

“Reimagining Activist Data: A Critique of the STOP AAPI HATE Reports through a Cultural Rhetorics Lens”

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Abstract

STOP AAPI HATE reports, which are activist technical communication documents, engage with the field of cultural rhetorics by sharing AAPI stories and by advocating for resistance against dominant anti-AAPI narratives in coronavirus-related media. This article uses a cultural rhetorics methodology to critically examine how the STOP AAPI HATE initiative gathers and presents data in these reports, evaluating how the current document design limits access for AAPI users. By reimagining the presentation of STOP AAPI HATE report data, this article demonstrate how a cultural rhetorics approach can bolster both the accessibility and reach of technical communication documents for vulnerable user communities.

Introduction

At the start of 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak quickly became a critical international issue, sowing fear as the disease spread indiscriminately into communities around the world. As the World Health Organization classified COVID-19 as a pandemic, the general public began to shift its focus towards the site of the initial outbreak: the Chinese city of Wuhan. This widely-accepted fact of COVID-19’s Chinese origin quickly morphed into a central point of racial blame in popular media conversations. In their initial COVID-19 coverage, many news outlets initially complemented their articles with images of Chinese citizens wearing protective face masks, even if the content itself had nothing to do with China. In his press briefings, United States President Donald Trump repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as a “Chinese virus” before explicitly blaming China as the pandemic began to negatively impact the U.S.

Historically, the Trump administration’s negative treatment of China mirrored the U.S.’s xenophobic attitude towards Chinese immigrant railroad workers in the late 1800s. According to Reny and Barreto (2020), “Chinese immigrants have been stereotyped as culturally exotic and as dirty acute vectors of disease” (p. 7). Due in part to these inaccurate stereotypes, the U.S. government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the first law to bar an immigrant population based on its ethnicity. Additionally, the nationally-backed Geary Act of 1892 renewed the terms of the Exclusion Act and required all Chinese Americans to carry proof of U.S. residence. If a Chinese immigrant failed to produce this proof, the immigrant would face either deportation or a sentence of hard labor. Both of

these restrictive laws, not fully repealed until 1943, serve as examples of longstanding institutionalized racism against Chinese immigrants in the U.S. The current COVID-19 pandemic has reignited this anti-Chinese, contagion-based xenophobia in America. With anti-Chinese rhetoric quickly being disseminated and normalized by media and authority figures, *all* AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) are once again becoming targets for racial abuse.

As an Asian American graduate student and full-time office worker, I experienced this anti-AAPI attitude firsthand when a worker in my building explicitly attributed my small cough to the “Chinese coronavirus,” encouraging their other coworkers to avoid me for the rest of the day. Although this was a singular occurrence, I remember still feeling hurt, lost, and alone days after the encounter. Thankfully, I was taking my first graduate course in cultural rhetorics at this time, where we routinely discussed the field’s four core pillars: stories, relationality, constellation, and decoloniality. Inspired by these conversations, I began thinking about digitally telling my own story, or sharing my own experience within an online community. My search for this space eventually guided me to the STOP AAPI HATE website, a digital activist initiative that gives victims of anti-AAPI rhetoric a chance to share their stories with the public via submitted “incident reports.” On a mostly consistent schedule, STOP AAPI HATE releases a summative technical document which outlines trends within submitted incident reports, while also sharing selected AAPI accounts within those reports.

In this article, I assert that the STOP AAPI HATE reports are technical communication documents that engage with the pillars of cultural rhetorics by sharing AAPI stories and by giving voice to resistance that opposes dominant anti-AAPI narratives in coronavirus-related media. Using these pillars, along with decolonial, Indigenous, and feminist theory, to inform my methodology, I then critically examine how STOP AAPI HATE gathers and presents data in these reports, explaining how these current practices unknowingly limit user access to valuable AAPI stories. Ultimately, by suggesting solutions that reimagine the presentation of STOP AAPI HATE summative report data, I will demonstrate how a cultural rhetorics approach can bolster both the accessibility and reach of technical communication documents.

Outlining the STOP AAPI HATE Initiative

Purpose and Impact

Before examining the myriad connections between the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports and the field of cultural rhetorics, I will introduce the initiative’s specific purpose and involvement within AAPI communities. In response to the rising amount of anti-AAPI rhetoric within the U.S., the California-based Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council (AP3CON), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and San Francisco Department of Asian American Studies launched The

STOP AAPI HATE website on March 13th, 2020. The website serves as a reporting center for anti-AAPI violence, offering AAPls the opportunity to submit digital “incident reports” (or personal accounts) to share and make visible their experiences. According to Choi and Kulkarni (2020), the STOP AAPI HATE digital reporting center aims “... to collect and track incidents of anti-Asian American and Pacific islander hate... in California and throughout the country. The reporting center will enable individuals ... to share their stories” (para. 1).

As of May 2020, two months since the site’s initial launch, affected AAPls have already submitted nearly 1,500 stories to the STOP AAPI HATE initiative. Using these stories as data, the initiative has produced three technical summative reports, which feature incident report data trends and selected AAPl accounts, over that time span. According to Choi and Kulkarni (2020), “... the collected data will allow [STOP AAPI HATE] to assess the extent and magnitude of these incidents and to develop strategic interventions” (para. 3). Considering both its short-term purpose (AAPl story sharing) and long-term goals (policy changes to combat AAPl racism), it is clear that the STOP AAPI HATE initiative is residing in an intriguing activist niche, with its technical, data-driven summative reports advocating for AAPl justice in these uncertain times.

Incident Report Forms

Since the sharing of stories is central to the STOP AAPI HATE objective, it is necessary to briefly outline the incident report submission process. As of May 2020, the incident reporting form is available on the main STOP AAPI HATE website via drop-down menu or click-through link. The forms are digitally accessible in 12 different languages, and the form itself presents the submitter with various required response prompts using Google Forms. For reference, Figure 1 shows a screen capture of the main reporting site, while Figure 2 shows a section of the incident reporting form (in Korean).

