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Artificial Intelligence (AI), Surveillance, and Relationship Power: How Technology Amplifies Spousal Domestication

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Abstract
Digitally amplified spousal domestication is an extension, intensification, and technological reconfiguration of the foundational theory of spousal domestication developed by Odeleye (2024, 2025). This conceptual paper examines how artificial intelligence (AI) and surveillance technologies are transforming power relations within intimate partnerships by amplifying spousal domestication. Historically, domestication, the systematic regulation of a partner's autonomy and behaviour, was constrained by physical proximity and social visibility. The diffusion of AI-enabled technologies, including smart home systems, location-tracking applications, and automated communication monitoring tools, has fundamentally altered these constraints. Such technologies enable continuous, often covert surveillance that blurs the boundary between care and coercion. Drawing on surveillance theory, coercive control theory, and feminist analyses of technology, the paper argues that AI-enabled surveillance produces a digital extension of domestication that erodes trust, restructures intimacy, and entrenches asymmetric power relations within the home. By synthesising empirical findings from existing studies on technology-facilitated abuse, the paper demonstrates how tools marketed for security and convenience is converted to instruments of control. The paper concludes by outlining ethical, legal, and design-oriented implications, emphasising the need for abuse-conscious technological governance and renewed attention to autonomy and consent in digitally mediated relationships.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Digital Surveillance; Coercive Control; Intimate Partner Power; Technology-Facilitated Abuse

Introduction
Technological innovation is frequently celebrated for enhancing connectivity, safety, and efficiency within intimate relationships. Digital tools such as smart home systems, location-sharing applications, and algorithmically mediated communication platforms are commonly framed as mechanisms that foster transparency, trust, and mutual care between partners (Lyon, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Within domestic settings, these technologies are often normalised as benign or even desirable features of contemporary relational life, signalling responsibility, attentiveness, and shared security. However, alongside these benefits, a growing body of scholarship demonstrates that digital technologies increasingly function as subtle yet powerful mechanisms of coercion, particularly within asymmetrical intimate relationships (Henry & Powell, 2015; Woodlock, 2017).

In contemporary partnerships, AI-powered surveillance tools are frequently embedded seamlessly into everyday domestic routines. Smart cameras, voice-activated assistants, biometric sensors, and automated communication logs operate continuously in the background of intimate life, producing detailed behavioural data that can be accessed, interpreted, and acted upon in real time (Marx, 2016; Stark & Hester, 2019). While these technologies are marketed as instruments of convenience or protection, research on technology-facilitated abuse demonstrates that they are often appropriated to monitor, regulate, and discipline a partner's behaviour (Levon & Nordmeyer, 2020; SafeLives, 2020). In such contexts, intimacy is progressively transformed into a site of governance, where relational closeness becomes entangled with surveillance and control.

This paper conceptualises this phenomenon as digitally amplified spousal domestication. Spousal domestication refers to a relational process through which one partner systematically constrains the autonomy of another, managing behaviour, mobility, and social interaction in order to sustain an imbalance of power (Odeleye 2024). Historically, domestication was

dependent on physical proximity, direct observation, and socially sanctioned gender norms that legitimised control within intimate and familial spaces (Stark, 2007). These constraints imposed practical limits on surveillance, requiring the physical presence of the controlling partner and exposing coercive practices to potential social scrutiny.

Building on this concern with power, autonomy, and relational governance, the present analysis is grounded in the concept of spousal domestication, a relational power framework developed by Odeleye (2024, 2025). Spousal domestication refers to the systematic regulation of a partner's autonomy, behaviour, and relational space through patterned practices of control that are often normalised within intimate life. Unlike episodic models of abuse, spousal domestication conceptualises domination as an ongoing relational process through which inequality is stabilised and rendered culturally acceptable, frequently under the guise of care, responsibility, or marital authority.

