DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED IT
IT FACULTY

"Barriers that can Drive Someone Crazy"

Self-Disclosure and Highly Skilled Transnational Migrants' Abilities to Cope with Social Difficulties

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Essay/Thesis:	30 hp
Programme:	Master in Communication
Level:	Second Cycle
Year:	2023
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Examiners:	Bernard Geoghegan and Davide Gerardelli
Word count:	11,194

Abstract

With the high demand for highly skilled transnational migrants and yet little known about how they navigate social challenges, the need to examine their lived difficult social experiences and how they manage their social difficulties becomes pertinent. Therefore, this research investigates the social difficulties faced by highly skilled transnational migrants in Sweden and examines the impact of self-disclosure on their coping abilities.

Drawing on Social Penetration Theory (SPT) to address this research gap, the study analyses the lived experiences of 12 highly skilled transnational migrants (6 males and 6 females) from 8 countries through semi-structured interviews, with data thematically analysed using Nvivo 14. With ten themes realised, the study uncovered major and common social difficulties highly-skilled transnational migrants face in Sweden namely language barrier, difficulty making friends, difficulty managing workplace relations and difficulty navigating the Swedish society and social situations. Critically examining the patterns of self-disclosure through the lens of SPT showed that the dynamics of self-disclosure enactment account for its outcomes. Ultimately, the study found that self-disclosure has psychological and solution-oriented outcomes that impacted their coping abilities.

The study extends empirical studies in the domains of SPT and self-disclosure beyond disclosure/non-disclosure and relationship development to coping with social difficulties in a new country, specifically Sweden. As a result, it highlights the applicability of SPT to relational contexts beyond romantic relationships. Findings from the study provide pathways for improved integration efforts relevant to policy makers and transnational migrants themselves.

Keywords: self-disclosure, social difficulties, highly skilled transnational migrants, Social Penetration Theory, social integration

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to God for granting me the opportunity to undertake this journey of study and for providing me with the strength, wisdom, and perseverance needed to complete this thesis.

I am sincerely thankful to my supervisor, Amy Wanyu Ou whose input and insightful feedback, especially in the early stages of writing this version of the paper, greatly enriched this study. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my teachers whose generosity with their wealth of knowledge and unwavering support has been instrumental throughout the learning process. Your dedication to teaching and your commitment to my academic growth have profoundly impacted my understanding and perspective.

This research was conducted in collaboration with the International House Gothenburg. I am thankful to Jessica Humleklo and Madalina Magnusson who made sure I had the necessary assistance I needed. Your support significantly contributed to the success of this study.

A special thanks to all the participants who took part in the interviews for their cooperation and contribution without which this research would not have been possible. Your willingness to share your experiences and perspectives was crucial in generating the data for this study.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Literature Review 5

Defining Highly Skilled Transnational Migrants 5

Transnational Migrants' Social Difficulties and Coping Strategies 6

Self-disclosure 8

Self-disclosure and coping with social difficulties in a new country 10

Research on the experiences of transnational migrants 11

Purpose of the Current Study 13

Theoretical Framework 15

Social Penetration Theory 15

Implication for the Study 16

Methods 18

Qualitative Research 18

Procedure 18

Participants 19

Data Collection 22

Data analysis 23

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Qualitative Study 24

Ethical Considerations 25

Positionality 26

Findings 28

Social difficulties 29

Patterns of Self-Disclosure 33

Impact of Self-Disclosure on their Coping Abilities 38

Discussion 42

Implication for Social Integration Efforts 45

Limitations of the Study 46

Conclusion 48

References 50

Appendix 1 56

Appendix 2 58

Appendix 2 61

Introduction

The increased interconnectedness of the world through the process of globalisation and migration has changed the demographic composition of countries in the world, including Sweden (Irastorza & Törngren, 2022). As of December 31st 2023, in Sweden where there were over 10.55 million people in population, 72.8% had Swedish background while 27.2% had foreign background. 79.4% of the population were born in Sweden, while 20.6% were foreign-born, representing over 180 nationalities. This makes Sweden one of the most multicultural countries in the world (Statistics Sweden, 2024).

One of the groups of migrants in the country is highly skilled transnationals. Although there is a lack of unanimous definition for them, highly skilled transnational migrants have been seen as people with high formal or informal education and/or extensive professional work experiences (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Iredale, 2001; Kilinc, 2021). Usually, they live in a host country while still having ties to their home countries. This set of migrants is preferred for their high education, creative potential, transcultural and human capital, as well their relevance for national economies. In fact, the Swedish government is set to improve migration conditions for them (Government Office of Sweden, 2023). Interestingly, statistics reveal that most people who are granted residence permits to Sweden are those coming to work and study, and from 2013 to 2022, over 300,000 people have been granted residence permits to work in Sweden (Migrations Agency (2023). They are assumed to have the resources to weather the storm of social difficulties and easily integrate into the society. Consequently, research on highly skilled transnational migrants in Sweden are focused on economic challenges including their labour market integration, employment patterns, and

upward occupation mobility (Irastorza & Bevelander, 2021; LikicBrboric & Bennich-Björkman, 2016; & Risberg & Romani, 2022) and not on social difficulties.

However, in reality, they often encounter various kinds of social difficulties (Kilinc, 2021), including but not limited to language barrier, making friends, understanding how the society works and navigating workplace relations (Accordini et al., 2018; Ali, 2023; Ayuk, 2020). These difficulties often constitute psychological challenges (Werkman et al., 1981). Therefore there is a clear need to examine their lived social experiences to understand the dynamics of their social well-being beyond basic assumptions.