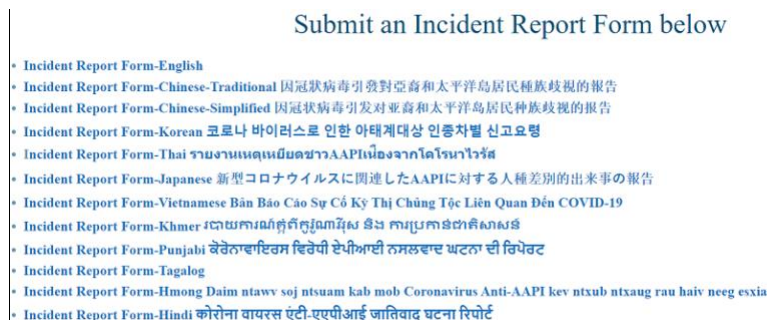


Figure 1: As of May 2020, the STOP AAPI HATE Incident Report home page provides users with hypertext links to the incident report forms, available in 12 different languages.

인종차별이 코로나 바이러스가 원인이라고 추측되는 이유(Suspected Reason for Covid-19Discrimination) 복수응답가능 (Click all that apply) *

인종 (Race)

민족 (Ethnicity)

성별 (Gender)

언어 (Language)

종교 (Religion)

음식 (Food)

외모나 마스크 (Face Mask or Clothing)

Description of Incident (인종차별 사건에 대해 구체적으로 서술하세요) *

최소 2-3 문장으로 해당 사건에 대해 서술하세요 (Please Provide 2-3 sentences describing the incident)

Your answer _____

Figure 2: The STOP AAPI HATE incident report forms ask the user to fill out a variety of checkbox and free-write responses. In this portion of the Korean-translated form, users are required to submit their suspected reason for and description of the incident, as of May 2020.

The reporting form requires the user to supply personal identifying information, such as first and last name, ethnicity, age, email address and city/state location (which, per the initiative, is kept confidential). The user is then required to supply the date/time of the incident, classify the type of incident, and provide a concise account of the incident. Once the form is submitted, the user is taken to a screen that thanks them for their submission and gives them an opportunity to edit their response. Upon clicking out of that screen, the user officially completes the incident report submission process. With nearly 1,500 submissions received as of May 2020, the initiative does caution that it will not be able to address or reply to all received submissions. Interestingly, the user is not sent an email confirming their submission, despite being required to provide their email address. The initiative presumably stores the user-submitted incident reports in a digital database before collating said submissions in its end deliverable: the STOP AAPI HATE summative report.

Summative Reports

The STOP AAPI HATE summative report is a technical document that primarily serves to convert a specific time period's submitted incident report forms into statistical data, using tables and graphs to visualize incident trends. Additionally, the summative report publishes selected AAPI stories, chosen from that time period's received forms. Each summative report can be broken down into three central components: a press release section that lists the most prevalent trends

from that week’s incident reports, tabled or graphed data gathered from incident report responses, and categorized AAPI stories. Highlighting a particular summative report—covering dates from March 19th to April 15th, 2020—as an example, one can see how the STOP AAPI HATE initiative chooses to interpret data from the submitted incident report forms. In the “press release” section, the initiative highlights specific data trends within the report, consistently referring to the number of received incident submissions while comparing the newly collected data to previous summative reports (Figure 3).

- Emerging trends include:
- Almost 100 reports daily, with 5.5% from limited-English speakers
 - Women are three times more likely to report harassment than men
 - Asian Americans of different ethnicities are racially profiled; 61% of the reports are from non-Chinese
 - Verbal harassment and name calling are the most commonly reported type of discrimination, making up over 2/3 of reports
 - With shelter-in-place policies, Asian Americans are more likely to face coronavirus discrimination in businesses, especially stores, rather than at schools and public transit as previously observed

Figure 3: This section, printed in the March 23rd STOP AAPI HATE summative report, outlines some notable data trends in the incident report form submissions.

In the “tabled/graphed data” section, the initiative illustrates the statistical data gleaned from the incident report forms, charting the different sites, reasons, and types of anti-AAPI discrimination using percentage tables and simple bar graphs (Figure 4).

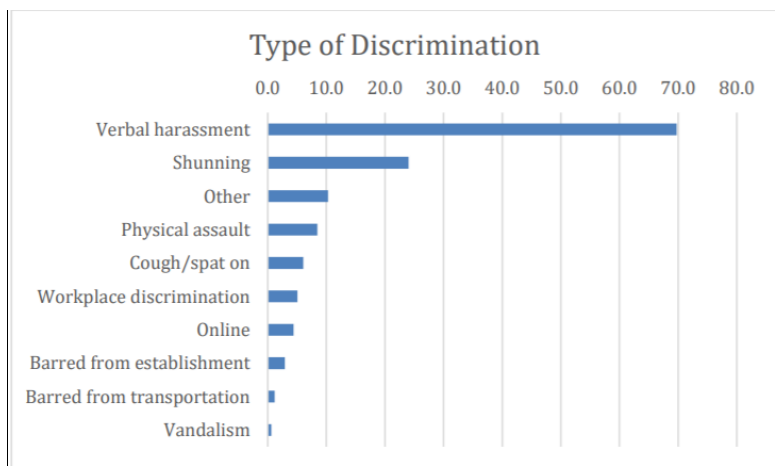


Figure 4: This graph, printed in the April 23rd STOP AAPI HATE summative report, shows the types of discrimination highlighted by AAPI victims in their incident report submissions. The Y-axis lists the type of discrimination (ranked by frequency), and the X-axis shows the percentage of submitted reports.

Interestingly, the initiative switches to a pie graph visual when charting the ethnicities, ages, and locations of incident report submitters, presumably because of the abundance of options (Figure 5).

