

# The Inquiry

Winter 2025-2026



## Featuring...

*“Screen-free” zone  
Feminism  
Privacy in the digital world*

# Letter from the Editors

*Dear Inquirers,*

*It is my honor to usher in the first publication of the Choate Inquiry of 2026! As snow hardens beneath our feet and we yearn for warmer days, the Choate Inquiry masthead has worked tirelessly to bring you some hard-hitting journalism this gloomy February. The past year has been characterized by great change, both in the Choate community as well as the national community at large. In a world that feels increasingly tumultuous, we wanted to provide an outlet for great writers and burgeoning thinkers to voice different opinions on hot button issues. Feminist scholarship! Technofeudal surveillance! Mourning the freshman section of our beloved dining hall! This issue really has it all, and we're so proud to provide it for you. In a political landscape that lends itself all too well to the Orwellian oeuvre, holding firm to our principles of individual freedom and expression is its own form of resistance. We are so lucky to have a forum at this school to voice opinions, and have them proactively engaged with. Let this issue be a reminder to have the courage to stand up for what you believe in. It is only then that real progress can be made.*

*Thank you to all the writers and editors who have helped make this winter issue everything I hoped for! Happy reading!*

*Love,  
Harper Marsden-Uren  
Editor in Chief - The Choate Inquiry*

# Choate Rosemary Hall Should Return the 'Screen Free' Zone of the Dining Hall to the Freshmen

PRO: Matthew Zhang

When you walk into the dining hall and look around, you might find a common occurrence that feels somewhat troublesome: freshmen drifting from table to table, hovering around groups already having a fun conversation, while balancing their plates, cutlery, and glass for a safe place to sit. In a place built to provide comfort and stability, the absence of a designated dining area for freshmen has reshaped Choate's social landscape, and the change is not for the better. Therefore, Choate should reinstate this section by removing the screen-free section to strengthen our community.

For years, the Freshman Section of the dining hall was a place where new students, fresh from different schools, states, and even continents, could arrive at meal times without fear of being out of place. It was practically a built-in home base for the newcomers of the Choate community! Even though the change to a screen-use zone might be convenient for those who want to work or go on their phones while having their meal, it simultaneously erases a crucial support system for those who need it the most. Freshman year can be overwhelming, and without a reliable space, students who are just beginning to navigate Choate's rhythms face yet another social challenge.

By reestablishing the Freshman Section, this single change would build community coherence. If freshmen can count on eating together, friendships can develop more naturally. Students will then begin to recognize names, faces, and routines, building goals and confidence with each other. The dining hall becomes a place where new students can learn how to enter into a community through daily conversations that can stem from simple interactions with their peers.

Without this space, many freshmen sit alone or scatter into corners of the dining hall, where joining existing friend groups feels nearly impossible.

A freshman zone also promotes equity. Not all ninth graders arrive at Choate with the same social advantages. Some have siblings who can help them integrate into the community, while others have friends from their hometowns to build mutual friendships. However, many do not. Through providing a consistent gathering space, it ensures that no student's sense of belonging depends on whether they already know someone, which fosters fairness.

Some may argue that freshmen should be encouraged to be with older peers, but this does not require eliminating foundational support. Freshmen can still interact with upperclassmen in many instances, such as classrooms, dorms, advisories, and extracurriculars. A designated dining zone provides them with a space to retreat and an environment in which they can confidently branch out. Growth happens most successfully when students feel grounded, not when they are tossed into uncertainty. At the same time, enforcing a screen-free zone in the dining hall risks solving one problem by creating another. Screens, for better or worse, have become an integral part of how students manage their academic and personal lives. For some, eating while responding to messages from home, reviewing notes, or decompressing is not a distraction but rather a common routine. Rather than fostering connection, strict enforcement can heighten anxiety, making students constantly feel policed and watched in a space that should offer relief at the end of a long day.

The issue is not the presence of screens, but intentional structure. A dining hall that can accommodate both social engagement and individual needs without enforcing a model on everyone is what the Choate community needs. The freshman year is a year of building academic habits, forming friendships, and growing emotional resilience. Something as simple as where students sit during a meal affects whether they feel overwhelmed or welcomed. Reinstating the freshman dining section may seem like a small adjustment, but its impact on freshmen's social confidence, equity, and connection is undeniable.