This paper argues that artificial intelligence and surveillance technologies do not create spousal domestication but radically extend its reach and efficiency. Digital infrastructures enable domestication to operate beyond physical proximity, transforming it into a continuous, data-driven, and often invisible system of governance. What emerges, therefore, is not a new form of domination but a digitally amplified expression of an existing relational logic, rooted in spousal domestication and intensified through algorithmic surveillance.

The diffusion of digital infrastructures has fundamentally altered these limits. Networked technologies extend surveillance across time and space, enabling continuous observation irrespective of physical co-presence (Lyon, 2018). Artificial intelligence intensifies this transformation by introducing predictive analytics, behavioural profiling, and automated pattern recognition. Through AI-enabled systems, surveillance shifts from episodic monitoring to persistent oversight, allowing controlling partners to anticipate movements, infer intentions, and pre-emptively regulate behaviour (Zuboff, 2019). Control thus becomes increasingly continuous, data-driven, and largely invisible, reducing the need for overt confrontation while deepening relational asymmetries.

The central argument advanced in this paper is that AI-enabled surveillance technologies significantly amplify spousal domestication by collapsing key relational distinctions: between presence and absence, safety and control, and intimacy and governance. Drawing on surveillance theory, coercive control theory, and feminist analyses of technology, the paper situates digitally mediated domestication within broader sociological debates on power, autonomy, and governance in private life (Foucault, 1977; Stark, 2007; Woodlock et al., 2023). Rather than presenting new empirical data, the paper offers a conceptual synthesis of existing scholarship on technology-facilitated abuse, digital surveillance, and intimate partner violence to illuminate how domestic power is being reconfigured in the digital age.

By foregrounding the relational consequences of AI-enabled surveillance, this paper contributes to emerging interdisciplinary scholarship that challenges the assumption that technological intimacy is inherently emancipatory. Instead, it argues for a critical re-examination of how surveillance technologies reshape autonomy, consent, and power within intimate partnerships. In doing so, the paper underscores the ethical, legal, and design implications of allowing intelligent surveillance systems to proliferate unchecked within the most private domains of social life.

Spousal Domestication as the Foundational Framework

The theoretical foundation of this paper is the concept of spousal domestication (Odeleye, 2024, 2025), which conceptualises intimate partner power as a process of relational governance rather than isolated acts of abuse. Spousal domestication describes how one partner incrementally constrains the autonomy of another by regulating movement, communication, decision-making, and identity, often through practices that appear ordinary, relational, or culturally sanctioned.

Central to this framework is the insight that domination within intimate relationships is frequently normalised rather than imposed through overt violence. Control is exercised

through routines, expectations, and moral narratives that redefine obedience as love and surveillance as care. This conceptualisation provides the groundwork for understanding why technologically mediated monitoring can be embraced within relationships even as it erodes autonomy and equality.

In this paper, digitally amplified spousal domestication is conceptualised as the technological extension of this foundational framework. Artificial intelligence and surveillance systems intensify domestication by enabling constant observation, predictive regulation, and remote enforcement. Surveillance theory, coercive control theory, and feminist critiques of technology are therefore employed not as competing explanations, but as analytical lenses that illuminate how spousal domestication is operationalised and automated in the digital age.

The analysis is grounded in three complementary theoretical traditions: surveillance theory, coercive control theory, and feminist critiques of technological power. Together, these frameworks provide an integrated lens for understanding how artificial intelligence and digital surveillance technologies restructure intimacy, autonomy, and power within spousal relationships. Rather than treating technology as a neutral mediator, this framework conceptualises AI-enabled surveillance as a socio-technical system that actively produces new modalities of domination within private life.

Digital Panopticism and Intimate Surveillance

Michel Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of the Panopticon offers a foundational framework for analysing how surveillance operates as a mechanism of discipline. In the panoptic model, power functions not primarily through direct force but through visibility: individuals internalise the possibility of being observed and, as a result, regulate their own behaviour. Surveillance thus becomes effective precisely because it is continuous, unverifiable, and internalised. Could be bring in the question of 'terms and conditions' here? What are power relation dynamics that trigger the use of technology in mediated relationships? So far, the influence of technology is understood, but you need to mention the triggers.

