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The LGBTQIA+ community, in and outside of Choate, has work to do. Our safe spaces aren’t safe for everyone, our politics aren’t always expansive or well thought out, and our community continually replicates the hegemonic forms and structures that we claim to exist outside of. But with awareness and compassion, we can start to figure this stuff out. Invest energy in listening to and anticipating the struggles of those who have less privilege than you. Be a good friend, ally, and resource because it’s the right thing to do, and because you’d hope someone would do the same.

We are always here, too. Talk to us if you want. Share your ideas. Criticize us. Slide into our Outlook inboxes if that’s what you need. We don’t really have much going on, so you’ll probably get a quick response.

<3,
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FROM THE EDITORS:

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<3,
Voices

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"I would say quarantine and isolation has definitely forced my identity to take a backseat, if only because I’m not really seeing many people on a daily basis. The social aspect is also wack--being 200 feet from someone’s room and not even being able to see them. Distance is such a strange concept--at home I was the only Choatie around for hundreds of miles, and I could accept that and understand it. Now there’s hundreds of people right on campus, and to still feel rather isolated, that’s something different. Not to mention the total lack of emotional intimacy available. We just want cuddles, dang it."

- Lucas Eggers ’21.

“I feel more alone (literally and figuratively) when at home and away from people I can talk to. Home is just me and my parent, who I’m not out to yet, so there’s not much room for conversation. I had many chances of online communication, but it still felt bad to not see anyone in person. After a while, I just became more withdrawn and less motivated. I think the queer community itself is very based around friendship and physical connection, which definitely made things difficult for lots of people during the pandemic.”

- Athena Liu ’23.

“It didn’t hit me super hard until maybe a month or so into online classes just how lonely I was. I had been thinking about my identity for a few years at this point. I couldn’t figure it out for a long time because I never had any education on LGBTQ+ matters from my family, or anyone. It just clicked one day during quarantine and I tried to keep it to myself but that’s really hard to do when you’re confined in a relatively small space with no one but your homophobic parents, growing increasingly depressed from gender dysphoria, with literally no one to talk about this.”

- Anonymous

“Being cut off from a lot of heteronormativity, eg being around boys who I constantly felt forced to be attracted to, let me realize that I [don’t have to be] attracted to men. Discovering gay internet culture also hit different and helped me figure out my identity. The time also played a role--being stuck in your room for months on end really makes you think about yourself and your life.”

- Anonymous

“I constantly counted the days until I was able to go back to campus. In a dorm with people I know and trust, I was finally able to completely be myself. At home it wasn’t the most comfortable space for me to be me. Despite the barriers that quarantine brings I’m still so happy that I’m back in a space that doesn’t judge me.”

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“I would constantly count the days until I was able to go back to campus. In a dorm with people I know and trust, I was finally able to completely be myself. At home it wasn’t the most comfortable space for me to be me. Despite the barriers that quarantine brings I’m still so happy that I’m back in a space that doesn’t judge me.”

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The recent reflections of the Choate Rosemary Hall community on the topics of diversity, inclusion, and justice have sparked conversations on Spectrum's historical presence on campus. Spectrum, Choate's gay-straight alliance, has undoubtedly been a major source of support for many queer members of the Choate community, offering both a safe space for queer youth and an opportunity for education of the school's general population. Because of how prominent conversations of identity and intersectionality are, there is no better time than now to discuss and mediate Spectrum's long-standing issues of social insularity and lack of BIPOC representation in its cabinet.

BIPOC have historically made up a small portion of Spectrum's six-member cabinet, with a notable lack of Black students in positions of authority. This fact has been pointed out within @blackatchoate posts alongside discussions of intersectionality and diversity in leadership positions. With these historical cabinet demographics, Spectrum propagates the idea that it largely caters to white members of the queer community and is unrepresentative of the larger, diverse community at Choate. Circulating discussions of intersectionality within minority groups have risen to prominence within the last few months; with the need for self-reflection and improvement at a high point, the importance of representation in positions of authority for these affinity-intended groups becomes paramount.