Research shows that openly expressing one's difficulties and negative feelings can alleviate distress, improve wellbeing, and mobilise social support otherwise unavailable if people are unaware of one's challenges (Derlega et al, 1993; Zhang, 2017). Self-disclosure has been found to be effective in communicating about and coping with the social challenges associated with moving to and living in a new country (Chen, 1993; Pennebaker, 1995). Self-disclosure is an individual's willingness to disclose private information about themselves to others (Hargie, 2011). The information revealed transcends facts to include feelings, fears, aspirations, emotions, and desires (Carpenter & Greene, 2016; Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Pickard, et al., 2018; Provasi, 2012). Self-disclosure has been found to build trust, intimacy, and security in social relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Chen & Nakazawa, 2012), diminish anxiety and enhance psychological resilience in the face of difficulties (Hemenover, 2015; Pennebaker, 1995).

However, studies applying self-disclosure to migrants' abilities to cope with social difficulties in a new country have been largely focused on students and other individuals (Chen, 1993; Werkman et al., 1981), with little known about highly skilled transnational

migrants. A research that has attempted to study their social challenges focused on their workplace social relations (Barbarich, 2024). Their abilities to cope with social difficulties, especially in regard to using self-discourse, remain under-researched. Therefore, there is a need to address the research lacuna on the impact of self-disclosure on transnational migrant workers' abilities to cope with social challenges in a new country, for example Sweden in this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine highly skilled transnational migrants' social difficulties in Sweden and how self-disclosure impacts their ability to cope with them. A study of this nature will yield critical insight needed to re/shape integration efforts targeted at highly skilled transnational migrants. Furthermore, delving into the dynamics of self-disclosure and its implication for coping with social difficulties yields insight into the potentials it presents for transnational migrants' coping abilities.

The data for the study was drawn from the semi-structured interviews of 12 highly skilled transnational migrants in Sweden (6 males and 6 females) from 8 countries. They were selected to have a balanced view of highly skilled transnational migrants' lived social experiences. The data were thematically analysed with the assistance of Nvivo 14 through the critical lens of Social Penetration Theory (SPT) (Altman and Taylor, 1973). It is important to state that although SPT has been criticised to be reductionist in its postulations on stages of relationship and its scientific credibility has been questioned (Carpenter & Green, 2016), its applicability for understanding social relational processes are relevant to this study.

Key terms in the study, previous literature, and empirical studies on the topic are presented in the Literature Review section. A discussion of the theoretical framework and its application is presented in the Theoretical Framework section while the Methodology

section contains a thorough discussion of the research design. The findings from the analysis are presented and explained in the Findings section. This is followed by an in-depth discussion on their meanings, implication and future research possibilities. The limitations of the research are outlined in the Limitations section and, lastly, the concluding section rounds up the study.

Literature Review

Defining Highly Skilled Transnational Migrants

Transnational migrants are people living in a host country while still having ties to their home countries. They have been categorised into low-skilled and highly skilled transnational migrants based on their education and occupation. This stratification by skill level problematises the concept because there is no unanimous referent for the term among scholars. While some define highly skilled migrants as those with tertiary education or extensive professional work experiences (Iredale, 2001), some argue that 'skill' is an ability to solve tasks irrespective of whether they were acquired through formal education or vocationally (Brown & Tannock, 2009). Regarding the lack of unanimous referent for the term, Kilinç (2021) argue that the 'highly skilled migrant' is a term that requires country-specific and contextual definition. The Swedish Migration Agency (2023) defines highly qualified persons as those having master's or Ph.D. degrees. Participants were selected based on this criterion.

Compared to other migration categories, highly skilled migrants are preferred for their high creative potential, education, transcultural and human capital associated with them (Favell et al., 2017). For example, the Swedish government is set to implement 'stricter conditions for low-skilled labour immigration and improved conditions for highly skilled labour' (Government Office of Sweden, 2023). This idolisation has led to the misconception that they are able to "escape the coercion of a sociological process" (Favell et al., 2017, p. 21) and therefore are in less or no need of social integration efforts from the state (Weinar & von Koppenfels, 2020). This feeds into the assumption that society's perception of highly

skilled migrants is guided by the migrants' level of education and status of occupation, automatically immunising them from social difficulties (Barbarich, 2024). On the contrary, like others, they face diverse difficulties including language barrier, workplace difficulties, and social disconnection (Accordini et al., 2018; Ayuk, 2020). In fact, Kilinç (2021) argues that while their higher level of skills, experience, and education afford them a privileged position in comparison to low-skilled migrants, it can as well be the reason they lack social support from their home as well as their host countries. The first objective of this study is to examine the social difficulties they face.

Transnational Migrants' Social Difficulties and Coping Strategies

Social difficulties are hurdles to migrants' social integration in a new country, including legal and bureaucratic hurdles, language and cultural difference, and role changes and expectations (Accordini et al., 2018; Ali, 2023; & Alireza Behtoui 2022). In the case of migrants in Sweden, Ayuk (2020) cites lack of Swedish competence, lack of social network, as some migrants' social challenges. Specific social situations that constitute areas of difficulty to migrants include making friends, going to public places, attending social events, taking public transport, making jokes and relating with strangers and co-workers and can lead to difficulty establishing social networks and developing a sense of belonging (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). These social difficulties have psychological impacts on migrants leading to less positive self-concept and increased insecurities about the future (Werkman et al., 1981) which can negatively affect their health and work performance (Hack-Polay, 2012).

