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Equality Archive: Open Educational Resources as Feminist Praxis

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The big ambition of Equality Archive is to digitally present multidimensional issues, people, and history relevant to feminist thought and action in the United States.¹ As an Open Education Resource (OER), it blurs genre—analog and digital, scholarly and popular, theory and practice—to offer a free and reliable source of knowledge and activist opportunities for a generation trained to seek information via Google and YouTube. Equality Archive’s ongoing project is responsively built with open-source technology and adheres to the principles of fair use. Each entry is composed by a feminist professor, artist, or activist and originally peer reviewed by colleagues at the Feminist Press, now peer reviewed by its own collective of feminist specialists. The content created by Equality
Archive contributors is licensed under Creative Commons, which allows authors and creators to retain some rights to their work while releasing the content to the public domain so that it can be shared and used. As an OER, Equality Archive serves as a teaching and learning resource in which curious people can get involved with social action groups relevant to their interests.

By now, most people agree that feminism is intersectional. This thinking insists that gender inequality and its attendant oppressions such as racism, homophobia, rape culture, ableism, and xenophobia cannot be examined or addressed in isolation. More recently, feminist criticism has productively cautioned against the potential of intersectional theories to reinforce static discourses of difference, limiting more fluid considerations of gender, history, and space that feminist assemblages can offer. Our position follows this innovation in feminist praxis to build on both intersectionality and assemblage. The issues, persons, histories, and opportunities that organize Equality Archive’s individual assets function as dynamic collage. Each asset exists in relation to the others in a multilayered feminist ecology. Consequently, the curious user can simultaneously identify feminist knowledge within the temporal dynamic of history, among intersecting issues and attentions, and in relation to individual influences, and seek immediate opportunities to get involved.

As a digital theater for feminist intersections and assemblages, Equality Archive asserts that feminist thinking is simply not enough. It advocates the feminist praxis that thinking requires practice: thought must inspire action, since action—not just thinking—can transform the world. The current cultural trend that positions social media as a powerful source for information and political action is an invitation for Equality Archive’s digital initiative: it provides brief, accessible, fact-based assets that can be shared on Twitter, blogs, and digital media sites. Its connectivity to online content and to social media provides opportunities for users to publicly access and explore information presented in multiple modes. It builds on UNESCO’s invitation to maximize the value of open content, particularly in “its ability to be reused, revised, remixed, and redistributed.”

As a digital space, Equality Archive embodies feminist practice by utilizing an education-oriented server hosting company, building with an open-source web framework, and drawing on an extensive collection of digital community resources. Reclaim Hosting provides its server space, database, and web management tools. Founded and run by former academics and administrators, Reclaim is dedicated to providing educators with the ability to own and control their own data and web domains. Maintaining ownership of data lends a sense of
control and empowerment that allows us to interrogate the boundaries and formats of traditional open educational resources.

Using open source tools in Reclaim’s web interface and Cyberduck, a file transfer protocol software program, we installed WordPress, an open-source web framework and content management system. As an open-source project, WordPress can be modified by anyone; thus millions of individuals have participated in the development of the framework. Though on a smaller scale, the type of collaboration exemplified by WordPress mirrors the collaboration that drives Equality Archive. Just as the WordPress framework is often updated to improve and expand its functionality, Equality Archive regularly adds and revises content, bringing together diverse contributors who add to the rich history of sex and gender equality in the United States. In this way, Equality Archive’s architecture is a flexible and adaptive platform in the same way that feminist knowledge continues to evolve.

Since the source code is open and editable, each individual installation of the framework, including the Equality Archive, is completely customizable. To build and design Equality Archive, we drew on the vast collection of resources provided by the WordPress.org community. Design and functionality can be customized using themes and plugins that sit on top of the basic framework. Knowing our audience would largely be young people and students, we chose a responsive, media-centric theme that highlights image and video content when viewed on any device. To expand functionality and draw users to the site, we utilized plugins that added an image slider to the home page, allowed users to continuously scroll in order to browse all the archive entries, and incorporated sharing buttons to allow users to post Equality Archive entries to other platforms.

To organize the archive and optimize navigation through the site, we developed a taxonomy of entries using WordPress tags and categories. This taxonomy results in an intersected and interconnected network of linked entries that can be browsed in multiple ways. Just as feminism intersects with questions of race, gender, class, and sexuality, Equality Archive connects words, images, and sound to create meaning that more closely represents the multiple layers of experience digital mediums can provide. One can find information by browsing images or search the site using keywords located in the tag cloud. The search window can help a curious person seek a specific historical topic, issue, or person, such as “compulsory heterosexuality,” “Battle of the Sexes,” “transgender,” “Georgia Gilmore,” or “The Equal Rights Amendment.”
Our purpose is to use the power of the Internet to share feminist knowledge for free and to inspire social action. Our conversation with digital media professionals outside the academy prompted us to imagine a feminist resource friendly to a generation whose access to information comes to them from their mobile phones, and at the same time, to offer direction toward more complex, detailed information available in books. Now, multimodality as a formal concern is part of the theory, or the thinking, behind Equality Archive as a feminist tool for critical consciousness and social action that is infinitely scalable. It takes seriously the notion that diversity in knowledge appears as diversity in form.

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**NOTES**


4. For a blog example, see: https://fsotn肠道eastern.wordpress.com/2016/09/25/meeting-92116-riding-the-waves/. For a digital media site example, see: http://mashable.com/2016/03/31/feminist-leaders-you-missed/.