In digitally mediated intimate relationships, AI-enabled technologies generate what can be described as digital panopticism. Smart home cameras, motion sensors, voice-activated assistants, biometric devices, and automated communication logs establish an environment in which one partner may be perpetually observable. Unlike traditional surveillance, digital panopticism is not confined to a single institutional space but is embedded within the everyday infrastructure of domestic life (Lyon, 2018). The surveilled partner is often uncertain about when monitoring is occurring, what data are being collected, or how that data are interpreted, intensifying the disciplinary effect.

Artificial intelligence deepens this panoptic condition by transforming raw observation into predictive governance. AI systems analyse behavioural patterns, infer routines, and flag deviations, enabling surveillance to operate anticipatorily rather than reactively (Zuboff, 2019). In this context, power is exercised not only through ssurveillance but through forecasting and pre-emption. The surveilled partner may therefore engage in anticipatory self-regulation, modifying behaviour in advance to avoid suspicion, interrogation, or conflict. Digital panopticism thus reconfigures intimacy into a space of algorithmic discipline, where autonomy is eroded without overt confrontation.

Coercive Control and the Automation of Intimate Power

Coercive control theory conceptualises abuse as a patterned strategy of domination rather than a series of discrete violent acts (Stark, 2007). This framework shifts analytical attention from episodic incidents to the cumulative effects of surveillance, isolation, intimidation, and regulation of everyday life. Coercive control operates by narrowing a victim's "space for action," progressively undermining autonomy, dignity, and self-determination.

AI-enabled surveillance technologies significantly extend the reach and efficiency of coercive control. Whereas traditional forms of domination relied on physical proximity and direct enforcement, digital technologies allow control to be exercised remotely, continuously, and

invisibly (Stark & Hester, 2019). Location-tracking applications, communication monitoring tools, and smart home systems provide abusers with real-time access to a partner's movements, interactions, and routines, collapsing spatial and temporal boundaries that once limited control.

Importantly, AI transforms coercive control from a labour-intensive practice into an automated and routinised system of domination. Algorithms can flag perceived anomalies, generate alerts, and aggregate behavioural data without constant human intervention. This automation renders control less visible and more difficult to contest, as it is often framed as a technical function rather than an intentional act of domination (Woodlock et al., 2023). Victims may struggle to articulate their experiences as abuse when control is exercised through devices marketed as neutral or protective technologies.

Within this framework, digitally amplified spousal domestication emerges as a technologically mediated form of coercive control, characterised by continuous oversight, behavioural regulation, and the erosion of relational equality. Power is sustained not through overt violence but through persistent, data-driven governance of intimate life.

Feminist Critiques of Technology and Gendered Power

Feminist analyses of technology provide a critical lens for understanding how surveillance systems are embedded within existing gendered power relations rather than operating independently of them. Feminist scholars have long argued that technologies are not value-neutral but reflect and reproduce dominant social hierarchies, including patriarchal norms that legitimise control over women's bodies, movements, and social interactions (Henry & Powell, 2015).

Within intimate partnerships, surveillance technologies often intersect with traditional gender expectations surrounding care, protection, and obedience. Practices such as monitoring a partner's location, scrutinising digital communications, or installing in-home surveillance devices may be framed as expressions of concern or responsibility, particularly within heteronormative relationships. Feminist critiques highlight how such narratives obscure the asymmetrical distribution of power, normalising surveillance as an acceptable feature of intimacy while delegitimising resistance as secrecy or disloyalty (Dragiewicz et al., 2018).

From this perspective, AI-enabled surveillance constitutes a form of gendered technological governance, where control is exercised through culturally sanctioned discourses of safety and care. The opacity of algorithmic systems further exacerbates this imbalance, as technical expertise and device control are often concentrated in the hands of the dominant partner. Feminist theory thus underscores the need to situate digital domestication within broader structures of inequality, recognising that technology both amplifies and conceals power relations already present within intimate life.

