Issues of Race in Employment
Experiences of Caribbean Women in Toronto

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Cet article compare la situation des femmes et des hommes originaires des Caraïbes à celle de ceux et celles qui sont d'origine européenne. L'étude s'attache aux personnes qui ont une éducation post-secondaire et à la place donnée à leur sexe et à leur ethnie dans leurs expériences de travail.

It has often been remarked that immigrant women are a double minority —they are disadvantaged when compared to Canadian-born men and women, and when compared to others in their ethno-racial group. One could even call them a triple minority, if they are racial minority immigrants. Do these disadvantages persist, even among second generation Caribbean women and men when they have a post-secondary education? This paper compares the employment situation of Caribbean women to their male counterparts and to the Canadian-born population of European origin. Our discussion is based on information from three sources, the 1991 census and a survey of 328 mostly post-secondary educated Caribbean-origin people living in Toronto, and personal interviews with 20 (ten each) women of African and South Asian (or Indian) origin. Our data was collected between 1997 and 1998. The study was funded by the Toronto Centre for Excellence in Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS).

Profile of the Caribbean-Canadian population in 1991

In 1991 there were 481,700 persons of Caribbean origin living in Canada of which 236,967 lived in Toronto. Unlike the total population or other visible minorities in Toronto, where there was a more or less equal split between the sexes, for every 100 male Caribbeans there were 120 females. This is reflective of the migration patterns of Caribbean women to Canada. Responding to the domestic labour needs of Canada, women from Guadeloupe and the English Caribbean were recruited through agreements between Caribbean and Canadian governments that brought hundreds of women each year to work in white middle- and upper-class Canadian households. These women were expected to be between the ages of 18 and 35, single, and have at least a Grade 8 education (Silvera; Calliste).

While 40 per cent of Toronto's total population was foreign-born, this was as much as two-thirds of the Caribbeans. However, over seven in ten had Canadian citizenship. In 1962, Canada removed any reference to race from its immigration policy and in 1967, instituted the point-system, effectively opening immigration to more than just immigrants of European origin. This fact helps to explain why by 1991, only 18 per cent of all Caribbeans who had immigrated to Toronto, had been here before 1970. The 1991 census also showed that 37 per cent of Caribbeans in Toronto were under age 20 compared to only 27 per cent for Toronto as a whole. This difference was reflected in marital status, with 60 per cent of Caribbeans being single compared to 45 per cent for Toronto's total population. However, eight per cent of the Caribbean population were female single parents and 15 per cent of the total Caribbean population were children living in female single parent homes, compared to three and five per cent, respectively, for Toronto as a whole.

Caribbeans had the advantage of knowing the English language, compared to other immigrants: 93 per cent had English as their mother tongue and 95 per cent spoke it in the home, compared to only 65 and 77 per cent, respectively, for the total population of Toronto and 27 and 41 per cent, respectively, for other racial minority groups in Toronto.

When considering levels of education among persons 15 years and older, Caribbeans (58 per cent) were only a little less likely than the total Toronto population (61 per cent) to have post-secondary education. However, when compared to their European-origin counterparts, even those with post secondary education do not do as well.

Whether born in Canada or having immigrated at a young age, men and women of Caribbean origin all seemed to be at a disadvantage in the world of work, even if they had com-

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pleted some or most of their primary, secondary, or post-secondary education in Canada. Our research compares unemployment rates, proportions in full or part-time work, proportions in managerial/professional occupations (including management/administration, natural and social sciences, teaching, medicine, and artistic) and their wage incomes in 1990. In all cases, we are considering only persons with post-secondary education. For both sexes, we considered three groups: Canadian-born, Canadian-educated, and foreign-educated. Canadian-educated refers to immigrants who came to Canada at a young enough age to complete some of their primary or secondary education here.

