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## ***Digital Desires and Racialized Borders: How Dating Apps Shape Transnational Students' Belonging in South Korea***

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### **Abstract**

In today's digital world, we are encountering diverse forms of sexual self-presentation and intimate engagement at a mind-boggling pace, yet their transnational implications remain noticeably under-studied, particularly within South Korean social contexts. This presentation aims to offer new insights on how racially non-Korean students in South Korea navigate their lives while transitioning between dating apps and in-person interactions with sexual minorities, shedding light on emerging implications for how race and sexuality shape transnational students' intimate experiences and self-perceptions in the country. Through discursive analysis of what my students say—and don't say—I investigate how graduate students construct and reshape their sexualities across transnational contexts, negotiating identity, desire, and belonging across digital and in-person spaces. These spoken and unspoken narratives help to uncover whether and how these students see sexual dating apps as indispensable tools for shaping new 'international' sexual identities, exploring their desires, building minority-based communities, and staying connected to home-country and racialized sexual experiences. Beyond user narratives, the work also addresses what remains unsaid—especially the belief that internalized social exclusion is a persistent, deeply felt, and even 'normal' condition for non-Koreans, and how this shapes the way racialized individuals talk about sexuality in South Korea and transnationally. In other words, dating apps in Korea provide racially non-Korean students in South Korea a means to regain and maintain sexual agency, but in doing so, they also confront persistent racialized exclusion and the tension between digital and non-digital spaces that reinforce and challenge ideas of 'foreignness' and race.

**Keywords:** south korea, dating apps, transnational sexuality, digital intimacy, racialized exclusion, sexual agency