Organised activities by civil society organisations, sports clubs, religious places of worship as well as institutional initiatives within the spheres of housing, education, labour market, and politics are cited as useful for transnational migrants' social integration (Escobar & Ahl, 2024). However, this is possible only if they understand migrants' lived social experiences. In effect, Kilinç (2021) argues for mutual adjustment through social interrelations.

Transnational migrants struggling with social difficulties employ different coping strategies. Coping is a strategy for managing rather than controlling difficult situations (Yen et al., 2021) and has been viewed as correlates of health and behaviour outcomes (Jaspal et al., 2020). It involves changing cognitive and behavioural response to manage external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Coping strategies can be emotional focused (regulating one's emotions in response to difficulties), problem-focused (aimed at resolving the specific challenge), and avoidance-focused (including attempts to remove oneself from a challenging situation, and not discussing difficulties). While emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies are categorised as active coping strategies and tend towards positive adaptation, avoidance-focused is categorised as passive and can yield both positive and negative outcomes (Jaspal et al., 2020; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Self-disclosing about social difficulties is an effective strategy for coping with the difficulties associated with moving to a new country (Chen, 1993). It is an avenue for expressing emotions resulting from difficult situations and useful for resolving the actual challenging situations (Chen, 1993; Pennebaker, 1995). According to Jaspal et al.(2020),

effectively coping with events and social change reduces anxiety, depression, and psychological distress and yields better physical and psychological health outcomes.

Self-Disclosure

Although there is no unanimous definition of self-disclosure, it is broadly conceptualised as the process of revealing information about oneself that the interlocutor cannot know otherwise (Chen & Nakazawa, 2012; Hargie, 2011). The information revealed transcends facts to include feelings, fears, aspirations, and desires (Jiang & Hancock, 2013) and typically surrounds emotionally relevant and often difficult experiences (Harvey & Boynton, 2021). Topics of self-disclosure can be descriptive (information about the self) or evaluative (information about feelings, judgement, and emotions) (Derlega et al., 1993). Self-disclosure has four features, including disclosing feelings or facts; information about the self or the other; information pertaining to the past, present, or future; and the use of personal pronouns (Hargie, 2011).

Self-disclosure is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing breadth, depth, valence, time, and target (Provasi, 2012). While breadth is the range of topics discussed, depth is the degree of intimacy with which personal information is disclosed. The valence captures how positive or negative the information disclosed is while the target is the recipient of the information disclosed and time refers to the period within a relationship that it takes partners to self-disclose as well as time of actual disclosure (Carpenter & Greene, 2016; Provasi, 2012).

Motivations for self-disclosure are largely categorised into intrapersonal and interpersonal motivations. Where the former concerns on self-focused reasons such as

expression of self, feelings, emotions, and opinion for self-disclosing, the latter focuses on establishing relations with other people(Luo and Hancock. 2020).

Beyond forming and maintaining cross-cultural social relations (Berry-Cyprian et al., 2017; Chen & Nakazawa, 2012; Haisfield, 2012), it is useful for relieving stress. Zhang (2017) posit that people are motivated to share more intimate information during stressful life events as a way to release the heightened emotions created by these events. If done with emotions, self-disclosure can yield stress-buffering effect that help to reduce loneliness and anxiety (Derlega et al., 2020), resulting in happiness and wellness (Aldahadha, 2023). It can also have short-term negative effect (Luo & Hancock 2020).

However, it comes with risk related to face, relation, stigma, role, and security (Petriono, 2002). There is *perceived risk* which is pre-disclosure and cognitive-based, and *vulnerability* which is affect-based and occurs post-disclosure (Pickard, et al., 2018). Consequently, people may decide to hold sensitive information to protect themselves and the relationship (Hargie, 2011). Therefore trust is an essential requirement for self-disclosure to happen, even though it produces it (Hargie, 2011). Self-disclosure is subject to the different enactment styles of individuals and is an on-going and dialectical process that can change as individuals change (Chen & Nakazawa, 2012).

Self-Disclosure and Coping with Social Difficulties in a New Country

Research has established the link between self-disclosure and coping with social challenges associated with moving to a new country (Chen, 1993; Pennebaker, 1995) and

diminishing anxiety (Tam et al., 2006). In a study of how Asian students cope with social difficulties in the US through self-disclosure, Chen (1993) found that while honesty, consciousness, and positivity of disclosure enhanced coping ability, the amount and depth of self-disclosure did not. Also, the intent and honesty of self-disclosure is related to the ability to manage intimate relationships. Similarly, in a study of students who transition to college and how they cope with moving to a new environment, Arroyo et al. (2021) found that different relational sources of support such as friends, family, and romantic partners has beneficial psychosocial outcomes for the students and those with better self-disclosure skills benefited from family support. Similarly, Luo and Hancock (2020) found that self-disclosure enhances relationship quality and this has a positive impact on well-being.

Hemenover (2015) posits that acts of disclosure impact individuals' thought process thereby improving their resilience in the face of social challenges. Similarly, Pennebaker (1995) avers that self-disclosing emotionally relevant life experiences, rather than just recounting events, can improve psychological resilience and have long term positive psychological impact whereas the lack of it can lead to stress and mental rumination. Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) explained psychological resilience as the ability to protect one's mental health from being affected by the negative effect of challenging experiences and successfully adapt to challenging situations. Similarly, Derlega et al. (1993) aver that self-disclosure has stress-buffering effects on those who self-disclose emotionally. And self-disclosing emotions, thoughts, and experiences puts the topic of disclosure in focus and makes the discloser more mindful of them (Sultan, 2017).