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While unemployment rates for Canadian-born males and females of European origin, ranged between six and eight per cent, for Canadian-born Caribbeans, rates were 16 per cent for both sexes. Among Canadian-educated, those of European origin had rates of seven or six per cent for females and males, but Caribbeans had 23 and 11 per cent, respectively. The foreign-born had the lowest levels of unemployment, but among both sexes, Caribbeans had higher proportions than those of European origin.

Both European origin men and Caribbean origin men who were foreign-educated, had above 90 per cent in full-time employment. This proportion was similar for European origin women who were Canadian-born or educated. For Caribbean origin men who were born in Canada or Canadian-educated, as well as for all females, around 80 per cent were in full-time jobs while among foreign-educated Caribbeans, a higher proportion of females than males was in full-time employment.

The proportion of the labour-force in managerial/professional occupations was always higher for both women and men in the European-origin group. Among males, the proportion in managerial/professional occupations was around 45 per cent for the Canadian-born, Canadian-educated and foreign-educated of European origin. Among Caribbean origin males, the proportions were, respectively, 27, 29, and 23 per cent and in all three groups the cohort of European origin females, had proportions that were higher than these. But among Canadian-educated and foreign-educated Caribbean women they had higher proportions than their male counterparts in these occupations.

Given the above situation, it was not surprising that there were strong differences in wage incomes. The average wage income of Canadian-born men of European-origin with post-secondary education was $32,306. Using this as a base equal to 100, no sub-group of women earned more than 60 percent, while the index for Canadian-educated men of European-origin was slightly higher at 103. In every case, Caribbean men earned more than Caribbean women, but the highest rate among Caribbean men, was 80 per cent for the foreign-educated.[1]

The social situation of post-secondary educated caribbeans in Toronto

While the census provides a profile and allows for analysis of situations, it does not take into account the way people feel about a situation. In the survey of 328 persons of Caribbean origin, we asked respondents, among other things, about their work situation, and the degree to which they felt racism played a part in their daily work life. This is not a representative sample of Caribbeans in the workforce. Our sample of respondents is heavily weighted in favour of those who had post-secondary education. (Of all respondents in full or part-time work, 83 per cent had post-secondary schooling and a further 16 per cent had a high school diploma.) The sample was obtained by a snow-ball effect. We interviewed several Caribbeans and asked them for names of friends. These, in turn, were asked for names of other friends. In addition, we had articles published in various Black and Caribbean presses in Toronto about our study and about our need for respondents to our survey. This produced a large number of responses. In an attempt to get at the differences among Caribbean people of various ethno-racial backgrounds, we make a distinction between Black and others—others represent those of South Asian, Chinese, European origin and those who reported themselves as "mixed."

Our survey data showed that among all respondents who were in jobs, most were in clerical—with a more or less equal number of men and women (22 per cent). Those in professional occupations were teachers, mainly high school (16 per cent), social workers (15 per cent), and medical, mainly nurses (seven per cent). Fifteen per cent were managers, and eight per cent were skilled and unskilled workers. Those in sales, service, and government administration accounted for six, five, and five per cent, respectively. Just over half were working in a field related to their education, but this was more likely the case for Black women (56 per cent) compared to Black men (45 per cent).

Informed by studies of Black Car-

ibbean-Canadians in Toronto (Simmons and Plaza; Henry; Mendoza; Richmond; Head; Ramcharan), we asked respondents about different aspects of their job. Overall, respondents were least likely to say that the pay was good, which is not surprising, given the differences in average salaries observed in the previous section. Only half felt that their chances for promotion were good. They were most likely to agree that they had an interesting job, and this was followed closely by being free to make decisions, a chance to develop their skills, and the job being related to qualifications. They were a little less likely to agree that they could influence decisions and that they had good job security.

