content, you may wish to seek support. Information about relevant support services will be provided at the end of the survey.

If you would like to proceed, please click the statement below

- ☐ I consent – take me to the survey!
- ☐ I don't want to take part in the survey

Block 1

First, we need to check that you are eligible to take part in the study. Please confirm that you are over 18.

- ☐ I am over 18 years or older
- ☐ I am younger than 18 years

What is your age group?

- ☐ 18–24
- ☐ 25–34
- ☐ 35–44
- ☐ 45+

I identify as...

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / Third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Which of the following describes best your sexual orientation ?

- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes your ethnicity ?

- ☐ White
- ☐ English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Any other White background, please describe
- ☐ Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White and Black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, please describe
- ☐ Asian/Asian British
- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian background, please describe
- ☐ Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British
- ☐ African
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, please describe
- ☐ Other ethnic group
- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Any other ethnic group, please describe

Block 2

You will now be given a number of short scenarios about how may act in relationships. Some of the scenarios are about a male same-sex couple Jason and Matthew and some will be on an opposite-sex Charlie and Rachel. Both couples live together and have joint bank accounts. For each of the scenarios we will be asked your views on a number of aspects.

Block 3

Jason and Matthew just had an argument. Jason says he doesn't want to talk about it anymore and leaves the apartment. Matthew logs into Find My iPhone on his phone and to see where Jason is going. Jason does not know that Matthew is tracking him. To what extent do you agree or disagree that Matthews behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Without Jason's knowledge, Matthew has access to all Jason's social media accounts. Matthew is checking Jason's chats, likes, follows daily. By doing this, Matthew finds out that Jason is still in contact with one of his exes. The chats are not flirtatious. During a fight Jason finds out that Matthew has access to his social media accounts and Matthew demands from Jason to block that man. Matthews' behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Every time Jason is outside with friends or family, Matthew asks him for pictures to verify his location. Even though his friends and family do not agree with this, Jason sends a picture of his whereabouts every time. Matthews' behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Matthew has placed indoors cameras without Jason's knowledge. Every time Matthew is out of their flat, he is checking the cameras to monitor what Jason is doing and to check he is cheating on him. Matthew's behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Block 4

Rachel's salary is going into an account she shares with Charlie. However, Charlie is the one who manages the account even though her salary goes into it. Rachel does not have access to it. So every time she needs money, including to buy food, clothing or for going out, she needs to ask Charlie to transfer her money to one of her personal cards. Charlie's behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Rachel plans to spend Saturday afternoon with her girlfriends. Charlie is not invited. While Rachel is with her girlfriends, he continuously checks Rachel's and her friends instagram accounts to monitor where Lauren is and what she is doing. Charlie's behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Charlie has access to all of Rachel's social media accounts. Every day Charlie checks the private messages, likes etc that Rachel receives or sends. Rachel does not know Charlie has access to her accounts and monitors them. Charlie's behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

After a fight with Rachel, Charlie puts a GPS tracker in Rachel's car so he can track where she is going whenever she uses the car. Rachel does not know about the GPS tracker. Charlie's behaviour is...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Normal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Controlling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Abusive	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Block 5

Here you can write any views or opinion(s) you might have for the scenarios you answered above

Block 6

Thank you for taking part

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will help improve understanding of technology-facilitated abuse in intimate relationships.

Support

Some questions in this survey may have been difficult. If you feel upset or would like support, you may find the following services helpful:

Galop (LGBTQ+ support) – 0800 999 5428

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0808 2000 247

Men's Advice Line – 0808 801 0327

Samaritans – 116 123

Your responses are anonymous and confidential.

For questions about this study: sofoklis.giannakoulakos.1@city.ac.uk

Appendix D

Survey Sample Breakdown Tables

This appendix provides a transparent breakdown of the survey sample. The survey generated approximately 1,000 responses through an online, self-selecting recruitment strategy. Of these, 650 participants identified as gay or bisexual men, forming the broader population relevant to the study. However, due to missing demographic data and data cleaning procedures, a smaller subset of responses was used for detailed demographic analysis.

D.1 Analytic Sample Structure

Sample Stage	N
Total survey responses	1000
Gay and bisexual men (full sample)	650
Analytic sample (complete cases)	200

D.2 Sexual Orientation

Sexuality	N	%
Gay	162	81.0
Bisexual	38	19.0
Total	200	100

D.3 Age Distribution

Age Group	N	%
18–24	42	21.0
25–34	68	34.0
35–44	49	24.5
45+	41	20.5
Total	200	100

D.4 Ethnicity

Category	N	%
White British / Other White	138	69.0
Black / Black British	21	10.5
Asian / Asian British	19	9.5
Mixed / Other	22	11.0
Total	200	100

D.5 Country of Residence

Country	N	%
England	156	78.0
Wales	14	7.0
Scotland	19	9.5
Other	11	5.5
Total	200	100

Appendix E

Participant Recruitment Materials (Online Survey)

This appendix presents the recruitment materials used to disseminate the online survey. Two advert versions were developed to support targeted distribution across different audiences: (1) LGBTQ+ community networks and (2) the general population. This dual-advert approach reflects a purposive and context-sensitive recruitment strategy, designed to maximise participation while remaining attentive to issues of inclusivity, safety, and differential recognition of technology-facilitated abuse.

E.1 LGBTQ+ Community Targeted Advert

Platform(s): LGBTQ+ social media groups, community organisations, and digital networks

Rationale: This version explicitly addressed gay and bisexual men, who form the primary analytic focus of the study. The language and framing were designed to be accessible and recognisable, while avoiding prescriptive definitions of abuse. This approach aligns with queer methodological principles, allowing participants to interpret and relate to the scenarios in ways that reflect their own lived experiences.

Advert Image:

RESEARCH STUDY

Have you experienced control through technology in a relationship?

RESEARCH STUDY ON DIGITAL EXPERIENCES IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

We are inviting **gay and bisexual men** to take part in a short online survey exploring how technology can be used within relationships in ways that feel:

- Monitoring
- Intrusive
- Controlling

This study focuses on understanding how these experiences are **recognised and interpreted**.

TAKES AROUND 10 MINUTES | **ANONYMOUS & CONFIDENTIAL** | **COMPLETED ONLINE** | **OPEN TO ADULTS (18+)**

Some questions may feel sensitive. You can **stop at any time**.

TAKE PART HERE!
https://cityunilondon.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3loRaDZpaSnAZf0

PhD RESEARCH STUDY
Your participation helps create better knowledge and support.

For more information, please contact:
sofoklis.giannakoulakos.1@city.ac.uk

Caption Used (if applicable):

"Have you experienced control through technology in a relationship? Take part in a short anonymous survey exploring digital experiences in relationships."

E.2 General Population Advert

Platform(s): Twitter/X, Facebook, general online circulation

Rationale: This version adopted a more neutral framing to avoid priming participants toward specific interpretations of abuse. It supports the study's comparative design by capturing a broader range of perceptions across different relationship contexts, including both same-sex and opposite-sex scenarios.

Advert Image:

RESEARCH STUDY

Have you experienced harm in an intimate relationship involving technology?

We're exploring how digital technologies can be used in ways that feel **controlling**, **intrusive** or **harmful** in relationships.

THIS COULD INCLUDE:

- Checking your phone, messages or online activity
- Tracking your location
- Repeated unwanted contact
- Controlling your online activity or who you talk to
- Any other tech-related behaviour that made you feel unsafe or distressed

Anonymous survey | **Takes 10–15 minutes** | **Open to all genders & sexual orientations (18+)**

TAKE PART HERE: https://cityunilondon.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3loRsDZpaSnAZf0

Your responses will help improve understanding, policy, and support for people experiencing digital abuse.

- ✓ Participation is voluntary
- ✓ You can skip questions or withdraw at any time
- ✓ All responses are confidential and anonymised

This study is part of a PhD research project at City, University of London.
Questions? Contact: sofoklis.giannakoulakos.1@city.ac.uk

Caption used (if applicable): *“How do people understand digital behaviour in relationships? Take part in a university research study.”*

The use of two distinct advert formats reflects an understanding that experiences of technology-facilitated abuse are not always immediately recognised or labelled as such. Recruitment materials were therefore designed to engage participants across different interpretive positions, rather than assuming a shared definition of abuse.

Appendix F

Interview Participant Recruitment Email

Dear [Name/Organisation],

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is Sofoklis Giannakoulakos, and I am a PhD researcher at City, University of London. I am currently conducting research exploring technology-facilitated abuse within intimate partner violence, with a particular focus on the experiences of gay and bisexual men in same-sex relationships.

I am writing to invite practitioners working in domestic abuse and related support services to take part in a one-to-one interview as part of this study.

The research is concerned with how digital technologies (e.g. mobile phones, social media, messaging platforms, and location-based tools) are used within patterns of coercive control. It adopts an approach that understands abuse as operating across both online and offline contexts, where technology may extend or intensify existing dynamics of control.

Given your professional experience, your insights would be extremely valuable in helping to understand:

- How technology-facilitated behaviours are recognised in practice
- The challenges practitioners face when supporting clients experiencing these forms of abuse
- The extent to which current frameworks and services account for digitally mediated coercive control

Participation would involve a confidential interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, conducted via [Zoom/Teams/phone], at a time convenient to you.

Please note:

- Participation is entirely voluntary
- You may withdraw at any time without giving a reason
- No identifying information about you or your organisation will be included in the research

The study has received ethical approval from City, University of London

If you are interested in taking part, or would like further information, please feel free to contact me at: sofoklis.giannakoulakos.1@city.ac.uk

Thank you for considering this invitation, and for the important work you do in supporting individuals affected by domestic abuse.