In their study of the mediating roles of self-esteem and self-compassion on self-disclosure and psychological resilience, Harvey & Boynton (2021) found that self-disclosure

impacts one's characteristics thereby improving their level of self-compassion and self-esteem. The study also showed the influence of gender on self-disclosure and psychological resilience as the male participants reported higher levels of psychological resilience than females.

These studies establish the impact of self-disclosure on coping with social challenges in a new country. Therefore, they motivate the study to examine the influence of self-disclosure on transnational migrants' abilities to cope with social difficulties in Sweden.

Research on the Experiences of highly skilled Transnational Migrants

Research on the experiences of highly skilled transnational migrants in Sweden have focused on their economic situation, examining the patterns of their employment, occupational mobility, and the conditions of their employment and marginalisation in the Swedish labour market (Irastorza & Bevelander, 2021; Risberg & Romani, 2022). Risberg & Romani's (2022) qualitative study examined highly skilled migrants' underemployment and their employability. LikicBrboric & Bennich-Björkman's (2016) qualitative study on migrants' political and socioeconomic integration focuses on refugees' experiences. Through biographical interviews, the study revealed that the interviewees' true life experiences of integration are greatly different from integration portrayed as a policy objective.

Barbarich's (2024) qualitative study on migrants in Sweden focused on highly skilled female migrants' social encounters in the workplace and how they access social capital. Through interviews of participants and thematic analysis, the study found that while

Swedish politics assumes highly skilled migrants have an easier time integrating into Swedish society, they are a long way away from feeling like they belong and have the same status as Swedish workers. The study also stressed the need for Swedish society to reciprocate the efforts of transnational migrants to bridge the gap in social connection. The methodology of the study is relevant to this current research.

The author acknowledged the limitation of the study as covering only a category of migrants - highly skilled female migrant workers - and calls for a qualitative study with interviews focused on the lived experiences of transnational migrant workers of other categories such as male and female migrant workers. This study answers the call to fill this research lacuna by studying the social challenges faced by both male and female highly skilled transnational migrant workers in Sweden. Furthermore, Barbarich (2024) interviewed three participants for the study; therefore it is a relatively small study. Acknowledging this limitation, the author called for a replication of qualitative study and interviews of a larger number of participants to generate wider views and broader knowledge and understanding of the lived social experiences of transnational migrant workers. This study also answers this call by studying 12 interviewees comprising both male and female highly skilled transnational migrant workers in Sweden. While Barbarich's (2024) study is centred on social relations in the workplace, this study examines social difficulties in the broader social sphere that transcends the workplace, thereby providing a broader view on highly skilled transnational migrants' social experiences in Sweden. These studies foreground the effectiveness of qualitative study in unravelling the lived experiences of migrants in Sweden as opposed to approximations reached through quantitative study.

Purpose of the Current Study

This study seeks to examine how self-disclosure impacts highly skilled transnational migrants' abilities to cope with social difficulties. The study starts by understanding what these social difficulties are by examining their lived social experiences. Previous studies have focused on labour integration and other economic concerns (Irastorza & Bevelander, 2021; Risberg & Romani, 2022). A study that partly covers highly skilled transnational migrants' social integration focused only on females' experiences in the workplace (Barbarich, 2024). However, more than economic comfort, social interactions constitute a crucial part of migrants' well-being and feeling of sense of belonging in the host country. Furthermore, the assumption that highly skilled migrants have smooth social integration is largely misleading (Barbarich, 2024; Kilinc, 2021) and there is a need to examine their lived social experiences to gain proper understanding of it beyond basic assumptions. As a result, the study aims to answer the research question:

RQ1: What social difficulties do transnational migrants face in Sweden?

Additionally, the impact of self-disclosure in coping with social difficulties in a new country has been established. However, these researches focused on students' experiences in countries like the United States (Chen, 1993; Werkman et al., 1981). Studies applying self-disclosure to highly skilled transnational migrants' abilities to cope with social difficulties in a new country, particularly in Sweden, are lacking. Therefore, the need to examine how these highly skilled transnational migrants self-disclose about their difficulties and the outcome of their disclosure dynamics on their coping ability becomes salient. The study seeks to fill this gap by answering the research question:

RQ2: How does self-disclosure impact their ability to cope with these social difficulties?

Theoretical Framework

Social Penetration Theory

Social penetration theory is essentially Altman and Taylor's (1973) theoretical postulations on the linkage between self-disclosure and relationship formation and development. They posit that self-disclosure progresses intimately as relationships develop (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Information disclosed through self-disclosure is examined along the dimensions of breadth and depth of penetration (Taylor, 1968). While breadth of penetration is the range of topics discussed and amount of information disclosed, depth of penetration refers to the level of intimacy with which the information is disclosed (Taylor, 1968; Carpenter & Greene, 2016). With the information disclosed, people are able to penetrate through the personality of their partners. Therefore the theory conceptualises human personality as being multi-layered (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Altman and Taylor (1973) captured the multi-layered quality of human personality using the analogy of an onion. In this sense, the human personality is described as having four layers: the outer/surface layer, the middle layer, the inner layer, and the core personality (Carpenter & Green, 2016). Through interpersonal interaction, people "peel back" layers of their partner's personality from the outer/surface layer (the public self) to the core (the most private) (Carpenter & Green (2016). In correspondence with these layers, self-disclosure progresses through four stages: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange (Carpenter and Green, 2016; Philpott & Crocker, 2019). In the orientation stage, people are cautious and disclose superficial information that projects the public self, which is the projected self-image in social interactions (Myers et. al.,

2012). In the exploratory affective exchange stage, people are less cautious and share information beyond the periphery to include social preferences and political views. The breath of penetration might broaden, but the public self is still portrayed. In the affective stage, partners are more committed and comfortable with each other and share private information spontaneously. They can have nicknames for each other and share private jokes. The final stage, that is stable exchange, is characterised by openness, intimacy, trust, and a high level of spontaneity. The depth and breadth of disclosures is highest and most private information about feelings, behaviours, and thoughts are shared (Carpenter & Green, 2016).