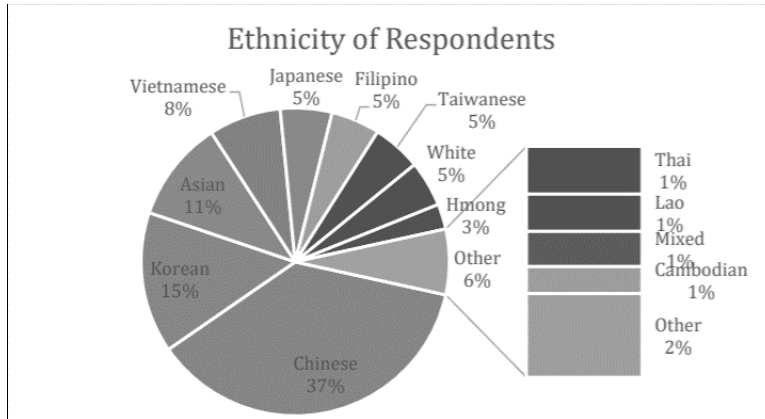


Figure 5: This graph, printed in the April 23rd STOP AAPI HATE summative report, charts the ethnicities of incident report submitters.

Finally, in the “AAPI stories” section, the initiative highlights around 20 specific incidents of AAPI discrimination per summative report, categorizing these stories by their specific type of discrimination (Figure 6).

Physical Assault

- I was getting in my car after shopping wearing a mask and gloves. A truck drove by and threw a [fast food franchise] drink on my back and yelled “hey chink, you’re f--king nasty.”
- Middle aged Caucasian woman walking around inside post office mumbling “f--king Chinese” around my wife (Chinese) and threw a bag at her. Also walked up to window to give all Asian employees the middle finger. My wife was distraught and left.

Figure 6: These two stories, published in the April 23rd STOP AAPI HATE summative report, were listed under the “Physical Assault” discrimination category.

Although non-English options exist for incident reporting submission, it is unclear if non-English versions of the summative reports are available for public viewing. Ultimately, given these descriptors and due to their use of statistical data to convey information clearly to stakeholders invested in AAPI issues, the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports can be considered as technical communication documents.

Linking the STOP AAPI HATE Reports and Cultural Rhetorics

With context now established, I will now show how the STOP AAPI HATE summative report, a technical document in both content and design, links with the field of cultural rhetorics. In general terms, cultural rhetorics' central assertion is one that "[views]...rhetorics as always-already cultural and cultures as persistently rhetorical" (Powell et al., 2014, p. 3). By viewing rhetoric and cultures as interconnected entities, cultural rhetoricians focus on how all cultures are rhetorical and vice versa, exposing how certain systems of power influence (and often oppress) languages and practices within various communities. Cultural rhetorics can help clarify the treatment of AAPIs during the COVID-19 crisis: a culture of xenophobia and manufactured anxiety, encouraged by popular media and the federal government, normalized the use of anti-AAPI rhetoric within local communities across the U.S.

In practice, cultural rhetorics aims to prove that all cultures and rhetorical traditions have value, not just the dominant ones that have been privileged and normalized within society. The cultural rhetorics field compares this inclusive attitude to the idea of "constellation," which encourages all communities (even those who are presently silenced) to share their unique perspectives with the world (Powell et al., 2014, p. 5). Additionally, this practice of constellation aims to demonstrate that all cultural knowledges exist in a shared network of meaning and thus have equal value to the world.

Ultimately, an important goal of cultural rhetorics is to "even out" unequal cultural power balances with this constellative mindset: critiquing powerful and oppressive rhetorical traditions while also elevating and making visible the voices of disempowered or oppressed communities. Knowing this, it is clear that the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports are doing cultural rhetorics work by providing the victimized AAPI community with activism-oriented data that seeks to quell rising anti-AAPI rhetorics. More specifically, the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports engage with various tenets of cultural rhetorics by sharing stories and providing embodied AAPI experiences in their rebuttal to dominant anti-AAPI sentiments in the wake of the coronavirus.

Both the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports and cultural rhetorics as a practice place great importance on stories and storytelling. According to Maracle (1990), "...story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people" (p. 3). By allowing people in oppressed communities the opportunity to share their unique experiences and perspectives, stories provide valuable insight into the overall mindsets of cultural communities. In other words, these AAPI stories, when viewed collectively, form a constellation and shared network of meaning, producing more-informed insights and complicated conclusions. With its incident reporting forms, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative empowers racially abused AAPIs by inviting them to submit their own stories, and, in essence, raise their voices from within a U.S. society

that has recently taken to negatively stereotyping their broader cultural community.

Even though these submitted stories detail seemingly everyday occurrences from anonymous authors, cultural rhetorics recognizes the power of stories to collectively elevate the overall voice of a community and drive social change. According to Cruikshank (2002), “narrative is grounded in...everyday life and capable of addressing large questions about the consequences of historical events” (p. 5). While Cruikshank is not specifically a cultural rhetorics scholar, her emphasis on the importance of narrative here aligns with cultural rhetorics’ respective elevation of stories. With its collection of submissions, STOP AAPI HATE is able to point out the real-world consequences of anti-AAPI rhetoric in a COVID-19 environment, detailing various data trends concerning the treatment of AAPIs in each report. STOP AAPI HATE is effectively demonstrating an active cultural rhetorics approach by constellating and sharing stories to change the overall societal conversations surrounding AAPI communities.

Both the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports and cultural rhetorics show that it is important to critically listen to dominant stories while tuning our ears for unheard stories as well. As mentioned in the previous paragraph regarding a constellation’s shared network of meaning, cultural rhetorics asserts that “it’s important to keep all traditions/stories/histories in play” when conducting research (Powell et al., 2014, p. 8). Cultural rhetorics primarily uses this call for equivalent multiplicity to counter academic reliance on singular and/or dominant traditions or histories. However, the field’s elevation of multiplicity can also be extended to stories and storytelling. For example, Powell et al. (2014) state, “...we have to have a solid understanding of as many stories as possible if we’re going to be able to say anything at all about the practice of rhetorics over the past 10,000 years” (p. 7, emphasis mine). As evidenced by this statement, cultural rhetorics prioritizes an academic shift away from dominant traditions, histories, and stories, favoring multiple, equally-important options instead.