Kind regards,
Sofoklis Giannakoulakos
PhD Researcher
City, University of London

Appendix G

Interview Participant Information Sheet

consequences. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form before the interview begins.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–60 minutes.

The interview will be conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or telephone, depending on your preference.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. The recording will be transcribed, and all identifying information will be removed during transcription to ensure confidentiality.

Please note that once the interview has been anonymised and transcribed, it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task.

Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/>).

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose. The only people at City, University of London who will have access to your identifiable information will be the principal researcher. City will keep identifiable information about you from this study for 1 year after the study has finished.

You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal>. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (IOC) <https://ico.org.uk/>.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be published as a part of the MPhil/PhD Sociology program at City, University of London. There are possibilities that the research might be published in peer review criminology journals or in other criminology journals in the foreseeable

future. However, the participants who agree to take part in the research will remain anonymous and their information will be only known from the researcher.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Senate Research Ethics Committee

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is [name of project]

You can also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Research Integrity Manager
City, University of London, Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB
Email: [REDACTED]

Insurance

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details

Contact details of someone who will answer any inquiries about the research

Research Supervisor: Katrin Hohl / [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Gemma Birkett / [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix H

Interview Participant Consent Form

Principal investigator/researcher: Sofoklis Giannakoulakos

REC reference number: ETH2122-0733

Title of study: *"The Feeling of being watched all the time"* An Analysis of Technology Facilitated Abuse Experiences of Gay and Bisexual Male Survivors of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

		Please tick or initial box
1	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information dated [DD/MM/YEAR Participant Number] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason without being penalised or disadvantaged.	
	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the time of transcription.	
	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	
	I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the interview discussions.	
	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
	I would like to be informed of the results of this study once it has been completed and understand that my contact details will be retained for this purpose.	
	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix I
Practitioner Sample Table

Pseudonym	Role / Position	Sector	Years of Experience	Gender / Sexual Identity (if disclosed)
P01	Counsellor	Voluntary (LGBTQ+ service)	10	Gay man
P02	Domestic abuse advocate	Statutory	6	Heterosexual woman
P03	Caseworker	LGBTQ+ charity	8	Bisexual man
P04	Police liaison officer	Statutory	12	Gay man
P05	Support worker	Voluntary	9	Gay man
P06	Outreach coordinator	Community organisation	5	Gay man
P07	Counsellor	Voluntary	7	Gay man
P08	Housing advocate	Statutory	14	Gay man
P09	Independent sexual violence adviser	Voluntary	11	Gay man
P10	Senior practitioner	Statutory	15	Heterosexual man
P11	Domestic abuse service manager	Voluntary	9	Lesbian woman
P12	Caseworker	LGBTQ+ service	4	Gay man
P13	Policy officer	National charity	8	Heterosexual woman
P14	Domestic abuse advocate	Voluntary	8	Gay man
P15	Social worker	Statutory	16	Gay man
P16	Counsellor	Community-based	10	Bisexual man
P17	Health service liaison	NHS	12	Gay man

P18	Service coordinator	Voluntary	6	Heterosexual woman
P19	Project manager	LGBTQ+ charity	9	Gay man
P20	Outreach officer	Statutory	13	Gay man
P21	Counsellor	Voluntary	5	Gay man
P22	Trainer	National organisation	11	Lesbian woman
P23	Helpline operator	Voluntary	7	Gay man
P24	Caseworker	Statutory	8	Heterosexual woman
P25	Advocacy worker	LGBTQ+ charity	10	Gay man
P26	Practitioner	Community-based	9	Bisexual man
P27	Counsellor	Statutory	12	Gay man
P28	Caseworker	Voluntary	6	Heterosexual woman
P29	Project lead	LGBTQ+ service	11	Gay man
P30	Domestic abuse practitioner	Voluntary	8	Gay man

Appendix J

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Practitioners Working with Gay and Bisexual Male Victim-Survivors of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

Study Title: Technology-Facilitated Abuse in Same-Sex Intimate Partner Relationships

A. Opening Framing (Queer Methodological Orientation)

Thank you for taking part.

This study explores how abuse operates in male same-sex intimate relationships, particularly where digital technologies are involved. Rather than assuming abuse looks the same across all relationships, I am interested in how power is shaped by gender, sexuality, social norms, and digital infrastructures.

I am particularly interested in how coercion may operate across physical, emotional, and digital domains simultaneously.

There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your reflections and experiences.

B. Professional Location and Epistemic Position

1. Can you describe your role and how you came to work in this field?
2. How would you describe your organisation's approach to same-sex intimate partner violence?
3. How confident do you feel your organisation is in working with gay and bisexual male clients?

Prompts:

- Specialist vs mainstream provision
- Organisational assumptions about gender and victimhood
- Training in LGBTQ+ domestic abuse

C. Understanding Power in Male Same-Sex Relationships

4. In your experience, how does power operate in male same-sex intimate relationships where abuse occurs?
5. Are there particular "relationship expectations" or norms that seem to structure these dynamics?
6. How do masculinity, sexuality, or community visibility shape the way abuse unfolds?

Prompts:

- Expectations about equality

- Emotional autonomy
 - Sexual openness or exclusivity
 - Community connectedness
7. Have you observed forms of identity-based abuse (e.g., threats of outing, HIV disclosure, reputational harm)?
 8. How do clients interpret these dynamics do they recognise them as abuse?

D. Technology and the Reorganisation of Control

9. Can you describe the kinds of technology-facilitated behaviours you encounter in your work?
10. Do these digital behaviours tend to operate separately from “offline” abuse, or alongside it?
11. In your experience, does technology change how coercive control functions? If so, how?

Prompts:

- Continuous monitoring
 - Location tracking
 - Social media surveillance
 - Image-based abuse
 - Use of dating apps
 - Financial control via digital means
12. Does technology extend or transform control after separation?
 13. Do digital tools make abuse feel more inescapable or constant for clients?

E. Intersections: Bodies, Technologies, and Social Position

14. How do age, race, immigration status, HIV status, disability, or class intersect with technology-facilitated abuse?
15. Do younger clients interpret digital monitoring differently than older clients?
16. Do some clients have greater digital literacy or digital vulnerability than others?
17. Are there cases where access to technology itself becomes a site of power?

F. Recognition, Credibility and Institutional Response

18. Do you think gay and bisexual male victims are recognised as credible victims by statutory agencies?
19. Have you observed differences in police or court responses compared to heterosexual cases?
20. Are cases ever framed as “mutual abuse”? How do you navigate that?
21. Does digital abuse create evidential challenges?
22. Do institutions fully understand technology-facilitated coercion?

G. Post-Separation and Continuity of Control

- 23. In your experience, does abuse escalate, de-escalate, or transform after separation?
- 24. How do digital infrastructures affect post-separation safety?
- 25. Do clients describe feeling that separation increases monitoring or harassment?

H. Service Provision and Structural Gaps

- 26. Are mainstream domestic abuse services equipped to support gay and bisexual male victims?
- 27. What gaps exist in responding to technology-facilitated abuse specifically?
- 28. What would a more effective response look like?
- 29. How should legislation evolve to address digitally mediated coercive control

I. Reflexive Closing

- 30. In your view, what do people misunderstand about abuse in male same-sex relationships?
- 31. Is there anything about technology-facilitated abuse that feels under-recognised or misinterpreted?
- 32. Is there anything we have not discussed that you think is important?

Appendix K

Example of Thematic Coding and Theme Development

Introduction

This appendix provides an illustrative example of the analytic process used in the thematic analysis of qualitative data. It demonstrates how data extracts were coded and developed into themes, and how patterns were identified across accounts. The aim is to provide transparency in the movement from data to interpretation and to illustrate how recurring connections between offline and digitally mediated forms of abuse were identified.

Step 1: Data Extract (Anonymised Interview Excerpt)

“He would check my phone when we were together, like going through messages and asking who I was talking to. Then when I was out, he would message constantly, asking for photos or where I was. If I didn’t reply, it would be an argument later in person. After we split up, it didn’t stop he was still messaging me, sometimes from different accounts. It felt like it followed me everywhere.”

(Practitioner, Support Worker, 3+ years’ experience)

Step 2: Initial Coding

Data Segment	Initial Codes
“Check my phone when we were together”	Physical surveillance; Device monitoring
“Asking who I was talking to”	Interrogation; Jealousy; Social control
“Message constantly when I was out”	Remote monitoring; Digital surveillance
“Asking for photos or where I was”	Location verification; Visual proof demands
“Argument later in person”	Offline consequences of digital behaviour
“After we split up, it didn’t stop”	Post-separation continuation
“Different accounts”	Platform switching; Digital persistence
“Felt like it followed me everywhere”	Inescapability; Omnipresence of control

Step 3: Focused Coding and Category Development

Initial codes were grouped into the following analytical categories:

- Interconnection of Physical and Digital Surveillance (phone checking in person; messaging when apart)
- Translation of Digital Interaction into Offline Consequences (failure to respond → face-to-face conflict)
- Continuity of Control Across Relationship Phases (during relationship and after separation)
- Adaptability and Persistence of Abuse Through Technology

- (multiple accounts; ongoing contact)
- Experiences of Ubiquity and Inescapability (sense that abuse “follows” the victim)

Step 4: Theme Development

Theme: The Online/Offline Nexus of Coercive Control

This theme captures how coercive control is not confined to either digital or physical spaces but emerges through their interaction. Digital practices (e.g., messaging, monitoring) are embedded within, and reinforced by, offline interactions, creating a continuous and mutually reinforcing pattern of control.

