

**SMALL TOWN STATE OF MIND: A CASE STUDY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
COMMUNICATION AND DISCOURSES OF DIVERSITY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

By

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## **Abstract**

In consideration of questions of racism, discrimination, and social equity in our increasingly multicultural society, this paper considers the Town of Halton Hills for a case study on discourses of diversity and identity in rural communities in southwestern Ontario. Grounded in sociopolitical theory and informed by the existing research on diversity as a discourse and as a mechanism of power on the local governmental level, this project aims to determine whether norms are challenged or reproduced in the narratives that emerged from the recent circumstances of social change. Through a critical discourse analysis of archived town Council meetings and government outputs such as media releases and “Mayor’s Messages”, quantitative and qualitative data provides a glimpse into the topics, themes, and strategies in the Town of Halton Hills’ communications. By drawing on a range of perspectives, this paper contributes to a limited body of research on local government communication by examining the engagement with and promotion of diversity and inclusion in rural communities, as well as the discursive constructions of community identity based on the urban/rural divide. Through this project, one gains an understanding of which discourses are presented and their impact on diversity and identity in rural communities and beyond.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **1. Introduction**

In the past year, social justice movements, public health crises, and economic struggle have turned the world's attention to questions of racism, discrimination, and social equity. This increased awareness towards enduring prejudices and systemic racism honed collective consciousness in on the policies and practices that informed social structures, demanding responses from every institution and organization, no matter the sector or size. As a result, this project examines how a small-town government responded and engaged in the discussion of diversity and inclusion in Council meetings and official Town communications.

The roles and responsibilities of Ontario's municipalities and local governments are defined as providing social services, implementing models and mechanisms to deal with social issues, and regulating the quality of life in their neighbourhoods (Sancton, 2008; Poirier, 2004). Despite the traditional argument that local governments have the closest link to the public and are therefore the most relevant to the day-to-day lives of individuals, the vast majority of existing literature studies the communications of large institutions such as corporations and provincial and federal governments (Killingsworth, 2009; Hasso, 2010; Mills & Gore, 2016; Young & Leuprecht, 2006; Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus, 2010; Poirier, 2004). Researchers who do study municipal level communications tend to focus on urban centres, such as large cities with high levels of immigration and demographic diversity (Almeida, 2016; Almeida, 2019; Poirier, 2004; Croucher, 1997). However, substantial growth in immigration to the southern Ontario region is changing the social landscape of rural areas as more and more of Canada's immigrant population are settling away from urban centers (Reimer, 2007). The 2016 census found a 50% decline in Toronto's share of foreign-born in population since 2006 (Office of Economic Policy, 2017). This reveals a gap in the existing body of research that needs to be addressed, as local

governments in rural areas have been overlooked despite also having to respond to matters of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Historically, smaller communities in rural areas have retained relative cultural and social homogeneity (Reimer, 2007). The dynamic of greater immigration to these areas challenges the status quo and necessarily calls for increased discourses of diversity, where programs, practices, language, and policies should help develop and support social and cultural inclusion of individuals and groups from different backgrounds. Yet, the social and political dynamics around heritage and identity in homogenous communities can act as an obstacle to social inclusion and may stall progress on initiating programs and managing the demands of immigration (Reimer, 2007). In the context of rapid social change and the introduction of diversity in previously static areas, historically marginalized groups are susceptible to prejudice and inadequate response by institutions (Reimer, 2007). However, Askins (2009) notes that population flow into rural areas will likely blur the intersection of the urban and the rural, generating a “growing fuzziness between contemporary social and cultural meanings of the rural” (p. 373). There is a social expectation attached to diversity, where governments from local to national are compelled to show a commitment to diversity, and where diversity has “become an omnipresent emblem of openness and fairness” (Vertovec, 2012, p. 302). With population growth and the unique dynamic between small town governments and their publics, there is a need for research on how local governments respond to equity, diversity, and inclusion issues, which discourses are presented, and the resulting social, cultural, and political influence of their communications.

## **2. Literature Review**

This project grounds itself in sociopolitical theory through existing research on diversity as a discourse and as a mechanism of power on the local governmental level (Mills & Gore,

2016; Almeida, 2016; Almeida, 2019; Vertovec, 2012). This research is reviewed alongside literature that analyses the typology of ethnocultural policy framing, as well as the role of place in constructing moral geographies along the hegemonic urban/rural divide (Poirier, 2004; Jansson, 2013). To further provide a theoretical and conceptual basis for this project, there is consideration given to existing research by authors such as Chou (2020), Mohan and Stokke (2000), Holloway (2007), Croucher (1997), Clarke and Cochrane (2013), and others, on rurality, local government communication practices, and local government autonomy in social policy initiatives. While these areas of research are independent from one another, they provide a valuable framework for this project's analysis of modern rurality and the diversity discourses in local government communication.

### *2.1. Role of Place: Identity and modern rurality*

The framework for this project is centered on the definition of modern rurality and the concept of identity as tied to a discursive place. Based on the definition by Cruickshank (2009), modern rurality is understood as either an area where value is created through the industrial exploitation of natural resources, or an idyllic place that is associated with remnants of the national culture and with areas of recreation in nature (p. 101). In both conceptions, rurality is defined in terms of its difference from the urban. Also contributing to the conceptual background of this research project is Chou's (2020) consideration of right-wing localism and how its accompanying political, cultural, and economic inequalities are born, in part, from a romanticization of the traditional concepts of community and a strategic emphasis on "threats" localities face. Chou's emphasis on the traditional concept of community in rural identity discourses can be explicated by Jansson's (2013) concept of the "rural idyll" (p. 90).

Jansson's (2013) study of a rural community in Sweden examines the urban/rural divide

as a moral geography and offers important concepts and insights related to discourse and power dynamics, such as the concept that *rural* place is defined by the rural's connection to localism. In a point of disagreement with Cruickshank, Jansson argues that certain cultural dynamics sustain a hegemonic urban/rural divide, and further asserts that the discourses of rural areas construct a social entity rooted in tradition and community, which leads modern rurality to acquire another layer of meaning as an idyllic remnant of the national culture (Jansson, 2013). His study analyzes qualitative data gathered through interviews with residents of a rural community in Sweden, periods of ethnographic observation, as well as data from a 2008 survey conducted by the Swedish Society Opinion Media. Through his data analysis, Jansson (2013) ascertained that the attraction of the rural is “largely a matter of place-making along the lines of dominant cultural scripts” (p. 95). Consideration was given to how people who had migrated from urban to rural communities differentiate modes of representing the rural, but it was ultimately put forth that mediatized processes normalize dominant scripts and maintain the hegemony of the urban/rural divide (Jansson, 2013).

It is necessary to distinguish that the concept of the urban/rural divide has different connotations in developing countries, and therefore the division discussed in this project focuses specifically on the North American context. In the argument that certain cultural dynamics sustain a hegemonic urban/rural divide, people's moral geographies are mediatized through media's power to “define the centers (the urban) and the margins (the rural) of society” (Jansson, 2013, p. 89). In Jansson's conception of the urban/rural divide, the “urban” represents the metaphysics of flow (dynamism, diversity, openness) whereas the “rural” represents the metaphysics of fixity (stability, security, continuity) (Jansson, 2013). Interviews with new rural residents revealed prejudices tied to either metaphysical state, such as individuals acting in

accordance with the rigidity and social closure of the rural metaphysic (Jansson, 2013). A key finding in Jansson's (2013) work is that rural areas signify *local security*, while urban centres signify *global openness*. These dimensions make up the moral geographies in which the local security and fixity of the rural is structured by solidarity, sedentary, high quality of life and local engagement, whereas the global openness and flow of the urban is indicated by openness to new ideas, entrepreneurship, and global engagement. This finding, along with Jansson's (2013) recognition that rural reappropriation and recoding processes are led by dominant groups, has significant implications for understanding the motives of rural communicators as well as the influences on local government communication strategy in rural areas.

Similarly, in their analysis of local policies and agendas, Mohan and Stokke (2000) note the "tendency to essentialize and romanticize 'the local'," where local social inequalities and power relations are downplayed and the local is viewed in isolation from broader economic and political structures (p. 249). The tendency for stagnation in rural areas stems from the continual ties to tradition and valorisation of local knowledge, where social change and development is "locally determined and free from the normative biases of 'non-locals'", ultimately privileging certain interpretations of local 'needs' which lead to local underdevelopment and lack of beneficial social change (Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p.252).

According to Mohan and Stokke's (2000) study on a variety of local communities around the world, the political imagination of participatory development in rural areas tends to treat 'the local' as a harmonious community, but the conception of community reveals a binary ontology where the 'poor' are set against an unspecified 'elite', linked through affective ties of kinship, ethnic group, etc. The binary within "community" undermines stated intentions to seek diversity and inclusion (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). It must be noted that their research is conducted on a

global scale, and the circumstances of a rural community in a developing country cannot be directly applied against a Canadian community, but Mohan and Stokke (2000) still offer an important finding that “community” is a concept often used by state and other organizations that carries connotations of consensus and “needs” determined within set parameters.

Significant to the literature on modern rurality is Holloway’s (2007), discussion of whiteness and the rural idyll in England. Holloway (2007) states that the notion of the rural idyll is “embedded deep in the politics of the countryside,” acting as a repository of national values and culture and through which the countryside is constructed as a place of white safety (p. 7). Holloway (2007) reviews studies which provide contemporary challenges to racially exclusive constructions of the rural idyll, along with those which note its enduring power. Based on her review of the literature, Holloway (2007) offers an important suggestion for future work in this area: “as cultural constructions we should not just expect to see continuity in the constitutions of the rural idyll but also contentions and change” (p. 9). Holloway (2007) calls for research which considers current constructions of race and rurality and which explores the ways discursive constructions of race and rurality can be reinforced and/or challenged through social practice.

The body of literature reviewed in this section aide in setting a frame of reference to analyze urban/rural discourse in a local Canadian government context. These ideas help solidify the basis for what this research explores and contributes to the body of literature on government communication, rurality, and discourses of diversity and inclusion. The role of local government discourse, place, moral geographies, and their relation to community identity and issues of diversity and inclusion in rural communities is an opportune topic through which to conduct an in-depth examination of an overlooked area of research.

