

SO, BOB - Ep2 - Consent

ALIA: So, Bob. I decided that I wanted an Apple Watch recently. And one of the reasons I wanted it was to, you know, remind me to breathe and drink water because I'm a child. Uh, but also I was curious about all the different sleep apps. So I'd heard that like, you know, you can wear this thing at night and it will monitor your sleep and tell you if you're getting good REM sleep and like how much REM sleep you're getting. And I don't even know what REM sleep is, but it sounds important. And so I download the sleep app. I do some research, find the best, what I think is the best sleep app. I'm going to pull it up right now. Okay. So it looks really cool. So like, have you ever seen this?

BOB: Mm, no.

ALIA: Oh, here we go. Okay. So yeah, look at this I'm looking at the top of this and it says heart. So it like monitors my heart rate. Cool. Sleep, talks to me about the quality of sleep. And then this thing says audio. And it says 298. I'm like, so what is that? It's like a flag, like unread text messages. Bob, there are 298 audio files of me sleeping. Look at them. Of varying lengths. Nineteen seconds, 37 seconds, 10 seconds. One minute and one second at 10:23 PM. When I hit play, this comes up.

BOB: Premium features, sound recordings during sleep. Listen to important audio during each sleep session. Upgrade now, \$4.99.

ALIA: So I have to pay \$5 to listen to the 300 sleep audio files that this thing has on me.

BOB: So you've invited this software into your bedroom. It has now recorded you in bed, and it's now charging you to hear yourself, and what you sound like when you're asleep.

ALIA: I'm Alia Tavakolian, podcast producer and millennial with a lot of questions.

BOB: And I'm Bob Sullivan, longtime tech journalist. I have some of those answers for you, but I have a long list of friends who have a lot more. Alia, we're going to tackle your questions about your digital life, and we're going to try to do that for all the listeners, too.

ALIA: This is "So, Bob" a weekly conversation about the frustrating/creepy/confusing digital stuff that might be ripping you off, and you're not dumb for wondering about it.

BOB: I mean, the word technology is almost meaningless at this point because everything is technology. You don't buy something without using technology, without leaving digital smoke signals behind you. You can't go to sleep without using technology. You can't raise a child, drive a car. All of these things.

ALIA: I can't remember how to breathe or drink water, Bob.

BOB: Yeah.

ALIA: Without technology.

BOB: We are kind of half robots at this point already.

ALIA: My god.

BOB: And you know, these things are happening to us and most of us are really unaware of them. Important decisions about the future of our lives, about humanity are happening in places like Silicon Valley and most of us are just along for the ride. It's about 60/40 in my view, good versus bad. And it's really important that we understand the bad so at least we make conscious choices instead of just being victims, being passengers in this new digital world.

ALIA: So Bob, my sleep app.

BOB: You had no idea it was going to record you at all?

ALIA: No, I didn't consent to that.

BOB: Let me guess what the questions are. Where are these audio files? Could anyone else see them? What's in them or is there something potentially embarrassing for me? How do I delete them?

ALIA: How does it decide when to start recording?

BOB: I mean, if you think about, it's creepy enough to have someone watch you when you're awake. When you're asleep, you have no control over what you're doing.

ALIA: Exactly.

BOB: You couldn't wake up in the middle of the night and say, stop recording me.

ALIA: Right.

BOB: In the end this, this has this crazy sensation of being out of control, doesn't it?

ALIA: Yes. Yes.

BOB: And, um, I think that's where we begin. Where we begin is technology is doing things to us at a pace that's just mind boggling. And even if these companies were incredibly explicit about what they were doing, there would not be time to read every single privacy policy. And more importantly, to make specific intelligent choices.

BOB: And so most people have these occasional like, I don't really like this. It doesn't change your behavior. Did you? Did you use it the next night?

ALIA: I'm still using it.

BOB: Of course.

ALIA: That's the most ridiculous thing, is I'm still using it and I'm, I'm creeped out, but somehow like the, the cost of the creepiness is you know it's lower than the reward of like knowing what kind of sleep I'm getting, which is bad by the way. I'm getting poor sleep, Bob.