The Safety–Control Duality

A central paradox underpinning digitally amplified spousal domestication is the safety–control duality. Surveillance technologies are commonly marketed as tools for protection, risk management, and relational transparency. Features such as location sharing, emergency alerts, and in-home monitoring are framed as enhancing trust and security within partnerships (Lyon, 2018). However, empirical research consistently demonstrates that these same features are frequently repurposed as instruments of restriction, monitoring, and intimidation (Levon & Nordmeyer, 2020; SafeLives, 2020).

This duality complicates the ethical evaluation of surveillance practices within intimate relationships. Because technologies are socially coded as protective, coercive uses may be rendered invisible or socially acceptable. Abusive practices are thus legitimised as care, and resistance is reframed as irresponsibility or secrecy. The safety–control duality therefore functions as an ideological shield, masking domination beneath the language of concern and technological rationality.

By integrating surveillance theory, coercive control theory, and feminist critiques of technology, this framework illuminates how AI-enabled surveillance collapses the boundaries between intimacy and governance. Digitally amplified spousal domestication emerges as a distinctive form of power, continuous, data-driven, and culturally normalised that demands critical scrutiny within sociological and ethical debates on technology, privacy, and intimate life.

Technologies of Digital Domestication

Viewed through the framework of spousal domestication (Odeleye, 2024, 2025), digital surveillance technologies function as instruments that stabilise and automate relational domination rather than merely facilitating communication or security. Digitally amplified spousal domestication operates through an ecosystem of interconnected technologies that collectively transform the intimate sphere into a site of continuous observation and behavioural governance. These technologies do not function in isolation; rather, they operate synergistically, enabling multilayered surveillance that spans physical spaces, digital interactions, and behavioural patterns. Artificial intelligence serves as the integrative force that links these systems, converting discrete data points into actionable insights that sustain relational control.

Smart Home Systems and Domestic Surveillance

Smart home technologies constitute one of the most immediate and invasive instruments of digital domestication. Devices such as internet-connected cameras, motion sensors, smart locks, thermostats, and voice-activated assistants are increasingly embedded within domestic environments under the premise of convenience and security (Marx, 2016; Lyon, 2018). These systems enable real-time monitoring of movement, routines, and activities within the home, often without the continuous awareness or informed consent of all occupants.

Within coercive relationships, smart home systems can be repurposed as tools of domination. Research indicates that controlling partners may use cameras to monitor private behaviour, manipulate environmental conditions (such as lighting or temperature), or signal omnipresence through remote device activation (Woodlock, 2017). Such practices transform the home, that is traditionally associated with privacy and refuge, into a surveilled space where autonomy is persistently undermined. The psychological impact of this surveillance lies not only in observation itself but in the uncertainty surrounding when and how monitoring occurs, fostering chronic anxiety and self-regulation.

Location-Tracking Technologies and Spatial Control

Location-tracking technologies extend surveillance beyond the domestic interior, collapsing the spatial boundaries that once limited relational control. Applications such as GPS-enabled location sharing, smartphone tracking software, and Bluetooth-based devices allow for continuous verification of a partner's whereabouts (Levon & Nordmeyer, 2020). While these tools are frequently framed as safety mechanisms, particularly in contexts of perceived risk, they are widely documented as instruments of coercive monitoring in abusive relationships.

The ability to track movement in real time enables controlling partners to enforce spatial discipline, restrict mobility, and interrogate deviations from expected routines. Survivors of technology-facilitated abuse report being compelled to justify minor changes in location or timing, reinforcing a constant sense of accountability to the surveilling partner (SafeLives, 2020). In this way, location-tracking technologies function as digital leashes, constraining freedom of movement while preserving the appearance of mutual transparency.

Communication Monitoring and Social Isolation

Digital domestication is further reinforced through the monitoring of communication technologies, including text messages, emails, social media platforms, and call logs. AI-powered tools increasingly enable automated scanning of digital communications, allowing

controlling partners to scrutinise social networks, emotional expressions, and interpersonal affiliations (Henry & Powell, 2015). This form of surveillance often results in social isolation, a core component of coercive control.