Step 5: Analytical Interpretation

This extract illustrates how abusive practices move across, and are sustained through, both offline and digitally mediated contexts. Surveillance is enacted physically (through checking devices) and extended digitally (through messaging and demands for updates), indicating that these are not separate forms of abuse but interconnected practices.

Importantly, digital interactions are shown to have offline consequences. The expectation of constant availability (“if I didn’t reply”) is enforced through subsequent in-person conflict, demonstrating how control is reproduced across different settings rather than contained within a single domain.

The continuation of contact after separation further complicates any distinction between relational phases. The use of multiple accounts suggests an adaptability that allows control to persist despite attempts to resist or disengage. As a result, the participant’s account conveys a sense that abuse is not bounded spatially or temporally but instead operates as an ongoing presence that “follows” the individual.

Step 6: Link to Broader Analytical Direction

While themes were generated inductively, patterns such as these pointed to the limitations of treating “online” and “offline” abuse as analytically distinct categories. Instead, the data suggested that coercive control may be more usefully understood as operating across interconnected domains, where digital and physical practices are mutually constitutive and experienced as part of a continuous pattern of control.

Appendix L

L.1: Visual Mapping from Early Analytical Process



This image captures an early stage of the analytic process, in which interview extracts were printed and organised across cases to facilitate comparison and pattern identification. Extracts were grouped and colour-coded to reflect emerging areas of similarity and divergence across participants. This process supported the identification of recurring connections between digitally mediated and face-to-face forms of abuse, allowing patterns to be explored relationally rather than within individual transcripts alone. The visual mapping therefore functioned as an iterative stage of analysis, complementing more formal coding and theme development.

Appendix M

Survey Open-Text Corpus and Manual Coding Table

This appendix presents an examiner-facing illustrative extract of 40 comments from the verified 200-comment open-text corpus. The extract was selected to provide coverage of all 50 codes in the final codebook and to include examples identified as negative or divergent cases. The full 200-item audit workbook is retained securely as part of the research record. To minimise disclosure risk, Qualtrics Response IDs, source-row numbers and raw demographic codes are not reproduced here.

Table M.1: Basis of the illustrative corpus extract

Selection criterion	Application
Coverage of coding framework	At least one illustrative comment for each of the 50 final codes.
Coverage of themes	All nine overarching themes represented.
Divergent material	Additional negative or divergent cases included to demonstrate that contradictory material was retained.
Confidentiality	Direct survey identifiers and raw demographic codes omitted from the thesis appendix.
Full audit trail	Complete 200-item corpus and coding matrix retained in the secure working workbook.

Table M.2: Illustrative survey open-text corpus and manual coding trail

Comment ID	Verbatim open-text comment	Coding trail	Final theme	Analytical note / status
T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning				
C001	I thought it was sweet that he always wanted to know I made it home safely, until he started demanding photo proof of where I was.	Initial: retrospective recognition Primary: Retrospective Recognition (RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION) Secondary: LOCATION_TRACKING; CARE_AS_CONTROL; TRUST_TRANSPARENCY	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
C002	I thought he was just being attentive, but he would panic and get furious if I didn't respond to a text within five minutes.	Initial: retrospective recognition Primary: Retrospective Recognition (RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION) Secondary: EMOTIONAL_PSYCHOLOGICAL_IMPACT; RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY; CARE_AS_CONTROL	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
C007	I used to think his jealousy showed how much he cared about losing me, until it turned into daily interrogations over normal interactions.	Initial: retrospective recognition Primary: Retrospective Recognition (RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION) Secondary: CARE_AS_CONTROL; JEALOUSY_OWNERSHIP; NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
C010	I thought he was just helping me style my clothes, until he refused to leave the house with me if I wore something he didn't approve of.	Initial: retrospective recognition Primary: Retrospective Recognition (RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION) Secondary: HELP_SEEKING_DISBELIEF; DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY; CARE_AS_CONTROL	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
C012	I thought he was encouraging me to rest, but he was actually encouraging me to quit my job so I'd be completely dependent on him	Initial: retrospective recognition Primary: Retrospective Recognition (RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION) Secondary: ECONOMIC_HOUSING_EMPLOYMENT_CONSTRAINT	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No

Comment ID	Verbatim open-text comment	Coding trail	Final theme	Analytical note / status
C032	At first I felt lucky seeing the loving paragraphs he posted about me online, until I realized those posts were just armor to make sure no one would believe me when I spoke about his temper at home.	Initial: retrospective recognition Primary: Retrospective Recognition (RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION) Secondary: OUTING_DISCLOSURE; PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION; DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY; ONLINE_OFFLINE_REPUTATION	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
C040	Those scenarios described narcissistic behaviour. It's sad how some of the scenarios are the norm for the society as we have multiple examples from friends around us.	Initial: normalisation minimisation Primary: Normalisation Minimisation (NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION)	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Controlling behaviour framed as ordinary, modern, healthy or typical. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: Yes
C085	Adding his Face ID to my phone was presented as the ultimate gesture of emotional vulnerability, but it just meant he was scrolling through my work emails and bank texts while I slept.	Initial: normalisation minimisation Primary: Normalisation Minimisation (NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION) Secondary: DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY; PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Controlling behaviour framed as ordinary, modern, healthy or typical. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: Yes
C089	He made a big show of us deleting Grindr together as a 'milestone of devotion,' but then used app store purchase histories to police whether I was secretly reinstalling it behind his back.	Initial: relationship rules Primary: Relationship Rules (RELATIONSHIP_RULES) Secondary: POLICE_COURT_FAILURE; CALENDAR_APP_HISTORY_AUDITING	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Coercive expectations formalised as rules, rituals or tests of commitment. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
C096	He insisted that sharing Apple IDs and cloud accounts was 'how modern couples build a life together,' turning our shared drive into his personal evidence room.	Initial: relationship rules Primary: Relationship Rules (RELATIONSHIP_RULES) Secondary: PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS; DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE; DIGITAL_SOCIALISATION_NORMS; NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	T1 Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Coercive expectations formalised as rules, rituals or tests of commitment. The comment contributes primarily to Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning. Negative/divergent case: No
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance				
C048	At first I thought sharing streaming accounts was just a normal step in our relationship, but he started using my watch history to track whether I was awake, at home, or ignoring his texts."	Initial: calendar app history auditing Primary: Calendar App History Auditing (CALENDAR_APP_HISTORY_AUDITING) Secondary: DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY; RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION; NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	T2 Digital Access and Surveillance	Auditing calendars, app histories, archives or digital records to account for behaviour. The comment contributes primarily to Digital Access and Surveillance. Negative/divergent case: No
C050	At first I thought he was tagging my physical location on social media as a cute gesture, but he was actually broadcasting my exact whereabouts so I could never leave without his permission.	Initial: location tracking Primary: Location Tracking (LOCATION_TRACKING) Secondary: PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION; COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING; RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION; RELATIONSHIP_RULES	T2 Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring or verifying physical location through digital tools. The comment contributes primarily to Digital Access and Surveillance. Negative/divergent case: No
T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation				
C072	Because I'm bisexual, he convinced himself I was twice as likely to leave him, using that insecurity to demand full access to my phone so he could audit my messages with men and women alike.	Initial: biphobia identity invalidation Primary: Biphobia Identity Invalidation (BIPHOBIA_IDENTITY_INVALIDATION) Secondary: COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	T3 Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Sexual identity stereotyped, mocked, denied or used to rationalise surveillance. The comment contributes primarily to Identity, Visibility and Reputation. Negative/divergent case: No
C135	He routinely reported my posts in local community forums from alt accounts, slowly getting me muted or banned from the online spaces where I felt most affirmed.	Initial: queer community isolation Primary: Queer Community Isolation (QUEER_COMMUNITY_ISOLATION) Secondary: BLOCKING_CIRCUMVENTION; PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION	T3 Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Restriction from queer friends, spaces, advocacy or community networks. The comment contributes primarily to Identity, Visibility and Reputation. Negative/divergent case: No
T4: Sexual and Image-Based Coercion				

