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**Visible Minorities in Canada's Workplaces: A Perspective on the 2017
Projection**

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**Visible Minorities in Canada's Workplaces:
A Perspective on the 2017 Projection**

by

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Introduction

Canada's visible minority population has increased rapidly since the 1960s when immigration regulations were changed to allow substantial intake from Asia and Africa. Forty years ago, only 2 percent of the population (about 300,000 people) could be classified as visible minority. Twenty-five years later, in 1986, there were about 1.1 million visible minorities living in Canada. A mere 15 years after that, through a combination of immigration, births and intermarriage the 2001 Census recorded four million visible minority persons.

The last forty years has also seen a massive move toward urbanization and rapid technological change. Further the last fifteen years has seen stagnant incomes, and growing socio-economic polarization (Myles, Morrissette and Picot 1994; see also Hawkins 1988; Myles and Satzewich 1990; Pendakur 2000). So, an increasingly diverse population is sharing—or fighting over—a roughly fixed pie. Canada is now one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. As a result, people are brought face-to-face with more diversity than ever before at a time when oncoming generations anticipate, for the first time since the 1930s, a less affluent future than their parents (Beaudry and Green 1997).

Such transformations bring both challenges and opportunities. Challenges arise because, in a liberal democracy such as Canada, the state has a responsibility to identify and remove barriers that may create differential opportunity structures across groups. Opportunities arise because, with changes to the social, demographic and ethnic mix of the population can come new ways of doing, thinking and being which could potentially benefit Canadian society. The goal of this paper is to explore the possibilities for the future of our ethnically diverse labour market in the face of these changes.

Employment Equity

The *Employment Equity Act* of 1986 classifies as a visible minority anyone whose ancestors are neither entirely European nor partly Aboriginal. This rather clunky definition was created to capture 'nonwhiteness' and to exclude Aboriginals (since they are their own equity group)

for policy purposes. The visible minority category is comprised of highly heterogeneous groups with quite distinct migration and social histories—visible minorities include both the Canadian-born and immigrants, and are comprised of both single- and multiple-origin people. The visible minority category include such diverse groups as Caribbean Blacks who arrived in the 1970s, the descendants of 19th century Japanese migrants, and mixed origin people whose ancestry lies partly in Chinese migrations of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Discussion of the labour market performance and prospects of these highly diverse groups is eased because of four factors: (1) there are several very large distinct ethnic groupings within the visible minority population including the Chinese, South Asian and Black (comprising predominantly Caribbean, African and Canadian-Black) ethnic groups; (2) there are several common patterns in labour market outcomes shared by the majority of visible minority groups, mostly notably poor labour market outcomes in comparison with white workers; (3) the heterogeneity of the visible minority population is much smaller within particular cities as compared to Canada as a whole; and (4) Statistics Canada has put great effort into counting and projecting numbers for these population definitions.

In 2001, about one-eighth of Canada's people were visible minorities. This proportion will grow to about one-fifth by 2017 because visible minorities comprise a disproportionate share of immigrants, and because visible minorities disproportionately are of child-rearing age. Canada's visible minority population is predominantly urban and dominated by a few large groups. Now and into the future, about three-quarters of visible minorities live in Canada's three largest cities of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. By 2017, half of the visible minority population will be in two ethnic groups—South Asian and Chinese populations will each be about 2 million (Statistics Canada 2004, *DRAFT*).

What Are Visible Minorities?

Despite community based origins (see Pendakur 2000) the term visible minority is somewhat contentious. We use the word 'visible' to denote the difference in skin tone, and we use the word 'minority' to denote numerical smallness or weakness in power relations. Both of these elements are somewhat misleading, and grow more misleading over time.

The visibility of non-European origin people is obviously a social construction. Fifty years ago, the eyes of an average person were trained to spot minute differences in ancestry across different parts of the British Isles; the 1951 Census had codes for whether people were English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Devon, Cornish, etc. Until 1981, “Asia” was a birthplace category in public-use census microdata, alongside, for example “Belgium and Luxembourg.” So, our idea of what constitutes a difference in origin, which is necessary for ‘visibility’, changes over time. We may hope that as the diversity of Canadian society grows, our sense of “differentness” diminishes, and the visibility of ethnic minorities disappears.

