



WHAT'S **MINE** IS **YOURS**

How couples share an all-access pass to their digital lives

Introduction



Privacy is deeply connected to safety, especially for survivors of abuse. This report highlights the critical need to examine norms around privacy as they exist within intimate relationships, as well as the need for tools that allow us to easily disentangle ourselves from shared accounts. While sharing account access or information can be useful, consent should remain at the core of these decisions.

– Erica Olsen
National Network to
End Domestic Violence



Being in a relationship today often means sharing a deep digital footprint that extends far beyond what most couples fully grasp. With so much of our personal world digitally-based, letting someone into our everyday lives means letting them be part of our digital lives as well. Locations are shared, passwords are traded, and devices are handed back and forth.

While some digital entanglement is expected—like shared access to smart devices, family apps, and financial accounts—recent news reports and lawsuits highlight the potential for harm. Abusive exes have been accused of stalking and harassing their partners through shared location-based apps for vehicles, fitness, delivery, and more.

To better understand how romantic partners navigate the digital side of relationships, Malwarebytes commissioned an independent research study among people aged 18+ who are married or in a committed relationship in the United States. We surveyed 500 partners to gauge their attitudes and behaviors when it comes to sharing their digital lives.

Here's what we found: While couples largely embrace being digitally intertwined, it's not without complication. Sometimes there's undue pressure to share, feelings of regret, and harm at the hands of an ex-partner who abuses trust and misuses access.

With so much at stake, it's clear that everyone could benefit from guidance on how to better handle their shared digital relationship to ensure their personal security, safety, and privacy.

5 things to know

01 What's mine is yours

Everyone shares some kind of account access with their partner whether that's through joint accounts, shared personal access, or both. **85%** of people in a committed relationship grant their partner access to their **personal accounts**—for **Gen Z alone, it's 95%**. Sharing is ubiquitous and **2 in 3** agree sharing digital access is “**key to building trust**” in a relationship.

02 Partner pressure and regret

43% of all respondents admit they've felt **pressured by their partner to share** logins, passcodes, and/or locations. Gen Z and Millennials are particularly vulnerable to partner pressure: **55% of Gen Z and 53% of Millennials have experienced pressure** of some kind **versus 32%** for older generations. **1 in 3 regret** at least some aspect of sharing their digital footprint.

03 Potential for misuse and abuse

More than half believe **sharing account access can “lead to harmful situations for partners,”** with 2 in 3 Gen Z and Millennials acknowledging the potential for harm. **Nearly 30% have experienced some harmful effect** of digital sharing themselves such as an ex-partner using accounts to stalk them or track them. For **Gen Z and Millennials, 45% and 41%** respectively **report having been a victim** of an ex-partner's digitally-fueled abuse.

04 Illusion of invulnerability

While people readily acknowledge the potential for harm to others when it comes to sharing their digital lives, relatively few feel concerned for themselves. Nearly **3 in 4 have no personal concerns** about sharing with their partner, but with people **sharing an average of 12 different types of accounts**, nobody is truly invulnerable to the potential pitfalls of digital entanglement.

05 Help wanted

7 in 10 partners acknowledge they **could use some support** when it comes to navigating the complexities of sharing their digital lives with their partners. This is especially true for Gen Z.



01

What's mine is yours

Couples' digital lives are deeply intertwined. Committed partners readily exchange passcodes, login information, location data, and a whole host of other account credentials with one another, weaving a complex web of digital connections that can be difficult to unravel.

Digital co-habitation is universal

Sharing digital access with your partner appears to be inescapable: Whether it's sharing accounts for household smart devices or granting your partner access to your social media accounts and messages, every single couple shares access in some way.

100% 

are digitally connected to their partners
via either a joint account, shared access
to personal accounts, or both

Sharing account access builds trust

Partners agree: While it shows trust to keep your information private, it builds trust to share. This is true regardless of sex or age group, underscoring how digital sharing has become table stakes for the modern relationship.