Comment ID	Verbatim open-text comment	Coding trail	Final theme	Analytical note / status
C024	Threatening to send my private photos or messages to my employer was digital, but the fear of losing my livelihood and housing was as real as it gets.	Initial: nonconsensual image distribution Primary: Nonconsensual Image Distribution (NONCONSENSUAL_IMAGE_DISTRIBUTION) Secondary: INTIMATE_IMAGE_THREAT; ECONOMIC_HOUSING_EMPLOYMENT_CONSTRAINT; COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	T4 Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Actual distribution or publication of intimate/private images without consent. The comment contributes primarily to Sexual and Image-Based Coercion. Negative/divergent case: No
C063	It started with exchanging private photos on encrypted apps, but the moment I tried to end things, he uploaded them to a shared drive and texted the link to my family with the message: 'Think carefully about your next move.'	Initial: nonconsensual image distribution Primary: Nonconsensual Image Distribution (NONCONSENSUAL_IMAGE_DISTRIBUTION) Secondary: POST_SEPARATION_MONITORING; INTIMATE_IMAGE_THREAT; CARE_AS_CONTROL	T4 Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Actual distribution or publication of intimate/private images without consent. The comment contributes primarily to Sexual and Image-Based Coercion. Negative/divergent case: No
C064	He framed his interest in my health apps as pure care, but he was actually logging into my pharmacy portal to track my PrEP refills and check if I was taking medications without his knowledge.	Initial: sexual health monitoring Primary: Sexual Health Monitoring (SEXUAL_HEALTH_MONITORING) Secondary: CARE_AS_CONTROL	T4 Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Monitoring or controlling sexual-health information, medication or health portals. The comment contributes primarily to Sexual and Image-Based Coercion. Negative/divergent case: No
C069	The nightmare didn't end with the breakup; he created fake profiles using my private photos on location-based apps, pinning my exact apartment address to invite strangers over.	Initial: nonconsensual image distribution Primary: Nonconsensual Image Distribution (NONCONSENSUAL_IMAGE_DISTRIBUTION) Secondary: FAKE_PROFILES_LOCATION_EXPOSURE; INTIMATE_IMAGE_THREAT; PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION; DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY; LOCATION_TRACKING	T4 Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Actual distribution or publication of intimate/private images without consent. The comment contributes primarily to Sexual and Image-Based Coercion. Negative/divergent case: No
T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm				
C013	The wall of 50 missed calls and angry texts during my workday was never just digital it was the preview of the silence and slamming doors waiting for me the moment I walked through the front door."	Initial: digital to physical escalation Primary: Digital To Physical Escalation (DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION) Secondary: RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital monitoring or communication leads to in-person confrontation, retaliation or physical fear. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No
C015	The rage in my DMs always predicted the mood in the living room. The screen didn't separate his behavior from reality; it was just the warmup.	Initial: digital to physical escalation Primary: Digital To Physical Escalation (DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION) Secondary: COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital monitoring or communication leads to in-person confrontation, retaliation or physical fear. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No
C017	It started with demanding my phone passcode to 'build trust,' and ended with him searching my physical bags, car, and mail.	Initial: digital coercion in physical proximity Primary: Digital Coercion In Physical Proximity (DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY) Secondary: PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS; TRUST_TRANSPARENCY	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital control operates within the home or while partners are physically together. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No
C019	Online, he posted loving photos and paragraphs about how much he cherished me; at home, he barely acknowledged my existence unless he was berating me.	Initial: online offline reputation Primary: Online Offline Reputation (ONLINE_OFFLINE_REPUTATION) Secondary: PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION; DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Online public presentation conceals or intensifies offline abuse. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No

Comment ID	Verbatim open-text comment	Coding trail	Final theme	Analytical note / status
C022	He wasn't even in the house, but he would remotely alter the smart thermostat or drop in on the home cameras just to remind me he was always watching.	Initial: smart home physical environment Primary: Smart Home Physical Environment (SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT) Secondary: DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY; DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Smart-home or connected-device access used to alter the physical environment. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No
C057	It wasn't just my text messages he audited my digital payment apps, turning a simple notification for a four-dollar coffee into a full trial about who I was meeting and why.	Initial: digital coercion in physical proximity Primary: Digital Coercion In Physical Proximity (DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY) Secondary: COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING; FINANCIAL_DATA_MONITORING	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital control operates within the home or while partners are physically together. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No
C065	I assumed turning off my location for a two-hour community event was a basic boundary, but doing so triggered three days of icy hostility and furious accusations about where I'd been.	Initial: digital coercion in physical proximity Primary: Digital Coercion In Physical Proximity (DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY) Secondary: QUEER_COMMUNITY_ISOLATION; LOCATION_TRACKING; RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION	T5 Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital control operates within the home or while partners are physically together. The comment contributes primarily to Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm. Negative/divergent case: No
T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence				
C061	Powering off my phone was supposed to give me space to breathe, but ignoring the digital barrage only accelerated things from endless missed calls to him pounding on my front door at midnight	Initial: post separation harassment Primary: Post Separation Harassment (POST_SEPARATION_HARASSMENT) Secondary: DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION; RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY	T6 Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Repeated contact, threats or demands for accountability after separation. The comment contributes primarily to Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence. Negative/divergent case: No
C068	Even after I changed the front door locks, he retained master access to our smart home hub killing the Wi-Fi and dropping the thermostat remotely whenever I stopped responding to his texts.	Initial: continued platform control Primary: Continued Platform Control (CONTINUED_PLATFORM_CONTROL) Secondary: POST_SEPARATION_MONITORING; DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION; SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT; RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY; DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE	T6 Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Shared platforms, smart-home systems or accounts remain under the ex-partner's control after separation. The comment contributes primarily to Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence. Negative/divergent case: No
T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition				
C177	When I brought in printouts of the thousands of location-pings and missed calls, the officer sighed and called it a 'messy break-up,' advising me to 'just turn my phone off as if going dark wouldn't trigger immediate physical retaliation.	Initial: mutual abuse conflict framing Primary: Mutual Abuse Conflict Framing (MUTUAL_ABUSE_CONFLICT_FRAMING) Secondary: POLICE_COURT_FAILURE; POST_SEPARATION_HARASSMENT; LOCATION_TRACKING; RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY	T7 Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Coercive control framed as a mutual dispute, argument or equal conflict. The comment contributes primarily to Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition. Negative/divergent case: Yes
C178	The officers stood in our apartment looking at a smashed phone and immediately asked who started the argument, treating months of digital tracking and covert surveillance like a bar fight between two equal combatants.	Initial: mutual abuse conflict framing Primary: Mutual Abuse Conflict Framing (MUTUAL_ABUSE_CONFLICT_FRAMING) Secondary: POLICE_COURT_FAILURE; DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY	T7 Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Coercive control framed as a mutual dispute, argument or equal conflict. The comment contributes primarily to Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition. Negative/divergent case: Yes
C179	The judge looked at six months of constant GPS tracking and smart home manipulation and ruled it didn't meet the threshold for a protective order because there were 'no explicit physical threats in writing.'	Initial: physical harm threshold Primary: Physical Harm Threshold (PHYSICAL_HARM_THRESHOLD) Secondary: POLICE_COURT_FAILURE; SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT; LOCATION_TRACKING; CARE_AS_CONTROL; RELATIONSHIP_RULES	T7 Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Recognition is withheld because physical injury, explicit threats or physical obstruction are absent. The comment contributes primarily to Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition. Negative/divergent case: No
C180	He used to tell me the police would just see two men arguing and lock us both up and when I finally called them,	Initial: gendered misrecognition Primary: Gendered Misrecognition	T7 Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Abuse between men is misunderstood through heterosexual or gendered assumptions. The comment

Comment ID	Verbatim open-text comment	Coding trail	Final theme	Analytical note / status
	the officer's immediate skepticism and dismissive tone proved him completely right.	(GENDERED MISRECOGNITION) Secondary: POLICE_COURT_FAILURE		contributes primarily to Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition. Negative/divergent case: No
T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust				
C184	The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as 'an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,' treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix.	Initial: healthcare therapy failure Primary: Healthcare Therapy Failure (HEALTHCARE_THERAPY_FAILURE) Secondary: MUTUAL ABUSE CONFLICT FRAMING; COERCION_REFRAMED_AS_INSECURITY; MEDIATION_INSTEAD_OF_SAFETY; TRUST_TRANSPARENCY	T8 Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Healthcare or therapeutic professionals minimise, misattribute or validate abuse. The comment contributes primarily to Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust. Negative/divergent case: No
C185	When I told my individual therapist about his constant demand for screen-recordings, she asked what I had done to 'damage his sense of security,' unintentionally validating his surveillance.	Initial: healthcare therapy failure Primary: Healthcare Therapy Failure (HEALTHCARE_THERAPY_FAILURE) Secondary: VICTIM_BLAMING_PRIVACY_SUSPICION	T8 Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Healthcare or therapeutic professionals minimise, misattribute or validate abuse. The comment contributes primarily to Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust. Negative/divergent case: No
C189	When I called customer service to remove him from my smart home hub, they refused because his name was listed as the primary account owner treating my safety fear as a routine account dispute.	Initial: platform tech support failure Primary: Platform Tech Support Failure (PLATFORM_TECH_SUPPORT_FAILURE) Secondary: HELP_SEEKING_DISBELIEF; CONTINUED_PLATFORM_CONTROL; SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT; ADMINISTRATIVE_CONTROL_DEPENDENCY; CARE_AS_CONTROL	T8 Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Digital platforms, carriers or technology providers fail to remove access or address abuse. The comment contributes primarily to Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust. Negative/divergent case: No
C194	HR told me they couldn't intervene in his relentless Slack messages and work calendar holds because 'personal relationship dynamics shouldn't spill into office tools,' leaving me completely exposed at my desk.	Initial: workplace education failure Primary: Workplace Education Failure (WORKPLACE_EDUCATION_FAILURE) Secondary: HELP_SEEKING_DISBELIEF; POST_SEPARATION_HARASSMENT; COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING; CALENDAR_APP_HISTORY_AUDITING	T8 Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Employers or educational institutions frame abuse as a private or interpersonal issue. The comment contributes primarily to Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust. Negative/divergent case: No
C197	The domestic violence advocate paused when I gave my ex's name and asked if there was 'a female partner involved,' making me realize their intake forms didn't even have a category for what I was experiencing.	Initial: domestic abuse service gap Primary: Domestic Abuse Service Gap (DOMESTIC_ABUSE_SERVICE_GAP) Secondary: GENDERED_MISRECOGNITION	T8 Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Domestic-abuse or community services fail to recognise male same-sex victimisation. The comment contributes primarily to Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust. Negative/divergent case: No
T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation				
C102	He handled all our network setup because 'people in IT know how to keep things safe,' which meant he was the only one who held the router logs, admin passwords, and browsing records.	Initial: technical expertise as power Primary: Technical Expertise As Power (TECHNICAL_EXPERTISE_AS_POWER) Secondary: PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS; DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE; ADMINISTRATIVE_CONTROL_DEPENDENCY	T9 Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Technical knowledge is used to establish authority and conceal or legitimise access. The comment contributes primarily to Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation. Negative/divergent case: No
C106	Using his background in data analysis, he built spreadsheets of my daily travel times and expenses, presenting it as an efficiency exercise to help me optimize my routine.	Initial: technical expertise as power Primary: Technical Expertise As Power (TECHNICAL_EXPERTISE_AS_POWER) Secondary: FINANCIAL_PROFESSIONAL_EXPERTISE; RELATIONSHIP_RULES	T9 Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Technical knowledge is used to establish authority and conceal or legitimise access. The comment contributes primarily to Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation. Negative/divergent case: No
C109	Having lived in the city's queer scene for a decade before I moved here, he'd review my contact list and explain which guys were 'trouble' and needed to be blocked immediately."	Initial: age experience authority Primary: Age Experience Authority (AGE_EXPERIENCE_AUTHORITY) Secondary: QUEER_COMMUNITY_ISOLATION; COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	T9 Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Age, relationship history or local experience is used to position one partner as more knowledgeable. The comment contributes primarily to Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation. Negative/divergent case: No