## *2.2. Discourses of diversity*

In the existing research on diversity discourses, scholars have found that “diversity” is understood in many different and sometimes conflicting ways, from being considered a buzz word for talking about race, to a social project that both recognizes and accepts differences, to an empty word used to promote some unspecified social good (Ahmed, 2007; Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Modan, 2008; Vertovec, 2012). There are six broad dimensions in the canon of how diversity is understood: race/ethnicity, gender, religion/belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation (Dobusch, 2017). For the purposes of this project, diversity discourse is defined as the public and corporate language, policies and practices, and institutional structures that specifically cite some concept of diversity (Vertovec, 2012). As Vertovec (2012) explains in his literature on the rise and use of diversity discourses in the U.S. and Europe, there is “no clear, straight-line story of the emergence of “diversity” discourse, policies and practices,” but the “diversity” corpus shares the common concern of addressing and accommodating social differences (p. 288).

The notion of diversity stems from the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States, where Affirmative Action (AA) became an instrument for promoting equal opportunities, fighting discrimination, and helping minorities. “Diversity” became distinguished from AA through new demographic awareness in the 1980s and the rise of “diversity management” in the corporate sector (Vertovec, 2012). Corporate interests helped to ensure the continuation of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination measures, yet Vertovec (2012) outlines how diversity discourse was largely adopted to avoid discrimination lawsuits and as a strategy for organizational success. In Europe, diversity policies are becoming more prominent across all levels of government, and research has shown that in British government documents and policy,

the language of “diversity” is replacing and outpacing that of multiculturalism (Vertovec, 2012). What is made clear in Vertovec’s (2012) article is the broad variance in the types of social difference that make up “diversity”, as well as the multiple meanings, usages, and goals of diversity discourse.

According to Vertovec (2012), there are six different approaches – referred to as “facets” – to diversity that “lie between anti-discrimination and positive acceptance” (p. 297). The different aspects of diversity discourse are categorized by their purpose or goal, and include redistribution, recognition, representation, provision, competition, and organization. The objectives of “redistribution”, “recognition”, and “representation” are aimed internally, towards improving the social and economic inclusion of minorities, whereas “provision”, “competition”, and “organization” facets are audience facing, non-minority oriented, and have objectives that are more concerned with creating positive perceptions (Vertovec, 2012). For this project’s analysis on discourses of diversity, it is essential to note the general ambiguity of the diversity corpus, and that any one diversity policy or program may have numerous objectives (Vertovec, 2012). This literature provides key definitions and concepts of diversity discourses, which are core elements of the project’s analytic framework. Using Vertovec’s definitions of these categories, this project can determine which discourses are present in the Town of Halton Hills’ communications.

Canada is unique for its relationship to multiculturalism. Not only is it a central political framework, but an ideological descriptor and considered a sociological fact (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018). Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has been the default policy framework for accommodating ethnic diversity. The adoption of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1988 acknowledged and established multiculturalism as a “fundamental characteristic of Canadian

society,” whereby the Act is meant to help preserve culture and language, eradicate racism and remove discriminatory barriers, enhance cultural awareness and understanding, promote culturally sensitive institutional change at the federal level, and enhance the full and equal participation of all Canadians within institutions (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018, p. 5). For minorities in Canada, the policy of multiculturalism aims for equity across social, political, and economic spheres, while allowing for individualism in cultural identity and the preservation of distinct cultures.

The Library of Parliament lays out that under the Act, all government agencies are expected to “take part in the design and implementation of plans, programs, procedures and decision-making strategies that enhance the full and equal participation of minorities within institutional structures” (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018, p. 5). This may be well-meaning and offer support to ethno-cultural diversity in Canada, but critiques of multiculturalism have arisen that highlight the limitations of this policy and how it’s practiced. While Canada’s model is internationally admired, globalization and new media technologies mean that the concept is in dire need of updating to reflect complex ideas of national belonging and the multilayered identities individuals hold (Karim, 2009). Karim (2009) suggests that the basic principle of multiculturalism should be supported, but there is a tendency inherent to multiculturalism that compromises social cohesion. Critics also note that the policy does not do enough for successfully addressing and controlling racism and racial discrimination (Karim, 2009; Henry 2002). With significant limitations identified by scholars over the years, it is suggested that stronger, more “radical” or “critical” approaches to multiculturalism are needed for the inclusion, equity, and empowerment of minority cultures (Henry, 2002). This overview of Canadian multiculturalism policy is important for setting a basis of understanding for this project’s

discussion of multiculturalism and local government policy and strategy.

The conceptual framework of this project is further informed by research on local government autonomy and the discourses employed within policy communication in Canadian municipalities. Poirier's (2004) study of the management of ethnocultural diversity policy in municipalities considers how the amalgamation of municipalities in the early 2000s gave them greater agency and authority to involve themselves in social policy. Of the four elements examined in this study, the one that is most helpful for this project is the practical and discursive aspects of local government's management of ethnic diversity (Poirier, 2004).

Poirier compares the discourse of policy objectives and activities put forth by ethnically diverse Canadian cities as falling under three fundamental models: civic universalism, multiculturalism, and interculturalism. His typological distinction of these three approaches is of great interest to this project. By Poirier's (2004) definitions, the model of civic universalism constructs the public sphere as an area where all citizens are equal in relation to cultural and community rules and values. Multiculturalism, as the antithesis to civic universalism, valorizes differences and grants specific rights and privileges to minorities (Poirier, 2004). The search for social justice in a multicultural political project takes into account the cultural conceptions of minorities within a given area (Poirier, 2004). However, Croucher (1997) argues that the ideologies that sustain multicultural policies and the identities they construct serve specific political purposes, ensuring power is retained by "majority ethnic elites" (p. 335). The intercultural model emphasizes that the "immigrant as well as the host society should both adapt to each other" (p. 209). Canadian cities manage ethnocultural issues through policy that employs one model or switches between two of them (Poirier, 2004). Supported by other literature, Poirier's study speaks to a key consequence of "reframing ethnic issues" in government

discourse, whereby discrepancies appear between the discourse and the actual policies put in place (Poirier, 2004). Poirier also notes the role of the federal government in municipal ethnocultural policy, which to some degree conflicts with the notion that municipal governments have substantial autonomy. Conceptually, Poirier's case studies on the autonomy of municipalities – as it relates to the words and actions municipalities take on ethnocultural diversity policy – has a lot to contribute to this body of research.

Another key concept identified in the literature on policy discourse in rural communications is localism. In Clarke and Cochrane's (2013) research on the geographies and politics of localism in the United Kingdom, they note multiple overlapping and contradictory meanings around the notion of localism. Among the set of definitions outlined by these authors is the conceptualization of localism in political discourse as the fight for locality by locally dependent people and the view of local community as a kind of mediating layer through which "responsible action, right living, and good welfare outcomes may be achieved" (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013, p. 10). Within the localism model is a tendency to resist change, either due to vested interests in the status quo and/or because members of government can see the flaws of proposed developments (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013). Clarke and Cochrane (2013) identify strong connections between models of localism and an emphasis on community and neighbourhood, such that advancing community or neighbourhood interests is understood as a means of social influence through the involvement of local actors. Through this study one begins to understand the localist model for government policy and discourse. While not directly related to discourses of diversity, Clarke and Cochrane's (2013) insights into localism can be applied alongside other reviewed literature to help build a conceptual framework for analysing the discourses and conceptions of place-based identity utilized by the Town of Halton Hills.

To further the concepts brought forth by the discussed research, this project employs Almeida's (2016; 2019) examination of diversity discourse in the City of Toronto. Almeida (2016; 2019) drew on Foucault's theories of discourse and power to consider whether the effects of political power justify and reproduce "historical, social, and racial distinctions and exclusions," which leads her to conclude that diversity discourses legitimize racial practices and "re-inscribe race, power, authority and senses of place" (Almeida, 2019, p. 946). Along the same vein is the notion that the "picture" of urban ethnic relations are socially constructed phenomena that unavoidably emerge from vested interests, reflecting the existing social forces and bias within a community (Croucher, 1997). Similar to Almeida's studies, Croucher's (1997) study on the image of ethnic harmony in Toronto argues that the identities that characterize a given urban setting are social constructions that both reflect and reinforce existing power structures. Croucher (1997) notes that Toronto – while it may be an urban setting now – was once a homogenous community that underwent a "demographic transition," yet, distribution of power and resources remains in favour of the elites and strong sense of tradition for the predominant British culture through which the city was established (p. 325). The findings from Croucher and Almeida's framing and critical discourse analyses highlight the political forces behind diversity as a discourse and identity construction, offering a critical theoretical framework that can be applied in this area of research.

While there may be empirical differences between the aforementioned research and this project, such as a focus on urban epicenters with high levels of immigration and diversity, Poirier (2004), Almeida's (2016; 2019), and Croucher's (1997) studies on the discourses of diversity have important implications for this project's theoretical approach, methodology, and discussion of diversity and inclusion in rural communication.

### 3. Research Questions

This project considers the Town of Halton Hills for a case study on discourses of diversity and inclusion in rural communities in southwestern Ontario. The project focuses on this type of discourse for two key reasons: (a) to contribute to scholarly engagement with diversity and inclusion in an increasingly multicultural society, and (b) to determine whether dominant notions of identity are challenged or reproduced in the narratives that emerged from the recent circumstances of social change. By drawing on a range of perspectives, this project contributes to a limited body of research on local government communication by seeking to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1:* How and to what extent does local government communication engage with and promote social, cultural, and political ideas of diversity and inclusion in rural communities?

*RQ2:* How and to what extent does local government communication address notions of community identity based on the urban/rural divide?

*RQ3:* Considering RQ1 and RQ2, what implications or broader lessons might these findings have for Canada's social, cultural, and political landscape in general?

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1. Rationale

To examine how or to what extent local governments engage with or promote diversity and inclusion in rural communities, and to gain a better understanding of the extent to which community identity is tied to a discursive place, this project conducts a case study on the Town of Halton Hills.<sup>1</sup> Located 60 km from Toronto within the Regional Municipality of Halton, the rationale for selecting this town is to capture the communications of a small-medium sized

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<sup>1</sup> Big "T" Town refers to the corporation/local government, small "t" town refers to the metropolis.

community (pop < 100,000) that exists physically and conceptually on the border of the “urban”. The Town of Halton Hills recognizes itself as a “small, rapidly growing” municipality in Ontario that aims to set an example as a leader in local autonomy (*Strategic Plan*, 2021). The Town’s official branding tagline “Small Town Living at Its Best” (see Figure 1) carries deep implications towards the concept of the idyllic rural, making it compelling for a case study.