Thelma is an example of a person who reported that she had an interesting job. She reported that two weeks before graduating from Ryerson Polytechnical University with a degree in journalism, she was approached by her "area supervisor" at Red Lobster where she worked as a waitress. He encouraged her to apply for "an entry-level position at head office" in the public relations department. Some two years later when the company was going through restructuring, Thelma was faced with the fact that she would have to leave the company. She reluctantly applied for other jobs, but as she said, "I felt really committed to the company, they paid for my education because that's where I worked as a student." Again with the help of her boss, Thelma went on to find another job that was interesting, satisfying, and related to her university training. In her words,

> *It's been great. Fortunately, I have always worked for companies that were built on strong philosophies about taking care of people. The head office for Red Lobster where they were going through this restructuring had a philosophy that it was important to take care of people.... In my second company, they had a strong people philosophy and they had great processes for people to go through if they felt that they were being treated unfairly.... So, I have always been lucky to be in companies like that.*

There seems to be a relationship between having an interesting job and the level of support that respondents felt within their workplaces. For Thelma, the support she received from her bosses seemed to have given her a comfort with the job. Similarly, Virginia, a teacher, reported that she "really liked that last three years" at her job because, with the support of her vice-principal, she is now able to "really practice" her "philosophy of education."

Sheryl offers another reason for feeling positive about her job. After years of part-time and contract work with the provincial government, Sheryl pointed out that she felt "fairly secure" with her job because, even though she does not "like to praise the union" there is a sense of "stability" she feels because "if you lose that job depending on your seniority you would get an equal job at that level." Overall, about equal proportions of both men and women felt positive about their jobs. They cited good pay and having opportunities to develop their skills as reasons. However, in most other issues Black men were less positive: they were much less likely to feel that they could influence decisions or that they had good chances for promotion. Black women were more likely than other women to say they had a chance to develop their skills but less likely to think that their pay was good. Women had significantly higher proportions than men (differences of 18 and 11 per cent, respectively) to state that they had jobs relating to their qualifications.

When asked if good performance in the job would lead to positive things, less than half of the respondents expected that it would. Thelma's comments above are typical of those who believed that good job performance has a direct relationship to employment opportunities and attainment. Others, like Virgina and Jean claimed that good performance is not all, for as Jean reported, it was an employment equity initiative that enabled her to obtain the job which she once held in the newsroom of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

Respondents were most likely to believe that they would not be laid-off and least likely to think that they would be promoted. In all cases, men were more optimistic than women. Black men were less optimistic than others, but there were no strong differences between the two groups of women. With regards to their chances of lay-offs, we have already seen that Thelma feels that given her company's commitment to employees, her chances of lay-off are small. Similarly, Tina, a bilingual manager in a small industrial company, said that she too felt "very secure from lay-off," although she knows that nothing is "one hundred percent guaranteed." She went on: "I think I am more secure than some other people there now. I don't think my boss knows enough about the day-to-day tasks that she could survive without one of us"— referring to the other manager. Tina also suggested that as the coordinator of the "Information Systems Department" her "chances of being let go [are even] less likely."

Soyini and Winsome, who were

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still probationary teachers, also said that while they should be concerned about their jobs, given the current provincial government education policies and the fact that "the first fired, last hired" (Soyini), they still feel secure. This feeling is related to personal confidence as Winsome said, "I am good at what I do, the people that hired me know that.... I have a good rapport with students ... and staff." But probably, it was Soyini who most explicitly articulated the reason for their confidence. She said, "... if I were to look at the children of colour there is a huge niche for teachers like me."

In terms of experiences, when asked if they had encountered any discrimination in the workplace, black men (59 per cent) and black women (51 per cent) were most likely to state that they had, while other men (38 per cent) and women (31 per cent) experienced less. Name calling, not being promoted, and not being trusted were the main types of discrimination mentioned. The responses here are in keeping with other findings from studies of Caribbean-Torontonians conducted by Richmond, Henry, James, and Head.