# Choate Rosemary Hall Should Return the 'Screen Free' Zone of the Dining Hall to the Freshmen

CON: Sofia Chun

After an exhausting day of frantically submitting last-minute homework assignments and stumbling out of Lanphier Café to make the next class, stepping away from the chaos of stress and overwork and into the bustling environment of the dining hall has become a beacon of comfort for us all. It is one of the only spaces on campus where you can step away from the hefty student responsibilities and enjoy a comforting meal without finding yourself surrounded by a cloud of devices—the same ones that can easily drag all that pressure back onto your shoulders by luring you into clicking that Canvas or Teams notification.

Last year, Choate students were forced to temporarily relocate our dining area to the old Student Activity Center. The space was a fraction of the size of our current dining hall, featuring a small open area with a designated senior section upstairs. Although our dining space now is much larger, each time you step foot in the dining hall, you are instantly greeted with a strong sense of tight community connection and warmth. In contrast, entering the temporary dining hall induced a sense of disconnect because even though the space was much smaller, the community dynamic felt flat. The whole place lacked the easy, social energy that makes our current dining hall feel alive. It all came down to one thing that sucked this vibrant energy from the temporary dining hall: phones.

As students who had to endure the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic during some of our most important developmental years, many of our habits regarding social situations are still molded by the screen-heavy patterns we fell into.

Even now, when life feels “back to normal”, these lingering screen-trained habits pull us towards our phones and away from our friends. It is almost automatic to reach for a phone the moment a conversation quiets or to dart your eyes down at it when you walk past someone you know only well enough for a quick smile. Towards the end of last year, an increasing number of people began to notice how debilitating screens can be towards fostering a strong community dynamic. The school decided to take swift action by restricting device usage throughout the entire dining hall.

While well-intended, this harsh ban posed to be relatively ineffective, as banning devices throughout the entirety of the space where people have to eat is simply unrealistic. Choate students have many moments where they genuinely need their devices, and these strict rules were generally ignored. This was not out of rebellion, but rather because the expectation itself left little room for the realities of our busy lives.

Our community was quick to address this glaring flaw, and came up with an improved way to limit screen usage in the dining area as a community while still including those who may need to use their devices. When the current dining hall renovation was completed, the small alcove in the back of it which was once the Freshmen Section became a designated zone for those who wanted a space to use their devices while eating a meal. The rest of the dining hall was officially screen-free.

By keeping screen usage contained to a small area but still accessible in times of need, this reform has successfully rekindled a stronger sense of community and connection amongst students. The benefits of this new environment are evident, with a brighter buzz of chatter and laughter that fills the air as eyes are up and phones are down. It is more challenging than it may seem to simply place your phone face-down and leave it that way for just a few minutes. However, the emphasis on limiting screen-usage in the dining hall has helped students to do so with much more ease. The screen-limiting rules have been slowly but surely detaching the magnetic pull of students to their devices.

Despite the benefits of transforming our dining hall into a primarily screen-free area, the removal of the Freshmen Section has become a controversial topic amongst students. Some argue that the Freshmen Section played a transformative role in fostering and creating connections amongst the newest of our students. It can be helpful in easing uncertainty by providing a clearly defined space to meet others who are in that same stage, as oftentimes freshmen are still navigating unfamiliar social dynamics. However, the social support that this section provides is not extremely significant because friendships more frequently come from shared experiences and activities, not from placing students in the same section. Freshmen still gravitate towards one another in the dining hall, but without being confined to a single section and becoming more integrated into the larger community.

Campus culture is also much more welcoming when grades are encouraged to mix, and normalizing sitting with people outside of the freshmen class can help them to feel more included. Additionally, if the Freshmen Section returned, the dining hall would likely face two impractical choices. It would either have to become entirely screen free, which is unrealistic, or allow screens throughout the main space. Even if a different designated screen area was created, it would have to be in the main space rather than off to the side, which still disrupts the screen-free atmosphere.

All in all, the social benefits from a screen-free dining hall with the exception of an isolated area drastically outweigh those of bringing back the Freshmen Section. While this section provided a space that helped foster freshmen connections, changing the meal culture from staring at our phones to interacting with each other not only helps the freshmen, but also the entire community.