Because Spectrum is one of the only places that specifically caters to Choate's queer community on campus, it’s easy for the club to become insular. With such a consistent ability to make a change in the progressive direction. Even gathering up the courage to join a meeting can be difficult. This anxiety occurs even if said newcomers are LGBTQIA+, and especially if they are BIPOC. One at queerchoate post states: “Being both black and gay at Choate is exhausting. I’ve found that the LGBTQIA+ community (specialy Spectrum) here is generally pretty accepting, but it was just never something I felt I could publicly join/be proud of.” This makes a relation to racial diversity and potential lack of representation in the cabinet—when there exists less representation, the feeling of “not belonging” is more significant for minority students. Spectrum's goal is to offer support in and officiate conversations about sexuality and gender identity to everybody across the Choate campus; in having potential members be uncomfortable with the ideas and energy of the club itself, it fails to reach this goal. Personally, I have had multiple peers tell me they are uncomfortable with attending Spectrum because it feels like “a specific friend group.” People have also stayed away from meetings because they are not LGBTQIA+, thinking it'd be inappropriate to attend and share the space. Not only does this deter members from joining, it shields away the true intent of Spectrum's meetings and discussions—to provide a place for allies and queer students alike and to have important conversations about queer issues that everybody, regardless of sexuality or gender, should be aware of.

Thankfully, these issues have been noticed and addressed by Spectrum's cabinet members. There have been efforts to facilitate intersectionality within the club, from holding queer BIPOC affinity groups, hosting schoolwide club events, or moderating joint meetings with clubs like Hispanic-Latinx Forum, Choate Diversity Student Association, Choate Afro-Latino Student Alliance, etc. These shared spaces provide room for student growth, connection, and feedback, and they provide opportunities for different viewpoints to intersect within a place of safety. Highlighting these issues is an essential step in the process of improvement: to truly become the all-inclusive space as promised, the wider members of Spectrum must practice awareness of its insularity in racial and social contexts. It is beneficial to the club's growth and to Choate's LGBTQIA+ community that these issues are mitigated soon. Keeping a truly safe space for all willing members to participate is essential to the Spectrum experience; it's in our hopes that this club goes on to become a readily accessible resource of support for more students.

As of July 1st, 2020, there are only 15 states that have the option for nonbinary gender markers on their identification documents. Some of the states that recognize a third gender include: Oregon (June 2017), California (September 2017), New York (January 2019, Connecticut (January 2020), and most recently Virginia (July 2020). California Representative Ro Khanna introduced a bill earlier this year that would add an unspecified gender-neutral option (known as “X”) on United States passports for citizens that identify as non-binary or intersex. Mara Keisling, the executive director of NCTE (National Center for Transgender Equality), said in an interview with ABC News that “if the government is going to be in the business of declaring and labeling our gender, it should at least reflect today's science and allow everyone to answer truthfully.” If passed, this bill will make it easier for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to travel more safely and easily. Looking to other countries, the United States is late to the game. Australia has had a third gender marker for the last seven years all throughout their country. Argentina is another example. In 2012, Argentina passed its Gender Identity Law which “allows transgender people to identify with their chosen gender on official documents without first having to receive hormone therapy, gender reassignment surgery or psychiatric counseling.” While having a third gender option may be a progressive step for the equality of non-binary and intersex individuals, there may be an unforeseen downside. Some countries with beautiful sightseeing and incredibly unique cultures are the opposite of “gay friendly.” In these places, it can be very dangerous to be openly gay or part of the LGBTQIA+ community in general. Jail time, the death sentence, and lashing are just some of the things that have happened to identifiably LGBTQIA+ individuals abroad. There needs to be a federal change in order to allow alternatively-gendered people to feel valid in the eyes of their country. Non-binary and intersex people deserve the same basic human respect to be able to show their true selves to the full capacity. It is therefore the government's responsibility to make a change in the progressive direction.