BOB: While that's crazy, that's the decision that about 93 percent of Americans make when faced with these privacy issues. We're all too busy. We're raising families, we're trying to get jobs. We're trying to not lose our jobs-

ALIA: Running businesses

BOB: Yes. And as a result, this really does get to the issue of informed consent.

ALIA: So, okay, what is informed. Well, maybe we should take a step back. How do *you* define consent?

BOB: Um, lack of surprise. So one of the comments that I make to companies all the time, the very typical scenario. I, I bought this and you told me it was going to cost x, but it costs y. Oh, that's a fee. Well, I didn't know about the fee. Well there it is in the, in the paperwork, but that's small print. Well, you should've read it, um, and everyone's had this conversation probably multiple times this week, right? What I say to people is generally in real world, when you take someone's money and they don't know you're taking it, we call that theft.

ALIA: Yeah.

BOB: In the business world, we call that legalese, or fine print, or fine print fraud is one of the phrases I like to use.

ALIA: To return for a second to my creepy bedroom audio mystery. Every time I brought this up. This is, I mean, I'm stuck on this, Bob. I have been bringing it up to anybody who will listen for

the past like 24, 48 hours. Um, most people's response is, well, didn't you know that they were recording you? Didn't they make it clear? You, you probably just missed something. It's actually a question I have. I wonder if I missed something, and I wonder if you and I could look into like, if I wonder if I could almost resign up for it and kind of....Or if you could sign up for it.

BOB: Well, let's do that.

ALIA: Yeah. Because I actually want to know if I gave my consent just unknowingly. Or if they in fact never asked for my consent.

BOB: Back to the app.

ALIA: Okay.

BOB: So I, um, am looking for the app in the store-

ALIA: Okay, did you find it?

BOB: There's hundreds of apps with the name [STATIC] in them

ALIA: I did hearty research.

ALIA: I actually don't know if we can say the name of the app. So let's just not, I mean, they already know so much about me and I would hate to piss them off.

BOB: *laughs* I'd hate to have them come visit you at night.

BOB: But it's important to note - I looked around, and there are dozens, hundreds of apps actually, that do things just like this or very similar to this, so it could be any one of those.

ALIA: That's horrifying.

BOB: It does make for a lot of funny audio recordings.

ALIA: Oh my god. Like ghosts.

BOB: You haven't listened to your audio yet, you might have ghosts on yours.

ALIA: Now I'm even more freaked out. Thanks Bob.

BOB: Your home is haunted. But that's the truth actually! The ghosts aren't the ghosts, the ghosts are the tech companies that are haunting you!

BOB: It's so often true we're afraid of the wrong things... we're afraid of imaginary ghosts instead of real technology companies.

ALIA: So looking at the app that I downloaded, here's the language they used.

ALIA: Your privacy has always been a top priority for the app name. We've added a new dialogue in the APP that helps you understand how your data is handled inside the app and let you know about your options. I'm going to stop right here and let you know something about me, Bob. I don't read descriptions of apps before I buy them. I read, I go read about an app if it's something like this, right? And then I just download it.

BOB: You read what other people have said about the app.

ALIA: Yeah

BOB: Right.

ALIA: And then I just looked for the right logo and I download it.

BOB: To translate that, you care about what the app does, the features...

ALIA: Correct. But let's be fair because I have questions about whether or not they asked for my consent, so...

ALIA: Sound recordings? This is...okay, let's see how far down this is. I mean, look.

BOB: It's about 500, 600 words down, I'd say.

ALIA: Yeah. Okay. Sound recordings, all caps. Record sounds during your sleep. Play, export or delete any audio recording. Premium feature.