**Figure 1:** *Town of Halton Hills entry sign, Halton Hills, May 2021 (own photo).*



In addition to the previously stated reasons for selecting the Town of Halton Hills, I am motivated to engage in this research due to my personal connection to the town. Having lived in Halton Hills for most of my life, I have first-hand knowledge of the town and its government. In this context, it is also important to note my positionality as a white woman who was raised in Halton Hills and is committed to anti-racism and progressing diversity and inclusion. While my connection to Halton Hills benefits the project and its methodology for the base of understanding

and ease of access to information, the risk lies in the possibility of seeking information or patterns that confirm my preconceived notions of the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the town and its communications. Care needs to be taken to recognize what biases I hold and to actively avoid biases that may encourage a particular outcome.

#### *4.2. Timeline selection*

Taking into account the multitude of sources available and to manage the scope of this project, a content analysis is performed on archival material within a time frame of May 1, 2020 to May 1, 2021. This time frame captures a year where social justice movements, an unprecedented global pandemic, and issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion were pre-eminent to individuals, organizations, and institutions. It was hypothesized at the time of designing this study as the most likely time period to find discursive references to diversity and place-based identity.

#### *4.3. Sampling strategy*

On a conceptual and academic level, the design of this project is informed by Killingsworth's (2009) case study on the role of local government communications in a large municipality in western Ontario. Her methodology integrated interviews, qualitative data collection, and a content analysis of current documentation and archival material. In her data analysis, she used a pattern-matching technique to investigate the extent to which "excellent" public relations were applied in her selected municipality. While a theoretical focus on public relations is a significant difference in Killingsworth's study, given that local government is an under-researched area of communication, her study is a useful starting point for constructing the methods employed in this project.

The primary material for analysis was obtained from the Halton Hills Council meetings

available on haltonhills.ca, with unstructured data collected through transcription of video recordings. Official meeting minutes were used in instances where a video was not available online, such as for the Council meetings on May 25, 2020 and November 9, 2020 in which no recording was available. Transcription through dictation software on Microsoft Word was adequate for the nature of this research, as transcribing the meetings operates to show linguistic features and for the meetings to become another textual document.

The obvious consequence of transcription is its propensity to impose an interpretation on speech (Fairclough, 1992). Important details and features of speech, such as intonation, stress, pauses, loudness and tempo, and other nuances and non-verbal discursive features are lost when speech is captured in text format. This is an important consideration for treating Council meetings as “text” for discourse analysis. As well, the virtual nature of the Council meetings and access to recordings requires a note on its limitations. I was not present for these meetings and therefore transcriptions are limited by what was recorded and made available by the town. Any glitches in the video stream of the meeting participants, the recording itself, or the decision of when to start and stop recording may impact what was captured. For the sake of readability and clarity, transcribed meetings were edited to omit “ums” and other verbal fillers, irrelevant words, and to correct grammar.

To this end, 16 sources of varying lengths were collected and transcribed, resulting in approximately 400 pages of content.<sup>2</sup> To supplement the analysis of Council meeting discourse, qualitative data was also collected from targeted samples of public-facing documents. With a large number of public-facing documents between May 1, 2020 and May 1, 2021, selection criteria were employed to manage the scope of the corpus. A keyword search within the same

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<sup>2</sup> Council meetings ran anywhere from 30 minutes to approximately 4 hours in length.

time frame was used to uncover texts which referenced diversity and inclusion, revealing 30 (out of 91) media releases and 9 (out of 13) “Mayor’s Messages”. Due to this project’s length constraints, e-newsletters, tweets, and other examples of Council discourse (e.g., town hall meetings) were omitted to help manage the size of the corpus.

#### *4.4. Coding process*

The literature on rurality, place-based identity, and on discourses of diversity in local governments inform the coding manual for this project. After a keyword search gathered the samples, texts were coded for themes relating to this project’s research questions – diversity discourse and place-based identity – as well for categories that support the main research themes (see Table 1). Key terms were determined based off Almeida’s (2016; 2019) and Croucher’s (1997) studies of constructions of diversity and diversity discourse in the City of Toronto, as well as Cruickshank (2009) and Jansson’s (2013) literature, and included “racism/racist”, “racialized”, “equity”, “inclusive/inclusivity”, “diverse/diversity”, “black”, “Indigenous/First Nations”, “LGBTQ”, “ethnic/ethno-”, “human rights”, “vulnerable” “community/communities”, “neighbourhood(s)”, “rural”, “heritage”, and “culture/cultural” (see Table 1 below). As terms linked to diversity, inclusion, place, and identity in texts, the presence of key terms indicates a reproduction or contestation of signifiers for social, cultural, and/or political ideas of diversity, rural community, and power relationships in discourse.

With codes derived from the reviewed literature, a deductive coding method guides a critical discourse analysis of the gathered samples. Once collected and reviewed, the corpus was categorized and coded deductively based on frameworks from existing literature, allowing the researcher to follow a pre-determined process according to identified themes of interest. To ensure a focused corpus, texts were intentionally excluded in cases where “community” was

paired with “business”, or “diversity” referred to an economic, environmental, or otherwise non-sociocultural topic (e.g., “economic diversity”). Due to their length and the nature of Council meetings as conversation and debate between a group of people, a strategy was needed to parse content relevant to the research questions and ensure a manageable corpus. It was decided that Council meetings would be coded by paragraph, which determined the sections of text to be included in the corpus.

**Table 1:** *Coding manual*

Category	Example	Codes Included in this Category
Diversity and inclusion	“The Town of Halton Hills values democracy, equity, diversity and inclusivity” ( <i>Council Meeting - Nov 9, 2020</i> )	Race/racism/racist/racialized Inclusive/inclusivity Diverse/diversity Ethnic/ethno- Equity Human rights Vulnerable Black/people of colour Indigenous/First Nations LGBTQ
Place-based identity	“Ours is a community built on camaraderie, of fellowship, collaboration and support for one another” ( <i>Mayor Recognizes Death of George Floyd, 2020</i> )	Community/communities/ neighbourhood(s) Culture/cultural Rural Heritage
Town Slogan	“Small town living at its best”	Stated Not stated
Policy Model	“We as a municipality must come together to be welcoming, inclusive, respectful and celebrate both our differences and commonalities this Canada Day.” ( <i>Town and Canadian Heritage Offer Canada Day Activities, 2020</i> )	Civic universalism Multiculturalism Interculturalism Localism (Poirier, 2004; Chou, 2020; Clark & Cochrane, 2013)
Facet of diversity discourses, policies, and practices	“Racism extends beyond borders and a focused, well-coordinated, multi-faceted	Redistribution Recognition Representation

	ongoing approach is required to effectively address it.” (Bonnette, 2020b)	Provision Competition Organization (Vertovec, 2012)
Moral Geography/ Sentiment towards change	“I know when it passed the Regional Council, I had said at the time, we need to look at what our line in the sand is, where we will grow to here and we will grow no further.” (Council Meeting - February 1, 2020)	Progressive/willing – metaphysic of flow (dynamism, diversity, openness) Traditional/non-willing – metaphysic of fixity (stability, security, continuity) (Jansson, 2013)

#### 4.5. Critical discourse analysis

Discourse involves more than just language. It is recognized that discourses are internally consistent coordination's of language with actions, thoughts, interactions, values, beliefs, feelings, times, places, and other non-linguistic symbols (Gee, 2010; Cruickshank, 2009).

Fairclough's (1992) research on the cause and effect between discourse and social change and Pietikäinen and Dufva's (2006) literature on discursive and dialogical approaches to studying socially constructed identity lend structure to the discourse analysis method employed in this project. Regardless of scholars identifying certain theoretical and methodological weaknesses within critical discourse analysis, the ability to analysis the relationship between language and the social makes it a valuable method for a study of this nature (Pietikäinen & Dufva, 2006).

Fairclough (1992) suggests that social relations and social identities are exercised and constructed in discourse, and that discourse contributes to the process of cultural change through the association of social identities with specific domains. Discourse, in this context, is defined as “language use as a form of social practice,” where there is a “dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 63-64). Discursive practices simultaneously constitute and construct a view of the world, and a community associated with such a view

(Fairclough, 1992). To aid with a CDA analysis of Council meetings, which capture speech rather than written text, this study is informed by Pietikäinen and Dufva's (2006) argument that social facets of identity can be analyzed by examining the discourses present in talk. By considering dialogism within the CDA method, speech can be analyzed as examples of more personalized and individual appropriations of discourses. This method recognizes individuals as agents who are able to produce perspectives that either reproduce or challenge dominant discourses (Pietikäinen & Dufva, 2006).

As a dimension of discourse, there is a precedent for including the notion of voice in discourse analysis. According to Thompson (1996), voice can be determined to belong to one of five groups: self, specified other(s), unspecified other(s), community, and unspecifiable other(s). Furthering the idea of voice as belonging to groups is the concept of *social languages* by James Paul Gee. Gee (2010) observes that social languages – or different ways of talking and writing – are employed to accomplish different things and display different identities. Analysis may reveal linguistic “collocational patterns,” where correlations between grammatical units (nouns, verbs, phrases and clauses) coordinate with other non-language information to constitute a social language (Gee, 2010, p. 50). In its discourse analysis, this project draws from Thompson (1996) and Gee (2010) to examine how characteristics of voice and social language signal connection to different identities, values, and interests set by the social and historical structures of a distinct group – in this case, the Town of Halton Hills and its representatives.

To help conduct analysis and provide greater context to the influential demographic factors, 2016 census Canada data on the diversity profile of Halton Hills has been retrieved from Statistics Canada and applied in analysis.

The consideration of Town Council meetings and subsequent government outputs provides a glimpse into the discourses and narratives used by the Town of Halton Hills' local government. Employing a critical discourse and dialogical analysis method allows for an exploration of how social relationships and structures are represented and signified.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1. Quantitative findings

While a critical discourse analysis may be primarily qualitative in nature, quantitative analysis helps to determine the extent to which the Town of Halton Hills engages with and addresses diversity and inclusion discourses and notions of community (read: place-based) identity.

