

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

for project “What is Alexa?”

You are being invited to participate in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Title of Study: What is Alexa?

Department: Anthropology

Name and Contact Details of the Student:

Kat Matfield katmatfield@gmail.com

Name and Contact Details of Student’s supervisor:

Antonia Walford antonia.walford@ucl.ac.uk

This project has been approved by the Anthropology Ethics Committee

Project ID number: Matfield/DIG/2019/04/042

What is the project’s purpose?

This research project is being conducted as part of a masters degree in the field of digital anthropology. The results of the project will be written into a dissertation submitted as part of the required coursework for this degree.

The project aims to develop a better understanding of how people interact with Amazon Alexa devices in their home.

In particular, I hope to learn more about what social relationships are possible with these devices, and how/if they play a part in the existing relationships between people living together. Finally, I am interested in what implications this might have for whether any kind of ‘personhood’ can be attributed to Alexa devices.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you fit the following criteria:

- Aged over 18
- Do not share your home with anyone under 18 years of age
- Own 1+ Alexa devices positioned in the home
- Regularly interact with these devices

Around 30 other participants are being recruited for different activities as part of this project.

Do I have to take part?

No. There is no requirement for you to take part, and there will be absolutely no penalties for refusing to participate. It is up to you to decide.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will be asked to sign a consent form for participation in any activities apart from filling in a survey. Surveys will incorporate a consent form of their own.

You are free to withdraw at any time. Please see the section below titled '**What will happen if I don't carry on with the project?**' for more information on withdrawing.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research for this project will take place over a maximum of 8 weeks. Your participation is described in the tables below.

Surveys	
Required/optional	Required – this is the minimum level of participation in this project
How many	1-3
Duration	No longer than 20mins per survey
Recording	Data will be recorded by survey software
Description	<p>Surveys will be used to collect high level information from a broader range of participants.</p> <p>They will be used at the start of the project to develop basic understanding of the kind of ways people use Alexa; and near the end of the project to measure how commonplace are the behaviours that have been observed in the other research activities.</p>

Interviews	
Required/optional	Optional
How many	1-4
Duration	45mins to 2 hours
Recording	Audio recording will be used, as well as written notes
Description	<p>Interviews will be used to probe deeper into how a smaller number of participants use your Alexa devices, and other relevant questions. For instance, do you feel they are always 'present' in your home, or do you forget they are there when you're not directly interacting with them?</p> <p>As part of the interview, I may ask you to draw something related to your ideas about Alexa. This will be optional.</p>

In-home observations	
Required/optional	Optional
How many	1-6
Duration	1-6 hours
Recording	Audio recording will be used, as well as written notes
Description	<p>Sometimes, we aren't fully aware of how we behave, so discussing what we do in an interview only gives part of the picture. Spending some time hanging out in your home can help me fill in the missing parts of the picture.</p> <p>During observations, I will spend time in your home, at times convenient to you. You can ask me to leave at any time. While I'm there, I'll chat with you as well as listening and watching what you do. You can tell me when you want things to be 'off the record'; in that case, I won't use them in my research write-up.</p>

Collaborative data analysis	
Required/optional	Optional
How many	1
Duration	2 hours
Recording	The raw data and results of analysis will be saved to my laptop, as well as yours.

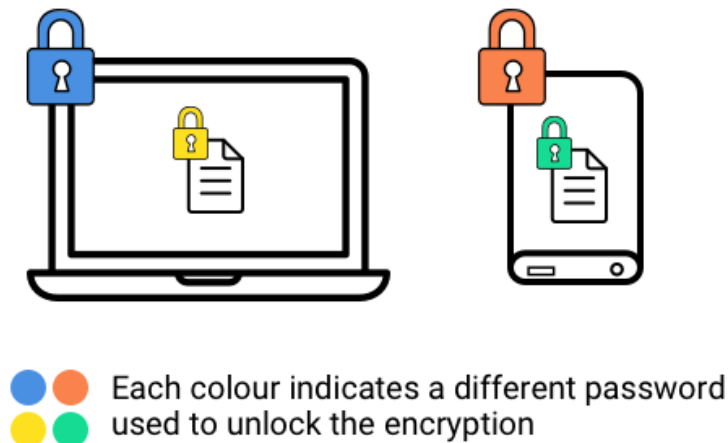
Collaborative data analysis	
Description	<p>You will request the data Amazon has captured through your Alexa device. This includes a number of different types of data, including the recordings Alexa has made, and the transcriptions of those recordings. I will only ask to see the transcriptions, and this analysis will only use this data.</p> <p>Together, we will look at this transcription data and use tools like Excel to analyse it to find out, for instance, what are the most common things you say to Alexa, and whether your usage has changed over time.</p>

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Yes. Your confidentiality and privacy are very important to me.