BOB: So there's two problems with this process with this. The first one is, again, behaviorally everybody knows no one's reading this stuff. So like just as a rule, as a technologist, you shouldn't blame people for doing what everyone does. But additionally, I'm sure everybody knows this is the most sensitive thing about this app. People are sitting there like when they're planning this app, like we got this cool feature, oh wait that's a little spooky, at which point you need to go over and above what would be normal because it's obvious this is a spooky feature and that means much larger, much more prominent disclosure. Um. Today when you buy things, especially when buying things involves a transaction like downloading an app or visiting a website, there's a, there's an intermediary in the transaction which is design. The way that the app itself is designed has a big influence on whether you use it in the first place and how

informed you are when you get it. There wasn't a big pop up that covered the screen saying we're going to record you, it's going to cost \$5 to hear it.

ALIA: I totally would remember that.

BOB: Absolutely.

ALIA: But to be fair, we're constantly multitasking.

BOB: You could have been distracted also.

ALIA: I know I was. I remember exactly what I was doing when I downloaded this. I was like rewatching an episode of Gilmore Girls and returning some emails and downloading this app.

BOB: Right. But that's a very typical use case. And they know that from design. There are designers in rooms who beta test products and they will know, hey, if we use this font color, they are more likely to notice the warning. So let's use this font color instead.- And there are actually rules for what explicit instructions are. You go into any industrial plants in America, and there's safety warning signs for hard hats must be worn here or whatnot. The font size of that is defined. You can't have tiny print saying hardhats required. You have, it has to be a certain size. That's how we should have our digital lives. Exactly that kind of really explicit instruction and rules should exist for companies when they're doing these creepy or nearly creepy kind of things.

ALIA: I feel like the first thing I'd want to see is the disclosure, which they do, but I also then want to see the option to turn it off, like the option I have to turn notifications off and on.

BOB: Let, let me, um, from the file of fairness tell you that I...one of the subsequent screens asked for, asks for permission to use the microphone.

ALIA: Really?

BOB: Yeah. So you have to actively...

ALIA: What if you say no?

BOB: Well, I just, I just tried to say no and it kind of blew up on me, which is, which is what I would say expected behavior.

BOB: Okay. So now we're back where we were. Um, so I'm, I'm wondering what happens if I say next, then I give it no permissions. It says, are you sure? Okay. So this is, I'm going to try not to let it use the microphone. Are you sure? [STATIC] will not be able to perform sleep analysis without the required permissions.

ALIA: That's why I downloaded the app.

BOB: This is no choice. This is what happens all the time. So what they're saying is, here's some options, but your options are yes or nuclear. So what is the point of this? Yes/no. there is none.

ALIA: It's pretending to give me power.

BOB: That, that happens a lot in these, in these yes / no questions.

ALIA: That does not feel good. That feels like, I feel like an idiot.

BOB: This also I think has to do with precise language which is really missing. Saying, can we use your microphone? Could mean anything. And in fact there are lots of apps that ask, can we use your microphone? You're used to just saying yes to that question.

ALIA: Totally. That's why I said yes to it I'm sure.

BOB: Can we use your microphone is so different from we will be recording hundreds of audio files of you sleeping at night. They're very different. They feel very different. It's more explicit. This, there's this, this notion that if it's written down somewhere that we've given people an opportunity to actually say yes or no. And again, everything about the way that all of this is designed is to trick you.

ALIA: Here's how I feel about this. I don't feel like I had the opportunity to give an answer. I don't feel like a question was asked of me. I feel like it flew by on a really fast car. I mean, so I feel like something we should bring up because we're kind of already talking about it, is active and passive consent. Right? As we're talking about this app you're talking about how, you know, the information was there when I opened it for the first time, right. Just as the information was there when you just opened it for the first time, and it was in front of me and I saw it, right? Whether I took it in or not is negligible, it doesn't matter. And then I said yes. So it's passive consent, right? I, at least I didn't, I didn't say yes, but I, uh, I'm used the app. I moved forward.

BOB: You did whatever the app was designed to make you do, so that...

ALIA: I followed the prompts

BOB: You gave them the permissions, but you didn't do so with informed consent.