Table 2 shows the frequency of main themes by paragraph, determined by an inductive process that captured the conservation. Table 3 shows the aggregate of keywords per samples that have been coded and included in the corpus. The key difference between the calculations for Council meetings between Table 2 and Table 3, is that Table 2 captures the total of all Council meetings, whereas percentages in Table 3 were calculated against the word count of the coded sections (see: 4.4. *Coding process*).

**Table 2:** *Presence of Main Themes in Primary Data (coded by paragraph, multiple codes used)*

Theme	Frequency in Council Meetings
Diversity and inclusion	2.06%
Place-based identity	3.12%

What can be derived from the results in Table 2 is the overall low frequency of both themes. Only about 2% of all Council meeting material discussed matters relating to diversity

and inclusion, and specific references to sociocultural community identity accounted for approximately 3%. The general inconsequence of the prevalence of diversity and inclusion discourses is revealing. What can be surmised in early analysis from these numbers is that engagement with diversity and inclusion is of minimal concern and “formal political access and participation have not been organized along ethnic and racial lines” (Croucher, 1997, p. 342). Further, to promote an anti-racist model for social change, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2009) calls for a “holistic” development whereby anti-racist ideologies, goals, policies and practices are interconnected and referenced to in all an institution does (p. 47). With this in mind, one would expect to see a much higher frequency of diversity and inclusion across all communications within and by the Town.

Table 3 determines the frequency of keywords across the corpus to account for the discursive references to main themes.<sup>3</sup> When comparing these samples, due to the differences in length of each type of texts, it is most useful to display the data as a percentage.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Keywords for Overall Data**

		Council Meetings		Media Releases		Mayor's Messages	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Diversity	Diversity/diverse	14	0.077%	21	0.192%	0	null
	Race/racism/racist/racialized	11	0.060%	22	0.201%	8	0.256%
	Inclusive/inclusion/inclusivity	17	0.093%	14	0.128%	6	0.192%
	Vulnerable	1	0.005%	3	0.027%	1	0.032%

<sup>3</sup> Excluded in the quantitative data calculations any mention of “culture” referring to the official “Culture Days” event or the Halton Hills Public Library Georgetown Branch and Cultural Centre, as well as “inclusive” when referring to “Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities”.

<sup>4</sup> The corpus of council meetings contained 18,184 words, media releases equalled 10,962 words, and Mayor's Messages were made up of 3,131 words.

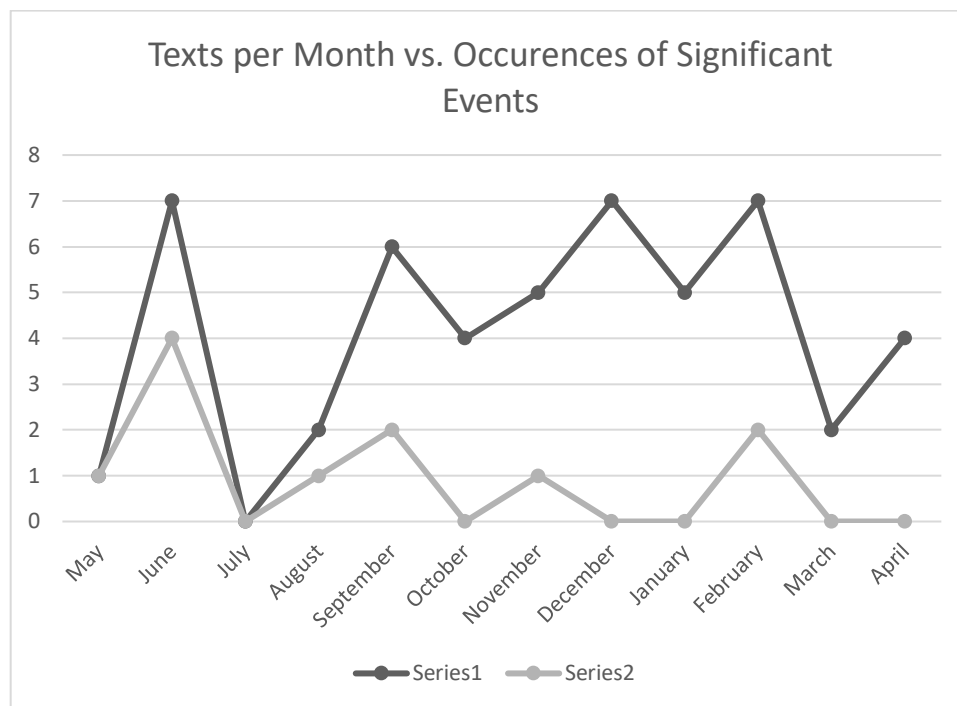
	Equity	6	0.033%	10	0.091%	0	null
	Ethnic/ethno-	2	0.011%	0	null	0	null
	Black	10	0.055%	14	0.128%	6	0.192%
	People of colour	0	null	0	null	3	0.96%
	Indigenous/First Nations	2	0.011%	2	0.018%	5	0.160%
	LGBTQ	2	0.011%	7	0.064%	2	0.064%
Total		63	0.360%	93	0.858%	25	0.990%
Placed-based identity	Community/communities	64	0.352%	84	0.766%	15	0.479%
	Neighbourhood(s)	30	0.165%	1	0.009%	0	null
	Heritage	13	0.071%	4	0.036%	0	null
	Rural	4	0.022%	8	0.073%	2	0.064%
	Culture/cultural	15	0.082%	17	0.155%	2	0.064%
Total		126	0.693%	114	1.040%	19	0.607%

The keyword category with the highest frequency in the Council meetings is “inclusive/inclusion/inclusivity” at 0.093%, whereas in the media releases and Mayor’s Messages, “race” and its other iterations have the highest frequency at 0.201% and 0.256%, respectively. The frequency with which race and racism are addressed is significantly lower in the Council meetings at only 0.060%. While the Mayor’s Messages have the highest percentage of discursive references to the theme of diversity and inclusion overall, there are no instances of the keyword(s) “diverse”/“diversity”, compared to its 14 and 21 uses in the samples of Council meetings and media releases. This suggests that while the mayor may be engaging in discourses

specific to inclusivity and discrimination (“anti-racist”), with references to “Black, Indigenous, and people of colour”, a concern with diversity and equity is not overt. This leads to a discussion of the nature of voice across the different texts. In the case of Mayor’s Messages, tags such as “I” statements indicate a *self* voice, yet examples such as “Black, Indigenous, and people of colour” and “we as a community have to come together” indicate the *community* voice (Thompson, 1996). The presence of this voice is indicated by sets of phrases that have a recognizable, pre-used status within the ‘group’, where people within the community (in this case, Canadian governments and their constituencies) associate certain wordings as belonging to particular ways of thinking (Thompson, 1996). The community voice is present in media releases and the Mayor’s Messages as examples of “official” statements relating to diversity, inclusion, and community.

At 1.040%, the frequency of keywords relating to place-based identity indicate the highest prevalence in media releases, overall. “Community”/“communities” has the highest frequency of all keywords related to place-based identity, and its frequency is more than doubled from Council meetings to media releases, at 0.352% and 0.766% respectively. It is interesting to observe the amount of diversity discourse and place-based identity in the media releases, compared to the other two sources. This could be due to the nature of media releases as the town’s primary outlet for official messaging. Media releases are unique from Council meetings and Mayor’s Messages, as they result from a need and/or opportunity for the town to promote messages and events relating to official diversity and inclusion strategy. How these ideas are engaged with and promoted, and how they relate to community identity, will be explored in the qualitative analysis.

**Figure 2:** *Distribution of Texts per Month against Significant Events*



*Note.* Series 1 displays number of samples (texts per month). Series 2 displays the occurrences of significant events.

To further understand the extent to which the Town of Halton Hills engages with ideas of diversity and inclusion, this project tracked variations in the prevalence of diversity discourses over time. By cross-referencing the months of texts in the corpus with their topics, it becomes clear that diversity and inclusion is primarily correlated to an event or significant cultural or social observance that is specifically related to racialized individuals or groups. This includes George Floyd's murder on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and the resulting Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020, Emancipation Day in August 2020, Orange Shirt Day in September 2020, the anti-Semitism motion in November 2020, Black History Month and joining the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities in February 2021, and the Rainbow Crosswalk initiative and subsequent unveiling (in June 2020 and September 2020, respectively). These findings are visualized in Figure 2,

series 1, with June 2020, December 2020, and February 2021 containing the most samples (7). March 2021, May 2020, and July 2020 had the least number of samples, with two, one, and zero respectively. Series 2 depicts the occurrence of significant events by month, such as the murder of George Floyd (May/June) and Black History Month (February).

Apart from the Rainbow Crosswalk, all topics were acknowledged in Council meetings. However, not all topics were addressed in media releases (e.g., the anti-Semitism motion, Emancipation Day, Orange Shirt Day), and the only event-to-text correlation in Mayor's Messages was in June, with texts relating to George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. There were no Mayor's Messages included in the corpus for the months of July, August, September, November, or December. Notably, observances such as Asian History Month (April), Indigenous History Month (June), Pride Month (June), and other days, weeks, or months for sociocultural commemoration were not addressed. Since the frequency of diversity discourse in the corpus is closely aligned with number of news events and observances related to racism, one can speculate that the town's engagement in the dialogue surrounding racism and discrimination specific to Black people rises from the scale of the social justice movement and the necessity to engage in the dialogue, rather than from a self-determined commitment to diversity and inclusion towards all racialized groups. On a broader scale, quantitative findings point towards reactivity rather than proactivity by the town. Discussion and messages put forth appear to be isolated incidents in response to external pressures, rather than instances of an ongoing, proactive engagement with diversity and inclusion throughout the year. This idea of reactivity carries interesting implications for the qualitative discourse analysis in the following sections.