Comment ID	Verbatim open-text comment	Coding trail	Final theme	Analytical note / status
C120	He brought up my past family history to explain why my desire for password privacy was just an unhealthy defense mechanism I needed to work through.	Initial: psychological authority gaslighting Primary: Psychological Authority Gaslighting (PSYCHOLOGICAL_AUTHORITY_GASLIGHTING) Secondary: INTERSECTIONAL_IDENTITY_LEVERAGE; PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS; NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	T9 Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Psychological language, diagnosis, memory or emotional response is used to undermine self-knowledge. The comment contributes primarily to Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation. Negative/divergent case: No

Appendix N

Survey Open-Text Codebook and Manual Frequency Summary

This appendix documents the final 50-code manual coding framework and the frequency summaries derived from the 200-comment analytic corpus. The codebook records definitions and decision rules. Frequency counts distinguish the number of comments for which a code was primary from the number of unique comments in which the code appeared through either primary or secondary coding.

Note: Counts describe the analysed corpus and are not prevalence estimates. One comment could contain several codes and several themes. A comment is counted only once within any individual code or theme.

Table N.1: Codebook: code identity, thematic location and definition

Code ID	Code label	Theme	Definition
CARE_AS_CONTROL	Care As Control	T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Care or protection used to justify monitoring or restriction.
JEALOUSY OWNERSHIP	Jealousy Ownership	T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Jealousy, possessiveness or ownership used to justify control.
NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	Normalisation Minimisation	T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Controlling behaviour framed as ordinary, modern, healthy or typical.
RELATIONSHIP_RULES	Relationship Rules	T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Coercive expectations formalised as rules, rituals or tests of commitment.
RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION	Retrospective Recognition	T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	A behaviour initially understood positively is later recognised as controlling or abusive.
TRUST_TRANSPARENCY	Trust Transparency	T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	Trust, openness or transparency invoked to remove privacy boundaries.
CALENDAR_APP_HISTORY_AUDITING	Calendar App History Auditing	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Auditing calendars, app histories, archives or digital records to account for behaviour.
COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	Communication Social Monitoring	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring messages, contacts, social-media activity or online interactions.
DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE	Device Cloud Router Surveillance	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Surveillance through devices, cloud syncing, routers, cameras or network logs.
FINANCIAL_DATA_MONITORING	Financial Data Monitoring	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring transactions, banking applications, payment platforms or expenditure.
LOCATION_TRACKING	Location Tracking	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring or verifying physical location through digital tools.
PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS	Password Account Access	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Obtaining or demanding passwords, passcodes, account access or authentication control.
RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY	Response Time Availability	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring availability through response times, missed calls, read receipts or online status.
BIPHOBIA_IDENTITY_INVALIDATION	Biphobia Identity Invalidation	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Sexual identity stereotyped, mocked, denied or used to rationalise surveillance.
INTERSECTIONAL_IDENTITY_LEVERAGE	Intersectional Identity Leverage	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Class, ethnicity, disability, family context or other identity conditions used as leverage.
OUTING_DISCLOSURE	Outing Disclosure	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Threatened or actual disclosure of sexuality, relationship status or private identity information.
PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION	Public Presentation Reputation	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Control over online presentation, visibility, posts, language or reputation.
QUEER_COMMUNITY_ISOLATION	Queer Community Isolation	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Restriction from queer friends, spaces, advocacy or community networks.
INTIMATE_IMAGE_THREAT	Intimate Image Threat	T4: Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Threatened use or disclosure of intimate images or private sexual material.
NONCONSENSUAL_IMAGE_DISTRIBUTION	Nonconsensual Image Distribution	T4: Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Actual distribution or publication of intimate/private images without consent.
SEXUAL_HEALTH_MONITORING	Sexual Health Monitoring	T4: Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Monitoring or controlling sexual-health information, medication or health portals.
DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY	Digital Coercion In Physical Proximity	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital control operates within the home or while partners are physically together.

Code ID	Code label	Theme	Definition
DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION	Digital To Physical Escalation	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital monitoring or communication leads to in-person confrontation, retaliation or physical fear.
ECONOMIC HOUSING EMPLOYMENT_CONSTRAINT	Economic Housing Employment Constraint	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital control threatens or restricts money, housing, employment or essential resources.
EMOTIONAL_PSYCHOLOGICAL_IMPACT	Emotional Psychological Impact	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Technology-facilitated control produces panic, anxiety, hypervigilance or trauma.
ONLINE_OFFLINE_REPUTATION	Online Offline Reputation	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Online public presentation conceals or intensifies offline abuse.
SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT	Smart Home Physical Environment	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Smart-home or connected-device access used to alter the physical environment.
BLOCKING_CIRCUMVENTION	Blocking Circumvention	T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Attempts to bypass blocking or stopped contact through alternative channels.
CONTINUED_PLATFORM_CONTROL	Continued Platform Control	T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Shared platforms, smart-home systems or accounts remain under the ex-partner's control after separation.
FAKE_PROFILES_LOCATION_EXPOSURE	Fake Profiles Location Exposure	T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Fake profiles or location-based platforms used to expose, impersonate or endanger the victim.
POST_SEPARATION_HARASSMENT	Post Separation Harassment	T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Repeated contact, threats or demands for accountability after separation.
POST_SEPARATION_MONITORING	Post Separation Monitoring	T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Monitoring or demands continue after the relationship has ended.
COERCION_REFRAMED_AS_INSECURITY	Coercion Reframed As Insecurity	T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Surveillance is reinterpreted as jealousy, insecurity or a trust deficit.
GENDERED_MISRECOGNITION	Gendered Misrecognition	T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Abuse between men is misunderstood through heterosexual or gendered assumptions.
MEDIATION_INSTEAD_OF_SAFETY	Mediation Instead Of Safety	T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Mediation or relationship repair is proposed instead of safeguarding.
MUTUAL_ABUSE_CONFLICT_FRAMING	Mutual Abuse Conflict Framing	T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Coercive control framed as a mutual dispute, argument or equal conflict.
PHYSICAL_HARM_THRESHOLD	Physical Harm Threshold	T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Recognition is withheld because physical injury, explicit threats or physical obstruction are absent.
DOMESTIC_ABUSE_SERVICE_GAP	Domestic Abuse Service Gap	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Domestic-abuse or community services fail to recognise male same-sex victimisation.
HEALTHCARE_THERAPY_FAILURE	Healthcare Therapy Failure	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Healthcare or therapeutic professionals minimise, misattribute or validate abuse.
HELP_SEEKING_DISBELIEF	Help Seeking Disbelief	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	The account is dismissed, trivialised or not believed during help-seeking.
PLATFORM_TECH_SUPPORT_FAILURE	Platform Tech Support Failure	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Digital platforms, carriers or technology providers fail to remove access or address abuse.
POLICE_COURT_FAILURE	Police Court Failure	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Police, courts or criminal-justice actors fail to recognise or respond to abuse.
VICTIM_BLAMING_PRIVACY_SUSPICION	Victim Blaming Privacy Suspicion	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Help-seeking produces blame or suspicion directed at the victim's privacy or conduct.
WORKPLACE_EDUCATION_FAILURE	Workplace Education Failure	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Employers or educational institutions frame abuse as a private or interpersonal issue.
ADMINISTRATIVE_CONTROL_DEPENDENCY	Administrative Control Dependency	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	One partner becomes the sole administrator or gatekeeper of accounts, devices or systems.
AGE_EXPERIENCE_AUTHORITY	Age Experience Authority	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Age, relationship history or local experience is used to position one partner as more knowledgeable.
DIGITAL_SOCIALISATION_NORMS	Digital Socialisation Norms	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Norms of modern digital relationships are invoked to justify surveillance or access.
FINANCIAL_PROFESSIONAL_EXPERTISE	Financial Professional Expertise	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Financial, professional, legal or administrative expertise is used to justify control.
PSYCHOLOGICAL_AUTHORITY_GASLIGHTING	Psychological Authority Gaslighting	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Psychological language, diagnosis, memory or emotional response is used to undermine self-knowledge.
TECHNICAL_EXPERTISE_AS_POWER	Technical Expertise As Power	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Technical knowledge is used to establish authority and conceal or legitimise access.