Employment Equity programs have operationalized the term visible minority based on the idea of majority whiteness. However the rapid increase in the numbers of people claiming more than one ethnic origin makes it increasingly difficult to classify individuals as visible minorities. If one’s mother is of European origin and one’s father is of Asian origin, does that make one a visible minority? Given the statistical definition above, it does indeed. However, to the extent that genetic mixing blurs the lines across ethnic groups and blurs variation in skin tone, those claiming multiple-origins do not fit neatly into the white/visible minority dichotomy.

This problem is more than just academic. In 1996, 20% of visible minorities had a European origin in their ancestry (Statistics Canada, 1996 Census PUMF). By 2017 about 20% of the population will be visible minority. However, given that exogamous marriage is increasingly common and that a large part of the growth of the visible minority population is driven by births, a large fraction of the visible minority population could be multiple-origin by 2017.

The import of whether or not people are classified as visible minorities really hinges on their status as minorities in the sense of numbers or power relations. Evidence from the 1990s suggests that people of mixed European and non-European heritage fare no worse in labour markets than people of fully European origin (Pendakur and Pendakur 1998, 2002a). This same evidence shows that people who have no European origin tend to fare worse than those of European origin. So, multiple-origin visible minorities may not be minorities in the same sense that single-origin visible minorities are minorities.

A natural question to ask is: so what? In this situation, it is advisable to create—at the least—population projections that distinguish between single-origin visible minorities and visible minorities with partly European origins. Mechanically, this is not difficult, because the propagation rule that all visible minorities have visible minority children is replaced with the propagation rule that mixed unions create mixed children. Such a projection might give a much different picture of the ethnic mosaic into which we are evolving.

A related question is that of the power structures that condition the lives of visible minorities. Taking for granted the official definition of visible minority, to what extent are visible minorities disadvantaged in labour markets? Recent research suggests that, broadly, visible minority and white earnings were converging between 1970 and 1985, diverging between 1985 and 1995 (Pendakur and Pendakur 2002a), and roughly static between 1995 and 2000 (Pendakur and Pendakur 2005). These results examine only the Canadian-born population and are thus not driven by (first-generation) immigration effects. In 2000, Canadian-born visible minority men earned about 13% less than similarly aged and educated Canadian-born white men (Pendakur and Pendakur 2005). These and other results in the literature (see, especially, Hum and Simpson 1998, Stelcner 2000, Kazemipur and Halli, 2001, Finnie and Meng 2002) offer several relevant lessons: (1) visible minority status does seem correlated with earnings; (2) some of this correlation can be explained away by individual characteristics such as education or labour market choices such as hours of work, but there is a large residual differential left standing on the shoulders of ethnicity; and (3) these differentials in earnings are persistent in the sense that they do not dissipate with age or over the decades.

As to the numerical smallness of visible minority populations, one may argue that 13% of Canada in 2001 is a small proportion, and even that 20% of Canada in 2017 is relatively small. However, visible minorities are not evenly spread across Canada—almost three-quarters of visible minorities live in the Census Metropolitan Areas of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. In Toronto and Vancouver, just under 40% of the urban population is visible minority, and by 2017 it may be over half (Statistics Canada, 2004 *DRAFT*). This concentration can be more pronounced at the level of the municipality (as compared to the CMA). For example, almost half the population of the City of Vancouver, and almost 60% of

that of its suburb, Richmond, is visible minority. So, in the particular areas where visible minorities are most likely to be found, they are hardly minorities.

