

# GENDER DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES IN THE INTEGRATION OF LUSO-CANADIANS<sup>1</sup>

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Research indicates that Portuguese-Canadians display significantly lower educational, income and academic achievement levels, in comparison to both the Canadian mainstream, as well as to other large minority groups. Yet, little of this work has explored the existence of any gender differences, within these phenomena. This paper will highlight some of the available census information on differences and similarities in indicators of Portuguese-Canadian integration, as well as between Luso-Canadian and other minority women. The paper will also discuss the implications of these differences to the future of the community.

## **Introduction**

Since the early 1960's, researchers in this country have documented the fact that the Portuguese-Canadian community displays disproportionate percentages of people with low education levels and with lower average incomes. Over the years, researchers such as Wsevolod Isajiw, Peter Li, Fernando Matas and others have shown that the Portuguese in Canada have the highest proportions of any Canadian minority with only a primary school education and one of the lowest percentages of people with a university degree.<sup>1</sup> In fact, census data, that is illustrated in the work by Matas & Valentine, as well as my own 1998 national study Portuguese-Canadians From Sea to Sea, indicate how these levels are equal to, or lower than, those of the Aboriginal communities in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

These statistics are understandable, given the fact that the bulk of Portuguese immigration was overwhelmingly from the poorly educated, rural communities of the Portuguese mainland and the Azores (even when compared to groups, such as the Italians and Greeks).<sup>3</sup> These lower education levels can also be explained by the educational policies and practices of the Portuguese government during the 1950's and 1960's, which mandated one of the lowest levels of schooling in Europe and which did little to promote education, in general.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, researchers have also shown the existence of a different, but related, issue amongst the Portuguese-Canadian community: This is the presence of high levels of academic underachievement amongst Luso-Canadian youth. This problem has been expressed through the disproportionately high levels of secondary school dropout rates amongst Portuguese youth and the low percentages of Luso-Canadians who are attending university. As early as the 1960's, Edith Ferguson was describing how school officials were already concerned about the high drop-out rate amongst Portuguese and Italian-Canadian students.<sup>5</sup> Over the next 35 years, a number of studies conducted by the Toronto Public Board of Education have shown that successive generations of Portuguese-Canadian youth in Toronto have been performing at significantly lower academic levels, have been disproportionately represented in Special Education and Remedial Reading programmes, are leaving school earlier and are dropping out in greater numbers than most other students in this city.<sup>6</sup> In fact, in a 1982 survey, Portuguese-Canadian secondary school students in Toronto's Public Board were found to be the least likely to feel that they have the capacity

to succeed in university.<sup>7</sup>

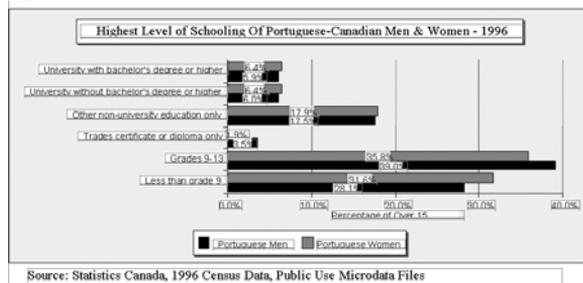
Over the past 10 years, the reality of academic underachievement has continued to affect the youth of this community. While the newer generations of Portuguese students have improved somewhat, so have those of most other communities, so that the relative gains that have been made by our youth in school retention and frequency in post-secondary education have, in part, been accompanied by a similar improvement amongst the youth of other groups.<sup>8</sup> In fact, a 2000 study on ethnoracial inequality in Toronto, by Prof. Michael Ornstein of York University has shown that, in 1996, Portuguese youth aged 20-24 in this city were second only to the Central Americans, in the proportions of dropouts amongst this age group.<sup>9</sup> As Ornstein's work illustrated, in the years leading up to and including 1996, roughly 29% of Portuguese youth aged 20-24 had left school without graduating. In fact, in his study, Ornstein describes the Portuguese as one of the groups "of most concern" and as suffering "extreme disadvantage," in the sphere of education.<sup>10</sup> It should be emphasized that the Portuguese were not the only group that Ornstein identified as being "of most concern." However, they were the only group in this city to be identified as suffering "extreme educational disadvantage," ostensibly due to their combination of low education levels amongst the first generation and high levels of high-school dropouts amongst the second.