ALIA: And like I have to say, I mean, uh, God. When I started really thinking about this whole, this whole app thing and the recordings and I was like working it out out loud, uh, with someone. I realized that I was using the same language about how I was sort of starting to like make

excuses for the app. I was like, well, I'm sure they tried and I just didn't see it, you know? And I, it's the same, it was the same sort of language I've used when describing like when I was assaulted, um, and like, that's really weird. It's really uncomfortable and strange, and they shouldn't seem similar. They shouldn't be similar, but like they feel strangely a little bit similar.

BOB: Consent is such an important topic and it affects our lives in so many ways. Obviously today we're talking about it more than ever. So I'm really glad we're having this conversation. I have a colleague and a friend who I've known for a long time who has spent most of her professional life writing about consent in all of its forms, in digital forms, in the world of feminism, and interestingly enough even when it comes to sex robots. So I'm anxious to introduce her to this conversation and have you hear from her.

AD BREAK

ALIA: So we've come down a path that's very, very far from my little sleep app mystery. But one thing I'm realizing as we're having this conversation, Bob, is how important consent is in my digital life too, like as a consumer. It seems like something I'm coming up against every day, but I'm not. I'm interacting with it but I don't actually know. I don't actually know when it's happening. You know.

BOB: Well, how did you feel when you discovered this happened?

ALIA: Oh, I felt really bad and really nervous when I discovered these audio files uh, because I feel like I didn't make a decision. I didn't give my permission for anyone to record me. And so that felt, it just felt like somebody took something and then they were like dangling it in front of me for \$5. That's really uncomfortable. I'm laughing, but that's how I deal with it. It's really uncomfortable.

BOB: What were you nervous about?

ALIA: I was nervous because I didn't know where they were going. I didn't know who else had them, who had access to them. I didn't know if like these were being put online somewhere in like a database or like, I mean I had just come off of Breach, Bob, I mean, nothing is secure and so then I, I just began to wonder, well, if this is out there, this exists, who has their eyes and ears on it?

ALIA: Who knows? I, I am not able to listen to them unless I pay \$5. Like sleeping next to someone is one of the most intimate things you can do in the world and knowing that somebody could have that sort of experience of that with me without my consent is really uncomfortable.

BOB: That's incredibly intimate.

ALIA: Yeah.

BOB: And first of all, they're charging you to find out what's in there.

ALIA: And you know, it would've been so much better if it was like, you know what, you can pay \$4.99 and we'll, we'll record you overnight and analyze your sleep. But instead they just do it. And then they show you all of it.

BOB: Bingo.

ALIA: And then they ask you to pay for it. And that's what felt sleazy to me. Like even if you can do nothing with these audio files, even if they're totally useless and nobody touches them, nobody should be able to take my agency away like that. I should have that. That is mine. And when somebody takes it away, it feels awful. It feels like a personal attack.

BOB: It feels like that because that's exactly what it is. This is, to me, the whole point.

BOB: And so now let's talk to Sinzi. She's a lawyer specializing in consent in the digital age and hopefully she can help make some sense out of this for us.

SINZI: Hi, my name is Sinziana Gutiu.

ALIA: She's in Vancouver, British Columbia, not the US.

BOB: So her expertise is in Canadian tech law.

SINZI: ...practicing in the area of privacy, data protection, and cyber security.

ALIA: Even though my sleep-app issue is in the US, we wanted to talk to Sinzi because digital consent is kind of her gig. And come to find out, they're way better at defining that outside of the US.

BOB: You're actually basically the new character in the TV show who shows up halfway through because we have been talking about, about consent and electronic consent.

SINZI: Dun dun dun.

BOB: There you go. See?

ALIA: That's right.

BOB: Sinzi's bringing sound effects.

BOB: Alia could, in like 30 seconds. Can you tell Sinzi about this sleep app situation?

ALIA: Okay. So Sinzi, I got an apple watch, um...

[the audio fades out]

ALIA: So here I break down my whole sleep app situation for Sinzi.

[audio fades back in]

ALIA: ... when I tried to click one of those play icons, it said, by the way, you have to pay \$5 to access these. Here they are, but you have to pay for them.

SINZI: Oh my God. Um.

ALIA: It's weird, right?