Do we have any reason to believe that the growth of visible minority populations in Canadian cities will lead to better performance by visible minorities, at least in those particular urban labour markets? Recent work (Pendakur and Pendakur 2002b) suggests that there is a weak positive correlation between the numbers of visible minority residents in a city and the relative earnings of visible minority workers in that city. This work uses cross-sectional variation in populations to identify the effect (ie: it looks at different cities at a single point in time). More illuminating would be a study of over-time variation within cities to identify the effect of growing visible minority populations on visible minority labour market outcomes. Such information is hard to come by. However, anecdotal evidence for Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver exists (Pendakur and Pendakur 2002a together with Pendakur and Pendakur 2005). Looking at these three cities over 1970 to 2000, we see that in Toronto and Vancouver—both of which experienced massive growth in visible minority populations in the 1990s—there was slight improvement in the relative labour market performance of visible minority men. In contrast, we see that in Montreal—which did not experience as large a growth in visible minority population in this period—there was a slight deterioration in the relative performance of visible minority men. Although in 2000 visible minority men earn less than white men in Canada's three largest cities, the pattern over time suggests that the gap may be narrowing in those cities where visible minority populations are growing.

So what are visible minorities? They may be neither visible nor minorities which suggests that the terminology may be due for an update. However, there are emergent patterns. Visible minorities—defined by the Employment Equity Act definition—fare worse in Canada's labour markets than do their similarly aged and educated white counterparts. This holds for both men and women, both in Canada as a whole and in its constituent cities, both for visible minorities as a whole and for its constituent ethnic groups, both currently and over the past thirty years. So, what of the future?

Visible Minorities in 2017

Visible minorities may not be numerical minorities in Canada's largest cities in 2017. Statistics Canada (2005, *DRAFT*) suggests that approximately half the residents of the Toronto and Vancouver CMAs, and approximately one-fifth of the residents of the Montreal CMA, will be visible minorities by that time. If birth rates for visible minority families should prove slightly higher than those underlying the projections, Toronto and Vancouver could be characterised by "visible majorities" and white minorities.

Numerical size does not capture the key feature of minority status—weak power relations. Although whites comprised only one-fifth of South Africa's population under Apartheid, their economic status was solidly dominant. So, the real question is: can we expect the increasing numbers and proportions of visible minority people in Canada's largest cities to undo some or all of the existing disparity in labour market outcomes? To answer this question, we must understand the nature of the growth, the degree to which it is correlated with integration and the degree to which it is correlated with better labour market performance.

Although the major part of the growth in visible minority populations will be driven by immigration, at least one million new visible minorities will be born in Canada between now and 2017 (Statistics Canada 2005, *DRAFT*). So, about one-third of the new visible minorities present in 2017 will be born in Canada, and most of them will have at least one immigrant parent. One might also wonder what proportion of these children will have at least one white parent.

Recent research (Pendakur and Pendakur 1998, 2002) suggests that multiple-origin visible minorities whose origins are partly European face markedly smaller differentials in labour market performance than single-origin visible minorities. If the visible minority population is comprised more of partly European (read: white) origin people, then we may expect a direct improvement in the relative labour market performance of the visible minority population as a whole.

To assess the potential magnitude of this direct effect which improves visible minority labour market performance, we need to know both the future numbers of partly

European origin visible minorities and the labour market performance that may be expected of this group. Although the results discussed above give us some reason to think that their labour market performance would be relatively good, we do not have a formal projections of their numbers over the next decades.

Immigrants to Canada tend to be single-origin, especially non-European immigrants. So, any growth in the visible minority population that is multiple-origin will likely be driven by birth, and by multiple-origin marriages in Canada. In the public-use microdata family file of the 1996 Census of Canada one finds that a little more than 10% of married visible minorities were married to whites. If one restricts the sample to Canadian-born visible minorities only, this proportion rises to more than half. This suggests that our future holds many, many visible minorities with partly European (white) origins who fare comparatively well in our labour markets.

Recent work by Milan and Hamm (2004) of Statistics Canada is illuminating. They examine mixed unions (including common law), where the union is between a member of a visible minority and a non-visible minority, or between two visible minorities. They find that 3.2% of couples were in mixed unions in 2001, up from about 2% in 1991. Most of these were visible minority with non-visible minority. However, not all visible minority groups are equally like to form mixed unions. The visible minority ethnic origin categories with the highest 'mixed-union' rates are Japanese (70% of all unions), Latin American (45%), or Black (43%) ancestry. Korean, Chinese, and South Asians were the least likely visible minorities to be involved in such mixed unions.

