For Conference:

Introduction:

This presentation is based on my Master’s Thesis work that identifies what the division of labour surrounding language and cultural retention is for 7 Canadian women of Portuguese decent (Luso-Canadians). Specifically, the issue of choice of retention and transmission of language and culture to children is addressed. I was interested in the Portuguese language, the life expectancy of that language in the given community and the ways in which Portuguese women and in particular Portuguese mothers were interested in teaching their child/ren Portuguese language and culture in places that were not Portugal. How is this managed? Is it solely the mother’s responsibility? Do mothers even want to engage in this type of work? How do their partners affect their desire or need to teach Portuguese to their child/ren? Do Portuguese fathers mean a heightened relationship with the Portuguese language and culture?

As identity is fluid and the discourse that describes it as well, it can be moulded, managed, and changes over time, and individuals have the option to decide which aspects of their identity they want to associate with. Although I had taken this role on wholeheartedly, I assumed automatically that other Portuguese descendants in the Greater Toronto area would attribute this identity as well. I was wrong. I have not finished my thesis work yet- I am in the write-up process of my data analysis and am building on my theory. Therefore, I apologize for any ‘holes’ so to speak in my work so far, but encourage your feedback for potential assistance throughout these sections. Due to the constraint of time for this presentation, I will mention all of the themes so far in the data analysis section but will only elaborate on two of them. I will begin with a brief summary of literature relative to my topic, overview of my theory, move onto methodologies and then discuss two themes out of the five I have found so far.

Review of Literature:

The immigration of Portuguese people to Canada is relatively recent, with the first Portuguese immigrants arriving in the 1950’s and the majority of Portuguese migrating during the 1970’s and 1980’s. By 2000, 1.2% of Canada’s population was descended from Portuguese people which, although a small percentage, roughly accounts for 358 000 people, the majority of which reside in Ontario and Quebec. The Portuguese population in Canada is entering its third born generation. People who are born in another country but migrate to Canada at a young age are considered the one and a half generation. This is due to their socialization primarily occurring in Canada but their birth having occurred elsewhere. Due to the flow of immigrants over time, there are immigrant families who are only in their second generation of Canadian born children. The one and a half and second generation Portuguese-Canadians are an interesting group to study in that they carry both cultural values and traditions from their parents and navigate the Canadian cultural values and norms they learn in a variety of social institutions. The position they take as second generation Portuguese-Canadians enables a cultural hybridity where individuals have the ability to choose which aspects of their culture they would like to accept or reject and manoeuvre the complex identities associated with both ethnicities and cultures due to their close proximity to both.

Some of the themes in the literature on Luso-Canadians (People with Portuguese descent) are:
Gender roles and patriarchy, migration to Canada and the subsequent patterns of migration within the GTA- i.e the general move from ‘little Portugal’ to other cities and suburbs like Mississauga and Vaughan, language retention with connection to regionalism, linguistic life expectancy, cultural retention, and academic underachievement.

Theoretical Overview:

- This part of my thesis is not entirely complete. So far, I have two bodies of academic study that I am pulling from: Sociology and Diaspora Studies.

In terms of the Sociological theory I am using both Foucault and Bourdieu. The discussion of discourse in relation to writing and knowledge production as discussed by Foucault is one of the terms I have used to theorize my work. Any discourse represents a form of power and by mapping the ways in which things are written, discussed, and debated, we can come to ‘know’ the positions of power inherent in the writing and that which frames discourse in general. From Bourdieu I am using language and symbolic capital- how specific languages, dialects and versions of language carry with them class and financial status as well as appropriateness. This system is focused on ‘othering’ those who do not fit this mould which has repercussions for those who do not fit.

From Diaspora Studies- migration and place, difference between groups of migrants, hybridity, and the connection to an imagined community,

Methodology:

- I conducted a qualitative Sociological study
- (Flip to sample of participants slide) this is a chart describing the characteristics of the women interviewed. Finding sample- I used liaison members of the Portuguese community who I am familiar with to ask these women on my behalf to participate. Also, for one of the interviews I knew the woman and asked her personally. Another interview was through a snowball sample from one of the women I had already interviewed.
- Data Collection Techniques:
  - I conducted 7 semi structured interviews with 1.5 and second generation Luso-Canadian women aged 23-45 who are mothers and cohabiting or married. The interviews varied from 1 hour to 4 hours in length.
  - Recording- I recorded all of the interviews with a recording device from the moment I entered the woman’s home, or coffee shop which are two of the place where I most interviewed the women. Another interview was conducted in my car.
  - Transcribing- 3 of the interviews have been transcribed verbatim and were used for the analysis included in this presentation (like the direct quotes). The other 4 have not yet been transcribed verbatim but it is evident that all of the 5 themes directly connect to all 7 interviews. Extensive field notes were conducted for all of the interviews after the interviews completion. I used a chart to format some preliminary thoughts and themes and the themes I will discuss today, were evident in the chart.
  - Coding- The coding scheme I used is borrowed from Doucet and Mauthner (2003) which involves reading the transcriptions three times or more where the researcher is reading for a different purpose. The first is reading the first time for the plot of the story, the emotions, feelings and connections in the story told by the participant. The second
involves reading for the ‘I’ within the story and tracing where the participant strays from connectivity or where they deeply connect to what they are saying. And the third reading is for the researcher’s reactions throughout the interview- how did the researcher impact the interview, what were their emotions, feelings and connections?

Self-reflexivity- My relationship to the community as well as to the informants is determined on the basis of their identity and my own as well as my insider/outsider identity in terms of being a Luso-Canadian woman but not a mother. The issue of insider/outsider status is one that is included in most Sociological and Anthropological studies due to the recognized importance of researcher’s position towards the data that is gathered.