 **65%**

I believe that keeping your personal login information **private** in a romantic partnership **shows trust** between partners

 **63%**

I believe that **sharing** login information is **key to building** trust in romantic relationships

Sharing brings a sense of security and simplicity

Gen Z and Millennials in particular feel reassured by sharing their location with their partner (83% versus 74% of older generations).

79%

Sharing locations with my significant other makes me feel safer



71%

I think sharing accounts or logins with my partner makes things easier for our relationship

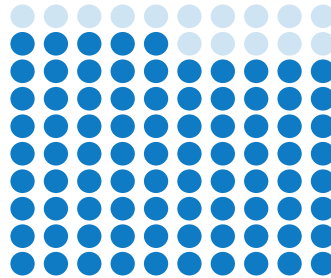


Granting access to private personal accounts is widespread and widely accepted

We asked partners about 21 different types of accounts to see which, if any, they give their partners access to. While many also have joint accounts, what we found most surprising is the staggering number of people willing to share account credentials for their own **personal accounts** for everything from social media to a slew of location-based apps.

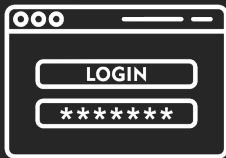
The sharing of personal account credentials creates a complicated web of digital entanglement—making it challenging to shut off access for security reasons, privacy concerns, or simply personal preference.

Only 5% of partners say they don't or would not share digital access to their personal accounts, showcasing how digital intimacy has become ubiquitous in romantic relationships.



85%

share access to at least one of their personal accounts



Partners share their personal login information for an average of **12 different types of accounts**

These accounts include:



Household Management

- Entertainment
- Parental monitoring
- Childcare facility
- Smart devices
- Online shopping
- Shared photo albums
- Financial
- Cloud storage



Location-Based

- Vehicle apps
- Location-sharing apps
- Food/grocery delivery
- Health and fitness
- Ride-hailing
- Vacation rentals



Social and Communication

- Social media
- Online forums
- Messaging apps
- Email

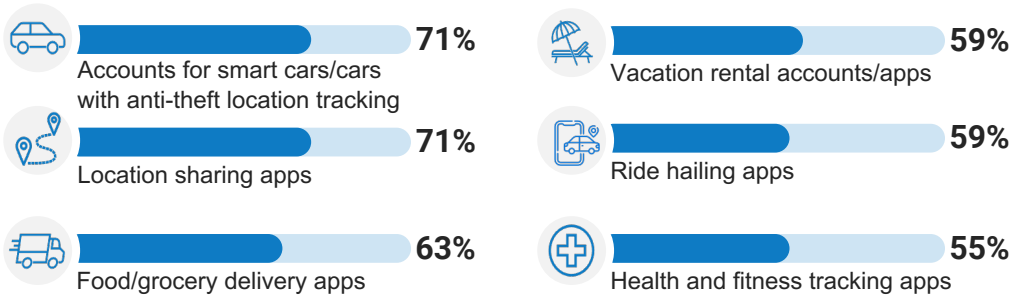


Device Passcodes

- Phone
- Tablet
- Computer

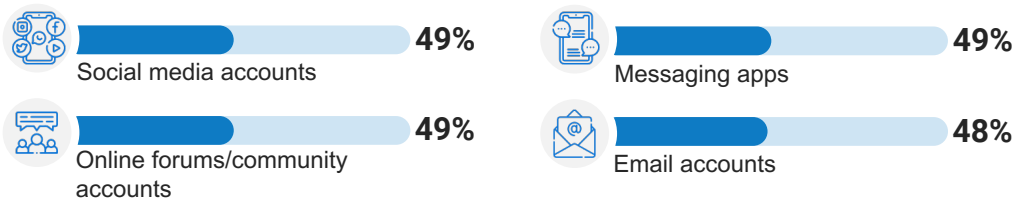
Sharing of location-based apps is the norm

The majority provide their partner with login credentials for their **personal** accounts for location-based apps and services, a likely byproduct of couples' desire to use shared access to simplify their lives. Males are significantly more likely than females to share access to their location-based accounts.