## 5.2. *Qualitative analysis of diversity discourse*

To begin this section, an analysis of diversity discourse will look at how the town engages with and promotes social, cultural, and political ideas of diversity and inclusion (RQ1). As seen above, the general lack of discourse surrounding diversity and inclusion in the Council meetings, especially in comparison to the official outputs by the town, is a significant finding. In the Mayor's Messages from June 3, 2020 and June 11, 2020, Mayor Bonnette made the following statement:

I want Halton Hills, Ontario and Canada to be recognized as welcoming, inclusive, respectful and one that celebrates both differences and commonalities. We have to continue to come together to be more than just NOT a racist but to be ANTI-RACISTS. (Bonnette, 2020a; Bonnette, 2020b [emphasis in original])

This statement was used in the back-to-back messages by the mayor in direct response to the Black Lives Matter movement and peaceful protest march organized by the Halton Hills Alliance for Social Change (HHASC). With the knowledge that similar discourse is not present in Council meetings or any subsequent Mayor's Messages, this statement by Mayor Bonnette stands as an individual, reactive expression rather than an official 'approach' by the town.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2009), a strong anti-racism policy must have a strong vision statement; the lack of such a statement may hinder an organization's ability to adequately address racism. References to an anti-racism file, a comment regarding a 2017 resolution proclaiming "zero tolerance for racism of any kind", and "advances in the areas of anti-racism" in media messages are the extent of the "official" commitment to anti-racism by the town (Bonnette, 2020b). It is worth noting that the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2009) provides concepts surrounding diversity which should be familiar to all governments, organizations, and institutions and suggests that organizations should strive for proactive and interconnected approaches. As stated in the media release *Town Launches New Initiative re:*

*Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism* (2020), the town wants to “ensure that diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism are fundamental principles that define Halton Hills”. Yet the extent to which there is indication of these principles in the Halton Hills Strategic Plan is a single statement that the government is “inclusive, forward-thinking and fiscally-responsible” (*Strategic Plan*, 2021). Further, despite the declaration in the *Town Launches New Initiative* media release that the town is “embarking on work to understand issues around equity, diversity, inclusion and racism” with the goal of “fostering a healthy and welcoming community,” the only resulting initiative was a diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism survey.

This survey was removed on October 28, 2020 after the HHASC made a statement regarding the reinforcement of “implicit biases, racism, and discrimination” within the survey (Myers, 2020). The consultants originally hired by the Town subsequently stepped down as a result of the “Town’s re-evaluation on how to approach the issue of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism” (Myers, 2020). Beyond the sources from June 2020 and October 2020, and the failed survey, the only other direct reference to anti-racism was found in the November 10, 2020 media release, *Council Meeting Statement Regarding Racist Incident*. Yet another example of the town reacting to an event that demanded a response, the release includes the following statement:

Earlier today I was made aware of an alleged incident of racism in Georgetown that I find extremely disturbing. It was reported that a skipping rope was found hanging from a tree in the shape of a noose. [...] I repeat what I have said many times before – racism is not welcome in this Town! (*Council Meeting Statement Regarding Racist Incident*, 2020)

This statement was read by Mayor Bonnette in the November 9, 2020 Council Meeting, with no extra comments made by Bonnette or members of Council and no further discussion on the matter. Interestingly, this media release is signed by Mayor Bonnette and employs the personal ‘self’ voice that is more common in the Mayor’s Messages. While the claim that “racism is not welcome in this town” is a fair statement to promote inclusivity, and is indeed repeated in

previous communications, there is a discrepancy between the language used in public-facing communication, the concerns of Council, and the policies and practices of the town. The discourse also fails to make a distinction between racism and hate. In communications such as the one above, extreme incidents are still talked about like a problem of racism instead of a more radical issue. Acts of hate stemming from hateful ideologies are organized forms of racism with a greater potential to be more physically harmful to people. The tendency to talk about hate under the banner of racism does not recognize hate as a separate, more sinister issue. But regardless of what is said in reaction to instances of racism or hate, assertions are not backed up by an intercultural or multicultural policy discourse. Instead, the diversity discourses more dominant in the corpus are aimed at creating positive perceptions and advancing community interests in a way that equalizes town citizens in relation to cultural and community rules and values. Overall, models of localism and civic universalism are more heavily reflected in the communications by Halton Hills.

Statements such as “the Town of Halton Hills values democracy, equity, diversity and inclusivity” (*Council Meeting – November 9, 2020*) indicate the official, political rhetoric implemented by the town. However, this statement only appears once across the corpus. In Council meetings, one also sees references to strategy, such as “the Town of Halton Hills is embarking on a strategy to address inclusivity, racism, and the actions recommended in the truth and reconciliation report,” and that the Town is “working actively towards the Coalitions 10 commitments that will assist the town in developing its strategy to help build an inclusive and equitable community for all residents, that respects and positively influences the lives of diverse and racialized persons, Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community” (*Council Meeting – November 23, 2020; Council Meeting – February 1,*

2020). The media release relating to the town joining the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities reads:

As part of the Town's advances in the areas of diversity, equity, inclusiveness and anti-racism, a motion was approved at Monday's Council meeting to join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. "Joining the coalition, means joining the call to mobilize against racism and discrimination," said Mayor Rick Bonnette. The Town of Halton Hills joins 82 municipal members that have pledged to actively work towards fulfilling the Coalition's 10 commitments to build an inclusive and equitable society. "It is timely and fitting that the Town of Halton Hills has joined this network, recognizing that the municipality is taking steps to develop a diversity strategy....". (*Town Joins Coalition*, 2021)

Applying this statement against the discussion that occurred in the Council meeting reveals two key points of interest. While the discussion in the Council meeting indicates that the town genuinely supported the motion to join the Coalition, the assertion "let's get on this so we can put this on our website" highlights underlying priorities; that of appearances rather than what has actually been accomplished in the way of diversity and inclusion within the town. The statement below (spoken by Mayor Bonnette) reveals objectives that indicate the diversity discourse facets of "competition" and "provision". This is determined by the promotion of diversity as a way to influence perceptions by improving an organization's image (Vertovec, 2012). However, there is also an overall objective present where the town is working to design a service to address the needs of its diverse citizens (Vertovec, 2012).

I think it's a good thing that we can join [the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities]...let's get on this so we can put this on our website etc., but there is some work that is expected of the Town of Halton Hills based on this resolution and that there's ten goals [...] So you can see on your page there's ten goals that we have to work towards and I think they're all worthwhile if we want an inclusive community and to support diversity in our community. (*Council Meeting – February 1, 2021*)

While the last sentence is a conditional clause (where working towards the goals is dependent on wanting an inclusive community that is supportive of diversity), the personalization of "we have to," "I think," and "we want", as well as positive statements from Council, conveys a certain

conviction towards making change. Overall, this discursive act signals a level of performativity, but also an acknowledgement that there is real work to do to be actively inclusive and supportive of diversity. In response, one Councillor stated, “That’s what I like about this, is that it’s action oriented, it’s providing tools for us to keep doing what we’re doing,” before then acknowledging “there’s always more to be done to show our respect and care for all members of our community” (*Council Meeting - February 1, 2021*). There are other instances of this kind of acknowledgement, such as a statement from the mayor relating to diversity and inclusion that “in order to be truly effective, we need to constantly aspire for better results; progress is not perfection” (Bonnette, 2020b). Despite this, an interesting linguistic feature appears in the February 1, 2021 Council meeting. The idea of “caring” in the context of diversity is suggestive of language that stems from benevolent white privilege. Rather than empowering the diverse through language or through actions that bring them to the table, language from the Town is paternalistic towards the diverse whereby these individuals or groups are subordinate, inactive, and dependent upon the Town for progressing social conditions.

As noted above, while diversity appears in relation to certain policies and strategy, the general lack of discussion of diversity in Council meetings indicates that diversity is not a central concern to the Town. Diversity discourses are primarily seen when there is an event or sociocultural observance the town is promoting or responding to. Following the murder of George Floyd and the resulting global Black Lives Matter movement, texts in June 2020 are the most significant example of an engagement with and/or promotion of diversity and inclusion for the Town of Halton Hills within this study. On June 11, 2020 the town released the *Mayor’s Remarks on Racism*, which opens with the sentence, “The issue of systemic racism has swept the country following the tragic murder of George Floyd” (Bonnette, 2020b). The language used

here reveals how systemic racism is regarded. Rather than understanding the big picture of entrenched white privilege and systems that discriminate against visible minority populations, the use of metaphor here paints systemic racism as a storm-like issue that moved quickly across the country as a result of George Floyd's murder. At a fundamental level, it is demonstrated here how Halton Hills maintains ways of thinking that fall short of adequately addressing and supporting anti-racism and inclusion.

In February 2021, the discourse is largely oriented towards recognition. In the announcement regarding Black History Month, Council states its “pleasure to recognize the African Caribbean Council of Halton and their contributions to this important designated month of awareness that honours the legacy of black Canadians” (*Council Meeting – February 1, 2021*). At the end of the meeting, Council again thanks the African Caribbean Council of Halton “for their work and building a healthy Halton Hills through advocacy and promotion and education” (*Council Meeting – February 1, 2021*). The recognition facet of diversity discourse is a “politics of presence” and indicates a “kind of historical redress” that is seeking to promote positive images and facilitate the participation and incorporation of minorities into social and political interactions (Vertovec, 2012, p. 297-298). In the relationship between discourse and social structure, there is a lack of formal political access or organization of ethnic and racially influenced participation in Halton Hills.

As another example, in September 2020 the Town announced the installation of a rainbow crosswalk that “recognizes the 2SLGBTQ+ community” and “creates a permanent visual show of support for our 2SLGBTQ+ community” (*Halton Hills' First Rainbow Crosswalk, 2020*). The crosswalk “symbolizes support for diversity and inclusion and [the town's] ongoing responsibility to keep the conversation alive” (*New Rainbow Crosswalk, 2020*).

While this is a good example of positive efforts by the town to promote engagement with sexual diversity in the town, there is a lack of action or representation for ethnic or racial diversity. In looking at this data, the question of *who is this discourse for* is raised. One could argue that recognition of groups that support and advocate for minority populations and inclusion help “the diverse”. On the other hand, it could be argued that these discourses by the town are aimed at changing habits of perception. Both may be true, but usually there is only one target in mind (Vertovec, 2012). The ambiguity of “a healthy Halton Hills” and the relegation of this discourse to Black History Month indicates the hollowness of the discourse. Ambiguity also appears in the statement that “the Town has a number of initiatives that *could* be pointed to as supporting inclusivity” (Bonnette, 2020b [emphasis added]), and again in the town’s June 11, 2020 media release, which quotes Mayor Bonnette as saying “I stand behind the black community and oppose actions that are divisive, hurtful, disruptive and violent” (*Mayor’s Statement on Racism*, 2020). The same media release quotes the Town’s Chief of Police, who “agreed” with Bonnette and said, “I stand in solidarity with our community” (*Mayor’s Statement on Racism*, 2020). This begins to reveal linguistic patterns, where phrases such as “standing with” a certain community may coordinate with values to show support, but ultimately are ineffectual except for maintaining the existing social and political state of affairs in the Town. This is indicative of social expectations that compel governments to show a commitment to diversity. However, passive and hollow discursive commitments by local governments do not greatly influence social change or progress diversity and inclusion in their localities. The Town and its residents can feel as though they are accomplishing necessary diversity and inclusion measures, but ultimately these discourses constitute a social language that is used to promote some unspecified social good where power is firmly held by the dominant group in the pre-existing social structure.