As students whose lives are intertwined with screens, the dining hall has become one of the few places on campus that reliably encourages real interactions. Bringing the Freshmen Section back would hand the dining hall back to our screens, and that is exactly the progress we cannot be willing to lose.

# What We Call Empowerment In the Feminist Movement is Just Objectification in Disguise

PRO: Shaleen Sheth

The modern feminist movement loves the language of choice, sexual liberation, and empowerment. These flashy terms have gradually worked their way into the fabric of neofeminist rhetoric, especially online, where empowerment is supposedly defined as a woman's ability to monetize her sexuality. However, this idea ignores the undeniable fact that many celebrated practices like pornography, prostitution, and popular platforms like OnlyFans, merely rebrand the objectification of women into a more socially acceptable framework.

At the center of this confusion is a misunderstanding of power and choice. Neofeminists who champion a "sex-positive environment" often assume any sexual decision a woman makes is automatically empowering. But empowerment is not just the ability to say yes. It requires safety, freedom from coercion, and genuine alternatives. These conditions are rarely present within prostitution, pornography, or other sexualized industries, where economic pressure and inequality dominate. When a woman's options are constrained by poverty or instability, treating her consent as liberation is misleading.

This logic inevitably leads directly to the commodification of women. Selling sexual access to a woman's body turns her into a product, an object to be marketed, distributed, and consumed by the highest bidder. In such a system, a woman's dignity and agency take the back seat to male demand. A culture that normalizes the buying and selling of women's bodies cannot simultaneously claim to respect their humanity. Yet neofeminist rhetoric insists that this commodification is, in fact, empowerment.

In reality, it undermines centuries of feminist progress by reinforcing the idea that women are valuable primarily for what they can provide sexually, rather than for their intellect and character.

The lived realities of prostitution and pornography are often ignored as well. There is a significant overlap between these industries and trafficking, and most women worldwide enter prostitution due to poverty, homelessness, addiction, or prior abuse, making them easy targets for manipulation by pimps and traffickers. Even in cases labeled “voluntary,” sex work is often a last resort in the absence of viable alternatives.

Moreover, the broader social impacts of these industries cannot be overlooked: pornography consumption increases aggression, lowers empathy, and encourages objectification of women, fostering the belief that women exist primarily for male use. Claims of empowerment rooted in these sexual industries ignore time-old ideals of emotional connection and respect that sustain healthy relationships.

It is essential to clarify here that women involved in prostitution are not the perpetrators of this system. They should not be vilified or punished. They are responding to limited and often brutal circumstances created by economic inequality and male demand.

Ultimately, neoliberal concepts of female empowerment are sexual desire painted over as freedom. When empowerment depends on being wanted sexually, purchased, or consumed, it ceases to be empowerment in any way, shape, or form. Pushing this objectification as empowerment risks setting the feminist movement back decades, reducing women once again to the miserable role of sexual objects rather than equal participants of society with full dignity and agency.

# What We Call Empowerment In the Feminist Movement is Just Objectification in Disguise

CON: Adrienne Prater

It can all be traced back to a bold red lip. The significance of red lipstick goes beyond its shade or availability. In the Victorian era, makeup, particularly red lipstick, was not worn because it was considered vulgar, sexual, and promiscuous.

However, in recent years, red lipstick has become a representation of female empowerment, deriving its significance from the reclamation of power from objectification. Equating empowerment and objectification overlooks examples like this, and by labeling empowerment as objectification, it oversimplifies the complexities and intentions of empowerment within the feminist movement.

The point of this article is not to argue the effectiveness or merits of empowerment in the feminist movement. It is to create a more nuanced conversation about how the conflation of empowerment and objectification diminishes the meaning of the feminist movement.

Women are objectified wherever we go. Whether on the street or in workplaces, scrutiny from men is an unfortunate reality. However, through appearance, women can control the narrative of objectification. Red lipstick is a feminist symbol because it subverts societal standards and encourages women not to be passive recipients of objectification. It shifts power by allowing women to be seen on their terms and to their benefit, reclaiming sexualization as a tool. The intent of the feminist movement is to encourage expression and choice across the spectrum, and the reclamation of women's bodies allows for beauty and sexuality standards to be redefined on our terms.