Table N.2: Codebook: inclusion, exclusion and illustrative decision rules

Code ID	Include when	Exclude when	Illustrative extract
CARE_AS_CONTROL	Use where concern, safety, attentiveness or protection legitimises control.	Exclude where care is described without coercive monitoring or consequences.	I thought it was sweet that he always wanted to know I made it home safely, until he started demanding photo proof of where I was.
JEALOUSY_OWNERSHIP	Use where exclusivity, loyalty or possession is central.	Exclude general monitoring without possessive meaning.	I used to think his jealousy showed how much he cared about losing me, until it turned into daily interrogations over normal interactions.
NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	Use where harmful conduct is treated as normal relationship practice.	Exclude retrospective recognition without a normalising claim.	I used to think his jealousy showed how much he cared about losing me, until it turned into daily interrogations over normal interactions.
RELATIONSHIP_RULES	Use for mandatory check-ins, open-screen rules, shared accounts or required proof.	Exclude isolated requests without an enforced relational expectation.	At first I thought he was tagging my physical location on social media as a cute gesture, but he was actually broadcasting my exact whereabouts so I could never leave without his permission.
RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION	Use for 'at first', 'I thought', or hindsight-based reinterpretation.	Exclude where the behaviour is recognised as abusive from the outset.	I thought it was sweet that he always wanted to know I made it home safely, until he started demanding photo proof of where I was.
TRUST_TRANSPARENCY	Use where access or proof is framed as necessary for trust.	Exclude consensual transparency without pressure or penalty.	I thought it was sweet that he always wanted to know I made it home safely, until he started demanding photo proof of where I was.
CALENDAR_APP_HISTORY_AUDITING	Use for calendars, download histories, watch histories or archived records.	Exclude current messages or location data.	At first I thought sharing streaming accounts was just a normal step in our relationship, but he started using my watch history to track whether I was awake, at home, or ignoring his texts."
COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	Use for DMs, likes, followers, contacts, posts or browsing activity.	Exclude monitoring limited to location or finances.	The rage in my DMs always predicted the mood in the living room. The screen didn't separate his behavior from reality; it was just the warmup.
DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE	Use for spyware, device logging, cloud mirroring or router records.	Exclude smart-home control primarily affecting the physical environment.	He wasn't even in the house, but he would remotely alter the smart thermostat or drop in on the home cameras just to remind me he was always watching.
FINANCIAL_DATA_MONITORING	Use for bank statements, Venmo, expense apps or transaction notifications.	Exclude direct deprivation of money without a digital monitoring mechanism.	It wasn't just my text messages he audited my digital payment apps, turning a simple notification for a four-dollar coffee into a full trial about who I was meeting and why.
LOCATION_TRACKING	Use for GPS, location sharing, trackers, distance data or proof-of-location demands.	Exclude general communication monitoring without location data.	I thought it was sweet that he always wanted to know I made it home safely, until he started demanding photo proof of where I was.
PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS	Use where privacy boundaries are removed through account credentials.	Exclude public information or consensual access without coercion.	It started with demanding my phone passcode to 'build trust,' and ended with him searching my physical bags, car, and mail.
RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY	Use where delays or digital absence produce questioning or consequences.	Exclude ordinary contact without enforced immediacy.	I thought he was just being attentive, but he would panic and get furious if I didn't respond to a text within five minutes.
BIPHOBIA_IDENTITY_INVALIDATION	Use for bisexuality myths, 'phase' narratives or identity invalidation.	Exclude general jealousy without sexuality-based meaning.	Because I'm bisexual, he convinced himself I was twice as likely to leave him, using that insecurity to demand full access to my phone so he could audit my messages with men and women alike.
INTERSECTIONAL_IDENTITY_LEVERAGING	Use where coercion draws on intersecting vulnerabilities or social locations.	Exclude sexuality-only identity abuse.	He brought up my past family history to explain why my desire for password privacy was just an unhealthy defense mechanism I needed to work through.
OUTING_DISCLOSURE	Use where family, employers, roommates or others may be informed without consent.	Exclude reputational harm unrelated to identity disclosure.	At first I felt lucky seeing the loving paragraphs he posted about me online, until I realized those posts were just armor to make sure no one would believe me when I spoke about his temper at home.
PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION	Use for profile policing, tagging, public comments, reputational threats or image management.	Exclude private monitoring without a public or reputational dimension.	Online, he posted loving photos and paragraphs about how much he cherished me; at home, he barely acknowledged my existence unless he was berating me.
QUEER_COMMUNITY_ISOLATION	Use where contacts, events, group chats or community spaces are removed or discouraged.	Exclude isolation not connected to queer/community belonging.	I assumed turning off my location for a two-hour community event was a basic boundary, but doing so triggered three days of icy hostility and furious accusations about where I'd been.
INTIMATE_IMAGE_THREAT	Use where images or sexual communications are held as leverage.	Exclude non-sexual reputational threats.	Threatening to send my private photos or messages to my employer was digital, but the fear of losing my livelihood and housing was as real as it gets.
NONCONSENSUAL_IMAGE_DISTRIBUTION	Use where images are uploaded, sent or used in fake profiles.	Exclude threats where no distribution is described.	Threatening to send my private photos or messages to my employer was digital, but the fear of losing my livelihood and housing was as real as it gets.
SEXUAL_HEALTH_MONITORING	Use for PrEP, sexual-health records or related medical surveillance.	Exclude general healthcare access unrelated to sexual identity or intimacy.	He framed his interest in my health apps as pure care, but he was actually logging into my pharmacy portal to track my

Code ID	Include when	Exclude when	Illustrative extract
DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY	Use for phone audits, speakerphone demands or device control in shared space.	Exclude purely remote conduct without shared physical context.	PrEP refills and check if I was taking medications without his knowledge.
DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION	Use where online conduct predicts or produces physical-world escalation.	Exclude digital-only fear without an identified offline consequence.	I thought he was just helping me style my clothes, until he refused to leave the house with me if I wore something he didn't approve of.
ECONOMIC_HOUSING_EMPLOYMENT_CONSTRAINT	Use for banking lockouts, phone plans, employer threats or housing access.	Exclude transaction monitoring without material restriction.	The wall of 50 missed calls and angry texts during my workday was never just digital it was the preview of the silence and slamming doors waiting for me the moment I walked through the front door."
EMOTIONAL_PSYCHOLOGICAL_IMPACT	Use where embodied or psychological consequences are foregrounded.	Exclude neutral descriptions of monitoring without impact.	I thought he was encouraging me to quit my job so I'd be completely dependent on him
ONLINE_OFFLINE_REPUTATION	Use where an idealised online relationship undermines credibility or masks home abuse.	Exclude general reputation management not tied to online/offline contrast.	I thought he was just being attentive, but he would panic and get furious if I didn't respond to a text within five minutes.
SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT	Use for locks, thermostats, cameras, speakers or home hubs.	Exclude passive device surveillance without environmental control.	Online, he posted loving photos and paragraphs about how much he cherished me; at home, he barely acknowledged my existence unless he was berating me.
BLOCKING_CIRCUMVENTION	Use for alt accounts, payment messages, new profiles or other circumvention.	Exclude continued access through an unchanged shared account.	He wasn't even in the house, but he would remotely alter the smart thermostat or drop in on the home cameras just to remind me he was always watching.
CONTINUED_PLATFORM_CONTROL	Use for retained administrator status, family sharing or account ownership.	Exclude active relationship account control.	He routinely reported my posts in local community forums from alt accounts, slowly getting me muted or banned from the online spaces where I felt most affirmed.
FAKE_PROFILES_LOCATION_EXPOSURE	Use where profiles publish images, identity or location after separation.	Exclude ordinary impersonation without post-separation coercive context.	Even after I changed the front door locks, he retained master access to our smart home hub killing the Wi-Fi and dropping the thermostat remotely whenever I stopped responding to his texts.
POST_SEPARATION_HARASSMENT	Use for ongoing harassment not captured by a more specific post-separation code.	Exclude a single post-separation communication without coercive persistence.	The nightmare didn't end with the breakup; he created fake profiles using my private photos on location-based apps, pinning my exact apartment address to invite strangers over.
POST_SEPARATION_MONITORING	Use where an ex continues tracking, questioning or supervising new contacts.	Exclude conduct occurring only during the relationship.	Powering off my phone was supposed to give me space to breathe, but ignoring the digital barrage only accelerated things from endless missed calls to him pounding on my front door at midnight
COERCION_REFRAMED_AS_INSECURITY	Use where abuse is psychologised as relationship insecurity.	Exclude mutual-conflict framing without insecurity language.	It started with exchanging private photos on encrypted apps, but the moment I tried to end things, he uploaded them to a shared drive and texted the link to my family with the message: 'Think carefully about your next move.'
GENDERED_MISRECOGNITION	Use where services expect a female victim/partner or trivialise two men.	Exclude general service failure without gendered assumptions.	The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as 'an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,' treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix.
MEDIATION_INSTEAD_OF_SAFETY	Use where restorative or couples approaches replace recognition of coercion.	Exclude therapy failures that do not recommend mediation or joint repair.	He used to tell me the police would just see two men arguing and lock us both up and when I finally called them, the officer's immediate skepticism and dismissive tone proved him completely right
MUTUAL_ABUSE_CONFLICT_FRAMING	Use for 'messy break-up', equal combatants, mutual dispute or joint problem framing.	Exclude service failure without symmetry or conflict framing.	The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as 'an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,' treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix.
PHYSICAL_HARM_THRESHOLD	Use where services require physical evidence before acknowledging abuse.	Exclude general minimisation not tied to physical-harm expectations.	When I brought in printouts of the thousands of location-pings and missed calls, the officer sighed and called it a 'messy break-up,' advising me to 'just turn my phone off' as if going dark wouldn't trigger immediate physical retaliation.
DOMESTIC_ABUSE_SERVICE_GAP	Use for advocates, intake workers, community services or crisis lines.	Exclude police or healthcare services.	The judge looked at six months of constant GPS tracking and smart home manipulation and ruled it didn't meet the threshold for a protective order because there were 'no explicit physical threats in writing.'
HEALTHCARE_THERAPY_FAILURE	Use for doctors, nurses, therapists or clinics.	Exclude domestic-abuse service or workplace failures.	The domestic violence advocate paused when I gave my ex's name and asked if there was 'a female partner involved,' making me realize their intake forms didn't even have a category for what I was experiencing.
HELP_SEEKING_DISBELIEF	Use where disbelief or dismissal is the main institutional response.	Exclude a specific service mechanism better captured by another code.	The couples counselor framed his daily auditing of my texts as 'an understandable reaction to an underlying trust deficit,' treating his coercive control as a joint communication problem we both needed to fix.
			I thought he was just helping me style my clothes, until he refused to leave the house with me if I wore something he didn't approve of.