SINZI: That...it's no surprise that you wouldn't expect that to happen because you had a reason that you got this app and you, it was probably advertised in a certain way. And so, anything that's really not necessary to provide that service to you should not be collected in the first place. In Canada there's the right to access your own information when companies collect it, and so that actually violates two potential rights that you have. One is to consent to information, especially when it's not really necessary to provide the service. And then your own right to access your own information about you that's collected. So that's a big no-no,

ALIA: Yeah. So is the US the only place that doesn't have these laws then?

SINZI: I'm not too super familiar with US because I practice in Canada, but in Canada there's specific legislation that protects personal information. It's defined as, uh, information about an identifiable individual, which is super broad. For example, like the spa I went to with my mom over the weekend. That's personal information. The fact that I like pepperoni pizza, again, that's personal information and is required to be protected when it's collected, user disclosed by a company.

BOB: So, so Alia did quote unquote consent to this data collection or did she?

ALIA: And I did hit allow to use my microphone.

SINZI: Did you read it? Did you read the policy?

ALIA: Sinzi, I didn't read anything. I mean maybe I did, but did I take in the information? No, because I was, you know, doing three other things while I was doing this.

SINZI: Yeah. And it's the way that a lot of policies are drafted and companies do take advantage of this gray area is - they just kind of bombard you with information. And really if you were to read every single privacy policy in detail of every app you use and program and everything, it would take you a very very long time. It's a paradox. It's a privacy policy paradox. The more information that you're given to really understand what is happening with your information, the less likely you are to read it and also the more time it will take you and you likely won't get through it anyway. And I get so annoyed when I hear very intelligent people say, oh, young people don't even care about privacy. They just download all these apps and they don't care. And the truth is, there's so much control that companies have to create programs and services that become essential services like Facebook... the Supreme Court of Canada said that social media is essential in participating in democracy. So now like it's not just something that you'd like to have. It's something that you essentially kind of need to have. Um, so they develop these apps, these programs, and they make you feel safe and they create them in a way where you don't really have an option. Right?

BOB: So I think we have an example of not informed consent here. Um, what does informed consent look like to you? How is it done well?

SINZI: There's different, all sorts of different methods of creative ways of communicating meaningful consent. Like, there's the whole consultation in Canada about that recently, like they talk about just-in-time notices and um...

BOB: Stop there —just-in-time notices, tell me what those are.

SINZI: So those are notices that come up when the information is being collected about you. So you know, you go to bed, and it kind of pops up and going back to your example of the, of the sleeping app that pops up and it says, you know, we're going to record you as you sleep. And you're like, that's cool. And so you provide them as you're collecting the information

BOB: In context at, at the moment when it's useful to you, not three days earlier when you're not thinking about it.

SINZI: Exactly.

BOB: If you don't mind Sinzi, could you talk to Alia a little bit about your research that you're kind of internet famous for?

SINZI: Yeah. So I wrote a chapter called, uh, the Robotization of Consent in a book called Robot Law that was edited by Ryan Calo, Michael Fromkin, and Ian Kerr, and it came out in 2016, that chapter was about consent in the context of human robot sexual interactions. Basically what I was arguing is that sex robots in themselves end up roboticizing, or in other words circumventing consent.

ALIA: She makes the case that circumventing consent, not requiring consent for men to interact with these robotic female bodies, is conceptually at odds with the idea that women have a right to bodily autonomy. That these sex robots communicate that, unless someone is actively yelling “no”, you have consent -- or even worse: that consent doesn't even matter.

SINZI: And-I think you can draw a parallel there in terms of roboticizing data rights and data privacy rights because I think there's a similar danger there that data subjects, so customers, individuals that their consent will become roboticized or circumvented or made to be irrelevant because they're not given the tools to express it, to really communicate their desire to use an APP and to only share a part of their information only for certain purposes.

BOB: In a way, you're kind of suggesting that Internet companies are turning us into sort of like sex robot victims.

SINZI: I mean that's a bit of a stretch, but yeah, I think there's a parallel there. I think that consent is a person's ability to make, you know, make decisions about what happens to them. So in the sex bots context it's what happens to women's bodies. And in this context, it's your data.