Yet, despite the evidence pointing to a problem, little of this past research has looked specifically at the situation of Portuguese women in relation to Portuguese men and to other minority women. There is little information on how Luso-Canadian women are faring not only in regards to indicators such as education, but also to income, occupational paths and employment rates. In fact, one of the few academics to attempt this type of analysis has been Prof. Wenona Giles, in her book *Portuguese Women in Toronto*, a book which tackles some of these questions.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, and in recognition of the importance of her work, I will be referring to some of Prof. Giles's findings in this presentation.

### Portuguese-Canadian Women & Levels of Schooling

In terms of overall levels of schooling, an analysis of the 1996 census which I conducted for this paper, illustrates that there are roughly the same proportions of Portuguese-Canadian women with a university education, as there are men (approx. 6%) (see figure 1). It is important to note that, these figures include both what we would term the "first generation" (those who were born and educated in Portugal), as well as the second (those who were born and/or educated in Canada).

Figure 1.



As figure 1. illustrates, amongst that portion of the Luso-Canadian population with less than grade 13, there are more women with less than a grade 9 education and more men with at least some secondary schooling. However, as figure 1. also illustrates, there are slightly more women than men in our community who attend university, although the difference is pretty much negligible (5.9% vs. 6.4%).

Yet, my analysis of the census data also showed that, in comparison to other ethnic and

racial-minority women, Portuguese-Canadian women have significantly lower percentages of their numbers attending university, as well as significantly higher percentages of women with only a grade school education. For example, in 1996, almost 32% of Portuguese women had less than a grade 9 education (compared to 23% of Italian, 6.6% of Jamaican and 11.8% of Canadian women). Similarly, only 6.4% of Portuguese women had a bachelor's degree or higher, second only behind 6% of women described as "North American Indian."<sup>12</sup> However, it should be noted that these numbers include the first generation (those who were born and educated in Portugal). In other words, this finding reflects the overall lower educational levels of the first generation.

In fact, in the analysis conducted by Prof. Giles in her book, she showed that nearly 50% of Portuguese-Canadian women who had been born in Canada had achieved a university or college degree, by 1996.<sup>13</sup> This was an even greater proportion than all Canadian-born women (47%). Portuguese Canadian-born men, however, continued to underachieve, with only 38% being University Graduates, in comparison to 46% of other Canadian-born. Therefore, Portuguese-Canadian women who were born in Canada seem to be entering college and university in numbers that are comparable to the average for all women in Canada. Thus, the failure to enter post-secondary education seems to lie mainly with Portuguese-Canadian males.

In order to further test this pattern which seemed to indicate that academic underachievement was predominantly a problem amongst males, I attempted to reproduce Michael Ornstein's graph of youth dropouts aged 20-24, but at a national level and broken down by gender.<sup>14</sup>

### Portuguese-Canadian Dropouts aged 20-24, by Gender

As I mentioned before, Prof. Michael Ornstein produced a study where he showed that, in 1996, approximately 29% of all Luso-Canadians aged 20-24 in Toronto were not in school and had not graduated (i.e. had dropped out).<sup>15</sup> When I tried to sample this same population at a national level (with the exception of the Atlantic Provinces, and the Northern Territories), I found that only approximately 19.5% of Portuguese youth in these age categories (aged 20-24) and regions had left school without graduating (Table 1). In other words, there were 10% fewer dropout youth aged 20-24 when all of Canada was

**Table 1: Percentage of Luso-Canadian Youth Aged 20-24 Out of School and Without a Diploma, 1996**

| Toronto | All of Canada* |
|---------|----------------|
| 29%     | 19.5%          |

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census Data, Public Use Microdata Files and Census Data compiled by Ornstein, M. *Ethno-Racial Inequality in the City of Toronto: An analysis of the 1996 census*. Toronto: Access and Equity Unit, City of Toronto, 2000, p. 49.