Code ID	Include when	Exclude when	Illustrative extract
PLATFORM_TECH_SUPPORT_FAILURE	Use for customer service, automated moderation, carriers or tech support.	Exclude police or employer responses.	When I called customer service to remove him from my smart home hub, they refused because his name was listed as the primary account owner treating my safety fear as a routine account dispute.
POLICE_COURT_FAILURE	Use for police reports, protective orders, cybercrime or judicial decisions.	Exclude non-criminal-justice service failures.	He made a big show of us deleting Grindr together as a 'milestone of devotion,' but then used app store purchase histories to police whether I was secretly reinstalling it behind his back.
VICTIM_BLAMING_PRIVACY_SUSPICION	Use where encryption, public profiles or reporting choices are treated as culpable.	Exclude simple inaction without victim-blaming.	When I told my individual therapist about his constant demand for screen-recordings, she asked what I had done to 'damage his sense of security,' unintentionally validating his surveillance.
WORKPLACE_EDUCATION_FAILURE	Use for HR, managers, universities or professional platforms.	Exclude platform-only failures without institutional employment/education context.	HR told me they couldn't intervene in his relentless Slack messages and work calendar holds because 'personal relationship dynamics shouldn't spill into office tools,' leaving me completely exposed at my desk.
ADMINISTRATIVE_CONTROL_DEPENDENCY	Use where ownership or administrative status creates dependence.	Exclude shared access where both retain equal control.	He handled all our network setup because 'people in IT know how to keep things safe,' which meant he was the only one who held the router logs, admin passwords, and browsing records.
AGE_EXPERIENCE_AUTHORITY	Use for older-partner authority, city experience or claims of maturity.	Exclude technical expertise unrelated to age/experience.	Having lived in the city's queer scene for a decade before I moved here, he'd review my contact list and explain which guys were 'trouble' and needed to be blocked immediately."
DIGITAL_SOCIALISATION_NORMS	Use for claims about what modern, mature or digitally competent couples should do.	Exclude trust claims without a broader digital norm.	He insisted that sharing Apple IDs and cloud accounts was 'how modern couples build a life together,' turning our shared drive into his personal evidence room.
FINANCIAL_PROFESSIONAL_EXPERTISE	Use for financial literacy, career etiquette, leases, utilities or work planning.	Exclude direct financial monitoring without an expertise claim.	Using his background in data analysis, he built spreadsheets of my daily travel times and expenses, presenting it as an efficiency exercise to help me optimize my routine.
PSYCHOLOGICAL_AUTHORITY_GASLIGHTING	Use for diagnostic labels, rationality claims or reinterpretation of discomfort.	Exclude ordinary disagreement without epistemic undermining.	He brought up my past family history to explain why my desire for password privacy was just an unhealthy defense mechanism I needed to work through.
TECHNICAL_EXPERTISE_AS_POWER	Use for IT, networking, data analysis, security setup or technical explanations.	Exclude ordinary device use without expertise claims.	He handled all our network setup because 'people in IT know how to keep things safe,' which meant he was the only one who held the router logs, admin passwords, and browsing records.

Table N.3: Manual code-frequency summary

Code ID	Code label	Theme ID	Theme	Primary code count	Comments containing code	% of 200 comments
CARE_AS_CONTROL	Care As Control	T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	3	31	15.5%
JEALOUSY_OWNERSHIP	Jealousy Ownership	T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	0	6	3.0%
NORMALISATION_MINIMISATION	Normalisation Minimisation	T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	18	26	13.0%
RELATIONSHIP_RULES	Relationship Rules	T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	13	33	16.5%
RETROSPECTIVE_RECOGNITION	Retrospective Recognition	T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	26	40	20.0%
TRUST_TRANSPARENCY	Trust Transparency	T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	13	24	12.0%
CALENDAR_APP_HISTORY_AUDITING	Calendar App History Auditing	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	1	17	8.5%
COMMUNICATION_SOCIAL_MONITORING	Communication Social Monitoring	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	4	45	22.5%
DEVICE_CLOUD_ROUTER_SURVEILLANCE	Device Cloud Router Surveillance	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	2	21	10.5%
FINANCIAL_DATA_MONITORING	Financial Data Monitoring	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	0	6	3.0%
LOCATION_TRACKING	Location Tracking	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	3	32	16.0%

Code ID	Code label	Theme ID	Theme	Primary code count	Comments containing code	% of 200 comments
PASSWORD_ACCOUNT_ACCESS	Password Account Access	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	0	16	8.0%
RESPONSE_TIME_AVAILABILITY	Response Time Availability	T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	2	19	9.5%
BIPHOBIA_IDENTITY_INVALIDATION	Biphobia Identity Invalidation	T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	5	10	5.0%
INTERSECTIONAL_IDENTITY_LEVERAGE	Intersectional Identity Leverage	T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	4	7	3.5%
OUTING_DISCLOSURE	Outing Disclosure	T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	6	11	5.5%
PUBLIC_PRESENTATION_REPUTATION	Public Presentation Reputation	T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	13	38	19.0%
QUEER_COMMUNITY_ISOLATION	Queer Community Isolation	T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	6	12	6.0%
INTIMATE_IMAGE_THREAT	Intimate Image Threat	T4	Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	1	7	3.5%
NONCONSENSUAL_IMAGE_DISTRIBUTION	Nonconsensual Image Distribution	T4	Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	4	4	2.0%
SEXUAL_HEALTH_MONITORING	Sexual Health Monitoring	T4	Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	1	4	2.0%
DIGITAL_COERCION_IN_PHYSICAL_PROXIMITY	Digital Coercion In Physical Proximity	T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	7	20	10.0%
DIGITAL_TO_PHYSICAL_ESCALATION	Digital To Physical Escalation	T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	7	15	7.5%
ECONOMIC_HOUSING_EMPLOYMENT_CONSTRAINT	Economic Housing Employment Constraint	T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	0	6	3.0%
EMOTIONAL_PSYCHOLOGICAL_IMPACT	Emotional Psychological Impact	T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	3	10	5.0%
ONLINE_OFFLINE_REPUTATION	Online Offline Reputation	T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	3	4	2.0%
SMART_HOME_PHYSICAL_ENVIRONMENT	Smart Home Physical Environment	T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	2	11	5.5%
BLOCKING_CIRCUMVENTION	Blocking Circumvention	T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	1	5	2.5%
CONTINUED_PLATFORM_CONTROL	Continued Platform Control	T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	1	4	2.0%
FAKE_PROFILES_LOCATION_EXPOSURE	Fake Profiles Location Exposure	T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	0	2	1.0%
POST_SEPARATION_HARASSMENT	Post Separation Harassment	T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	1	4	2.0%
POST_SEPARATION_MONITORING	Post Separation Monitoring	T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	0	4	2.0%
COERCION_REFRAMED_AS_INSECURITY	Coercion Reframed As Insecurity	T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	0	2	1.0%
GENDERED_MISRECOGNITION	Gendered Misrecognition	T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	1	2	1.0%
MEDIATION_INSTEAD_OF_SAFETY	Mediation Instead Of Safety	T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	1	3	1.5%
MUTUAL_ABUSE_CONFLICT_FRAMING	Mutual Abuse Conflict Framing	T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	4	5	2.5%
PHYSICAL_HARM_THRESHOLD	Physical Harm Threshold	T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	3	4	2.0%
DOMESTIC_ABUSE_SERVICE_GAP	Domestic Abuse Service Gap	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	3	5	2.5%
HEALTHCARE_THERAPY_FAILURE	Healthcare Therapy Failure	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	5	5	2.5%
HELP_SEEKING_DISBELIEF	Help Seeking Disbelief	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	0	7	3.5%

Code ID	Code label	Theme ID	Theme	Primary code count	Comments containing code	% of 200 comments
PLATFORM_Tech_SUPPORT_FAILURE	Platform Tech Support Failure	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	5	5	2.5%
POLICE_COURT_FAILURE	Police Court Failure	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	0	9	4.5%
VICTIM_BLAMING_PRIVACY_SUSPICION	Victim Blaming Privacy Suspicion	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	0	3	1.5%
WORKPLACE_EDUCATION_FAILURE	Workplace Education Failure	T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	3	3	1.5%
ADMINISTRATIVE_CONTROL_DEPENDENCY	Administrative Control Dependency	T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	1	5	2.5%
AGE_EXPERIENCE_AUTHORITY	Age Experience Authority	T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	5	6	3.0%
DIGITAL_SOCIALISATION_NORMS	Digital Socialisation Norms	T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	7	11	5.5%
FINANCIAL_PROFESSIONAL_EXPERTISE	Financial Professional Expertise	T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	4	5	2.5%
PSYCHOLOGICAL_AUTHORITY_GASLIGHTING	Psychological Authority Gaslighting	T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	3	5	2.5%
TECHNICAL_EXPERTISE_AS_POWER	Technical Expertise As Power	T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	5	5	2.5%

Note: The 200 comments generated 584 coding references when primary and secondary codes are combined. The "comments containing code" column counts a code no more than once within any individual comment.