Women are also able to redefine their relationship with their bodies. When women reclaim their sexuality, it diverts the power of external judgment to internal self-esteem. This creates a society where women feel empowered to express themselves without fear of external pressures, helping to eliminate shame, anxiety, and low self-esteem because worth becomes associated with personal enjoyment rather than external validation.

The feminist movement has multiple intentions and pluralities that objectification simplifies. For example, while body positivity and sexual liberation movements, can be seen as self-objectification they are meant to divert control and power to women. By calling them objectifying, it reframes feminist movements to be male-centered, which is not the intention.

Looking at empowerment this way diminishes women's autonomy and the pluralities of how women experience empowerment. Even if their choices conform with current beauty standards, it is still a woman's choice and consensual, making it not self-objectification, but rather self-sexualization, which can be empowering.

The fundamental difference between empowerment and objectification is consent. The feminist movement encourages women to make choices, turning objectification into empowerment by making it an active choice. The power of objectification does not lie in visibility, but rather, who chooses it and why.

This important distinction allows for the complexities in feminism to exist while promoting a culture of choice. Because, while red lipstick is not inherently oppressive or liberating, it becomes meaningful through the right for women to choose, which is what the feminist movement is fighting for.

# Privacy is a privilege, not a right, in the digital world

PRO: Lady Olive Winston-Ashie

“Do you agree to the terms and conditions?” “Do you accept cookies?” “Share your information with third parties?” These questions greet every Choate researcher and internet user, people who could confidently swear they “know their rights”. Yet with each mindless tap on “Yes,” part of our supposedly fundamental right vanishes. The concept of digital privacy, the “right” that exists in name only, operates as a privilege in practice in the digital sphere, and collapses at the knees of the invisible bargain we have accepted with the internet: use a service in exchange for being tracked.

A right, in theory, is universally protected and unconditional, yet digital privacy is anything but; we have little control over who has our information, and there is virtually nothing that can be done to remove ourselves from this tradeoff. Everyone should have privacy; without it, we become vulnerable to surveillance, manipulation, and discrimination.

Privacy is undeniably important, but the question at hand is not whether privacy matters; rather, it is whether it is treated as a genuine right in our daily lives on screens. Sure, a hacker in a dark room shouldn't see our Amazon purchases, but simply declaring privacy as a moral and ideological entitlement in principle does not make it a right in practice. Digital privacy is not reliably protected or enforced, and exists only as long as platforms and systems choose not to steal our information for the day. Instead of a fundamental right, in a surveillance-built and surveillance-driven digital ecosystem, privacy is a privilege that is threatened by the contract that the internet (and you, by clicking “Agree”) signs by the millisecond.

For the other rights that we hold in the United States, like the right to a fair trial, the right to property, and freedom of speech, what makes them rights? They are protected by the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law" (the opening phrase to the First Amendment) that infringes upon said rights. The so-called "right" of digital privacy, by contrast, is not enforced through legislation or institutions.

Instead, laws, such as the one passed through the House Senate and signed by President Trump in 2017, allowed Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to collect and sell browsing history and other sensitive information to marketers and other companies (the very same third party sources you click agree to sell your information to) without prior customer permission and barred the FCC from creating "substantially similar" rules in the future.

If the surveillance-dependent system of the internet still honored privacy as a fundamental and inalienable right, why is it treated as a negotiable privilege? And why is it consistently undermined by all three branches of government? Automated monitoring of our private information is inseparable from the internet, and a "right" that can be switched off whenever it inconveniences corporations is not a right at all.

A privilege is not something that everyone is guaranteed. Privacy, once universal, now requires technical management, digital literacy, and paid tools to maintain (resources which most people don't have). For some, privacy does not exist; instead, it functions as a privilege available only to those with the resources or skills to protect it. Social media companies like Facebook already require a monthly subscription to keep data private, and for free websites, the cost is personal information (a "pay to play" system, regardless).

Groups targeted by algorithms and bias often face disproportionate surveillance, and losing privacy can be more threatening even if they have "nothing to hide". A world where privacy is a quid pro quo system is one where privacy is a privilege, available only to those who can afford it.