\*Note: Excludes Atlantic Provinces and Northern Territories

sampled, in comparison to Toronto. This 10% difference between Toronto and the national average suggests that the academic underachievement problem may be more acute in the City of Toronto, and particularly, in today's inner city (the old City of Toronto, which was the area of

focus for Ornstein's study, before the Provincial government forced an amalgamation of the various cities of Metropolitan Toronto into one large megacity).

Secondly, when I broke down these rates between Portuguese women and men, I also found that the incidence of leaving school without graduating was nearly twice that for young 20-24 year old Portuguese men, as it was for young Portuguese women (see table 2.).

**Multiple versus single ethnic origin**

Furthermore, Table 2. also shows another trend. In 1996, approximately 25% of all Lusio-Canadians in Canada were born of multiple ethnic origins. However, when we compare the incidence of dropping out between those who had single and multiple origins, we find that those with multiple origins are underrepresented within this dropout figure. Roughly 18% of all Portuguese dropouts of the 20-24 age group had multiple origins (900 is 18% of 5,076). This means that being born of one, or more, non-Portuguese ancestors seems to make young Lusio-Canadians slightly less likely to drop out. This finding was

even truer for Portuguese-Canadian women of multiple ethnic origin - 15% of the women versus 19% of the men had dropped out of high-school, a figure similar to the overall percentage of Portuguese youth aged 20-24 that had dropped out of school at the national level (19%). So, at least for Portuguese-Canadian women, there does seem to be a slight educational advantage to being from a mixed ancestry. This same advantage was not present for males.

**Table 2: Portuguese-Canadians, Aged 20-24, Not Attending School and Without a Secondary-School Diploma, 1996\***

|                               | Women | Men   | Total |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Single Ethnic Origin</b>   | 1,584 | 2,592 | 4,176 |
| <b>Multiple Ethnic Origin</b> | 288   | 612   | 900   |
| <b>Total</b>                  | 1,872 | 3,204 | 5,076 |

(\*Note: Excludes Atlantic Provinces and Northern Territories)  
Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census of Canada, Public Use Microdata Files.

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**Employment Income**

When I looked at employment income, I saw that Portuguese women continue to earn significantly less than Portuguese men, (i.e. \$18,547 vs. \$27,885). However, women in other groups also earn between \$7,000 to nearly \$15,000 less than males. Therefore, Portuguese women do not appear to earn substantially less than other women, (i.e., They earn \$9,338 less than Portuguese men, which is within the range for other women).

**Occupation**

With regards to occupation, younger Portuguese-Canadian women seem to be moving very heavily into business, finance and administration-related occupations, and away from sales and service and manufacturing. In 1996, 41% percent of Portuguese women in the 45 to 64 age group worked in sales and services, while only 30% of women 25 to 44 worked in these fields.

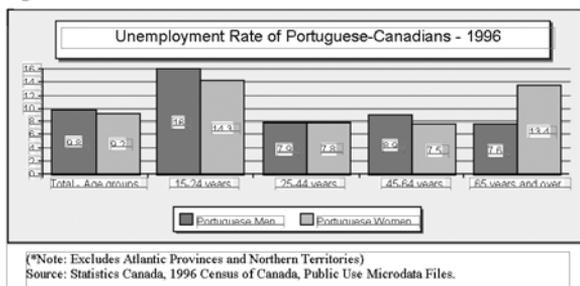
**Unemployment**

In terms of unemployment, the Portuguese community has not traditionally had disproportionate rates of unemployment. In fact, when we compare women to men, we can see that in 1996, Portuguese women had a slightly lower unemployment rate than men, for most age groups (9.2% in 1996, vs. 9.8% for men) (see figure 2). However, the rate for Portuguese women over 65 was nearly double that for men (13.4% vs. 7.6%). Furthermore, this rate was high, even in comparison to other minority women. It was nearly double the rate (7.6%) of those women over 65 who called themselves "Canadian" and resembled the rate amongst new immigrant, visible minority women (ex. 10.3% of Chinese and 14.9% of Jamaican women over 65 were unemployed).

In relation to this, one of the points that came out of the National Needs Assessment

Study of the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress was that, Portuguese-Canadian seniors, as a whole, tend to have much higher percentages of their incomes coming from government transfer payments, than is the case for other seniors.<sup>16</sup> As we can see from this graph, Portuguese women appear to be greatly more vulnerable than men to unemployment in their senior years.