SINZI: Yeah. Becoming a robot, maybe not necessarily a sex robot but becoming a robot altogether. Like you're essentially being programmed. Right? And in a certain sense...

ALIA: Absolutely. And I think that's what this experience made me feel like, you know, it made me feel like I wasn't being treated like a human. I was being treated like um something else. Maybe like a robot.

BOB: You're, you're essentially being programmed. I think that's a, that's a really great and alarming phrase.

SINZI: And the scary thing, just to add another thought to that, the scary thing is it doesn't happen overnight. It happens very, very slowly over time. And it starts with you being blamed for not having read your privacy policy, which really in the first place wasn't drafted for you to truly understand it. And then it continues with, you know, the next thing where now all of your ads are targeted towards things that you like, including the news and including world facts.

BOB: What's the most positive way you can view this going if we make the correct turn at this fork in the road we're at?

SINZI: I think it will end positively because it's, um, actually catching the eye of the corporations that the big data companies that um, you know, are the, are the ones that are using this information in an improper way and setting the standards in a way. Um, so they're starting to use privacy and consent as a competitive tool. I work in the cybersecurity space, so I'm seeing

class actions started and um, you know, people in the c suite really paying attention because there's financial consequences, not just in terms of fines which require legislative change but also through, through the courts, so that's, I think things are positive. I'm positive about the future

ALIA: This was so lovely. Thank you so much, Sinzi.

SINZI: Thank you so much.

BOB: You bet.

ALIA: Absolutely.

BOB: When there's something to hear, we'll send you a link to it right away.

ALIA: Definitely, but we'll make you pay \$5 to listen to it.

SINZI: I consent. Wait, wait. What was the fine print? What was the fine print? Wasn't listening.

SINZI: Keep up the good work guys.

ALIA: Thanks.

BOB: Thanks.

ALIA: Wow. It's always really nice when another human, especially when it's their profession, validates our uh, experience. It was just so nice to hear her be like, that's insane. Yeah. That's like actually terrible. The way she was talking about your personal information, having a right to it and that being that like sort of infringing on so many laws outside of the US, was, it seems so sensical. But that's just not the way I think. I'm like, oh, okay, so they're going to charge me \$5. But she's like, no, that's actually illegal

ALIA: Well, in Canada it's illegal. And in more than 80 countries and territories, (including most of Europe and many in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.) In the US, we're conspicuously behind the times when it comes to comprehensive data protection laws.

BOB: It's your audio file, it belongs to you.

ALIA: But I don't think as a consumer, Bob, that I, I my stasis, is not my information belongs to me.

BOB: Right.

ALIA: Because I haven't been taught that.

BOB: And she also said they're programming us. That was the most chilling moment of that discussion. Like we're being programmed right now.

ALIA: That was the realization. That was when I had the realization that my, that I don't view my information as my own and I want to, and it inspired me to want to advocate for myself, for my information.

BOB: What this podcast is doing, is we are deprogramming you.

ALIA: Yes.

BOB: One thing that stood out to me was how optimistic she was that we're turning a corner. She's much more optimistic than I am, I think. And that may be because Sinzi's practicing in Canada, not the US, where she has some extra legal tools at her disposal. And also as a lawyer, she has a front row seat to GDPR and how it's changing consumer data rights internationally.

ALIA: Can you just give me like two lines. What the fuck is Gdpr.

BOB: General Data Protection Regulation.

ALIA: So it's in the subject line of so many of my emails.

BOB: Right. We've all gotten spammed with emails about this for the past two months. That's basically all Americans know about, but in Europe, here's what it means. It's a whole bunch of rights that consumers now have to their data and what how their data is used, and if a company violates it, the fine can be in the billions of dollars. It could be up to four percent of annual revenue.

ALIA: But not for American companies.

BOB: Not for America, it covers only the EU. However, any company that has any business in the EU has to comply. So the tentacles of it absolutely are reaching across the Atlantic and into the US.