Instead of elevating a single story, both cultural rhetorics and the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports focus on giving stories (plural) equal visibility. By displaying a collection of AAPI stories that detail various types of racial abuse from many different personal perspectives, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative practices this “decentralization” by positioning shared stories equally in each of its summative reports—no one story gets more attention than the others. Ultimately, both STOP AAPI HATE and cultural rhetorics understand the importance of recognizing the multiple stories of those affected by U.S. xenophobia in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aside from engaging with story, cultural rhetorics and the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports are also linked through their recognition of embodied experience and relationality. Specifically, when situated in cultural rhetorics, the concept of embodiment focuses on how research and story affect the bodies and

relationships of both researchers and community members (Riley-Mukavetz, 2014, p. 109). Many first-hand accounts highlighted within the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports focus specifically on AAPI bodies and reactions against them.

For example, one AAPI account in the April 23rd report states, as shown in Figure 6, “I was getting in my car after shopping wearing a mask and gloves. A truck drove by and threw a...drink on my back and yelled ‘hey chink, you’re f--king nasty’” (Jeung & Nham, 2020, p. 10). This is a clear example of an embodied experience: the victim tells of how they were discriminated against based on their outward appearance (“mask and gloves”), while also describing how their own body was physically (“drink on my back”) and verbally (“chink”) assaulted.

This embodied experience demonstrates how the STOP AAPI HATE initiative encourages relationality between its readership and the affected AAPI community. According to Riley Mukavetz (2014), “... practicing relationality is partly about how we embody and carry stories and relationships with us, it’s important to recognize how stories impact bodies” (p. 116). Cultural rhetoricians use embodiment and relationality to reveal commonalities between constellated communities and themselves, developing newly-informed knowledge from this shared pool of experiences throughout the process.

By sharing anonymous embodied accounts, the STOP AAPI HATE report indirectly encourages the reader to imagine themselves (more specifically, their own body) in the AAPI victim’s place, aiming to foster empathy for the AAPI lived experience. According to Mignolo & Walsh (2018), one of the goals of relationality is to “...enter into conversations and build understandings that both cross geopolitical locations and colonial differences” (p. 1). This point is particularly relevant because the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports have free digital availability, allowing for a wider range of people to read about and relate to lived AAPI experiences in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the summative reports are available online, they can presumably be disseminated all over the country (and more boldly, even the world), exposing new readers to the hardships facing AAPI communities. With its embodied accounts in digital circulation, the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports use relationality as a far-reaching tactic to undo inaccurate AAPI stereotypes, changing the negative perception of AAPIs in other communities. The STOP AAPI HATE summative report shares a wide variety of racist encounters towards AAPIs in each technical document, encouraging other communities to relate to AAPI experiences in a COVID-19-impacted world and ultimately seeking to form more informed relationships with dominant communities.

Importantly, I believe that the STOP AAPI summative reports, in their present forms, are only loosely connected with the cultural rhetorics pillar of decoloniality. As Driskill states, decolonization “... includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation”

(Powell et al., 2014, p. 8). Further supporting Driskill's point, Tuck and Yang (2012) also assert that "decolonization is not a metaphor," contending that decolonization only concerns itself with the issues of Indigenous land repatriation and sovereignty (p. 1). Based on these two clarifying statements, the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports cannot be labeled as decolonial documents because they do not primarily engage with the reclamation of physical, nor Indigenous, land.

However, while these reports are not specifically decolonial, I argue that the STOP AAPI HATE reports allow marginalized AAPIs to reclaim space and fight for sovereignty, aligning with decolonial principles. While the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports do not engage with the reclamation of physical land, I contend that the initiative as a whole allows marginalized AAPIs to carve out a much-needed digital space online, where they can freely share their stories and counter dominant racist narratives within the U.S. In regard to AAPI sovereignty, Alban (2018) asserts that decolonial resistance happens when human groups make visible racialization, exclusion, and marginalization, prioritizing dignity and self-determination (Mignolo & Walsh, p. 16). With its efforts to raise awareness of anti-AAPI racism and to enact future policy changes using statistical data and personal stories, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative has created a space of resistance, using its summative reports to destabilize the negative, harmful stereotypes surrounding AAPI communities and people. Ultimately, while I contend that the initiative fights for similar outcomes, such as the reclamation of space and sovereignty within an oppressive system, I also recognize that STOP AAPI HATE reports fail to engage directly with cultural rhetorics' concept of decolonization. However, in the following section, I will explain how decolonial theory actually helps to inform the cultural rhetorics methodology that I use to critique these same reports.

Assembling a Cultural Rhetorics Methodology: Decolonial, Indigenous, and Feminist Theory

My methodology draws upon decolonial, Indigenous, and feminist theory to both critique and then reimagine STOP AAPI HATE's data documentation initiative as a robust cultural rhetorics project. I include these three different theories because they all connect to the pillars of cultural rhetorics (and my work) in their own distinct ways. For instance, by factoring these three perspectives into my critique, I thoroughly detail the problematic limitations of the initiative's data collection, storage, and presentation practices. Additionally, using this valuable three-part methodology, I describe how my cultural rhetorics-inspired reimagining of the STOP AAPI HATE initiative can provide marginalized AAPIs with more transparent story submission options (decolonial theory), engage in collaborative and relational practices with AAPI communities (Indigenous theory), and uncover more previously-silenced AAPI stories (feminist theory). In the following sections, I further explain how each theory connects back to my cultural rhetorics

methodology, thus influencing my evaluations of the STOP AAPI HATE initiative and summative reports.