Under conditions of constant digital scrutiny, individuals may engage in self-censorship, avoiding contact with friends, family members, or support networks to prevent conflict or suspicion. Communication monitoring thus operates not merely as observation but as a mechanism for regulating relational boundaries, narrowing the social world of the surveilled partner and reinforcing dependence on the controlling individual (Stark, 2007). The erosion of private communicative space undermines both emotional autonomy and access to external support, intensifying vulnerability.

Artificial Intelligence and Predictive Surveillance

Artificial intelligence amplifies these technologies by enabling the aggregation, analysis, and interpretation of vast quantities of behavioural data. AI systems transform surveillance from a reactive practice, responding to observed behaviour, into a predictive mode of governance. Through machine learning and pattern recognition, AI can infer routines, anticipate deviations, and generate alerts based on perceived anomalies (Zuboff, 2019). This predictive capacity fundamentally alters the dynamics of control within intimate relationships. Surveillance no longer depends on direct observation or suspicion; instead, algorithms pre-emptively identify behaviours deemed irregular, allowing controlling partners to intervene before autonomy is exercised. Such anticipatory surveillance fosters what scholars describe as algorithmic discipline, wherein individuals modify behaviour in advance to align with expected patterns (Lyon, 2018).

Crucially, AI-mediated oversight is often opaque. The criteria by which behaviours are flagged or interpreted may be inaccessible to the surveilled partner, rendering control both inscrutable and incontestable. This opacity further entrenches power asymmetries, as technical knowledge and device control are typically concentrated in the hands of the dominant partner. Autonomy is thus eroded not through overt force or explicit prohibition but through persistent, algorithmically mediated oversight that normalises compliance.

Cumulative Effects of Technological Convergence

Taken together, smart home surveillance, location tracking, communication monitoring, and AI-driven analytics create a comprehensive infrastructure of domestication. The convergence of these technologies produces a condition of total relational visibility, in which bodily movement, social interaction, and behavioural patterns are continuously monitored and evaluated. Control becomes ambient rather than episodic, embedded within the technological environment rather than enacted solely through interpersonal confrontation.

This technological convergence illustrates how digital domestication differs from earlier forms of relational control. Power is exercised quietly, efficiently, and continuously, reducing opportunities for resistance while increasing the psychological burden on the surveilled partner. In this sense, AI-enabled technologies do not merely facilitate existing patterns of domination; they fundamentally transform the conditions under which intimacy, autonomy, and power are negotiated in the digital age.

Empirical Synthesis

A growing body of empirical research provides substantial evidence for the dynamics of digitally amplified spousal domestication outlined in the preceding theoretical analysis. Studies on technology-facilitated abuse consistently demonstrate that digital surveillance technologies are not peripheral or incidental features of intimate partner abuse but have become central mechanisms through which coercive control is enacted and sustained (Woodlock, 2017; Dragiewicz et al., 2018).

Qualitative research offers particularly vivid insights into how survivors experience AI-enabled surveillance within intimate relationships. Survivors frequently describe smart homes

not as spaces of comfort or safety but as environments of omnipresent observation, where everyday actions are subject to monitoring and interpretation by a controlling partner (Woodlock, 2017). Devices such as smart cameras, voice assistants, and connected appliances are reported to be used to observe private behaviour, manipulate domestic conditions, or signal constant presence, even when the abusive partner is physically absent. These experiences align closely with the concept of digital panopticism, wherein uncertainty about observation produces internalised discipline and anticipatory compliance.

Quantitative studies further illustrate the scale and prevalence of these practices. Large-scale surveys indicate that cyberstalking, non-consensual location tracking, and digital communication monitoring are increasingly common within intimate partnerships (Levon & Nordmeyer, 2020). Research from domestic violence advocacy organisations suggests that a significant proportion of survivors report being monitored through spyware, GPS tracking, or smart home devices, often without their knowledge or consent (SafeLives, 2020). Importantly, these forms of surveillance frequently co-occur with other controlling behaviours, reinforcing the argument that AI-enabled monitoring functions as part of a broader coercive strategy rather than as isolated incidents of misuse.