Nearly half of partners grant access to their personal social media and email

A surprising 1 in 2 romantic partners allow their significant others to access their personal realm of communication and community, revealing how common the practice is. This raises an important question of how these accounts are secured: With passwords, which can be leaked, or with multifactor authentication, which may frustrate partners?





02

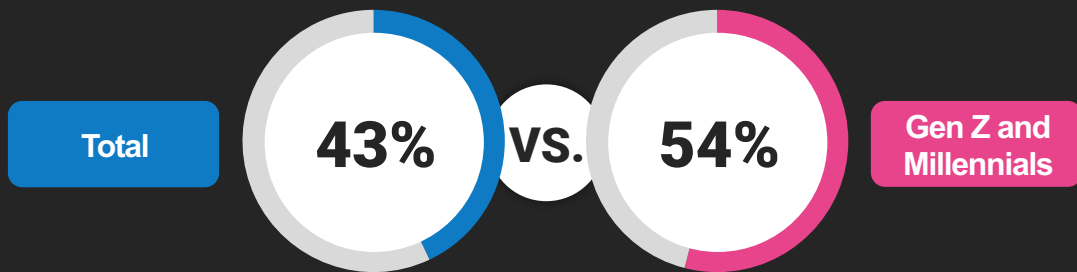
Partner pressure and regret

Nearly half of partners have felt pressured by their significant other to share access to their location or to their accounts, likely contributing to regret for some. Millennials and Gen Z are particularly prone to feeling coerced to share and regretful of doing so—underscoring the potential for harm.

Pressure to share digital access is strong

While most report comfort with sharing account access, 2 in 5 romantic partners admit they've felt pressure to do so, revealing inner conflict over the growing expectation of digital intimacy.

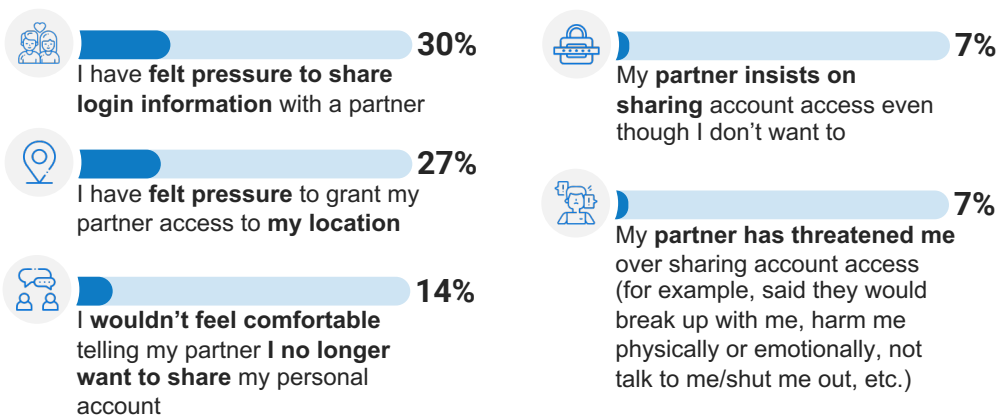
As the generations most immersed in the digital world, Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more likely than older generations to have felt pressure to share their digital footprint with their partner. Coupled with the fact that they are also more likely to share their personal accounts, this finding underscores the need for education on how to safely navigate a relationship in an ever-expanding digital world—especially as Gen Alpha and future digital-first generations begin dating.



have felt pressure to share their accounts with their partners

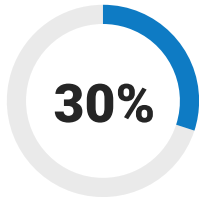
Pressure comes in many forms—including threats

These numbers are slightly elevated for younger generations: 1 in 10 Gen Z/Millennial partners agree “my partner has threatened me over sharing account access.” Notably, there are no differences between males and females when it comes to feeling pressure, showing that everyone is both impacted and vulnerable to potential harm.