ALIA: Okay, so, nobody really knows what's going to happen, but observers say that in the next six to 12 months, some company is going to get a huge fine thrown at it for violating this, and it's going to scare everybody else.

BOB: So what do we do now? What's next with all of this? We should be watching GDPR and see how companies react and whether big fines put them in their place and they're a little more cautious with our data. I hope people are more skeptical. I hope people are more reluctant to download apps and don't do these things thoughtlessly. Just take an extra moment of caution. Think about a yellow light instead of a green light. And then I think mostly is to just be really aware of this entire concept of consent and push back whenever you have the opportunity. As a consumer, you've got to speak up. You've got to complain and you've got to not be the proverbial frog in the boiling pot of water that doesn't notice as slowly but surely your humanity is ripped away from you by machines that are programming you to just be little revenue generating models for corporations.

ALIA: If you're listening to this right now on some kind of technological device, the irony is not lost on us, and this resonates with you, you have questions about the consequences of your digital life shoot us an email at sobob@spokemedia.io. We're a safe space for all the frogs in the pot saying "hmm, wait a minute..."

BOB: Uh, so Alia what are you going to do about this? Are you going to talk to the company? Are you going to complain?

ALIA: No, I think as far as I would go, I would, I would write a review. Um, maybe I would write a really thoughtful email just given how busy I am these days. No I'm, I have, I feel like I don't have the space to do that.

BOB: Next episode, the response Alia got after Bob made her write the email to the company.

ALIA: I'll write the email of the company. What does the email say, dear app? Let's just break this down a little bit less. What's the subject line? Subject line.

BOB: Your app is creepy and I'm disappointed.

ALIA: Yeah. Yeah. No, you're right. You're right. You know, I'm, I'm always one to just be like, somebody else is going to handle this, but that's just not true. I just can't be that person.

ALIA: As consumers these are some of our most powerful tools to not use things we find creepy to complain and be skeptical and push back and ask why and to write strongly worded emails telling companies what you want them to change. Yeah. Like don't assume they're evil, like maybe they actually will change.

BOB: There could be a genuinely a misunderstanding. In fact, you know, most of these companies aren't full of evil people trying to do harm in the world, but a lot of times they don't appreciate their own unintended consequences.

ALIA: If you're maybe like me, and have questions about your digital life that make you feel crazy - you might not be crazy, you might be right and you're being hacked. This is a thing I now know!

BOB: Yeah. If you have questions, any questions about your digital life, this is my favorite thing to do.

ALIA: And my new favorite thing to do.

BOB: To help people not get screwed. There's nothing too big or too small. In fact. So often it's the small things that actually are the big things.

ALIA: As for *my* sleep app question... Bob, I think you're right. I think I do need to complain. I need to take back my agency and I need to stand up for myself because I mean, how else am I going to sleep at night?

[SNORING]

ALIA: Dear Sleep App. I was excited when I downloaded your app, but I feel like it violated my privacy. I'm mulling over a complaint to the Federal Trade Commission, and I'm telling everyone that I know that they shouldn't use your app and your company is not trustworthy anymore. I respectfully request that you put a warning at the top of your app that says we will be recording you at night and that you don't charge consumers to hear those recordings. And if not, I will follow through with my complaint to the Federal Trade Commission. Sincerely, a very sleepy consumer.

ALIA: If you have questions about your digital life, write to us! At sobob@spokemedia.io. Or DM us on Twitter or Instagram @sobobpod. We'd love to answer anything you want to ask us. Next week, Bob answers one of your questions. It's about smart meters. And spoiler, they're a lot more intrusive than you think.

ALIA: So Bob is a Spoke Media production. It's hosted by me, Alia Tavakolian and Bob Sullivan. We're produced by Kelly Kolff, with help from Reyes Mendoza, Carson McCain, and Janielle Kastner. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett. Our head of post production is Will Short. The songs you hear in this episode come from FirstCom. And our executive producer is Keith Reynolds. Thanks to this week's guest, Sinziana Gutiu, you can see more of her work on Twitter @sgutiu, that's S G U T I U. Thanks for listening.