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The migration of desire: Chinese immigrants' accounts of sexuality and intimate relationship in transnational contexts

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O111 THE MIGRATION OF DESIRE: CHINESE IMMIGRANTS' ACCOUNTS OF SEXUALITY AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

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The current generation of Chinese immigrants to Canada occupy what are increasingly recognized as “transnational spaces” – spaces that, with the ubiquity of the internet and the availability of daily direct flights between the Canada and China, span the territorial boundaries of the host country and the home country. This paper draws from interviews conducted as part of a study that aims to understand the vulnerability to HIV faced by the current generation of Chinese immigrants to Canada. In it we consider interview participants’ narratives of what they desire and what they do in terms of sex and intimate relationships. More generally we reflect on how immigration and experiences in Canada have shaped sexuality and its expression, sexual identity, desires for partnership and the nature of the partner desired. Movement between geographical and social spaces both prompts and is prompted by new opportunities for sexual expression, particularly for men who have sex with men but also for some heterosexual women. Transnational lives are also, however, subject to new limits, pressures and constraints; downward social mobility after immigration, for example, appears as a persistent source of stress in heterosexual relationships, and was sometimes cited as the cause of extramarital sexual relationships. We examine the values that interview participants activate and endorse in their narratives of sex and intimate relationships, especially how values or worldviews deemed Chinese intersect with ‘foreign’ worldviews, or values considered Canadian. Our central intent with the paper is to highlight ways that sexual and partner desirability is (re)constructed in relation to immigrants’ new social and cultural circumstances in Canada, and in relation to their ongoing opportunity for transnational connections to China.