Most mixed-origin unions are between visible minority and white partners; hardly any are between visible minority partners of different ethnic groups. The percentage of mixed unions between visible minorities was small, at only 0.4%. But, it is notable that among Canadian-born visible minorities, the propensity for form a mixed-origin with another visible minority is much higher. Visible minority immigrants tend to marry whites if they marry exogamously, but this tendency is less pronounced among the children of visible minority immigrants (Lessard 2002; Kalbach 2002).

The asymmetry between the propensity of visible minorities to exogamous matching with whites compared to exogamous matching with visible minorities is troubling from the

point of view of integrationist goals. In particular, a society truly integrated on ethnic lines would see people marrying people of other ethnic groups with probabilities given only by their relative sizes, and not by their colour. However, regardless of the reason that visible minorities and whites are marrying each other with increasing frequency, a consequence of this is increased numbers of partly European-origin visible minority children over the next decades. If the past is a guide, we should expect these mixed-children to have relatively good labour market outcomes.

In addition to this direct—essentially compositional—effect, there may be an indirect effect of increasing numbers of multiple-origin marriages and children that serves to improve the lot of visible minorities as a whole. In particular, rising rates of inter-ethnic marriage may be a cause or a consequence of rising inter-ethnic tolerance and social integration. Such rising tolerance and integration would naturally lead to less discrimination in labour markets because you can only discriminate on a margin that you can perceive—nobody is stigmatized for an invisible difference. In this case, we may expect that in the coming decades as the social barriers between ethnic groups dissolve, inter-marriage rates rise, and multiple-origin populations rise, ethnic origin may be a less important way of dividing people into identifiable groups. And if people are not in identifiable groups, then they cannot face group-based labour market discrimination.

Identity

The increasing numbers of multiple-origin couples and multiple-origin children in the visible minority population raises the issue of how such couples and children feel about themselves. In particular, do visible minorities *feel* like minorities in the sense of weak players in power relations, and, if so, do multiple-origin visible minorities feel this to the same extent. The answer to this question will depend on how people classify themselves, that is, whether they identify with their ethnic origin or not. Defining an *identity* as a group with which a person feels a connection, it is clear that people have multiple identities because they identify with many groups—perhaps their ethnic group, their soccer team and their profession. Identity has only recently gained attention as an object of study in economics, but at least two themes are important in this context. First, the identities of people affect what they want in life. One's identities condition one's aspirations, goals and actions. Second, identities may be

both ascribed and attained. That is, identities correlated with observable things, like skin colour or sex, may be ascribed to us by others unless we work hard to undo that ascription. A young black male in a large American city may be ascribed an identity unless he signals otherwise, and even that may not work very well.

That ethnic identity might affect the desires and aspirations of people suggests that members of different might pursue different goals in the labour market and, for example, end up in different jobs. Here, the difference in labour market outcomes (occupation) would be driven not by any bad behaviour on anyone's part, but rather by the differing desires of people in different ethnic groups. For example, tabulating the occupation distribution by visible minority status of Canadian-born people more than 40 years of age in the 1996 Census public-use microdata, we see that whereas about 2% of whites are professionals, less than 1% of blacks are professionals and almost 3% of South Asians are professionals. Before we rush to the conclusion that whites discriminate against Blacks but not South Asians, we should allow for the possibility that Black and South Asian people have different preferences. One may get a sense of this by looking at the education distribution of these population subgroups. In these data, about 4.5% of whites and Blacks have university diplomas or degrees above the Bachelor's level, but more than 7% of South Asians have such diplomas. This is consistent with a story for differential labour market performance that rests on different aspirations and goals across ethnic groups. Such a story will hinge critically on how ethnic identity plays out in the educational and labour market choices that people make.

A picture of identity that is all about 'free choice' is, however, fundamentally misleading when identity is along lines that are also lines of discrimination and unfair treatment. In this case, identity would affect both the preferences of people and the constraints they face. For example, identity conditioning education choices might go some way to explaining the preponderance of highly educated South Asian-origin professionals, but it is not as good at explaining the lack of Black professionals. In particular, Black and white people have about the same proportion of people with post Bachelor's diplomas and degrees, but Black people have much lower representation among professionals. So, if the influence of identity on labour market aspirations is mediated by educational choices, and if educational choices are unconstrained, then we have evidence that Blacks are unfairly underrepresented in professional occupations.