Taken together, empirical findings across qualitative and quantitative domains demonstrate that AI-enabled surveillance is deeply embedded in contemporary forms of intimate partner control. The evidence underscores that digital domestication represents a structural transformation in how coercive power is exercised, shifting from episodic, physically bounded practices to continuous, data-driven, and technologically mediated governance of intimate life.

Consequences and Societal Implications

Digitally amplified spousal domestication produces profound psychological, relational, and societal consequences. At the individual level, continuous surveillance erodes the foundational elements of trust and mutual recognition that sustain intimate relationships. When one partner is subject to persistent monitoring, the relational bond is reconstituted around suspicion, accountability, and behavioural regulation rather than reciprocity and autonomy (Stark, 2007). Intimacy becomes inseparable from oversight, fundamentally altering the emotional texture of relational life.

Psychologically, individuals subjected to AI-enabled surveillance frequently experience chronic anxiety, hypervigilance, and a fragmented sense of self. The absence of private space, both physical and digital, undermines opportunities for self-reflection, emotional processing, and identity formation (Woodlock et al., 2023). Over time, the internalisation of surveillance may lead to anticipatory self-censorship, whereby individuals modify thoughts, actions, and social interactions to avoid triggering scrutiny or conflict. This erosion of agency represents a core harm of digital domestication, distinct from but deeply intertwined with more visible forms of abuse.

At a broader societal level, the normalisation of surveillance within intimate life carries significant implications. As digital monitoring becomes culturally framed as responsible, caring, or even necessary, communities risk becoming desensitised to coercion enacted through technological means (Lyon, 2018). The widespread adoption of surveillance technologies in domestic contexts blurs the boundary between protection and domination, making it increasingly difficult to recognise abusive practices when they are embedded within everyday technological routines.

Moreover, the societal acceptance of intimate surveillance may contribute to the legitimation of broader surveillance cultures. When monitoring is normalised within the home, which is the most private of social spaces, it reinforces a wider tolerance for data extraction, behavioural tracking, and algorithmic governance in other domains of life (Zuboff, 2019). In this sense, digitally amplified domestication not only harms individuals but also shapes collective norms around privacy, consent, and power, with implications that extend well beyond intimate relationships.

Policy and Design Implications

Addressing digitally amplified spousal domestication requires coordinated interventions across legal, cultural, and technological domains. Existing regulatory frameworks often lag behind the realities of AI-enabled surveillance, treating digital monitoring as a privacy issue rather than recognising it as a potential form of intimate partner abuse. There is an urgent need for legal frameworks to explicitly classify non-consensual digital surveillance, tracking, and monitoring within intimate relationships as forms of coercive control (Levon & Nordmeyer, 2020).

From a technological perspective, responsibility must extend beyond individual users to include designers, manufacturers, and platform providers. Technology developers should adopt abuse-conscious design principles that anticipate and mitigate the potential misuse of surveillance tools within intimate contexts (Dragiewicz et al., 2018). Such principles include default privacy protections, transparent consent mechanisms, shared-device safeguards, and alerts that notify users of tracking or monitoring activity. Importantly, consent must be ongoing and revocable, rather than assumed through initial device setup or relational status.

Public education also plays a critical role in addressing digital domestication. Digital literacy initiatives should move beyond technical competence to include digital relationship literacy, equipping individuals to recognise the difference between care and control in technologically mediated relationships (Henry & Powell, 2015). Educational campaigns, professional training for social workers and law enforcement, and integration of digital abuse awareness into domestic violence services are essential for improving recognition, reporting, and support.