Decolonial Theory

Recently, decolonial theory, which helps inform the cultural rhetorics pillar of decoloniality, has gained increasing prevalence within the broader technical communication field. For instance, Haas (2018) contends that decolonial theory must be factored into effective technical communication practices, stating that technical communicators “...must investigate how [they] may be complicit in, implicated by, or transgress the oppressive colonial and capitalistic influences and effects of globalization” (Cobos et al., p. 145). Importantly, Haas’s call for critical self-examination within the field includes technical communicators who are working on digital data collection projects, like the STOP AAPI HATE initiative. While STOP AAPI HATE aims to intervene in the xenophobic effects of a globalized pandemic, the project also needs to consider how its data collection and presentation practices silence marginalized AAPI perspectives, “...[functioning] as agents of oppression—albeit often unwittingly—for Others” (Cobos et al., 2018, p. 145).

Inspired by Haas’s recommendation to examine technical communication projects through the lens of decoloniality, I use decolonial theory within my cultural rhetorics methodology to critically examine how the initiative’s technical communicators collect, store, and present the stories that the users (victims of AAPI racial violence) provide to the STOP AAPI HATE project. To reimagine the STOP AAPI HATE initiative as a project that works towards a more decolonially-minded future, I draw inspiration from decolonial theorists, such as Walter D. Mignolo. Mignolo (2011) states, “Decoloniality means decolonial options, confronting and delinking from coloniality, or the colonial matrix of power” (p. xxvii). Mignolo’s emphasis on “decolonial options” ties into cultural rhetorics’ emphasis on the inclusion and equivalent value of all cultures, not just the cultures situated in the present colonial matrix of power: western, capitalist society. In my cultural rhetorics reimagination of STOP AAPI HATE, I suggest various “decolonial options” that aim to improve the project’s data collection and presentation methods, helping it become a more activist-oriented initiative in the process. By offering critical feedback and by suggesting an embrace of decolonial options, I offer hope that STOP AAPI HATE may function more successfully as “...[an agent] of knowledge-making and change” for their silenced user communities (Cobos et al., 2018, p. 145).

Indigenous Theory

During my evaluation of the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports, I paid close attention to how the initiative engaged with the ideas of “reciprocity and collaboration,” two tenets of Indigenous research practices. Reciprocity and collaboration are two strategies that link back to the cultural rhetorics tenet of

relationality, with both encouraging a “balancing of power” between both the researcher and the researched subject. By viewing the researcher and researched as equally valuable members of the knowledge-making process, these two moves also delink from traditional colonial ideas of research, in which one dominant party extracts information from an “othered” subject. Wilson (2008) states, “Respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology” (p. 77). Collaboration echoes relationality by fostering this sense of mutual respect and responsibility, encouraging the researcher to work with and alongside their research subjects to create meaningful projects for both parties. Additionally, Smith (1999) states that the idea of reciprocity implies that the researched subject is involved and informed in all stages of the research project, asserting that “... consent indicates trust and the assumption is that the trust will not only be reciprocated but constantly negotiated -- a dynamic relationship rather than a static decision” (p. 136). In my own project, by characterizing the STOP AAPI HATE initiative as a research entity and AAPI victims as the researched, affected community, I am able to see if and how the initiative engages with the Indigenous research tenets of reciprocity, collaboration, and trust in its interactions with the vulnerable community of AAPI storytellers.

Feminist Theory

In my critique, I also use feminist rhetorics theory to explore how the STOP AAPI HATE initiative treats the stories told by previously silenced AAPI victims in these pandemic-stricken times. According to Jones Royster (2003), one of the main objectives of feminist rhetorics is the “... recovering, re-ordering, re-situating, re-visioning, and re-creating [of] the lives, experiences, contributions, and achievements of various non-normative subjects...” (p. 161). Feminist rhetorics aligns itself with cultural rhetorics, as both perspectives seek to elevate new voices and cultures as new options in the face of dominant, oppressive, and patriarchal systems of power. Additionally, Novotny and Gagnon (2019) further reinforce the connection between feminist rhetoric and story, stating that “... stories are sacred and must be honored as such once transcribed, analyzed, and revised” (p. 74). This concept of respect towards both individual storytellers and their stories, previously mentioned within Indigenous theory, discourages the presentation of story as numeric, generalized data. Informed by these perspectives, my methodology and ensuing critique interface with cultural rhetorics, positioning the STOP AAPI HATE initiative as the “center of power” while also drawing the concepts of reciprocity, collaboration, and respect to evaluate the initiative's treatment of vulnerable AAPI people and their stories in a pandemic-stricken global setting.

In the sections that follow, I first draw from my cultural rhetorics methodology (incorporating decolonial, Indigenous, and feminist theory) to critique the STOP AAPI HATE initiative's current data collection and presentation practices. Then, I use this methodology to suggest ways in which the STOP AAPI HATE initiative

(and other similar activist-oriented documentation projects) could reimagine their aforementioned practices to fully empower their marginalized communities. Importantly, both my critiques and reimagination of the STOP AAPI HATE project are based on the May 2020 version of the initiative's website.

Critiquing the STOP AAPI HATE Reports

With explanations for this project's context, cultural rhetorics connections, and corresponding methodology, I am now prepared to offer informed critiques of the STOP AAPI HATE initiative's data collection and presentation methods. The following critiques, drawn from my cultural rhetorics methodology, focus on how the STOP AAPI HATE initiative uses the sensitive stories of AAPI victims during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, I would like to turn a critical cultural rhetorics-informed lens towards the initiative's data/story gathering process (the incident reporting form) and the presentation of such data/stories (in the summative report, a technical document). While all three summative reports are markedly similar in terms of format and presentation, for clarity's sake I will be focusing my critiques on the incident reporting form as it appeared on May 1st, 2020.

Data Gathering Critiques

With its incident report form, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative generalizes and erases nuance from AAPI stories by presenting the user with an abundance of "checkbox questions" and by offering limited space for free writing. "Checkbox questions" require the user to select their answers from a provided list of one or more prewritten choices. For example, the incident reporting form requires the user to answer "checkbox questions" regarding the site of discrimination, type of discrimination, and suspected reason for discrimination, even though all three questions could yield unique, layered answers (see Figure 2).