SOURCES:  
Sex-ed, or sexual education programs, have long been a cause of controversy, regardless of sexual orientation, but there is a notable lack of education surrounding sexual education for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Choose, for example, included information on condom usage in their health and wellness curriculum, but did not mention dental dams, or anal sex. At a school meeting where prophylactic use and STI testing were discussed, there was no additional information offered about the importance of protection not just as a tool for avoiding pregnancy, but for other sexual health reasons. This is the norm: a 2013 GLSEN survey found that only 5% of LGBTQIA+ individuals received positive queer sex-ed.

This is a problem. Whilst many cis or straight students still lack the resources they need, the situation is even more dire for LGBTQIA+ youth. It is important to note that queer teens are having sex; they just aren’t accessing necessary information. In fact, a CDC study notes that “Identity-based sexual minority youth subgroups were more likely than heterosexual students to engage in sexual risk behaviors.” A study from Paediatric Child Health echoed that sentiment: “Gay and lesbian young people are at an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) because they are more likely to have had sexual intercourse, with more partners, and to have had nonconsensual intercourse.”

The consequences of having sex without proper protection, that many may not realize they need, can be serious. Gay and bisexual men made up the majority of new HIV diagnoses in 2018, and 1 in 6 gay men are unaware they carry HIV. Other STD’S such as HPV and chlamydia can also be transmitted though unprotected sex, though rates of transmission are thought to be lower in cases of women having sex with women. By understanding that frequent STI testing is necessary, and should happen regularly, as well as having frank discussions about the necessity of protection, these diseases would be less prone to spreading among LGBTQIA+ people, and the general population.

If students, regardless of whether they identify as a part of the community, were more educated on sexual health, in all cases, the result would be a generation of people having safer and healthier sex. Unfortunately, many parents and educators do not approve of any sex-ed, let alone inclusive sex-ed, being taught in schools, which causes students to go elsewhere for their information. This can cause individuals to be exposed to content that is incorrect, inappropriate, or misleading. This could be avoided if schools took the initiative to provide accurate, helpful, and non-discriminatory sexual education.

It’s important to recognize that LGBTQIA+ teens are likelier to have sex under the influence, and are more likely to be assaulted. This means that even more conversations around consent are necessary, so that students can be aware of their own bodies, and understand that they are able to set boundaries. Diverse sex-ed would also help to normalize the fact that queer people exist and have sex. Students that come from households where they would not receive any information would also be able to learn more about important facets of sexual behavior.

Conversations around sex can be awkward and make people uncomfortable, but they are necessary. Sex-ed programs should be adjusted for inclusivity and work to inform all students, not just straight cisgender people who have a certain type of sex; we need to include information on anal sex and different ways people experience pleasure outside of cisgender penetrative sex, while having more conversations around identity and consent.

S

What are the odds? I couldn’t believe it either. I guess it isn’t much different than being straight with straight parents. My moms are my closest allies, but I know others aren’t so lucky. When I came out to my moms this past summer, I knew there would be no negative impact to my wellbeing, no broken hearts, and no surprises. But before that, realizing that I was gay was still terrifying to me. How do I even know? What would people say? Am I just being biased cause I have gay parents? That last one is what really stuck with me. How could I be gay when my parents are? Straight is still the default even with queer parents. You have to question whether you are gay, never the other way around, or some sort of limbo state. Like the rest of us, I internalized heteronormativity. I thought I was straight up to a certain point and I didn’t want to be gay either. I didn’t dislike the idea of being gay, I just didn’t want it to happen to me; like it was another thing to add to the list.

I don’t know when people start questioning their sexuality. Around sixth grade is when I started questioning, seventh is when I knew. I only told my girl friends, although all my close friends were guys. I didn’t want them to know yet because I thought they might be uncomfortable if they knew. There was one conversation that stuck out to me; I don’t remember how, but the subject of me being gay in a joking manner came up. A comment from one of the guys there went something like, “Well then I guess it’d run in the family,” I didn’t say anything at the moment, but I was offended by this. Obviously, the notion that my moms’ gayness is the cause of my own is absurd. But at the same time, his comment wouldn’t be wrong. It does kind of run in the family. I guess I was annoyed by it because it’s something I can’t control; it’s who I am.