Finally, policy responses must acknowledge the gendered and relational dimensions of AI-enabled surveillance. Without addressing the underlying power inequalities that shape technology use within intimate life, regulatory and technical interventions risk treating symptoms rather than structural causes. A comprehensive response to digitally amplified spousal domestication therefore requires conceptualising autonomy, consent, and dignity as core principles guiding the design, regulation, and cultural understanding of surveillance technologies.

Pastoral Implications for Counselling Practice and Ministry

The increasing entanglement of artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, and intimate relationships presents urgent challenges for pastoral counsellors and faith-based caregivers. Within Christian pastoral theology, marriage and family life are understood as spaces of mutual care, trust, and shared responsibility rather than domination. Scripture affirms relational mutuality and dignity, emphasising love that seeks the good of the other rather than control (Philippians 2:3–4). In this light, digitally mediated forms of surveillance that erode autonomy must be examined critically within pastoral counselling practice.

First, pastoral counsellors need to broaden their assessment frameworks to include digital relational practices. While traditional pastoral counselling focuses on communication, commitment, and spiritual harmony, digitally mediated control often operates invisibly through tracking applications, shared passwords, and smart devices. Such practices may be justified spiritually as accountability or protection, yet pastoral counsellors must recall that biblical care is not rooted in constant monitoring but in trust and truthfulness. Sensitive inquiry into digital habits should therefore become part of responsible pastoral assessment, especially in marital and family counselling.

Second, the paper calls for a theological re-examination of care and authority within intimate relationships. Christian teaching on marriage consistently affirms mutual submission, not unilateral control. The Pauline exhortation that spouses "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21) provides an important corrective to interpretations that sanctify domination. Pastoral counsellors must therefore challenge narratives that frame surveillance as love or spiritual leadership, helping couples distinguish between mutual transparency and coercive oversight. Genuine pastoral care seeks to nurture freedom, not fear, within relationships (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Third, the findings highlight the need for ethical clarity regarding consent and personal boundaries. From a pastoral perspective, consent is inseparable from respect for personhood, which is grounded in the theological understanding of the human being as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This theological anthropology affirms that no spouse forfeits personal dignity, privacy, or agency by virtue of marriage. Pastoral counsellors must therefore emphasise that consent to digital monitoring must be informed, ongoing, and freely given, and that spiritual commitment does not legitimise the erosion of personal boundaries.

Fourth, the paper has implications for pastoral responses to abuse and safeguarding. Digitally amplified spousal domestication may not involve physical violence, yet it constitutes a serious form of harm that undermines emotional, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing. Scripture consistently condemns practices that oppress or entrap others under the guise of authority (Ezekiel 34:4). Pastoral counsellors must be vigilant in recognising technology-facilitated coercive control as abuse and respond with appropriate pastoral sensitivity, validation, and referral. In line with pastoral ethics, care for the vulnerable must take precedence over preserving appearances of marital harmony.

Fifth, the paper underscores the importance of digital literacy in pastoral formation and training. Just as pastoral counsellors are trained to recognise emotional manipulation and spiritual abuse, they must now be equipped to understand how digital technologies can be weaponised within relationships. The Nigerian Association of Pastoral Counsellors is therefore encouraged to integrate digital ethics, technology-facilitated abuse, and online relational boundaries into training curricula. Such formation reflects the biblical call for wisdom and discernment in changing social contexts (Proverbs 4:7).

Finally, pastoral counsellors have a preventive and educative responsibility within faith communities. Premarital counselling, marriage enrichment programmes, and pastoral teaching provide opportunities to articulate a theology of intimacy that values trust, freedom, and mutual respect. By drawing on scriptural principles of love, patience, and kindness (1 Corinthians 13:4–7), pastoral leaders can help couples develop healthy digital practices that resist surveillance-based control. Addressing these issues proactively allows the church to foster relationships that reflect both spiritual maturity and psychological wellbeing.

Integrating biblical insight with contemporary pastoral counselling scholarship reveals that digitally amplified spousal domestication is not merely a technological or legal concern but a deeply theological and pastoral issue. As digital technologies increasingly shape intimate life, pastoral counsellors are called to uphold the biblical vision of relationships grounded in love, mutuality, and dignity. Responding faithfully to the challenges of digital surveillance within marriage is therefore integral to pastoral ministry in a digitised age and essential to the church's witness to healthy human relationships.