In technical communication, the checkbox-question tactic generally makes data interpretation easier by readily sorting user submissions into easily discernible categories. However, in this context, where the central content of the gathered data consists of stories told by a vulnerable population, the use of checkbox questions does not allow that population to tell their own unique, silenced stories. Innis (2002) claims that "Colonial projects ... move forward by devising and reinforcing categories...routinely silencing local traditions that do not fit [in]" (Cruikshank, pp. 6-7). I am by no means labeling the STOP AAPI HATE initiative a "colonial project"; however, it is clear that checkbox categorization does effectively generalize stories that don't fit cleanly into said categories. It should be noted that the incident report form does encourage the user to check more than one box if their experiences apply to multiple categories, and the "Type of Discrimination" field contains an "other" option where the user can freely write out their own discrimination experience. However, the presence of suggested

checkbox options indirectly implies that there are preferred, dominant answers to these questions.

Additionally, near the bottom of the incident reporting form, there is space for a user to freely write out their own “Description of Incident” (as shown in Figure 2). While this prompt does allow for direct storytelling, it also imposes digital limitations on the storyteller. For example, the prompt instructs the user to keep their responses to “2-3 sentences,” effectively restricting their storytelling space. Moreover, the prompt only provides a single “fill-in-the blank” line for responses, indirectly curtailing the length of typed responses. Upon looking critically at the incident report form’s reliance on checkbox questions and limited free-writing space through a cultural rhetorics lens that prizes the inclusivity of all perspectives, I assert that the form’s current structure discourages the user from telling their own unique stories.

By using primarily the English language on the STOP AAPI HATE website, incident reports, and summative reports, the initiative risks silencing the stories and experiences of non-English speakers. Despite offering access to its incident reports in 12 different languages as of May 2020, it is clear that the STOP AAPI HATE initiative consistently uses the English language to convey their activist messages in other areas of the site. For example, the AP3CON website, which contains the main link to the incident report forms, is primarily available to the public in English. Although many current web browsers (such as Chrome, Firefox, and Microsoft Edge) offer the option to translate web text to other languages, some important elements of the AP3CON website, such as the “COVID-19 Resources” tab, cannot utilize these translation options due to their HTML formatting.

This translation issue also extends to the STOP AAPI HATE technical documents, as both the summative reports and press releases are written in English and disseminated as PDF files, which cannot be freely translated into other languages. The limited availability of non-English documents means that both summative report data and general news of this initiative often fails to reach non-English speaking AAPI communities, thus limiting their access to STOP AAPI HATE’s valuable movement. In the initiative’s first summative report, published on March 25th, 2020, only 5.5% of incident reporters classified themselves as limited English speakers (Jeung, p. 1). This English-speaking statistic, which interestingly isn’t brought up in future summative reports, demonstrates how this initiative’s reliance on the English language has hampered its positive influence and reach towards silenced, non-English speaking AAPIs.

By only offering the reports and press releases in English, the initiative is effectively restricting non-English speaking access to their movement, silencing potential stories that could be told from those populations. Additionally, it should be noted that each non-English incident report form actually still uses English for

the prompt labels, noting the appropriate translations in brackets (see Figure 2). This design choice to list the English translation first, before the native language, seemingly implies that English is the dominant language of the forms, with other languages viewed as secondary additions. Again, this choice indirectly discourages non-English speakers from submitting responses in their native languages, reinforcing a dichotomy where English is the dominant, preferred language choice over its non-English counterparts.

Even though the STOP AAPI HATE initiative provides a disclaimer regarding the confidentiality of user information on its incident report form, the movement showcases a lack of reciprocity by being unclear about how it will utilize that information. As Johnson (2016) states, “User advocacy is not fully enacted by merely making objects easy to use but also includes respecting users enough to convey effects of use so they can make informed decisions” (Jones et al., p. 218). While incident report forms are readily available to much of the AAPI population, the initiative remains somewhat vague on how these AAPI stories (and other required user information) will be utilized beyond the summative reports, stating that its main mission is “... to provide resources for impacted individuals and to advocate for policies and programs dedicated to curtailing racial profiling” (Choi and Kulkarni, 2020, para. 4). However, to my knowledge, as of May 2020, the initiative has not yet released specifics of these resources, policies, and programs to the public.

From the cultural rhetorics perspective of reciprocity, the STOP AAPI HATE is not, according to Smith (1999), “reporting back” to its users regarding progress towards its goals--users submit vulnerable stories and hear silence on the other end (p. 15). As a personal example, when I submitted my own incident report form to the initiative, I received nothing in return, not even a simple email acknowledgement (which, to my knowledge, can even be automated) of my submission. This current unequal transaction model, in which an AAPI user submits a valuable story only to hear silence on the other end, further clashes with Wilson's aforementioned Indigenous research tenets of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (2008, p. 77).

The need for transparency is made more urgent by the initiative's intrusive incident reporting requirements. For instance, to successfully submit a report, the user must first provide their first name, last name, age, email address, ethnicity, state, and zip code within the form. And while the initiative does state that this information will be kept confidential, with this information used for “data purposes,” they remain vague regarding their use and storage of such sensitive digital information. In return for offering their sensitive information and stories, users should at least be able to expect a heightened degree of transparency from the STOP AAPI HATE initiative regarding data usage, storage, and broader organizational progress in these uncertain times.

Data Presentation Critiques

My primary critique in this section centers around the STOP AAPI HATE initiative's practice of selectively publishing stories within each of their summative reports, effectively silencing many AAPI voices and perspectives in the process. As seen in Figure 7, an alarmingly limited number of AAPI stories (approximately 4% of all submitted stories) get published within the summative reports.