I’m happy I was able to confront the idea that straight is the default, and that I have power over my sexuality. So now, after writing all of this, I’m pretty confident that my experience is a lot different than that of someone who grew up straight with straight parents. I guess it runs in the family.
One of the most pressing issues in the MLM (men who love men) community is the masc4masc complex, a term for gay men who only seek to date those who present themselves as masculine. This complex communicates a problematic sentiment implying the apparent inferiority of male femininity.

The face of the MLM community—conventionally attractive, upper-middle class, and white—has been constructed in order to be as palatable as possible to homophobes. This image exists to send the message of we’re normal, just like you to any and all outsiders. Such an image, however, perpetuates respectability politics, which confine queer folk by expecting heteronormativity from them, causing further oppression of the LGBTQIA+ community. The term “normal” warrants examination. Where do we arbitrarily draw the line of social acceptability? The false construct of normalcy is fundamentally unjust—it creates a dichotomy between the accepted and the rejected, the valid and the invalid. It contributes to the exclusion of POC, poor, disabled, and HIV+ individuals in the MLM community. Those enforcing such a binary of respectability certainly maintain a place of privilege.

Any negative connotations of male femininity originate in toxic masculinity, a harmful attitude that exists to shame men for acting stereotypically feminine and expressing their emotions. When conformity to cisnormative and heteronormative standards of masculinity becomes the only acceptable option, gender-nonconforming men and drag queens are scorned as the LGBTQIA+ community’s embarrassing underbelly.

This rejection of diversity may contain the illusion of choice: that gender-nonconforming MLM go out of their way to be as feminine as possible, doing so with the intent to degrade the community’s collective image. Therefore, any discrimination they may face is their own fault; they must deserve punishment for discrediting the entire group.

From my personal observations, this toxic mindset stems from both the desire for acceptance and fear of exclusion from cisgender, heterosexual society. MLM, along with the rest of the queer community, can fall prey to societal pressures to adhere to arbitrary standards of normalcy, whether those apply to gender presentation, relationship style, or standards of conventional attractiveness. Those who stay in the closet for years or decades may feel pressure to imitate heterosexuality at all costs as a self-preservation mechanism. Many people who experience homophobia will develop insecurities and ultimately project those onto others.

MLM are not immune to the negative mindset and implications of toxic masculinity—societal reinforcement does not excuse problematic behavior. As individuals, we must actively address and dismantle our inherent biases, and welcome every gender presentation as equally valid. Conditional acceptance and outright rejection are similar in that they force people to sacrifice authenticity.

Ultimately, any amount of energy devoted to uniformity is futile. Homophobia dictates that queerness in itself implies deviancy, and no amount of intra-community exclusion will change this. The more marginalized MLM face exclusion from cishet society. Further rejection cannot erase their existence or improve the general perception of LGBTQIA+ people; oftentimes, it is simply bullying for bullying’s sake.

Therefore, LGBTQIA+ people in positions of power and privilege must not pressure stigmatized subgroups to water their identities down to cater to trivial norms and cishet comfort. Doing so corrupts the integrity of the entire community. Instead, we must throw out respectability politics and show compassion to all queer people. Ultimately, MLM identity is not an exclusive club. LGBTQIA+ people do not exist for heterosexual consumption, and basic respect should not warrant uniformity.
ACB VS. LGBT:
INTRODUCING AMY CONEY BARRETT,
“ABSOLUTE Threat” TO SEXUAL
AND GENDER MINORITY RIGHTS

Lucas Eggers ’21

“...have no agenda,” Judge Amy Coney Barrett remarked. As the second day of her Supreme Court confirmation hearings dragged on, the line of questioning had finally turned to Barrett’s views on LGBTQIA+ rights. “And I do want to be clear that I have never discriminated on the basis of sexual preference and would not ever discriminate on the basis of sexual preference.” Later in the day, Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii looped back to Barrett’s earlier comments, pointing out two words in particular. “Sexual preference” is an offensive and outdated term. It is used by anti-LGBTQ activists to suggest that sexual orientation is a choice. It is not,” Hirono noted during the hearings. “Sexual orientation is a key part of a person’s identity.”