Ethnic identity may thus affect both the preferences and the constraints faced by people. It affects our preferences by tying us to cultural norms associated with our ethnic identity, norms which place heterogeneous value on characteristics of education and work. These values then condition our choices in education and work. Ethnic identity may affect the constraints we face, too. In particular, if one's ethnic identity is signaled to others via dress, manner, language use, etc, then it may act as a lightning rod for economic discrimination. For example, whether or not one's identity is partly comprised of Sikh identity may be invisible to others, but if one wears a turban it becomes visible, and so becomes a marker for discriminatory treatment. Distinguishing the effects of ethnic identity on preferences from its effects on constraints is difficult, but we must grapple with these issues if we hope to create a society in which differences in preferences and aspirations are tolerated, but differences in treatment are not.

Integration

Do we have any evidence that inter-ethnic group differences are dissolving so that inter-ethnic integration is an emergent part of Canadian culture? The evidence here is sparse and mixed. As noted above, because large Canadian cities have experienced large increases in visible minority populations both through migration and birth, they are crucibles for the future of Canada. Pendakur and Pendakur (2002b) find that, looking across cities and ethnic groups, people with lots of co-ethnics residing in their city face smaller earnings disparities than people with few co-ethnics residing in their city. Our interpretation of these data in that paper was that large ethnic populations 'shield' their members from economic discrimination by the majority. An alternative interpretation is that the social barriers between ethnic groups dissolve as minority populations get large and interactions between minority and majority people become more commonplace. As social barriers dissolve, so too, the reasons for discrimination and the lines across which to discriminate dissolve. Thus as minority populations rise in Canadian cities, we may expect ethnically-based economic discrimination to diminish.

Pendakur and Pendakur (2005) provide evidence on the same issue by looking at over-time variation in the earnings differentials faced by visible minorities in Canada's three largest cities over 1970 to 2000. We find only weak evidence that increasing minority

populations over time is correlated with diminishing discrimination against visible minorities. Both Toronto and Vancouver saw large increases in visible minority populations over the the last 30 years whereas Montreal saw a much smaller increase in that population over those years. Looking at the minority earnings differential by city over time, we see that in 1970, 1980 and 1985 the earnings differential faced by visible minority males in comparison with white males was about 8-10% in all three cities. In 1990 , 1995 and 2000, that differential was more than 20% in Montreal. In contrast, although it grew in both Toronto and Vancouver, it grew only to about 15% and 8%, respectively. Thus, the long-term trends for the relative earnings of visible minorities seem better in Toronto and Vancouver, the cities with the largest growth of minority populations. Together these two types of results suggest that increased minority populations really are associated with diminished labour market discrimination against minorities.

Integration is not an evaluative classification; it is descriptive. Neighbourhoods, social groups or work environments are *integrated* across ethnic lines only if knowledge of a person's ethnic origin is not informative as to which neighbourhood they choose, who their friends are or where they work. Thus, the presence of a large ethnic group does not imply integration. A city may be highly diverse without being integrated if its constituent ethnic groups do not mix in work, social groups or neighbourhoods. Indeed, data from the 2001 Census show that Greater Vancouver has recently seen a spectacular concentration of Chinese origin people in the suburb of Richmond. Although about 17% of Greater Vancouver is Chinese origin, almost 40% of the City of Richmond is Chinese origin. So, as Vancouver has grown more diverse, it may have also grown more segregated.

Is segregation bad? Is integration good? The answers here are not obvious. Vancouver is an instructive example because in the case of the recent migrations from Hong Kong and Taiwan, immigrants have been on the whole reasonably well-off. Thus, one cannot blame the residential segregation on lack of opportunity for Chinese-origin immigrants to live in the neighbourhoods of their choice. Rather it is more compelling to suspect that they do live in the neighbourhoods of their choice, and their choice is to live with other Chinese-origin people. There are many good reasons—Chinese-language shopping, living and working are natural benefits of living in a segregated community within a diverse urban area. We refer to such things as an 'enclave' to get away from the negative connotation of

‘segregation’, but it is the same phenomenon. The positive aspects of segregation may be captured simply: to the extent that ethnicity is correlated with preferences, behaviours and language, our lives may be better, cheaper and easier if we live, work and socialize within ethnic groupings.