Beyond June, the discussion around Emancipation Day in August 2020 indicated the facet of recognition and an internal willingness to engage with matters of race and history. Councillor Somerville stated that “We don’t really recognize or speak enough of [Emancipation Day]...I think we have the history of respecting human rights and I think it would be important for us to recognize Emancipation Day” (*Council Meeting – August 10, 2020*). It is interesting to parallel this comment with Mayor Bonnette’s mention of Halton Hills’ “tarnished reputation” with the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK and played a significant role in spreading racism and hate in Canada and in lingering religious and ethnic prejudices and intolerances. While the activity of the KKK in Canada peaked from the mid-1910s to the 1930s, with a resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s, remnants of the KKK remained in small pockets across the country, including Halton Hills (TVO, 2021). The existence of the KKK is often conveniently forgotten in the whitewashing of Canada’s history, but in the June 11, 2020 Mayor’s Message, Bonnette (2020b) acknowledged that “the Halton Hills community has a tarnished reputation stemming from a small gathering of members of the KKK, who were actively distributing their literature back in January 1993”. He goes on to note the documentation of this event in the local newspaper and that “It is also documented that this type of activity and what it stands for was not welcome in Halton Hills. People opposed it then and we certainly oppose it now” (Bonnette, 2020b). It is encouraging that Bonnette does not shy away from the town’s history. However, there is a tension between the history of KKK activity in the Town and Councillor Somerville’s idea of the town as a place that respects human rights. To Councillor Somerville, Mayor Bonnette responded,

It’s raising our awareness of something that we just haven’t been paying attention to, and it falls in line with our other issues that we’re looking at. I think we’re going to have another staff response at some point about racism and so on, so it's just an indication that

we're trying to raise these issues and make amends if we can as well. (*Council Meeting – Aug 10, 2020*)

As seen in these quotes, the language in this discussion is relatively passive. Discourse can influence social and cultural change when internal values and beliefs are oriented towards that change. However, there is a lack of conviction to “I think,” “we’re trying,” and making amends “if we can” that reveals a certain social identity carried by the town. Additional examples of diversity discourse reveal more of the internal values held by the town, as well as a deeper sociopolitical phenomenon of co-optation.

It is recognized that as social movements gain traction and begin to formalize and institutionalize there may be opportunities created for progressive policy changes, yet, through co-optation the dominant social organizations or political institutions can retain their power and the “status quo” (Coy & Hedeon, 2007). When co-optation occurs, movements or groups challenging social order are acknowledged, appropriated, and ultimately undermined and defused (Coy & Hedeon, 2007). The social or political elites acknowledge the issue or call for change, appearing to cooperate by incorporating the language of the challenging group or movement and inviting them to participate in policy making. However, this incorporation happens in a way that reinstates the ideologies and vested interests of the dominant group, ultimately defusing the challenge and intervening before implementation of progressive policy changes (Coy & Hedeon, 2007). In the media release *Mayor Recognizes Death of George Floyd; Urges Community to Display Canadian Flags* on June 3, 2020, the statement made by Mayor Bonnette speaks of a community “built on camaraderie, of fellowship, collaboration and support for one another”. The statement quickly shifts away from a recognition of George Floyd’s murder and anti-racism messaging to a pro-Canadian, localism rhetoric:

These are the basic tenets of being a Canadian and I encourage people to display a Canadian flag as a show of unity in opposition to discrimination. The Mayor suggested that residents create, hang or display flags on their lawns, doors or windows from now until Canada Day on July 1, noting that: “By displaying a flag you are not only demonstrating pride in our great country but also, what this country stands for. Let’s show everyone once again, that Halton Hills is the most patriotic Town in Canada!”. (*Mayor Recognizes Death of George Floyd*, 2020)

The discourse here is aimed at creating a positive perception of the Town of Halton Hills and its residents. However, invoking the primary symbol of nationalism to build a rhetoric of national and local pride carries certain connotations. While multiculturalism is officially “what this country stands for”, displaying flags is an empty action in the way of diversity and inclusion. In addition, patriotism is biased towards the traditional notion of being “Canadian”. The idea of social “unity” in the context of Halton Hills must be questioned for who is excluded, as based on the literature, the discourses highlighted above work to reproduce and legitimize historical, social, and racial distinctions and that exclude by supporting white power, authority, and idyllic senses of place. Further, this statement indicates co-optation by the Town through a hegemonic absorption of resistance into a nationalistic narrative that defuses the challenge posed by anti-discrimination and the Black Lives Matter movement. The Town transforms the goals of progressing diversity and inclusion into goals that align with vested interest in maintaining the existing social dynamics of the community. The influence of community identity on diversity discourses is a key intersection worth examining in the next sections of this paper.

### *5.3 Qualitative analysis of place-based identity*

Demographic data from Census Canada provides contextual depth for analysis and exploration of how the town addresses notions of community identity based on the urban/rural divide (RQ2). Between the 2011 to the 2016 census, the Town of Halton Hills’ population grew 3.6%. This is less than the provincial average. Additionally, while 15.9% of Halton Hills’

population are immigrants, the majority (10.7%) claim European descent. Ethnic origin reported in the 2016 census was 80.3% “European” and 30.9% “North American”. Perhaps the most telling statistic about the Town of Halton Hills is the visible minority population, which sits at only 7.4%. This is well below the provincial average of 29.3% visible minority population (Government of Canada, 2017).

The story told by this data indicates a town that is marked by stasis and homogeneity, with a predominantly white, European/Caucasian populace. As the Town of Halton Hills exists within a country that has built its national identity on the idea of multiculturalism, outlining its demographic profile naturally leads to a discussion of how communication attends to place-based identity and the moral geography of Halton Hills.

In 2014, the Town of Halton Hills won a Marketing Canada Award for “its creation of a community-based brand” (Independent Free Press, 2014). Developed to “complement the existing Town corporate brand” as well as “convey the enduring sustainable nature of the community”, discursive place-based identity is built into the town’s tagline “Small Town Living at Its Best”. Contrary to urban centres like Toronto, which markets itself as a leader in diversity and has the slogan “Diversity is our Strength”,<sup>5</sup> diversity and inclusion is not a central concern to the branding and positioning of the Town of Halton Hills.<sup>6</sup> To further analyse the Town’s official identity, one need look no further than the Town of Halton Hills’ “About Us” statement. The town notes that it is “ranked as one of the top small communities in Canada,” officially marketing itself as a place recognized for “its natural beauty, active agricultural community, *high quality of life* and proximity to major centres” (*About the Town of Halton Hills*, 2021 [emphasis added]). This statement is included at the end of every media release, and supports the values

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<sup>5</sup> City of Toronto, 2020

<sup>6</sup> This claim is supported by the quantitative findings in Table 2.

imbedded in the town slogan. The use of “high quality of life” to brand and describe the Town – juxtaposed with distinctly non-urban indicators such as agriculture and “natural” beauty – reproduces and reinforces the moral geography of the rural idyll, where “city people think that rural life, rather than urban life, is marked by “high quality of life,” and so on” (Jansson, 2013, p. 92). References to the town’s official brand appear in Council meetings and in the Mayor’s Messages, such as in the statement, “I would like to extend a sincere thank you to all of our volunteers who support our community and make it such a wonderful place to live. As I like to say, this is our small town living at its best” (*Council Meeting – April 12, 2021*). Other appearances of the brand and values of Halton Hills are seen in examples such as “fostering a healthy community and a superior quality of life in Halton Hills includes providing a clean environment” (*Town Awarded for Energy Efficient Actions, 2020*). These examples work to show the discursive constructions of modern rurality through a cultural script of an idyllic place deeply connected to nature and a sense of community.

This discussion of the town’s branding leads naturally into an analysis of how notions of place-based identity along the urban/rural divide use “community” as a concept and an ideological signifier of power dynamics. Ultimately, the slogan represents and works to continually reinforce a romanticized, traditional conception of community. When the slogan was created, Mayor Bonnette stated:

The community brand belongs to everyone and the community is the target audience – individuals, groups, and businesses. The goal of the brand is to unite everyone around our shared values, help preserve our distinctive character, and enhance our small town way of life, [...] everyone in the community is encouraged to learn about the brand and use it to complement their own identity. (Independent Free Press, 2014)

The idea of ‘unity’ (as discussed in the above section) and “shared values”, as well as the community brand belonging to “everyone” indicates the normalized, dominant social language of

the Town. This appears throughout town communications, such as in the January 7, 2021 media release where the mayor encouraged leaving holiday lights on as a “demonstration of hope and community unity” (*Mayor Encourages Hope & Unity*, 2021). The local government communication strategy apparent in the gathered data reflects rural dimensions and the tendency for the political imagination to treat “the local” as a harmonious community (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). As an example of the rural moral geography, there is a stability that comes with “everyone” being “the community”, rather than a more urban openness to ‘non-locals’ and global engagement. There is an explicit link between place and identity in the communications surrounding the town’s official branding, as the town’s community identity comes from the construction of Halton Hills as an idyllic rural place.