Figure 2.



### Low Income

The incidence of low income is slightly lower amongst the Portuguese than in the population-at-large (generally between 15 to 20%). There is also little difference between men and women, with women having only a 1% to 2% higher incidence of low income (the same as in other groups).

### Marriage

Slightly more women than men between the ages of 25 to 44 were married (68% vs. 65%). Divorce rates in this age category were virtually similar (5% vs. 4.4%).

### Implications

The major implication of these results relates to the wide difference in educational achievement between men and women. Portuguese-Canadian young women are increasingly entering into post-secondary education in much greater numbers than Luso-Canadian males. Thus, tomorrow's Luso-Canadian young professional is more likely be a woman than a man. This has obvious implications for the future leadership of the community, as well as for the further breaking down of traditional gender roles. For example, given the fact that women are often more willing to work cooperatively, the presence of larger numbers of women might eventually translate into a greater tendency towards collaboration between our different community organizations.

Another implication relates to the Federal Government's *Employment Equity Act*.<sup>17</sup> This Act was initiated to combat the effects of racial and gender discrimination in hiring and promotion, by directing the government, as well as its funded agencies, to give special consideration to the hiring of women, the disabled, visible minorities and Aboriginals. Although Luso-Canadians are not considered visible minorities and consequently not covered by the Act, Portuguese-Canadian women, by virtue of their gender, are covered. Consequently, they may be targeted for hiring and promotion. However, Portuguese-Canadian males are not covered and must compete alongside other white male applicants. Whether the inclusion of Portuguese women by this Act will give them an advantage over other women in terms of hiring and promotion, or an even further improvement over Luso-Canadian males in terms of educational and career advancement, is still to be seen. Only future research will tell.

A third implication of these findings is the need to specifically target our School Boards' remedial and stay-in-school programs to young Portuguese males. In the past, this has not been done. In fact, I would argue that most of what has been tried in the commu-

nity and in local schools - in terms of student outreach, role modeling, mentoring programs, homework clubs, folk dancing in Portuguese clubs etc. - have tended to be geared towards young girls, rather than young boys, in both the tone, as well as the nature of the activities. Yet, the research clearly shows that there is a greater need for male mentorship than there is for women's. There is also a need to implement programs and activities which take into account the more active and experiential learning styles of young boys, as well as their greater physical activity.

Finally, in contrast to other European immigrant groups, our community is overwhelmingly a young one (in terms of its high percentages of youth). Figures provided by Ornstein show that about 19% of Toronto Portuguese-Canadians are below the age of 15, while only 8% are over 65.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, as a recent population projection of Canada's minority communities has shown, Portuguese-Canadians have the fourth highest rates of population increase of any ethnic community in Canada of children under the age of 15 (after the Chinese, South-Asian and Blacks).<sup>19</sup> Thus, in the year 2,020, our community could be well into 600,000 without any significant increase in Portuguese immigration.

Whether this will mean a greater voice for our community in Canadian affairs really depends on how well we can introduce our voices, concerns and hopes into the agenda and debates of the various Canadian governments and nonprofit sector.

Unfortunately for the Portuguese, the issues that have been raised in recent years in public, government and academic forums have generally been those of the more recent, articulate and generally better-educated visible-minority communities (although many have yet to be addressed). Our community has been virtually silent, invisible and absent in these debates. Hopefully, with increasing numbers of women with a higher education, our community can have a stronger and more effective voice, with which to address its concerns.

However, this will also depend on the level of interest which these women will have in maintaining a relationship with their Portuguese heritage and in participating in community life. I would also hazard to say that this participation will be highly dependent on the capacity and willingness of our community institutions - the vast majority of which are currently run by men - to accommodate to the needs and interests of these young women.