The negative aspects of segregation—and thus positive aspects of integration—are harder to identify once we accept the legitimacy of a preference for within-group social and economic interaction. I personally feel that sensible arguments for integration, and for public action which encourages integration, must rest on the idea that integrated societies can achieve more than segregated societies. Here, I invoke an efficiency argument of the following type. The edge of an immigrant society over non-immigrant societies is that the immigrant society can use information, talent and experience from all over to create new economic and social possibilities. This kind of effect is easiest to see on the consumption side. Vancouver and Toronto are two of the best cities in the world in which to go out for a meal. The reason is that these two cities have very large immigrant communities which expand the consumption possibilities for everyone. Those of us lucky enough to live in big integrated diverse cities experience this kind of effect all the time in our consumption of groceries, restaurant food, art, and music.

One may also see this effect on the production side. Large segregated diverse cities are, from the production point of view, effectively a collection of smaller homogeneous cities. If there are economies of scale in production—perhaps due to technically or socially increasing returns—then the economy has wider possibilities if the city is integrated than if it is segregated. A large literature on agglomeration economies has shown that most of the time, a collection of small towns is less productive than one big city.

Anecdotal evidence that integration is ‘good’ exists in the pattern of real estate prices across cities. Vancouver and Toronto, the two most expensive cities in Canada, are also the two most diverse cities in Canada. Expanding our view to the rest of the world, the list of large cities that are expensive roughly coincides with the list of large cities that are diverse—London, New York, Los Angeles, Sydney, Melbourne. People are willing to pay to be in large diverse cities, so diversity must be good.

What will Canadian cities look like in terms of integration and segregation in 2017? We observe at least in some urban environments substantial segregation along ethnic origin lines as minority populations have grown. If this type of segregation is a harbinger for the future, and if it is correlated with similarly segregated social groups and work environments, then we may not get an ethnically integrated society. However, it is worth noting that visible minority immigrants have very different locational preferences from Canadian-born visible minorities. Whereas, we see strong residential segregation among immigrants in Vancouver, the correlation between one's own and one's neighbour's ethnic origin is much smaller for Canadian-born visible minorities. So, hopefully, the next generation of visible minorities will choose integrated rather than segregated lives, neighbourhoods and workplaces.

Conclusions

We know that visible minority populations are growing constituents of Canada's ethnocultural mosaic, especially in our largest cities. We know that visible minorities marry whites (and of course vice versa) with increasing frequency, which suggests social integration of these populations. But, we also know that in some places increasing residential segregation along ethnic lines suggests social segmentation of visible minority populations. The evidence on changes in visible minority labour market performance across cities and over time suggests that the integrating processes (like intermarriage and schooling) have dominated the segmenting processes (like residential choice leading to segregation), and that as minority populations rise in number and proportion, they will fare better in Canada's labour markets.

This conclusion is at best tentative. The evidence is equivocal enough to be read in other ways and the future holds patterns that are inherently hard to predict. Even given the upbeat reading of the data presented here, the past may be a poor guide to future patterns in social, residential and labour market integration of ethnic communities. Few predicted the massive inflow of Chinese origin people into Richmond in the 1990s, the residential segregation of refugee communities, or the rise in inter-ethnic marriage seen over the 1990s.

Cultural groups exist as such because at least in some domains we prefer our own kind to the ill-defined 'other.' So, there is pressure collectively and privately to segregate in

our social and economic lives. But there is also collective and private pressure to integrate. We would all rather live in a colour-blind society. Our gut, our law and our culture tell us as much. There are signals of growing ethnic integration all around us—just look at your table-neighbours the next time you are out for Chinese or Indian food. Whether the pressure to integrate dominates the pressure to segregate is unknown, but I am hopeful. Staring into the future isn't easy, but it is necessary if we are to make that future our own.

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