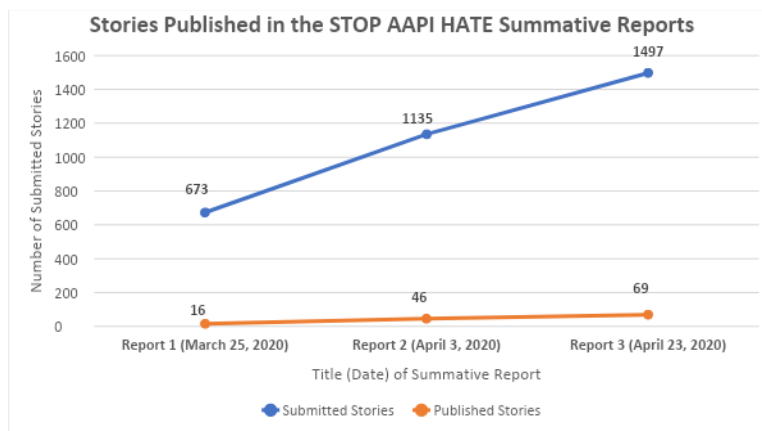


Figure 7: This self-designed line chart compares the number of AAPI stories published in each STOP AAPI HATE summative report to the total number of AAPI stories submitted to the initiative as of May 2020. As of the April 23rd summative report's publication, only 4% of stories received by the initiative have been published in these summative reports.

According to Banks et al. (2019), this filtration of stories demonstrates how the initiative "... [orients] toward the objects, participants, or contexts of study. These orientations speak ... about who is in charge of collecting data, what counts as data, and which objects ... have value" (p. 3). By engaging with this selective publishing system, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative indirectly implies that they value certain AAPI stories over others, their exact measurements for story publication remaining unclear.

By taking up this selective role, the initiative occupies a position of power over the user, as it ultimately decides which voices get to be heard by the broader AAPI community. This unequal arrangement not only clashes with the main objective of cultural rhetorics, which again recognizes the equal value of all cultures and their stories, it also showcases how seemingly "neutral" data, presented as factual, can be influenced by decisions from those in power. As Haas (2012) states, "Technologies are not neutral or objective—nor are the ways that we use them" (p. 288). By encouraging user responses with their incident

reporting forms and then choosing which of those submitted stories get published, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative silences a majority of submitted AAPI accounts. Additionally, I should note that it is unclear what happens to the stories that do go unpublished -- perhaps they are stored for future usage or discarded, for example. While the current reporting format understandably restricts how many stories can be published in each summative report, the initiative could be more transparent with their decision-making process and storage policies when it comes to publishing (or not publishing) AAPI experiences.

By publishing AAPI stories exclusively in English and by sorting them into preset categories, the STOP AAPI HATE summative reports seemingly translate AAPI perspectives to fit categorical needs, stripping storytellers of their unique voices. While the potential exclusion of non-English stories is definitely a discouraged move within the field of cultural rhetorics, translating those stories to English from their home languages is almost equally as problematic. Maracle (1990) explains this problem through the Indigenous lens of story, stating that, by preferring the English language to convey stories, "... the speaker (or writer) retains authority over thought. By demanding that all thoughts ... be presented in this manner ... the presenter retains the power to make decisions on behalf of others" (p. 11). By not being transparent in regard to whether the published stories are altered or translated, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative retains interpretive power over the types of messages being conveyed in the summative reports. This issue extends to the initiative's practice of sorting stories by different types of discrimination within the report (reference Figure 6). As Cruikshank (2002) asserts, excessive categorization of archival data can "... reduce complex stories to simple messages" (p. 22). Applying this knowledge to the summative reports, this practice of categorization means that the initiative must always select a single category for a published story, regardless of whether the AAPI user clicked multiple checkboxes under the "type of discrimination" option. Again, I am not claiming that this activist initiative has any ill intentions with their current treatment of AAPI stories. However, I do believe that STOP AAPI HATE could be more transparent regarding if (and if so, how) they edit non-English stories before sorting them into designated categories, which is another potentially problematic practice.

Further extending my critique of the STOP AAPI HATE initiative's overall transparency, I personally find it troublesome that much of the user data submitted to the initiative is not made consistently visible in the final summative report. To reiterate one of my previous points, the vulnerable AAPI storytellers who participate in this movement deserve to know how their data is being utilized by the initiative, especially after viewing the elements presented in the final summative report. For instance, the incident reporting form requires the user to submit their full name, zip code, and email address before submission. However, none of these elements (understandably) are present in the final summative reports, so one is left wondering why the initiative would ask for this confidential information in the first place.

Approaching this issue from another angle, each summative report begins with a press release that highlights specific data trends from week to week among the submissions. However, the initiative seems to pick and choose which trends to highlight in each report, with some trends (such as the percentage of limited-English submitters referenced in Figure 3) disappearing from the following reports. Additionally, while much of these trends can be interpreted with the reports' included and available data, the initiative occasionally pulls these trends from data, which is not accessible to the public, such as the "language chosen" in each report and the "daily number of reports." By drawing from data that is inaccessible to its users while also only publishing certain trends from week to week, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative retains control over the broader narratives that are derived from their data.

Additionally, when looking at the visual design of these reports, the initiative still relies too heavily on alphabetic and numeric text to convey data reinforced with its use of text-filled tables and typed-out trends. As Powell et al. (2014) state, "... human practices and makings are often reduced to texts, or to textual objects, in a way that elides both their makers and the systems of power in which they were produced" (p. 6). Thankfully, the reports have started to include graphed visuals as a data interpretation alternative to the English text (reference Figures 4 and 5). However, by not maintaining consistency with their data presentation and availability, the initiative ultimately retains control over the narratives told within its summative reports. While the STOP AAPI HATE reports reflect many aspects of cultural rhetorics, viewing the data collection and presentation practices that make up the reports through the same decolonial lens exposes certain information gathering and design practices for both critique and suggestions for improvement.