For a relationship to progress to the stable stage, information flow in self-disclosure has to be bidirectional. This is the norm of reciprocity which requires that both interlocutors disclose information about themselves at the same level of intimacy to maintain equity (Carpenter and Green, 2016). Self-disclosure advances through interactions and fosters social connection as people are more likely to disclose more to people who have self-disclosed to them during interactions (Haisfield, 2012). People who self-disclose with intimacy engage in interracial interactions with more open minds and are less racially biased. Self-disclosing with intimacy propels discussants into making more positive decisions within the interaction (Haisfield, 2012). Social de-penetration can also occur as self-disclosure deescalates leading to relationship dissolution (Carpenter & Green, 2016).

Implication for the Study

SPT will be used to examine the dimensions of self-disclosure - breadth, depth, valence, time, and target, to identify patterns of self-disclosure. Since this study is focused on how self-disclosure impacts participants coping abilities, the study will examine their

patterns of self-disclosure, that is the what, why, how, and when of their disclosure. To this end, the breadth of self-disclosure will be examined by investigating the types of information participants share and to whom they share them. Likewise, the depth of se-disclosure is examined by investigating the amount of intimacy with which this information is shared with the different disclosure targets.

A central tenet of SPT is that social penetration occurs in stages, reflecting the dynamics of disclosure and therefore progresses from Orientation stage characterised by peripheral and superficial disclosure to exploratory affective exchange (more personal but not too intimate), affective exchange (emotionally close) and stable exchange (complete openness). This is realised in the study by examining the dynamics of self-disclosure to different people with whom the participants are in different stages of relations, such as their close friends and family, fellow transnational migrants, and nationals.

The theory is also implemented in examining the relational outcomes of self-disclosure. SPT assumes that self-disclosure has intrinsic relational reward. The relational outcome of self-disclosure to different people will yield insight into how they navigate social interactions and relations in a new cultural context which is crucial for social integration. Giving the potential tension between the differing sociocultural nuances of their home and host countries, the theory aids in examining how they negotiate their disclosure patterns to manage their social realities. Ultimately, this theory will provide insight into the factors that account for the impact of self-disclosure on their coping abilities.

Methods

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and interview is one method the researcher uses to study and interpret the subjects' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). This study seeks to understand how transnational migrant workers in Sweden experience and navigate the Swedish social terrain with specific focus on their social difficulties and their abilities in coping with them. Choosing a qualitative approach was motivated by the necessity to acquire precise details about the subjects' understanding and interpretation of their lived social experiences in Sweden (Denzin & Lincoln 2011).

Procedure

Since samples used in qualitative studies are usually small; they are purposefully selected to give the interviewer the needed data (Shaheen et al., 2019). Therefore, to ensure the right participants are selected to give ample information about the social difficulties of highly skilled transnational migrants in Sweden, the study adopted a purposeful sampling method. This method is useful for selecting information-rich participants (Shaheen et al., 2019). To participate in the study, participants have to be transnational migrants with ties back to their home countries, have been in Sweden for at least 6 months, be working or looking for work, and have experiences with social difficulties. Also, they must have tertiary education, extensive professional work experience or specialised skills and certifications in their fields (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Iredale, 2001)

Based on purposive sampling technique, participants were recruited through social media, including LinkedIn and WhatsApp, and the International House Gothenburg through call for participation (see appendix 1). Since the International House Gothenburg has programs aimed at aiding international talents to integrate into the Swedish society, they organise programmes centred on expats and migrants. In those events, the call for participants was announced for interested migrants to participate. Participants were selected based on their qualification on the above stated criteria. Participation was voluntary with no remuneration. Participants' information was handled with confidentiality and they had the option of opting out of the interview at any time. Prior to the interviews, a consent form (see appendix 2) was signed to inform them of the aim of the study and to ensure they understood the conditions of their participation.

A challenge I faced was framing my research in a way that it is relatable and easily understood to potential participants. My study is focused on the impact of self-disclosure on transnational migrant worker's abilities to cope with social challenges. However, I soon realised that the concept of self-disclosure is not in the general knowledge of the majority of people. To avoid alienating potential participants, I emphasised that the study focused on how highly skilled transnational migrant navigate social difficulties while living and working in Sweden.

Participants

For this study, 12 transnational migrants from 8 countries were interviewed, 6 females, and 6 males with ages ranging from 27 to 41. They have diverse careers, including human resources management and Finance and Engineering. The gender and cultural

diversity among participants was necessary to explore the possibilities of gender and cultural diversity in their social experiences and self-disclosure patterns, if they occur. Note that years of professional experience was not presented for all because the information was not given. Participants' demographics are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1
Participant demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Country of Origin	Length Of Stay In Sweden	Work Industry	Years Of Experience
Female 1, India	Female	41	Master's	India	2 years, 5 months	Financial / Human Resources	1
Male, Iran	Male	32	Ph.d	Iran	6 years	Engineering	
Female 2, India	Female	31	Master's	India	9 months	HR Management	
Male 1, Nigeria	Male	34	Master's	Nigeria	7 years	E-Commerce	7
Male 2, Nigeria	Male	In his 30s	Bachelor's	Nigeria	Almost 2 years	IT	10
Female, China	Female	27	Master's	China	Almost 4 years	IT	
Female, Turkey	Female	29	Master's	Turkey	2 years, 6 months	Translation / Marketing	4
Male, India	Male	35	Master's	India	2 years, 5 months	Automotive	12
Male, Yemen	Male	41	Master's	Yemen	4 years, 9 months	Oil and Gas	17
Male, Trinidad and Tobago	Male	37	Master's	Trinidad and Tobago	4 years	Marketing	> 15
Female 3, India	Female	29	Master's	India	3 years, 9 months	Human Resources	