Every piece of data I collect as part of this project will be kept on an encrypted laptop and encrypted external hard drive. I will use AES 256bit encryption (as used in online banking) and different strong passwords for each of these.

You will be identified in this data by a pseudonym. The link between your real name and your pseudonym will be kept in a separate file on my laptop/external hard drive, as will a scanned copy of your consent form, if you sign one. As well as being covered by the laptop and external hard drive's encryption, these files will also be encrypted themselves.



When I make handwritten notes, these will include only your pseudonym and no other identifiable details, and will be shredded immediately after being written up onto my laptop. The paper original of your consent form that I keep will also be shredded after being scanned.

Only I will have access to the handwritten notes, laptop, and external hard drive.

(Icons in the image above come from the Noun Project: [document](#) by icon 54; [padlock](#) by Greenhill; [laptop](#) by dilakuscan; [external hard drive](#) by 4B Icons)

Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice: the data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk The Data Protection Officer is Lee Shailer, and can be contacted at l.shailer@ucl.ac.uk The Data Protection Number for this project is Z6364106/2019/04/15

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the provision of your consent. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

UK data protection law is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed you may wish to submit a complaint to them. Contact details, and details of data subject rights are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

You will be recorded in the following ways:

- Audio recording of interviews and observations
- Written notes made during interviews and observations

This media will be used to inform the write-ups of this research. I may include direct quotes from you in the write-ups, based on these recordings/notes.

No other use of the audio recordings and written notes will be made, or access to them given to anyone outside the project (including playing the recordings in the hearing of another person) without your written permission.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this research will be written up into

- a) a dissertation, submitted to the UCL exams board, read by UCL academics but not published anywhere
- b) one or more blog posts, published on medium.com
- c) one or more talks, given at conferences and public events, and possibly recorded

In all cases, participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms and I will make all efforts to exclude anything that might enable them to be identified.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

No discomfort or risks are expected to result from participation in interviews or surveys. Observation in your home may result in some small amount of social discomfort.

Collaborative analysis of transcriptions of what has been said to your Alexa devices could result in embarrassment and the revelation to the researcher of information that you would prefer she not know. However, you may be able to mitigate this risk by reviewing this data yourself before you start analysing it with the researcher. It is possible that reviewing this data yourself may reveal things about the people who also live in your home that they would prefer you not know.

It is also possible that your reviewing of the data that Amazon has collected about you, even when done alone, may be disturbing for you. Some people are concerned and frightened when they realise how often Alexa records sound in their home, or how much data about them Alexa devices have access to.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits for taking part in this project.

I hope that your participation will provide you with some interesting insights into the social relationships between you, the people you share your home with and Alexa, and potentially some interesting conversations about the future of AI.

What if something goes wrong?

If you are unhappy with the project, your experience or the researcher, you can contact the researcher in the first instance:

Kat Matfield

katmatfield@gmail.com

If you do not wish to contact the researcher, or you are not satisfied with how your complaint has been handled, you can contact:

1. The researcher's supervisor: Antonia Walford
Lecturer in Digital Anthropology in the UCL Department of Anthropology
antonia.walford@UCL.ac.uk

2. The Chairperson of the UCL Research Ethics Committee
ethics@ucl.ac.uk

What will happen if I don't carry on with the project?

If you decide to withdraw from the project, there will be no penalties and you won't have to give a reason. You will not have to participate in any other activities related to this project.

You can choose to withdraw data collected about you from the project up until May 31st 2019. At this point, I will be writing up the conclusions from my research and it will be very hard to remove all conclusions that have been partly based on your data.

If you choose to withdraw your data, all audio recordings, written notes, raw data and analysed data will be securely deleted.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised and funded by the researcher, Kat Matfield, as part of a master degree course studied at UCL Department of Anthropology.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the UCL Anthropology Department. The project ID used by this committee is:
Matfield/DIG/2019/04/042

Contacts for further information

Primary researcher

Kat Matfield

Masters Student in the UCL Department of Anthropology

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Project supervisor

Antonia Walford

Lecturer in Digital Anthropology in the UCL Department of Anthropology

antonia.walford@UCL.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research project.