It was yet another misstep for Judge Barrett, who has spent the past few weeks attempting to defend her more-than-suspicious record of associating with groups tied to same-sex marriage opposition and anti-LGBT discrimination. Whether her misrepresentation of sexual orientation as a choice was a simple gaffe or a dog-whistle, it speaks to a larger body of work that has led to the Human Rights Campaign labelling Barrett as “an absolute threat to LGBTQ rights.”

Amy Coney Barrett served for less than a year as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit before being nominated to succeed Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the Supreme Court, so the general public has a limited judicial record with which to weigh Barrett’s positions on LGBTQIA+ rights. However, before serving as a judge, Barrett was a longtime law professor at her alma mater, the University of Notre Dame, and spoke about queer issues numerous times throughout that period.

Many of those comments come from a lengthy 2016 interview at Jacksonville University in Florida, where she discussed upcoming rights cases in the Supreme Court. For instance, Barrett framed Obergefell v. Hodges, the landmark court case that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, as an issue about “who decides” whether marriage bans are unconstitutional. She defended those who thought it wasn’t the Court’s role to rule such bans on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, noting “[Chief Justice Roberts, in his dissent,] said, those who want same-sex marriage, you have every right to lobby in state legislatures to make that happen, but the dissent’s view was that it wasn’t for the court to decide... So I think Obergefell, and what we’re talking about for the future of the court, it’s really a who decides question.”

Similarly, Barrett brought up debate over whether Title IX protections against discrimination extend to transgender Americans, saying, “When Title IX was enacted, it’s pretty clear that no one, including the Congress that enacted that statute, would have dreamed of that result, at that time… Maybe things have changed… but it does seem to strain the text of the statute to say that Title IX demands [protection for transgender Americans].” Barrett’s summation of the legal debate over LGBTQIA+ rights as a question of “who decides” between the courts and state legislatures is not revolutionary. However, given her track record of teachings, it is easy to see what side of the divide she falls on.

The simple fact of the matter is Judge Barrett is a self-described textualist and originalist. What does that mean? To oversimplify, Barrett interprets a law based on the “plain communicative content of the words” of the legislation’s text, specifically in how the law was interpreted by the general public at the time of its writing. For instance, Judge Barrett thinks the Constitution’s meaning was set in stone when it was written, and should be interpreted primarily from that eighteenth-century perspective. In a more LGBTQIA+-specific context, Barrett likely believes that since the public in 1972 wasn’t really thinking about Title IX as applying to transgender individuals, its anti-discrimination protections shouldn’t extend to transgender Americans today.

This legal philosophy would clearly have massive ramifications for her opinions on future LGBTQIA+ rights cases before the Supreme Court; most laws currently protecting LGBTQIA+ individuals were passed before queer rights issues had truly come to the forefront of American politics and thus could be considered not part of the “original public meaning.” With this philosophy, Obergefell v. Hodges could easily be overturned, and further court decisions could leave transgender individuals with no real anti-discrimination protection.

Barrett’s nomination comes at a time when some in the current Supreme Court are already signaling their intent to take these kinds of backward steps. On October 5, the first day of SCOTUS’s new term, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote an opinion which Justice Samuel Alito joined, strongly condemning the Obergefell decision. Justice Thomas posits that the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide without state legislature approval “threaten[s] the religious liberty of the many Americans who believe that marriage is a sacred institution between one man and one woman… allowing governments, employers, and schools to ‘vilify’ those with these beliefs as ‘bigots.’”

Justice Thomas’s opinion came through a notice that the court was refusing to take up the case of Kim Davis, a Kentucky county clerk who made headlines in 2015 by refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. While Justice Thomas denied Davis’s appeal, noting the issues at hand were not “clearly presented” in her circumstance, he did make her out as a kind of martyr for freedom, calling her a “victim of this Court’s cavalier treatment of religion.” This belief that government officials should be allowed to discriminate against LGBT+ individuals based on their religious belief endangers the everyday lives of queer Americans in countless ways. It is likely that Barrett shares Justice Thomas and Alito’s beliefs—a she signed on to a letter in 2015 calling marriage a “commitment of a man and a woman” and if she agrees, it would only take two of the conservative-leaning justices to overturn Obergefell and allow U.S. states to return to same-sex marriage bans.