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<sup>1</sup> Isajiw, W. *Understanding Diversity: Ethnicity and Race in the Canadian Context*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc, 1999; Li, P. *Ethnic Inequality in a Class Society*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc, 1988; Matas, F. & Valentine, J. *Selected Ethnic Profiles on Educational Attainment. Strategic Research and Analysis*, Multiculturalism Program, Department of Canadian Heritage, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Matas, F. & Valentine, 2000; Nunes, F. *Portuguese-Canadians From Sea to Sea: A National Needs Assessment*. Toronto: Portuguese-Canadian National Congress, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Arroteia, J. C. *A Emigração Portuguesa - Suas Origens e Distribuição* [Portuguese emigration - its origins and distribution]. Lisboa: Ministério da Educação, Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa, 1983; Rocha Trindade, M. B. *Imigrantes portugueses* [Portuguese immigrants]. Lisboa: Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina, 1973; Serrão, J. *A Emigração Portuguesa* [Portuguese emigration]. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, G. M., & Higgs, D. *A Future to Inherit: The Portuguese communities of Canada*. Canada: McClelland and Stewart, 1976; UNESCO-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 1973. "Public Expenditures on Education," *Statistical Yearbook, 1972*, Paris: Unesco. cited in Anderson G. & Higgs, D., 1976, p. 141 (note 1).

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, E. *Newcomers in Transition*. Toronto: The International Institute for Metropolitan Toronto, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, R. S. A study of the grade 9 cohort of 1993, 1993-1998: The last grade 9 cohort of the Toronto Board of Education (Report #229). Academic Accountability, Toronto District School Board, 1999; Brown, R. S., Cheng, M., Yau, M., & Ziegler, S. The 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey: Initial Findings (Report #200).

Toronto: Research Services, Toronto Board of Education, 1992; Cheng, M., Yau, M., & Ziegler, S. The 1991 every secondary student survey, part II: Detailed profiles of Toronto's secondary school students (Report #204). Toronto: Research Services, Toronto Board of Education, 1993; Cheng, M. & Yau, M. The 1997 Every Secondary Student Survey: Detailed Findings, (report # 230). Toronto District School Board, 1999; Cheng, M., Tsuji, G., Yau, M., & Ziegler, S. The every secondary student survey, Fall 1987 (Report # 191). Toronto: Research Section, Toronto Board of Education, 1989; Yau, M., Cheng, M., & Ziegler, S. The 1991 every secondary student survey, part III: Program level & student achievement (Report #205), Toronto: Toronto Board of Education, Research Services, 1993. These are also summarized in Nunes, F. "Marginalization, social reproduction and academic underachievement: the case of the Portuguese community in Canada." In de Abreu, G., Cline, T. (Eds.), *The Education of Portuguese Children in Britain: Insights from Research and Practice in England and Overseas*. Department of Psychology, University of Luton, England, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Larter, S., Cheng, M., Capps, S. & Lee, M. Post secondary plans of grade eight students and related variables (report # 165). Toronto: The Board of Education for the City of Toronto, Research Department, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> For example, in the following 1999 Cohort study of the Toronto Board of Education, the graduation levels of students from a number of different groups, including the Portuguese, improved over time. Yet, the Portuguese continued to show consistently lower graduation rates (most often the lowest): Brown, R. S. A study of the grade 9 cohort of 1993, 1993-1998: The last grade 9 cohort of the Toronto Board of Education (Report #229). Academic Accountability, Toronto District School Board, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Ornstein, M. *Ethno-Racial Inequality in the City of Toronto: An Analysis of the 1996 Census*. Toronto: Access and Equity Unit, City of Toronto, 2000, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ornstein, p. 51, pp. 124-125.

<sup>11</sup> Giles, W. *Portuguese Women in Toronto: Gender Immigration and Nationalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Information compiled from Statistics Canada, 1996 Census Data, Public Use Microdata Files

<sup>13</sup> Giles, p. 98-99.

<sup>14</sup> Ornstein, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ornstein, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Nunes, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Employment Equity Act (An Act Respecting Employment Equity - 1995 § c. 4, Government of Canada. cited in <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/E-5.401/43300.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ornstein, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> "Population Projections of Ethnic Groups in Canada to the Year 2016" Ottawa: Teega Research Group, 1991. Cited in Tepper, E. L. "The future of ethnicity in Canada: A demographic and policy perspective." Paper presented at the Looking Back, Looking Forward: Building Strong Ethnocultural Communities Conference, of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, Delta Hotel, Ottawa, October 25-27, 2002.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mr. Walter Giesbrecht, Data Librarian at York University, for his assistance in compiling some of the census data for this paper