Female, Ukraine	Female	32	Master's	Ukraine	7 years	Communication

Data Collection

Semi-structured interview was used to collect data for this study. Although the interview follows a planned interview guide, it leaves room to pursue responses through unplanned questions. This study draws on Barbarich's (2024) interview guide in developing the interview guide for this study because it qualitatively studied highly skilled migrants' social encounters, although in the workplace. Barbarich (2024) studied how highly skilled female migrants' access social capital in the workplace, focusing on their social encounters with their colleagues. The demographic information examined in the present study includes gender, level of education, country of origin, length of stay in Sweden, the industry of work, and years of experience. This information was requested because it gives background information about the participant and insight into their experiences with social difficulties, as well as how their experiences shape their disposition towards Sweden and inform their decisions.

Some questions about transnational migrants' social experiences were adapted from Barbarich's (2024) interview guide. For example, the 15th question: "does your workplace offer assistance with navigating these issues, or is it up to you as an individual to handle those barriers?" informed the question, "how has your workplace influenced your social life in Sweden?"

A pilot study was conducted with two persons. They were actual highly skilled transnational migrants in Sweden so the pilot interview closely mirrored the actual interview of participants. Based on the pilot study, the interview questions were adjusted in some areas. Question 12 initially was *How does information sharing by you and others impact the social relations you build with people?* However, the pilot study participants needed clarification on "information sharing" in this context. Therefore, to ensure proper understanding of the context and appropriate response, it was edited to *How does the flow of information sharing between you and the people you connect with impact how the relationships develop?* Similarly, question 14 initially was *How would you describe your experience after talking about your challenges?* Pilot study participants described their daily life experiences, which was not the direction of the question. To aid appropriate response, it was rephrased as *How does talking about your challenges influence how you cope with them?* When the final version of the interview questions was done (see appendix 3), the interviews were conducted.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in English. Some of the interviews were conducted at the international House Gothenburg because I worked from there some days in the week while some were conducted in quiet public places such as the Gothenburg Central Library.

Data analysis

The data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis with the assistance of Nvivo 14 (Erlingsson & Brysiewics, 2017)**.** The analysis was done inductively, that is letting the data *speak* for itself as well deductively to ensure the critical tools of SPT

were applied. Thematic analysis entails identifying themes or patterns in one or more qualitative data and using these themes to address the issue under study (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). A theme is an abstract, deep, systematic pattern of information that emerges on the surface of a text with strings of words assumed to convey similar information (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). The process of thematic analysis entails being familiar with the data, generating initial codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Caulfield, 2023).

Coding entails recognising chunks of text relevant to the research goals. Codes provided a condensed meaning of the entire text and common meaning recurring throughout the data. These codes were grouped together to form systematic patterns that form the themes. These codes were reviewed and refined to ensure accurate representation of the data and coverage of the research focus (Caulfield, 2023; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Thematic analysis is suitable for examining participants' opinion, perception, or experiences on a specific issue (Caulfield, 2023). Thematic analysis was chosen for this study in order to identify common experiences of social difficulty and self-disclosure dynamics in coping with them. Although other methods of analysis such as reflexive thematic analysis could have been used, but the themes were not far-fetched therefore thematic analysis was deemed suitable.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Qualitative Study

Qualitative study is useful for examining the experiences, views, opinions, and perceptions of individuals about a specific subject and is therefore suitable for achieving the objectives of this study. Qualitative study is useful for approaching a subject with open-mindedness without the necessity to confirm preconceived assumptions. It has been praised for its flexibility and ability to generate in-depth and detailed information (Mwita, 2022). However, it is not without weaknesses.

Research methods within the qualitative approach have been criticised for their subjectivity because they involve human interpretation. However, a counter argument is that generalizability is not at the core of qualitative study (Mwita, 2022). The findings of this study are relevant for understanding the social experiences of transnational migrants in Sweden. Also, qualitative research has been criticised for lacking generalizability as a result of using small samples (Holmes, 2020). However, my study expands on existing studies and provides insight into how self-disclosure impacts transnational migrants' ability to cope with social difficulties.

Another weakness is that a researcher's direct contact with participants can inhibit their freedom to give certain information (Mwita, 2022). A preventive measure in this regard is the implementation of a strict ethical standard and the use of consent form promising confidentiality and anonymity and stating how data will be handled. Another concern is that a researcher's direct contact with participants can also lead to researcher's bias. However, the location of positionality can prevent researcher's bias (Holmes, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Data collected for this study included participants' personal experiences of social integration and how they self-disclose in relation to coping with these challenges which can be considered as private and sensitive information. Therefore, all collected data were confidential and participants were anonymised by excluding personal details such as names and places of work.