In the context of modern rurality, a key indicator to Halton Hills’ place along the urban-rural divide is attitudes towards change. Much of the concerns relating to policy and development in Council meetings relate to ecology and the environment, rather than to changes that affect social structures. As noted in Council, the sociocultural value system in Halton Hills is built on a goal to “preserve, protect, and promote our distinctive history” (*Council Meeting – December 14, 2020*). Growth proposals are met with opposition from Town Council, with clear examples of the metaphysic of fixity in metaphors about drawing lines in the sand and statements such as [the town] will “grow to here and we will grow no further” (*Council Meeting - February 1, 2020*). In another meeting, Councillor Lewis stated:

I am glad that the planning act says that we have to review official plans every five years, so there is certainly lots of opportunity in the future to bring more land into the urban boundaries if we need it, but this resolution gives the option for us to say at this time that we don't feel that we need additional land in in order to create the kind of community that we desire. (*Council Meeting – April 12, 2021*)

This is a multi-faceted statement, with a dimension of progressivity and growth masking an underlying localism. Inherent to the Town's discourse is a theme of preservation and a desire to remain unchanged. The reference to creating "the kind of community that we desire" has overtones of the binary identified in the literature, where the dominant group or 'unspecified elite' are linked through affective ties of kinship and ethnic group. Halton Hills must be recognizing as a racially homogenous town. With the understanding of the idyllic rural as places of tradition and white safety, one can be critical of what constitutes a "distinctive history" and a "desirable community". Statements such as this do not challenge constructions of race and rurality. Instead, they expose a motivation to preserve Halton Hills as a place of idyllic rural life where cosmopolitanism and change threaten the *concept* of Halton Hills.

Despite this finding, there is a certain willingness to develop and grow that stands in opposition to the tendency for rural areas to stagnant. For example:

Our needs have changed, particularly in recent years. I agree with the comments of the all the previous Council speakers with regard to the need to make sure that we take into consideration opportunities to provide maybe more of a dense development to increase the opportunity for affordable housing. (*Council Meeting – March 22, 2021*)

Instead of downplaying social inequalities, an acknowledgment of changing needs in the town and the openness to increasing density to provide affordable housing is more representative of the metaphysic of flow. This shows alternative motivations of rural communicators that are unexpected for the rural.

More subtle forms of community identity can be seen in the choices of holidays the Town chooses to recognize. Across Council meetings, media releases, and Mayor's Messages, the Town explicitly engages with the Christian holiday Christmas with a *Mayor's Christmas Message* media release. In closing the last Council meeting in December, Mayor Bonnette said, "I'd like to wish everybody a very safe holiday - all those who celebrate Christmas please

celebrate Christmas in your small bubbles” (*Council Meeting – December 14, 2020*). While Bonnette is conscious to give regards that not everyone celebrates Christmas, the lack of official recognition of other religious holidays or impartiality through the choice not to use “Holiday” indicates a cultural dynamic in the town that is based in the traditional, dominant national culture. This impression of the cultural identity of the town is supported by communications surrounding the Culture Days event held in the Fall. In 2020, the Town welcomed the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario as a participant in Culture Days and advertised her “important role in promoting awareness and action related to fostering a sense of identity among the people of Ontario, and encouraging activities aimed at building more just and sustainable communities” (*Get Creative, 2020*). The presence of a figure such as the Lieutenant Governor and her backing of cultural programming in Halton Hills is indicative of an effort by the Town to bolster its image of progressivity while maintaining an identity based in ideals set by the dominant cultural group.

While an analysis of two-way communication is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting the possible influence of the public on the communications of the Town of Halton Hills. As seen through the Council meetings, members of the public are invited to engage in dialogue with Council and share their thoughts and opinions regarding events and development proposals in the town. The discourses present in residents’ statements reflect the concepts discussed in this paper. Quotes from the members of the public show a desire to “maintain the integrity of [the] neighbourhood” and “maintain the status quo” (*Council Meeting - March 1, 2021; Council Meeting - September 28, 2020*). When responding to the development proposal for a regional transit mobility hub, one member of the public stated, “are you trying to say to give up the character of our neighbourhood, which helps to define the character of the town, for the GO

train?” (*Council Meeting – March 22, 2021*). Another instance where the moral geography and community identity appears through a speech act by a member of public occurs in the same meeting:

Georgetown was model small town living at its best. It has made us proud and I thank the many Council members, the department's, on the maintenance and all the planning and the citizen groups that have contributed to the success that has been achieved to live up to this model...honoring and preserving this success is most important to myself and my husband as we look to the future. [...] I know that we would want our future generations to enjoy the same pleasures of living in this town as we have been so fortunate as to have experienced. (*Council Meeting – March 22, 2021*)

The selection of quotes above not only shows a dialogue with the official “small town living at its best” brand of the town, but the ideologies inherent to rurality and the “character” of traditional, small town living. The metaphysic of fixity is exemplified with language like “honouring”, “preserving”, wanting to maintain the “status quo”, and wanting future generations to have the same “pleasures of living”. As these samples were not spoken by members of Council, they cannot directly contribute to the analysis of local government communications. However, they are interesting for considering the Council meetings as spaces for community consultation and how members of public contribute to government communication. As determined by Mohan and Stokke (2000), rural areas stagnate due to continual ties to tradition, where development and social change is locally determined. In terms of which voices are present, there is a tension in representation where those from minority racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds may be less vocal and therefore skew the idea of “general community” consultation (Sison, 2020). In the case of these Council meetings, the voices of the public may only reflect that of the dominant group, therefore privileging certain knowledge, values, and interpretations of local needs. These quotes closely align with Jansson’s finding that rural residents hold

prejudices tied to a certain metaphysical state, in this case being the rigidity and social closure of the rural metaphysic.

It is not insignificant that the dominant group's values reflect the rural idyll. Through the nature of Town Council as elected officials, Council and local government discourse can be considered an extension of the dominant group and therefore the discourse reflects and reinforces dominant culture and associated ways of thinking. By extension, these examples from town residents support local security in the rural that ensures power is retained by the majority. Future research may consider the nature of Council meetings as two-way communication between Council and members of the public.

#### *5.4. Discussion of broader implications*

Taking the analysis and discussion of RQ1 and RQ2 into consideration, one can begin to think more broadly about the implications of these findings for Canada's social, cultural, and political landscape in general (RQ3). Bearing in mind high levels of immigration to Canada and that the Town of Halton Hills shares its borders with Toronto, Mississauga, and Brampton, it is almost shocking that Halton Hills maintains a 92.6% white population.<sup>7</sup> Despite its proximity to cosmopolitan areas that have high levels of diversity, Halton Hills avoids demographic diversity and preserves a sense of rurality and tradition through its communications. Consequently, the Town falls short in its engagement with and promotion of diversity, inclusion, and positive social change. Although Halton Hills may not be representative of all small-medium towns in Canada, these findings are still concerning since diversity and inclusion may be just as low or even lower in similar or more remote towns and regions. Without external pressures to improve policies and programs in rural areas, localism and the presence of social languages that construct non-urban

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<sup>7</sup> Toronto, Mississauga, and Brampton each have over 50% visible minority populations: 51.5% in Toronto, 57.2% in Mississauga, and 73.3% in Brampton (Government of Canada, 2017).

areas as idyllic for their distinctly non-urban qualities can be seen as an obstacle to Canada's supposed identity as a nation that champions acceptance and multiculturalism. Towns and municipalities that are resistant to change risk increasing social, cultural, and political polarization. However, as Canada's population continues to grow and flow outward from urban centres, obscuring previously distinct intersections between urban and rural, there is an expectation that there will be contentions and change to constitutions of rurality. In the dynamic relationship between discourse and social structures, challenging the notion of the rural idyll is key to rural communities shifting their social identities and gaining new, contemporary meanings as spaces of true diversity and inclusion.

## **7. Conclusion**

Based on the results derived in this project, analysis shows Halton Hills' diversity discourse aligns with critical appraisals of this type of discourse. The emphasis of Halton Hills' diversity discourses is less on inequality and genuine improvement of structures and more on their esteem and 'feel-good' measures (Vertovec, 2012). While communications from the Town may say "there is no place for racism" in Halton Hills, the Town's diversity discourses are connected to values that do not challenge dominant ideas and stand separate from their other agendas, programmes, and communications. While it may not necessarily be a 'façade' by the Town, these communications align with Mohan and Stokke's (2000) finding that localities downplay social inequalities and power relationships, isolating the local from broader social and political structures. In this case, an essentialization of the local and acts of co-optation show little genuine engagement to improve social, cultural, and political conditions of diversity and inclusion in the Town of Halton Hills.

The conditions that lead to the articulation of statements relating to diversity and inclusion deserve further discussion, particularly regarding this study's foremost emerging theme: the tendency to respond to widely publicized events. This leads to the question of whether discourse is about global or local issues in small-to-medium sized towns. If diversity discourse is only employed to discuss big "global" media events, the Town necessarily avoids accepting any responsibility towards issues existing within its borders. When local issues arise, such as with acts of hate that occur undeniably within Halton Hills (e.g., the case of the discovery of the noose), the Town can treat this as an anomalous or standalone event rather than as a phenomenon that is symptomatic of a larger local issue.

What is articulated in much of the communications by and within the Town are the historical and racial conditions informing discourse. Truth-claims about the inclusivity of the town reinforce the narrative that racism is not a social problem in the town. The Town and its people may "oppose" racism and racist activities, but inherent to the word oppose is the idea of active resistance. With the reactionary nature of the town's diversity discourses, a sense of active resistance does not appear through any form of comprehensive engagement with social, cultural, or political ideas of diversity and inclusion. What comes out through this discourse is the idea that Halton Hills is already inclusive and diverse, and that racism is a problem that exists outside its borders. In this physical and ideological boundary between "inside" and "outside", outside of the community is a threatening place of racism and discrimination that occasionally intrudes in anomalous events. Racism and discrimination are not conceptualized as structured, systemic issues. The contradiction is that Halton Hills is not immune to these systemic and institutionalised issues. Like other towns and cities in Ontario, across Canada, and around the globe, there is still racism and hate in Halton Hills. The town is not the idyllic place it fashions

itself to be, and by holding onto the traditional notion of the rural idyll, the town's values do not reflect an acceptance of progressive social change.