Unlike a protected and basic right to water, which may be inaccessible due to circumstance, digital privacy is actively conditioned on wealth, skill, and consent. A right that depends on having the resources, digital literacy, or time to maintain it, unfortunately, is not a right but a reserved privilege.

Privacy is a necessity that should be an entitlement, but if it were truly a right, it would be guaranteed, not negotiable. In a perfect world, web searches would be secret between you and your search engine, but in reality, privacy has become a privilege for those who can navigate complex digital systems or who can pay to opt out.

So next time you claim to know your rights, read (all 235 pages) of the terms and conditions and realize how much you have agreed to give up, and see if your “right” has ever been adequately protected.

# Privacy is a privilege, not a right, in the digital world

CON: Laveenya Sobna Seenivasagam

Imagine waking up and checking your phone. You scroll through social media, search for directions, shop online, and message friends all before breakfast. But how much of that activity is private? Who is watching, collecting, and profiting from your digital footprint? In today's world, nearly every click, swipe, or search is tracked.

Digital privacy refers to the protection of personal information online, including sensitive data such as search histories, location tracking, browsing behavior, and personal communications. Because digital technologies are so vital in everyday life, privacy in the digital world is no longer optional, it is crucial. Privacy should be recognized as a human right in the digital world, not a privilege only for those who can afford it.

A privilege is something granted selectively, not guaranteed to everyone. It can be taken away or made available only to those with the means to access it. Unfortunately, this is the reality of digital privacy in our world today. Major technology companies collect massive amounts of user data through apps, websites, and smart devices. Platforms such as Facebook, Google, Amazon, and TikTok monitor what users search, and monitor the time span that each user spends on a video before scrolling. This data is used to influence what advertisements, products, and even political content users see.

Most users technically agree to this data collection through terms and service agreements but how many people actually read them? These are incredibly long. Is consent truly meaningful if it is buried behind complexity and convenience?

When privacy depends on whether someone has the time, education, or legal knowledge to read contracts, it becomes a privilege rather than a right. Many technology companies treat privacy as a premium feature. Through data monetization, companies profit by selling user data to advertisers and third parties without users' approval or awareness. Some platforms offer paid subscriptions that promise refrain of tracking or increased security, promoting the idea that privacy must be purchased. Apple, for example, heavily markets its products as privacy-focused, using it as a key selling point.

When a user first thinks about an iPhone, one major pull factor is privacy. While this appears positive, it shows a reality that privacy is marketed as a luxury instead of being a basic standard across all digital platforms.

Privacy is already recognized as a human right by the United Nations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which protects individuals from arbitrary interference with their personal lives. In an increasingly digital world, this protection must extend online. Without digital privacy, individuals are exposed to identity theft and surveillance. These risks threaten not only personal safety but also freedom of expression. When people know they are being monitored, they may censor themselves, preventing democratic values.

As awareness of digital privacy issues increases, more people are taking steps to protect themselves by adjusting privacy settings and limiting data sharing. However, individual action is not enough. Laws are necessary to ensure equal protection for all users, regardless of income or technological knowledge.

Laws such as data protection regulations help establish boundaries for companies and hold them accountable. Without legal enforcement, privacy remains optional rather than guaranteed. One major challenge in enforcing digital privacy rights is the argument that data collection is essential for innovation and economic growth.

Governments and corporations often claim that unrestricted access to data allows for technological advancement and personalized services. However, innovation does not require exploitation. Ethical data use can coexist with strong privacy protections.

Another challenge is enforcing privacy on a global scale, as different countries have different laws and values. Additionally, many users unknowingly trade privacy for so-called “free” services, unaware that their personal data is the true cost.

Digital privacy must be recognized as a human right because it protects individuals from exploitation, inequality, and harm. When privacy is treated as a privilege, those who cannot afford paid protections or lack digital literacy are left vulnerable. Without any safety measures, the future risks becoming a world of constant surveillance and manipulation.

What kind of society allows personal data to be valued more than personal dignity? Recognizing digital privacy as a fundamental right ensures fairness, freedom, and security in an increasingly digital future.

# Masthead

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