Asked about their experiences with specific types of discrimination in the workplace (see Henry and Ginsberg; Billingsley and Muszynski; James), close to half felt that they were treated unfairly by the boss and had heard racist jokes and were subjected to awkward glances. Over four in ten felt that they had been overlooked for promotion but only about a quarter experienced racist name-calling or were told to "go home." Both Black male and female respondents experienced significantly more discrimination than their counterparts. Over 20 per cent more Black men felt that they were subject to awkward glances and treated unfairly by the boss than other men. These differences were even more striking for women. In no case were differences between the two groups of women, less than 12 per cent, and the largest differences were 27 per cent. More Black women indicated that they were being treated unfairly by their boss, while 25 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively, stated that they had been overlooked for promotion and were subject to awkward glances. Just under a third of the Black female respondents were told to "go home," compared to only 14 per cent for other women. Twenty-six per cent of Blacks and 14 per cent of Others, reported that they experienced racist name-calling.

When asked if Caribbeans encountered a "glass ceiling" when seeking promotion, 44 per cent agreed. The proportions were higher for the Other group respondents: 65 per cent of women and 50 per cent of men, compared to 39 and 23 per cent, respectively for Black men and women. This is in keeping with James' findings that showed young Black workers, many of them in their 20s, reported that their experiences with a promotional "glass ceiling" in employment was a challenge for them. In our 1998 interviews, respondents such as Jean, the one-time CBC employee, and Sheryl, the government employee, expressed the fact that employment equity was a way that "people who would have never gotten the opportunity, will get the opportunity to get the jobs" (Sheryl). And as in James' study, respondents were quick to identify the negative side to employment equity. For instance, Sheryl said: "The bad point is that people think that once you get a certain position, you got it because of employment equity and it's not always the case."

In terms of average incomes, Other men had the highest average, and their differences with Other women was all the more striking. On the contrary, among Black men and women, averages were very similar. Earlier we used the average income of Canadian-born men of European origin, in 1991, as a standard. While the average must have increased between 1991 and 1997 when this survey was carried out, the incomes of our sample are relatively high. But while we should not be surprised because of the evidence of racism and discrimination, it is still the wish that we would find less evidence of experiences with prejudice and discrimination in the workplace.

Conclusion

We undertook this investigation to ascertain the extent to which race, gender, and migration status affect the employment situation, opportunities, and experiences of Caribbean people in Toronto. We found that, with reference to the 1991 census data, while Caribbean people tended to have a significantly high rate of unemployment, for the most part their full-time participation in employment was not very much different from that of other Canadians. However, with the exception of foreign-educated Black men, fewer Black women held managerial and professional positions and less than their counterparts. Our survey data indicate that most Caribbean Black women seem to have a fairly positive outlook on their occupational situation, despite the limitations in promotional opportunities, income, and experiences with discrimination. It should be noted that the experiences of Black women of Caribbean origin vary according to birthplace and where they received their education. From the census data, we found that foreign-educated women tended to do better than their Canadian-educated Caribbean counterparts. This seems to explain the positive perceptions that were expressed in the interviews by respondents. Hence, it seems appropriate to suggest that while in fact Black immigrant Caribbean women might be perceived as triply minoritized, this has not precluded them from utilizing available resources and effectively navigating the opportunity structures.

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[1]Source: Statistics Canada, 1991 Census of Canada, Public Use Microfiche files (PUMF).

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EILEEN CURTEIS

Snowbird's New Song Exudes Joy

Grown cold
as a shivering sun
it's time snowbird
stopped abandoning her vehicle.

Limbs frozen
below zero temperatures
she knows the road alright
but a song
smothered in a blanket
is getting her nowhere.

She wants music
real music
like a symphony
or orchestra
to play with.

Already she feels lighter.

Autumn bursts its seeds
and she laughs
at the yellow face of a dandelion
chasing her up a winter hill.

Playful,
this dumb weed
scooting around the earth
has given more joy
to her silent tongue
than a bear hibernating
ever could.

Eileen Curteis's poetry appears earlier in this volume.