Table N.4: Overarching theme-frequency summary

Theme ID	Final theme	Analytic description	Primary theme count	Comments containing theme	% of 200 comments
T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	How care, intimacy, jealousy, trust and relationship commitment were used to normalise or legitimise control.	73	121	60.5%
T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring through location data, communication platforms, devices, accounts, calendars and financial applications.	12	131	65.5%
T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Use of sexuality, disclosure, queer-community belonging, public presentation and intersecting identities as coercive leverage.	34	63	31.5%
T4	Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Threatened or actual use of intimate images, sexual-health data or private sexual material as a means of control.	6	10	5.0%
T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital practices producing embodied fear, physical confrontation, resource restriction or control within shared physical space.	22	56	28.0%
T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Continuation or adaptation of control after separation through platforms, accounts, fake profiles and repeated contact.	3	36	18.0%
T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Coercive control reframed as mutual conflict, insecurity, communication problems or conduct requiring physical violence before recognition.	9	13	6.5%
T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Institutional, service and platform failures that minimised, misunderstood or failed to respond to technology-facilitated abuse.	16	27	13.5%
T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Use of age, experience, technical expertise, professional authority or digital knowledge to establish unequal interpretive power.	25	30	15.0%

Note: Theme percentages are calculated using the 200-comment corpus as the denominator. Because comments could contribute to more than one theme, the percentages do not total 100%.

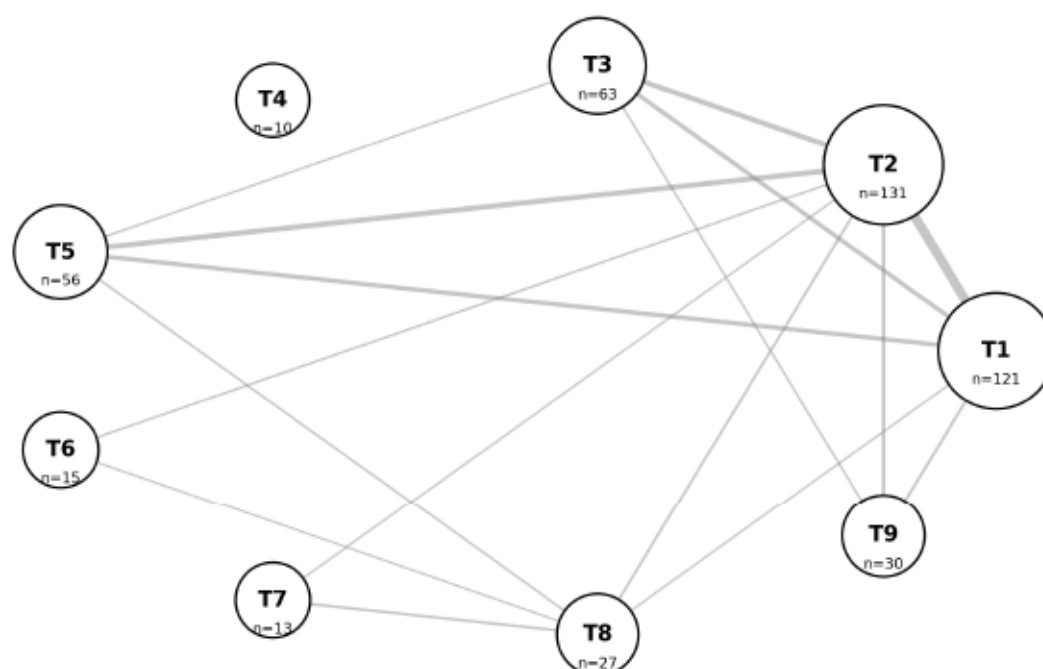
Appendix O

Survey Open-Text Theme Map

The thematic map displays the nine overarching themes and their observed overlap within the manually coded corpus. Node size is proportional to the number of comments containing each theme. Connections are based on comments coded to both themes and are presented as descriptive coding relationships rather than causal pathways.

Table O.1: Theme-map legend and constituent codes

Appendix O Theme Map: Survey Open-Text Corpus (n=200)



Node size reflects the number of comments containing the theme. Lines show cross-theme co-occurrence in at least seven comments; line width reflects the number of shared comments.

Theme ID	Theme	Analytic focus	Constituent codes
T1	Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	How care, intimacy, jealousy, trust and relationship commitment were used to normalise or legitimise control.	Care As Control; Jealousy Ownership; Normalisation Minimisation; Relationship Rules; Retrospective Recognition; Trust Transparency
T2	Digital Access and Surveillance	Monitoring through location data, communication platforms, devices, accounts, calendars and financial applications.	Calendar App History Auditing; Communication Social Monitoring; Device Cloud Router Surveillance; Financial Data Monitoring; Location Tracking; Password Account Access; Response Time Availability
T3	Identity, Visibility and Reputation	Use of sexuality, disclosure, queer-community belonging, public presentation and intersecting identities as coercive leverage.	Biphobia Identity Invalidation; Intersectional Identity Leverage; Outing Disclosure; Public Presentation Reputation; Queer Community Isolation
T4	Sexual and Image-Based Coercion	Threatened or actual use of intimate images, sexual-health data or private sexual material as a means of control.	Intimate Image Threat; Nonconsensual Image Distribution; Sexual Health Monitoring
T5	Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	Digital practices producing embodied fear, physical confrontation, resource restriction or control within shared physical space.	Digital Coercion In Physical Proximity; Digital To Physical Escalation; Economic Housing Employment Constraint; Emotional Psychological Impact; Online Offline Reputation; Smart Home Physical Environment
T6	Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	Continuation or adaptation of control after separation through platforms, accounts, fake profiles and repeated contact.	Blocking Circumvention; Continued Platform Control; Fake Profiles Location Exposure; Post Separation Harassment; Post Separation Monitoring
T7	Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	Coercive control reframed as mutual conflict, insecurity, communication problems or conduct requiring physical violence before recognition.	Coercion Reframed As Insecurity; Gendered Misrecognition; Mediation Instead Of Safety; Mutual Abuse Conflict Framing; Physical Harm Threshold

Theme ID	Theme	Analytic focus	Constituent codes
T8	Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	Institutional, service and platform failures that minimised, misunderstood or failed to respond to technology-facilitated abuse.	Domestic Abuse Service Gap; Healthcare Therapy Failure; Help Seeking Disbelief; Platform Tech Support Failure; Police Court Failure; Victim Blaming Privacy Suspicion; Workplace Education Failure
T9	Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	Use of age, experience, technical expertise, professional authority or digital knowledge to establish unequal interpretive power.	Administrative Control Dependency; Age Experience Authority; Digital Socialisation Norms; Financial Professional Expertise; Psychological Authority Gaslighting; Technical Expertise As Power

Table O.2: Strongest observed cross-theme co-occurrences

Theme A	Theme B	Shared comments	Interpretive use
T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	80	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	39	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	38	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	31	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	30	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	19	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	15	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	13	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	12	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	9	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	9	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	T5: Online–Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm	8	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T3: Identity, Visibility and Reputation	T9: Experiential Power and Digital Socialisation	8	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T1: Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	7	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T2: Digital Access and Surveillance	T7: Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition	7	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.
T6: Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence	T8: Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust	7	Indicates comments in which both thematic domains were present through primary and/or secondary coding.

Note: Only theme pairs co-occurring in at least seven comments are shown in the visual map and Table O2. The threshold is used for readability and does not imply that less frequent connections are analytically unimportant.

O.1 Interpretive reading of the map

Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning (T1) and Digital Access and Surveillance (T2) form the most densely connected part of the map. This reflects the frequency with which comments linked particular digital practices to contested meanings of care, trust, jealousy, intimacy and privacy.

Online-Offline Continuity and Hybrid Harm (T5) is connected most strongly to Digital Access and Surveillance (T2) and Recognition, Normalisation and Relational Meaning (T1). This overlap supports analysis of how digital access acquires embodied, spatial and material consequences rather than remaining confined to screens or platforms.

Identity, Visibility and Reputation (T3) overlaps with surveillance, relational meaning and experiential power. These connections capture the role of sexuality, disclosure, public presentation and unequal knowledge in shaping the meaning and consequences of digitally mediated conduct.

Mutual-Abuse Narratives and Misrecognition (T7) is closely linked to Help-Seeking and the Gap of Trust (T8). This relationship reflects comments in which the framing of abuse as mutual conflict, insecurity or a communication problem affected whether harm was believed, assessed or acted upon.

Post-Separation Persistence and Digital Omnipresence (T6) appears less frequently than the two largest themes but connects to surveillance and help-seeking. Its position in the map is analytically important because it illustrates how digital access may persist, adapt or become more difficult to evidence after a relationship ends.