Prior to participation in the research, participants were given a consent form that sought their permission to be recorded with my personal device during the interview which they signed. The consent form communicated that the interviews will be recorded in a password-protected format and stored in a password-protected dedicated computer. The recorded data will be confidential and will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Positionality

The researcher's assumptions and opinion can influence the direction of a project and shape how they seek information to answer the questions, ultimately shaping the outcome of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is therefore important for me to assess myself for the self-identifications, views, and positions I might bring to the research process. A researcher develops their positionality by locating themselves about the subject, the participants, and the research context and process (Holmes, 2020). In relation to this study, I have identified some aspects of my self-identification that are relevant to the subject matter of this study.

I share a similarity with the participants of this study as I am a transnational migrant living in Sweden and still maintaining ties to my home country. By educational standard, I am highly qualified as I have a master's degree and am currently studying for another one to which this project is a part. Furthermore, I have been in Sweden for more than six months, have worked in a Swedish organisation, and have personal experiences of navigating the social terrain all of which relate to my research focus. Therefore, the findings of the study are relevant to me as it will afford me a deeper understanding of how self-disclosure impacts highly skilled transnational migrants' abilities to cope with social difficulties. Therefore, it has been essential for me to be aware of these aspects, as well as any underlying assumptions that may arise from them, when designing the interview guide and analysing the data to avoid their influence.

Additionally, it is essential for me to understand that the theories and concepts adopted in his study are one way of interpreting transnational migrants' experiences and coping strategies. The research questions in this study can be examined from other perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the conclusion arrived at through the analysis of the data is by no means the only way to interpret the information.

Findings

To ensure a thorough outline of the findings and consequently a comprehensive response to the research questions, the Findings section is structured into three parts. The first part reports participants' social difficulties, thus addressing the first research question. To satisfy the curiosity of how self-disclosure impacts their abilities to cope with these difficulties, it is essential to first know how they self-disclose. This is because information on their disclosure patterns, that is the what, how, when, and why of their self-disclosure, naturally precedes information on how it impacts their coping abilities. Moreover, uncovering their disclosure message enactment strategies aids understanding its implication for their coping abilities. Therefore, while the second part provides results for their disclosure patterns, the third part is concerned with how it impacts their coping abilities. Taken together, both parts provide data that address the second research question.

In all, ten themes were realised: the first four pertain to their social difficulties, namely (1) language barrier, (2) difficulty making friends, (3) difficulty stabilising workplace relations (4), difficulty navigating social situations and the Swedish society. Four themes pertain to their self-disclosure patterns, namely (5) breadth of self-disclosure varies based on disclosure target, (6) depth of self-disclosure varies based on disclosure target, (7) time and frequency of disclosure reflects the intimacy of the disclosure, (8)self-disclosure is motivated and therefore systematic and strategic. The last two themes pertains to the impact of self-disclosure namely, (9) psychological impact and (10) solution-oriented impact. It is essential to note that participants' grammar, including ungrammatical ones, were used as is to maintain the integrity of the data.

Social difficulties

(1) Language barrier

Although three participants reported learning the Swedish language and making good progress, language barrier constitutes a major challenge for the majority of the participants. Common reasons accounting for this difficulty included relatively low language aptitude, which is an individual's potential for learning new languages; lack of confidence to speak the little they know; having no time to learn due to being occupied with work; teaching incompetence on the part of "substitute teachers"; and not having native speakers to practice with to improve their competence and performance. Participants also reported difficulty coping with the school system because it promotes "self-study" [Female 1, India] and classifies learners based on education level as a participant laments "since I have a college degree they put me in class C which could be fine for some but wasn't fine for me because I just couldn't pick it up" [Male, India**].**

This difficulty hindered their social interactions as a participant expressed, "I met a lot of good Swedes… they will directly talk with me in Swedish and at that moments I realise that I cannot really have a deeper conversation" [Female, China]. It also led to social exclusion as another participant recalled instances where "I may be the only English speaker in a given social context and nobody cares. There's no attempt to be inclusive in the language speaking" [Male, Trinidad and Tobago], making social interactions difficult.

(2) Difficulty Making Friends

Although the majority perceived Swedes as warm, welcoming, and helpful, and two participants reported having close Swedish friends, they expressed difficulty establishing

friendship with them for various reasons. For one, conversations with Swedes were reported to be “short” [Male 2, Nigeria] and “basic” [Female, Ukraine] and therefore do not aid friendships formation. They accrued this to Swedish cultural orientation of “little talks”[Male 1, Nigeria] and their tendency to be careful not to “cross line” or “say the wrong thing” [Male, Yemen]. Secondly, participants reported that “it’s very common for people to have friends that they meet as children and maintain a small circle of friends for their entire life which makes that super difficult for new friends to come in” [Male, Trinidad and Tobago].

Thirdly, participants perceived as Swedes as stereotypical “from the way they try to explain stuff to you” [Male, Yemen]; their preferences to “live in certain places” [Female, China]; the way they respond to them: “most of them tend to see black people as dangerous… when I'm closer to them as a black person, some of them tend to shake” and the way they look at you “like, are you a human being at all?” [Male 2, Nigeria]. A fourth reason is perceived lack of exposure of some Swedes because “swedes who have travelled a bit more and who had international experience are more open to, you know, embracing people who are expats and are much easier to approach” [Male, Indian].Although making friends with other transnational migrants was reportedly easier, these friendships are often short-lived because of the brevity of work and study period associated with most migrants in the academic and professional space, and therefore, have the tendency to become long-distanced.