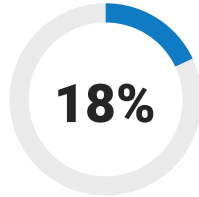


Sharing sometimes spurs regret

Roughly 1 in 3 say they regret sharing their location with their partner in general while 1 in 5 have regrets of sharing specific types of accounts—most notably ones that tend to allow for potential spying via access to location tracking, smart device cameras, and device monitoring.







**regret sharing
location tracking**



**regret sharing
account access**

Top types of accounts partners regret sharing:

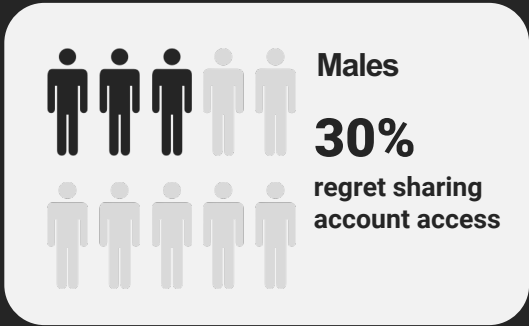
-  Vehicle accounts/apps
-  Device access
-  Vehicle accounts/apps
-  Smart device accounts

Gen Z and Millennials

Gen Z and Millennials are even more prone to regret: 37% of Gen Z/Millennials regret sharing their location with their partner compared to only 16% for older generations. 1 in 4 Gen Z/Millennials regret sharing account access versus 1 in 10 for older generations.

Males vs. females

While there are few notable differences between how males and females approach their digital ties, significantly more males say they regret sharing their account access with their partners.





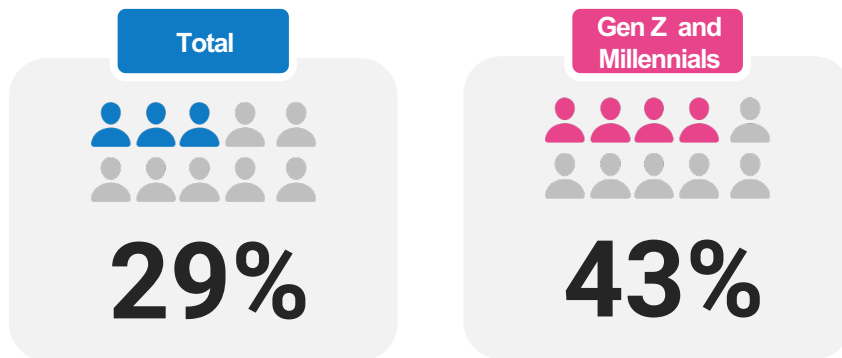
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Potential for misuse and abuse

The risk of harm due to digital entanglement is a real concern—and one that many Gen Z and Millennial partners have personally experienced.

Nearly 1 in 3 have been a victim of an ex-partner abusing shared access

A notable contingent—and nearly half of Gen Z/Millennials—have experienced serious safety breaches from ex-partners, shedding light on the potential dangers of digital sharing—including stalking, location tracking, impersonation, spying, and financial and communication breaches.



have had an ex-partner do at least one of these:

- Used my accounts to stalk me
- Logged into my social media accounts
- Used my accounts to track my location or tracked via location sharing apps
- Used my accounts to impersonate me
- Accessed my email, texts, DMs, or other messages
- Logged into my smart devices to spy on me
- Accessed my financial accounts

Around 1 in 3 Gen Z and Millennial partners report an ex has used their accounts to stalk them



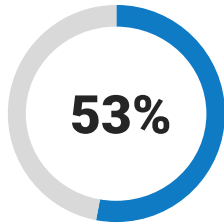
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Illusion of invulnerability

More than half readily acknowledge that sharing a digital footprint could have negative repercussions. However, despite some having experienced that kind of harm themselves, most feel invulnerable to harm in their own current relationship. Many are also unaware of how much certain apps are tracking them, further highlighting how people may feel a false sense of security.