My position as an insider assists me because at some degree, I have an association with these women as we are both from the same cultural background. As a Luso-Canadian woman, my insider outsider status highly influences my ability to converse, discuss, and maneuver the complexities associated with multiple fragments of identity. Since I related to the Portuguese community, I figured that my proximity would enable a facilitation access to the group I was interested in studying. However, my position as an insider can constrain my ability to understand these women as my preconceived cultural knowledge can interrupt my research interests. My personal associations with Portuguese culture and cultural retention can constrain my project as I seek to form intellectual analysis from personal knowledge.

My outsider status comes from the fact that I am not yet a mother. Sometimes, women assumed that I knew everything they were explaining. For example throughout all of my interviews the “you know what I mean” phrase came up many, many times. In almost all of my interviews this phrase was often stated after a strong opinionated justification for a response. Also I was worried that they would not tell me things that strayed from their conceptions of the norm of Portuguese culture.

Data Analysis:
The 5 themes are:

Theme 1: fear of academic underachievement in children
Theme 2: connection of grandparents- constant, daily, weekly connection
Theme 3: Partner’s inability to communicate- leaves room for saying they don’t want to communicate in the language as well.
Theme 4: personal feeling of detachment, inability to communicate fluently, confidently etc.
Theme 5: giving child what they deem they did not get due to parents migration status, poverty, cultural influences/ideas, abuse, education ignorance etc. – this connects to childhood experiences wanting to give their children what they never had either material or educational ie. Piano lessons, gymnastics, swimming etc.

Theme 1: fear of academic underachievement:

The Portuguese mothers interviewed had an issue with teaching their children aspects of Portuguese language and culture because they felt it would hinder their child’s ability to learn in English and subsequently do well in the Canadian education system. This was even though when asked if they thought teaching Portuguese language and culture is important, all of the women exclaimed yes they did think it was important. This was due to their fear that by learning the
Portuguese language first as they did, their children would take longer to learn English or confuse both languages. (read Diedra quote) “Bottom line is we didn’t want to confuse him because us being Portuguese and talking, speaking English with my mom. You know Portuguese people talk English and talk Portuguese at the same time right? So with Andrew we didn’t want to confuse him.”- Diedra (33 years old, son is 3) Further she states “….What I learned from our time is education is very important… I have to look after my son and I always have to, I’m also worrying about his education already at this point in time.”

Like Diedra, Susana also felt that multiple languages would hinder her children’s success and affect their stress and happiness. “…I don’t want them to be you know, in school ‘in school’. See when I was young I had to learn the English, the French, you know what I mean, and then the Portuguese. I had to learn those and they were very difficult for me. It was hard. So with my kids I don’t want them to go through that. I’m like you know what when you get older this and that, eventually you’ll want to learn our culture, they have classes there. Go learn it. You know they’re going to learn French in school. They’re going to have to take that so I don’t want to put all that pressure on the kids.”

Therefore only one of the seven women said they spoke Portuguese to their child on a regular basis, being every day many times a day. Others said they would translate words or reiterate things in Portuguese like when they disciplined their child, but that speaking the language was not conducted daily. Often when ‘why’ was asked, the women would discuss their own experience with the Canadian education system and their lack of understanding English even though they were born in Canada, due to their parents inability to speak the language, and even though two of the women work in high paying jobs- one an accountant and one a medical specialist. They attribute their difficulty in school and their own experience with their knowledge of the Portuguese language before English.

As you can see in the quotes, the fear of children not being able to communicate is evident and related to some of the mothers own experiences in the Canadian education system. As Desiree says: “Because my parents were from Portugal we spoke Portuguese at home which was cool and all but because I was born here and I was learning English at the same time and a lot of the Portuguese was lost, I found it harder to communicate.“Actually it still to a certain extent amazes me that some kids grow up speaking English to their parents because that’s the way they were raised and I thought wow you know if I spoke English to my parents I’d be able to communicate a lot better.”

Theme 2: the grandparent connection

The manner in which most of the children learn Portuguese is through their contact with their grandparents, and in particular their grandmothers. 6 out of the 7 women allow their parents to speak the Portuguese language to their children as that is the only method of communication they know. Four out of the seven women’s children have daily contact with their grandparent whereby the grandmothers care for the children after school or on the weekends. (flip to desiree) Most of the mothers don’t speak Portuguese to their child but their child is still receiving some type of Portuguese language and cultural transmission through the grandparents. Although this is not retained within the household, the children still have direct access to Portuguese through their connection to their grandparents. This may be a reason why the women are not so strict on teaching language and cultural practices to their children, even though they think it is very
important because they feel that at some level, their children are still receiving this type of knowledge.

All but one of the mothers allows this transmission of language and culture to their child. Diedra (quoted here) felt so strongly that her son would be affected by multiple languages and his education that she refused to allow her parents to speak to her son in Portuguese. Unfortunately this comes at a cost of broken transmission between grandparent and grandchild. Diedra regrets disallowing this and during the interview felt saddened by the realization that her son would not be able to verbally communicate with her parents. Her feelings of sadness with broken transmission between her son and her mother conflict with her fear of academic underachievement for her son. In a sense, class trumps race/ethnicity in terms of academics.

Conclusion:

This presentation has offered a preliminary overview of my thesis project that is still a work in progress. So far, I have found that the Luso-Canadian women interviewed feel as though they are proud to belong to a heritage and ethnic group that is hardworking and distinct but that this conflicts with their perceptions of success and achievement in their children. For the women interviewed, this conflict comes at a serious cost whereby communication within a generation is completely cut and lost due to language barriers like in Diedra’s case. In others, it presents as a complete disregard for the Portuguese culture and community in favour of a ‘Canadian’ success story that is the goal of the women for their children. I invite your feedback and suggestions, and any questions you may have.

Thank you.