As outlined in the literature review, there is a binary within “community” that undermines stated intentions to seek diversity and inclusion. Locality informs the dominant cultural script along which discursive place-making is enacted. In the same vein, ways of thinking and values held by the town's elected officials and residents directly impact the communications of the Town. This prompts the conclusion that place-based identity and diversity discourse are inextricably tied to each other. In the case of Halton Hills, a strong community identity associated with the idea of an idyllic rural community hinders the progression of diversity discourses in a way that does not challenge the existing social and political dynamics within the town. Social inclusion in homogenous communities suffers when engagement with equity, diversity, and inclusion lacks proactivity or responses are inadequate in supporting marginalized groups. The social, political, and cultural landscape of the town exists in a state of modern rurality where appearances are more important than real commitments to diversity and inclusion. The legitimacy of discourses that claim inclusion, diversity and anti-racism must be called into question when they fail to acknowledge systemic inequality or white normativity. As seen in this case study, discourses of this nature cannot be said to truly promote positive acceptance or a model of modern rurality that challenges traditional constructions of race and rurality.

## **8. Considerations for Future Research**

Through discourse analysis of Council meetings and other outputs from a smaller local government, this MRP contributes to an understudied area of government communications and the broader body of equity, diversity, and inclusion research. Council meetings are an interesting and important source of data for researchers in the field of communications and public policy, as

through the nature of conversation and debate, they demonstrate less “polished” discourse in government communications. While there are certain limitations to keep in mind, such as constraints on participation, access and record-keeping, sources such as those used in this study provide a new way of understanding government rhetoric and has the potential to reveal a variety of factors influencing the official discourses of towns, cities, municipalities, and other institutions.

Possible directions for further study include enhancing the corpus with interviews, or surveying government and community members. A mixed-method approach would add depth to the critical discourse analysis through insights to the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of Town Council and town residents. As mentioned above, this would naturally lead to expanding the study to consider the notion of two-way communication and the public’s influence on local government communication. It would also be useful to expand the types of media included in the research. Secondary analysis of additional outlets from within and outside the government would deepen the analytical focus and further show how ideas discussed during Council meetings are transferred to online media and news. This could include social media (tweets, Facebook posts, etc.), local news, and the meetings of other committees and councils.

To further develop the understanding of local government diversity discourses and notions of community identity, future iterations of this project could conduct a comparative study between the communications of Halton Hills and other towns similar in size and location. As a preliminary example, Caledon and Aurora are two towns that also have a total population around 60,000 and are located approximately 60 km from Toronto. Yet, in Halton Hills, only 7.4% of the population is a visible minority, while Caledon’s visible minority population is 18.7% and

Aurora's is 26.9%.<sup>8</sup> Other factors being similar, the high homogeneity of Halton Hills in comparison to Caledon and Aurora would make for an interesting cross-referencing of discourses and dominant narratives. This would help show whether the findings from this study are on par with other local or municipal governments, or if the Town of Halton Hills stands apart in its discourses.

The concept of Canadian multiculturalism is a worthy area of consideration for future research. As found in this study, there is a clear discrepancy in Halton Hills between official policy and the ideological structures within the town. The commitment to multiculturalism in a small town such as Halton Hills is only present as public policy language and is not actively promoted or practiced in daily life. As noted above, this challenges Canada's well-established national identity. As a rich direction for future research, one could examine local government diversity discourse against the broader "Canadian" identity to identify the strengths and limitations of Canadian multiculturalism, as well as to consider whether the social, ideological, and/or political notions of multiculturalism are challenged or reinforced beyond the federal level.

While there is much more work to be done in this area of communications research, this study has demonstrated the importance of looking critically at diversity discourses in small towns. This study has highlighted a number of key limitations in such discourses, where instead of true engagement with and promotion of diversity and inclusion, a reactionary pattern emerges where communications are put forth as needed to maintain positive appearances. Another key limitation of diversity discourses is the influence of community identity and metaphysical ties to rural areas as places of stability and tradition. As seen through this study, discursive constructions of race and rurality are reinforced through social, cultural, and political attitudes

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<sup>8</sup> Government of Canada, 2017

and values that are distinctly non-urban. Discourse analysis in this study highlights how racism, discrimination, and hate are not truly accepted as occurring within small town borders, therefore restricting positive social change. Overall, the ideas explored in this study add important concepts and findings to the body of literature on government communication, the urban/rural divide, and discourses of diversity and inclusion.

## **Appendix A – Council Meetings, by date**

*Council Meeting - June 15, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - July 6, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - August 10, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - August 31, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - September 14, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - September 28, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - October 13, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - October 26, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - November 9, 2020 [Minutes].* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - November 23, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - December 14, 2020.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom, Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - January 11, 2021.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom,  
Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - February 1, 2021.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom,  
Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - March 1, 2021.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom,  
Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - March 22, 2021.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom,  
Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

*Council Meeting - April 12, 2021.* Council Chambers, Halton Hills Town Hall and via Zoom,  
Town of Halton Hills. Halton Hills, ON.

## **Appendix B – Media Releases, by date**

June 3, 2020. *Mayor Recognizes Death of George Floyd; Urges Community to Display*

*Canadian Flags*. <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-recognizes-death-of-george-floyd-urges-community-to-display-canadian-flags.aspx>

June 11, 2020. *Mayor's Statement on Racism*. <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-statement-on-anti-racism.aspx>

June 15, 2020. *Town and Canadian Heritage Offer Canada Day Activities*.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-and-canadian-heritage-offer-canada-day-activities.aspx>

June 24, 2020. *New Rainbow Crosswalk for Halton Hills Supports Diversity and Inclusion*.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/new-rainbow-crosswalk-for-halton-hills-supports-diversity-and-inclusion.aspx>

August 26, 2020. *Shop Local Campaign Encourages Residents to Support Halton Hills'*

*Businesses*. <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/shop-local-campaign-encourages-residents-to-support-halton-hills-businesses.aspx>

September 8, 2020. *Age for Youth Taxi Scrip Changes to Support More Young People*.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/age-for-youth-taxi-script-changes-to-support-more-young-people.aspx>

September 14, 2020. *First Climate Change Adaptation Plan*.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/first-climate-change-adaptation-plan.aspx>

September 21, 2020. *New Exhibit at the Cultural Centre*.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/new-exhibition-at-the-cultural-centre.aspx>

September 24, 2020. *Get Creative with a Full Month of Culture Days.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/get-creative-with-a-full-month-of-culture-days-in-halton-hills.aspx>

October 21, 2020. *Town Launches New Initiative re: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-*

*Racism.* <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-launches-new-initiative-re-equity-diversity-inclusion-and-anti-racism.aspx>

October 27, 2020. *Town Announces New Affordable Housing Engagement Strategy.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-announces-new-affordable-housing-engagement-strategy.aspx>

November 10, 2020. *Council Meeting Statement Regarding Racist Incident.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/council-meeting-statement-regarding-racist-incident.aspx>

November 24, 2020. *Mayor Says All Welcome but Stay Home if you Can.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-says-all-welcome-but-stay-home-if-you-can.aspx>

November 25, 2020. *Town Awarded for Energy Efficient Actions at Mayors' Megawatt*

*Challenge Forum 2020.* <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-awarded-for-energy-efficient-actions-at-mayors-megawatt-challenge-forum-2020.aspx>

December 8, 2020. *Mayor Bonnette's 2020 Virtual Chamber Speech, December 8, 2020.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-bonnette-s-2020-virtual-chamber-speech.aspx>

December 9, 2020. *Mayor Participates in Vaccine Rollout Strategy Meeting.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-participates-in-vaccine-rollout-strategy-meeting.aspx>

December 9, 2020. *Local Culture Days Celebration Achieves Top 10 National Ranking.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/local-culture-days-celebration-achieves-top-10-national-ranking.aspx>

December 10, 2020. *Mayor Directs Donation to Crime Stoppers to Fight Hate Crimes.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-directs-donation-to-crime-stoppers-to-fight-hate-crimes.aspx>

December 14, 2020. *Mayor's Christmas Message: 'Please stay home!'*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-christmas-message-please-stay-home.aspx>

December 21, 2020. *Town Prepares as Province Moves to Shutdown.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-prepares-as-province-moves-to-lockdown.aspx>

January 7, 2021. *Mayor Encourages Hope & Unity with a Leave-the-Lights on Challenge.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-encourages-hope-unity-with-a-leave-the-lights-on-challenge.aspx>

January 15, 2021. *Halton Region leaders Continue to Support Proposals and Advocate for Improved Rural Broadband.* <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/halton-region-leaders-continue-to-support-proposals-and-advocate-for-improved-rural-broadband.aspx>

January 21, 2021. *Town Seeking Community Members for Public Art Advisory Board.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-seeking-community-members-for-public-art-advisory-board.aspx>

January 28, 2021. *Town Announces Programs for Black History Month.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-announces-programs-for-black-history-month.aspx>

February 2, 2021. *Town Joins Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-joins-coalition-of-inclusive-municipalities.aspx>

February 2, 2021. *Town Advocates for Improvements to Sick Pay Policies.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-advocates-for-improvements-to-sick-pay-policies.aspx>

February 8, 2021. *Town Council Advocates for Region to Delay Official Plan Approval.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-council-advocates-for-region-to-delay-official-plan-approval.aspx>

February 10, 2021. *Business Sector invited to have their say in Town's Community Improvement Plan update.* <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/business-sector-invited-to-have-their-say-in-town-s-community-improvement-plan-update.aspx>

February 22, 2021. *Learn More About Affordable Housing at March 4th Virtual Open House.* <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/learn-more-about-affordable-housing-at-march-4th-virtual-open-house.aspx>

April 21, 2021. *Town Announces Funding for Local Arts Community.*

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/town-announces-funding-for-local-arts-community.aspx>

## **Appendix C – Mayor’s Messages, by date**

May 1, 2020. *Mayor’s Message - May 2020*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-message-may-2020.aspx>

June 3, 2020. *Mayor’s Message – June 2020*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-message-june-2020.aspx>

June 11, 2020. *Mayor’s Remarks on Racism – June 11, 2020*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton

Hills. <https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-remarks.aspx>

October 7, 2020. *Mayor’s Message – October 2020*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-message-october-2020.aspx>

January 26, 2021. *Mayor’s Message – January 2021*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayors-message-january-2021.aspx>

February 11, 2021. *Mayor’s Message – February 2021*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-message-february-2021.aspx>

March 8, 2021. *Mayor’s Message – March 2021*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-message-march-2021.aspx>

April 8, 2021. *Mayor’s Message – April 2021*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/mayor-s-message-april-2021.aspx>

April 29, 2021. *Be Kind to One Another*. Rick Bonnette/Town of Halton Hills.

<https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/news/be-kind-to-one-another.aspx>

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