Reimagining Future Options for STOP AAPI HATE Data

Although my methodology exposes various flaws within the well-intentioned STOP AAPI HATE initiative's data collection and presentation practices, I also assert that the same perspective can bolster the initiative's commitment to social justice and AAPI communities using the pillars of cultural rhetorics. Furthermore, as the current field of technical communication continues to focus on the concepts of digital mediums, user interactivity, and user accessibility, cultural rhetorics can provide additional ways to engage with these practices. With user and community feedback continually influencing today's technical communication forms, communicators must critically consider their audience while designing documents, reports, or other stakeholder-intended media.

In her influential piece on technical writing, Miller (1979) states, "To ... engage in any communication, is to participate in a community; to write well is to understand ... the concepts, values, traditions, and style which permit identification with that community" (p. 617). By collecting and sharing these

valuable AAPI stories, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative is building an important community, providing digital space of resistance for marginalized AAPIs to speak freely about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using my suggestions below, which I consider to be new options for the current text-based summative report, I aim to show how the STOP AAPI HATE initiative could further encourage the wider AAPI community to engage with their important activist project.

First, I strongly believe that the STOP AAPI HATE initiative should allow incident reporters to share their stories in photo or video formats, eliminating the project's sole reliance on alphabetic text as a storytelling medium. As mentioned previously, the initiative's current dependence on English alphabetic text stories limits non-English-speaking accessibility and overall user creativity. Medina (2016) espouses the values of non-textual storytelling in a digital world, stating "Multimodal genre ... has the potential to more effectively communicate messages than purely alphabetic texts because the genre draws rhetorical power from additional semiotic resources and experiential knowledge" (para. 3). In Medina's digital testimonios, community members utilize both pictures and videos to create layered, powerful presentations.

Multimodal storytelling opposes the notion that stories can only assume textual forms in a digital world. By engaging with a user's sight and hearing in new ways, visual storytelling through photos and videos can encourage embodiment for a viewer or listener, further encouraging relational understanding and empathy between the user and the storyteller. Furthermore, multimodal storytelling presents the user with more mediums for self-expression, giving them creative options on how to tell their own story through digital means. Text, in comparison to its audio and video counterparts, tends to homogenize the format and appearance of stories, stripping them of their uniqueness and nuance. As Johnson (2018) states, "We are always creating meaning through available resources, many of which enact modes beyond alphabetic, calling for new approaches to composing that stress the materiality within a particular rhetorical situation" (p. 21). Videos and audio recordings are powerful, engaging with a user's senses and increasing relationality of stories. By allowing users to submit video and audio pieces alongside textual stories, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative can take advantage of their digital platform by allowing the AAPI community to engage and spread the message of the project in multiple different ways.

Second, I suggest that the STOP AAPI HATE initiative use their digital platform to create a publicly visible database that houses all AAPI stories. While the current summative report data presentations are helpful for visualizing data trends across incident report submissions, they fail to publish many vulnerable, important AAPI stories. The initiative can escape the restrictive bounds of the current summative report by making all stories viewable within a searchable, updated database, giving users access to a multitude of new AAPI experiences and perspectives. I believe that this shift towards a more public display of story

accomplishes two cultural rhetorics-inspired goals: (1) the shift makes all stories (even those previously silenced or not published) visible to the AAPI community and (2) the shift decenters the STOP AAPI HATE initiative as the sole powerful entity in charge of which stories get told. Reinforcing the need for collaborative, decentered projects within technical communication, Jones et al. (2016) state, “Not merely users but active cocreators, citizens of all kinds require technical communication that demands more expansive, inclusive approaches to communication practices” (p. 7). With this potential database model encouraging an inclusive, transparent view of STOP AAPI HATE stories and data, both the initiative and its participants can participate in collaborative meaning-making while constellating their multimodal stories and experiences. By escaping the bounds of the summative report altogether, and by making all stories visible in a database, the STOP AAPI HATE initiative gives AAPI users the potential chance to shape a more expansive, inclusive project.

Lastly, I also believe that the STOP AAPI HATE initiative could benefit from the creation of a digital community forum, where the initiative and AAPI community members could freely share stories, project updates, and general conversation. This forum-like structure again provides users with the option to make their voices heard, while also encouraging communication and relationship building between the initiative and incident report submitters. Additionally, the forum provides the initiative with a way to constellate AAPI community members and their experiences, providing a solid, organic community hub for inspired collective activist efforts. According to Miller (1979), “Certainty is found not in isolated observation of nature or in logical procedure but in the widest agreement with other people” (p. 616). Forums help foster tight-knit communities, and those communities can collectively promote progressive societal change, this change being the end goal of the STOP AAPI HATE initiative.

In summation, I promote the creation of an online forum for the STOP AAPI HATE initiative because these digital spaces potentially engage with multiple tenets of cultural rhetorics: relational community building, the constellation of embodied experiences, and story sharing as a driving force for change. Additionally, by presenting both the database model and the forum model as options that work towards digital decolonization, I encourage the STOP AAPI HATE initiative to move beyond the antiquated textual report model towards more community-oriented mediums.

Imagining a Cultural Rhetorics-Informed Future for Technical Communication

Ultimately, this project sought to reveal, critique, and reimagine the exigent STOP AAPI HATE initiative and its data practices through the lens of cultural rhetorics. However, despite its myriad ambitions, it is also important to acknowledge that this project began with a single story, sparked to life by an embodied experience in an uncertain, historical time. In this past year of pandemic-related fear and physical social distancing, it is admittedly easy for us

as technical communicators to retreat back into our data, away from our stakeholders' real needs and situations. However, as demonstrated by this project, a cultural rhetorics-inspired approach to technical communication encourages communicators to be ever cognizant of their user communities and their own roles of power in evolving digital platforms. As evidenced in this paper, communicators can use digital technologies and presentation techniques to reimagine how we share and receive information with our target audiences in a reciprocal and respectful fashion. Moving forward, I have no doubt that knowledge of cultural rhetorics can encourage technical communicators to continually work with, and not for, their users.

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