A sizable amount of media attention has also been directed towards Judge Amy Coney Barrett’s support of the Alliance Defending Freedom, an organization the Southern Poverty Law Center has classified as a far-right anti-LGBT hate group. The ADF has advocated for businesses that deny service to gay individuals, as well as for legislation in France that would require transgender individuals to be sterilized in order to legally change genders. Barrett has delivered five paid lectures at ADF, pushed her students towards its feeder programs, and maintained lengthy friendships with its members. Yet, during testimony in October, she claimed not to know anything about ADF’s anti-LGBT stances, a key component of its mission.

The national news media is perhaps justified in focusing on this aspect of Judge Barrett’s professional life as a lecturer and teacher. However, Barrett’s positions on statutory interpretation speak for themselves. Even if she had never interacted with ADF in her life, her stances on LGBTQIA+ rights would be completely predictable given her beliefs in textualism and originalism. If confirmed—a possibility that seems likelier by the day—Justice Barrett will work with an already conservative Supreme Court to overturn Obergefell and deny fundamental rights and protections to LGBTQIA+ individuals. With Judge Barrett on the bench, it will become increasingly important to focus on state legislatures’ politics, because relief will not come from the courts anymore.

graphic by mia katz ’21
Memorial House has been home to every male boarding student at Choate for decades; it’s a landmark of the Choate Rosemary Hall Campus. While some students reflect upon their Mem experience with a sense of sweet nostalgia, not all have a positive experience. Throughout the years, LGBTQIA+ residents of Memorial House have expressed mixed feelings about their Mem experiences.

Lucas Eggers ’21, a previous resident of Mem and current prefect of Pratt House, shares his experience in the freshmen dorm. “In a place like Mem, what you remember as a queer person are the moments where things became all too explicit. Walking in hallways and hanging out in rooms and hearing slurs against homosexual and trans people come to mind in particular. But what is often left by the wayside when we remember these things is the broader everyday homophobic reluctance of many boys in Mem to go near anything they deemed too effeminate, too challenging, too gay. Clothing choices, movies, video games, it didn’t matter, you didn’t cross the line.”

This sentiment is not uncommon. “From what I saw, gay was definitely thrown around as a derogatory term, which is always disheartening, but it’s something I’ve come to expect of teenage boys,” stated Will Lang ’21, who lived in the Memorial House basement last year.

In such a large dormitory with such a unique environment, Choate needs to focus more energy on supporting its LGBT+ students. Many of these students feel outcast and hidden inside themselves. Lang suggests an approach of advocacy. “Mem already has one LGBT+ advisor that I know of, but having more in addition to outspoken allies would help set the tone for the freshmen.”

Eggers asks Choate for more substantial change. “What I think is that you can’t really have a space set up like Mem and expect hurtful mentalities to be scarce. This is what happens when you concentrate all freshmen boarder boys into the same space. So what I think is the administration seriously needs to reconsider why it still has such an incubator of negative masculinity on campus. I really do believe that as Choate currently stands, teaching students empathy and self-acceptance is best done in smaller dorm environments with less students around and higher faculty presence.”

In intimate and immediately inclusive dormitories like Combination House, it feels much easier for queer students to lean into their own identity. Smaller houses allow for kinder and more accepting environments where there’s less pressure to “fit in.”

While big change might be far away, and living in Mem might seem rough, Lucas provides some insightful advice for students to ease into their environment. “Find each other. Seek out the weird ones, the one who also doesn’t look quite at ease with their surroundings. Then you two will at least have one thing in common. Find prefects who truly understand your experiences. Clubs are important too; they let you exist in a variety of different and often more welcoming spaces.”

Will also shares some valuable knowledge: “I hope I don’t have to tell you this, but there are always people [at Choate] who can relate to you and support you.”

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**Art:**
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- Mia Katz ’21

**Editors:**
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- Julian Hurley ’22
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- Kenadi Waymire ’22
voices

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