Conclusion

By grounding the analysis in the theory of spousal domestication (Odeleye, 2024, 2025), this paper demonstrates that digitally amplified surveillance does not invent new forms of intimate domination but reconfigures existing relational power structures through technological means. Artificial intelligence extends domestication beyond physical co-presence, rendering control continuous, anticipatory, and increasingly opaque. Digital spousal domestication thus represents the contemporary expression of a deeper relational logic, in which intimacy becomes a site of governance and autonomy is progressively eroded through normalised practices of control.

This paper has offered a conceptual intervention into contemporary debates on digital intimacy, surveillance, and power by demonstrating that artificial intelligence fundamentally reshapes spousal relations through the amplification of domestication. By extending surveillance beyond physical proximity and embedding it within algorithmic systems of prediction and monitoring, AI-enabled technologies collapse traditional constraints on control and transform the domestic sphere into a site of continuous, data-driven governance. Within this digitally mediated context, domination no longer relies primarily on overt force or

constant physical presence but operates through ambient oversight, anticipatory discipline, and the normalisation of surveillance within intimate life.

The central contribution of the paper lies in theorising digitally amplified spousal domestication as a distinct modality of power that integrates surveillance theory, coercive control theory, and feminist critiques of technology. Conceptualising AI-enabled surveillance as a socio-technical infrastructure of domination rather than a neutral relational tool enables a deeper understanding of how intimacy itself can be reorganised as a mechanism of governance. This redefinition illuminates the ways in which autonomy, consent, and relational equality are systematically eroded when surveillance becomes embedded within the everyday technologies that structure marital and family life.

Importantly, the analysis demonstrates that the harms of digital domestication extend beyond individual relationships to shape wider cultural and moral sensibilities. As surveillance practices become increasingly normalised within intimate partnerships, they contribute to a broader desensitisation to coercion and an expanding acceptance of algorithmic oversight as an ordinary feature of social existence. The intimate sphere thus becomes a critical site through which surveillance cultures are reproduced, with implications for privacy norms, gendered power relations, and the ethical foundations of relational life in data-driven societies.

Within this context, faith communities occupy a particularly significant position. As moral and formative institutions, churches and other religious communities shape understandings of authority, care, accountability, and relational responsibility. When digitally mediated surveillance is interpreted uncritically as protection, transparency, or spiritual concern, there is a risk that practices of domination may be legitimised under the language of care. Conversely, faith communities also possess the theological and pastoral resources to challenge such normalisation by articulating relational ethics grounded in dignity, mutuality, and respect for personal boundaries. In this sense, the church functions not merely as a site of pastoral response but as a critical moral interlocutor in debates about technology, power, and intimate life.

Recognising digitally amplified spousal domestication as a structural phenomenon rather than a series of isolated abuses has important implications for scholarship, pastoral counselling, and public engagement. It calls for regulatory frameworks that explicitly address non-consensual digital surveillance within intimate relationships, for technological design practices that foreground autonomy and abuse prevention, and for pastoral approaches that are attentive to the subtle ways power is exercised through digital means. For pastoral counsellors in particular, this recognition reinforces the importance of ethical discernment, safeguarding, and critical engagement with technology in marital and family counselling contexts.

Future research should build on this conceptual framework by examining the long-term psychological, relational, and spiritual consequences of living under conditions of intimate surveillance, including its impact on identity formation, trust, and mental wellbeing. There is also a need to explore the intergenerational effects of normalising domestic surveillance, particularly for children raised in environments where monitoring replaces relational trust. As artificial intelligence continues to permeate the most private domains of social life, safeguarding autonomy, dignity, and relational equality within intimate relationships emerges as a defining ethical challenge of the digital age, one that demands sustained scholarly attention, responsible technological governance, and thoughtful pastoral engagement.

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