Partners acknowledge that sharing a digital footprint can lead to harm for some

More than half of everyone in a committed relationship say sharing account access can result in negative consequences for some. Gen Z and Millennials are privier to this potential danger, with roughly 2 in 3 acknowledging that shared access could result in harm.



agree with the statement:

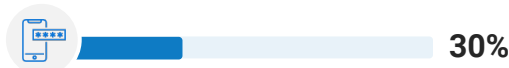
I believe sharing account access can lead to harmful situations for partners (even if not for me personally)

Fewer believe they could be personally affected

While many acknowledge the potential harm of sharing, most appear to place that potential on the anonymous “other” rather than as something that could happen to them. Few partners feel personally concerned about sharing with one another.



I worry about how easy it is for my partner to track what I'm doing and where I am at all times because of how much we share



I worry that telling my partner I don't want to share logins, PINs, and/or locations would upset them



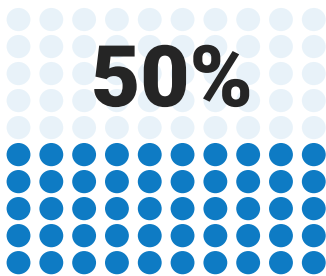
I worry that my partner has accessed my accounts without my permission before

Gen Z and Millennials

Gen Z and Millennials are significantly more worried about the potential for harm in their own relationships (roughly 40% overall), though they are still far less concerned for themselves than they are for others.

Many are unaware of how easily they can be located via their apps

Around half of location-based app users confess they were unaware that sharing location-based accounts with your partner generally grants them access to your location while those services are being used (for example, if you've ordered DoorDash, your partner can see the delivery location). While awareness is higher among Gen Z and Millennials (about 2 in 3 say they were aware), this exposes a serious gap in people's understanding of how location-based apps work. Recent lawsuits tied to location-based apps and cases of stalking further emphasize the importance of approaching digital sharing with informed caution.



were **not aware** that people with access to your location-based apps may be able to see your location when you're using the app

Males and females

Females have significantly lower awareness of the fact that location-based apps may reveal their whereabouts (43% vs. 58% for males), making them even more vulnerable to the potential harmful effects of sharing these apps and services.

Most feel invulnerable to potential harm from location-tracking

The vast majority acknowledge that location tracking is worrisome and could result in harm for others, but under 1 in 3 worry about their own partner tracking them.



78%

It's scary how many apps there are that show your location



78%

I can see how the ability to track your partner through location-based apps and services can lead to **harm for some people**



27%

I worry about **my own partner** tracking me through location-based apps and services



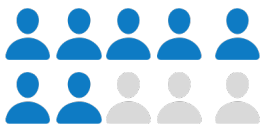
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Help wanted

The majority are seeking guidance on how to better navigate sharing their digital footprint with romantic partners—especially Gen Z who are clear in their desire for direction.

Nearly 3 in 4 partners acknowledge there's much to learn about navigating a shared digital footprint

Half of those in a committed relationship admit that digitally disentangling their location from their partner would be difficult given how much access they share, and 56% concede they could use some guidance on how to handle shared digital access. Given the acute potential for pressure, regret, and real-life harm, all couples could use advice and a blueprint on how to manage shared digital access in modern day relationships.



7 in 10
need help navigating
digital co-habitation



I would like to see **more guidance on how to handle shared logins, accounts, and apps** in a relationship or during a breakup (56%)



I would have a **hard time knowing where to begin if I no longer wanted to share location-based apps** or services with my partner or in the event of a breakup (45%)

Gen Z and Millennials

For Gen Z in particular, the call for help is clear: 79% of Gen Z either say they'd like more direct guidance on how to handle the digital side of relationships or that they'd have a hard time knowing how to stop sharing their location with their partner.

As one Gen Z survey respondent put it:

“I feel like it might take some effort (to digitally disentangle) because we are more seriously involved. We have many other kinds of digital ties that we would have to undo in order to break free from one another.”

Methodology:

Malwarebytes conducted this research using an online survey prepared by an independent research consultant and distributed via Forsta among n=500 survey respondents ages 18+ in the United States. The sample was equally split for gender with a spread of ages, geographical regions, and race groups. Data was collected from April 4 – April 9, 2024

About Malwarebytes:

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