Making friends is reported difficult because of the amount of effort involved, as the male participant from Yemen explained, the transnational migrant is “a wild card” who has to “take the initiative” to meet people in order to “reduce the gap that that makes you a wild card”. Consequently, they joined organised activities and attended networking events

where they committed to introducing themselves to as many people as possible. A participant lamented that "Honestly, its like being on Tinder… I got to do that with 50 different people to find that one person who I can connect with… even though I feel tired…back home, I don't think I would have put this kind of effort to go out and meet new friends" [Female 1, India]. When they do make some connections, "it takes a lot of time Investment to build those relationships" [Female 2, India]. Some reported focusing on making friends with internationals as a participant explained, "instead of spending too much energy socialising with Swedish, I have other alternative from different culture in this society, like if it was pure Swedish society, I would die" [Male, Iran].

(3) Difficulty Establishing Workplace Relations

Participants expressed difficulty navigating and establishing workplace relations. The male participant from Yemen explained that some workers were often clustered in groups of established friends, making it difficult for new colleagues to enter these social circles, and even more difficult "if you come there as manpower, they will not consider you are part of the team, you're just here to do some job for a couple of weeks or a couple of months and then you go". Sociocultural nuances also limited social relations as participants reported that their Swedish colleagues were "*overly polite", "subtle" and "indirect"* [Male, India] and conversations with them were "very cold" [Male, Iran] and often revolved around peripheral topics such as the weather and phatic communions and did not involve emotions. These differences in conversational styles, expectations, and outcomes limited communication effectiveness and took away from the richness of social relations.

(4) Difficulty navigating social situations and the Swedish society

Participants reported having difficulty understanding how the Swedish society worked. Common areas of difficulties were shopping for specific things; getting a bank account; understanding what Swedish holidays; accessing medical care: “we still haven't learned how to navigate the medical system in Sweden very well” [Female 1, India]; transportation: “every city has their own app” which makes it “difficult to navigate sometimes when you're travelling between cities” [Female 3, India]; and getting registered in Sweden: “the website was super complicated, I didn't understand anything at first and the translation sucks so it's terrible” [Female, Turkey]. The male participant from Trinidad and Tobago described them as the “unseen difficulties that immigrants deal with”.

Navigating social situations such as taking public transport, making jokes, playing with friends, and attending social events were also reportedly challenging because people are socialised differently in these areas. The male participant from Trinidad and Tobago reported that:

> In the Caribbean, for example, we would walk on to a bus and say ‘good morning’ to everyone and if you don’t say ‘good morning’ to everyone you’re considered rude, whereas in Sweden you walk into a bus and if you do say, ‘good morning’ to everyone you’re considered a weirdo.

Participants reported instances where they intended to use humour for socialisation but their jokes were culturally misplaced and created a rather counter-effect of social awkwardness. One participant reported that “I really wanted to, you know, be funny around people. But I didn't get that vibe back. And I felt disappointed” [Male 1, Nigeria]. Another participant commented that “culturally we are not racist so we have lots of racism joke and

we laugh together…here you cannot do the same joke because it's hot topic" [Male, Iran]. These social difficulties left them feeling out of place such that "by virtue of being who I am, I am weird and weird is not something that's cool in Sweden" and in a bid to fit in "you can mute your personality a lot" because "you're only showing up as much as you're allowed to so there are a lot of barriers that can drive someone crazy" [Male, Trinidad and Tobago].

These social difficulties constitute psychological strain for transnationals, resulting in poor mental health, feeling of helplessness and feeling "*super fragile" and "super anxious"* [Female, China]; increased self-doubt and less self-efficacy: "am I enough? Am I like, adapted?" [Female, Turkey]; and re-thinking their decisions, "I didn't think it through properly before moving… there was some stuff that just surprised me because I wasn't prepared in any way" [Female, Ukraine]. This negatively impacted their resilience, self-efficacy, and even desire to remain in Sweden.

Patterns of Self-Disclosure

(5) Breadth of Self-Disclosure Varies Based on Disclosure Target

Although the second Nigerian male participant revealed that he does not self-disclose about his social difficulties because "as a man, you don't complain, you fix the issue", and moreover is prepared to live with his choice of coming to Sweden, other participants reported self-disclosing on a broader range of topics relating to their social difficulties to their family and close friends than to international friends they met in Sweden, and the least to nationals. A participant revealed that "with my partner, it's usually everything that I can share with him. It's a more intimate close relation" [Female 3, India].

The scope of topics discussed was shortened in disclosure to international friends and revolved around similar difficulties such as difficulties meeting people, making friends, and language barrier. Because they are in "the same social category"[male, Iran], have "similar or relatable situations" [Female, Ukraine] and "share the same kind of feelings" [female, China], they tend to "talk about the difficulties as a collective" [Male, Trinidad and Tobago] and "understand each other" [Male, Iran]. They commented that the "shared understanding of the struggles that we are going through together" makes it "easier" to build connections [Female 2, India] and "the more we talk about these experiences with each other, the more we grow to trust each other" [Female 3, India]. This element of collectivity in the international community fostered a sense of trust, a "safe space" where they could express their opinions knowing that "I won't be judged if I say this" [Female 3, India]. This freedom of self-expression "speeds up the development of the relationship" they build with internationals because "if you self-disclose a little bit,, then the other people also kind of feel that they can self-disclose a little bit" [Female, Ukraine].

Because conversations with nationals were reportedly "basic" and "casual", topics of discussions were rather narrow and peripheral. Also, self-disclosure with them was "one-sided" with transnationals on the disclosing side and did not yield the desired "feedback" because they did not exceed a certain threshold in their disclosures, therefore, transnationals did not feel "safe and confident" to keep sharing [Male, Iran]. **T**hey did not express significant challenges or opinions for fear of being "avoided" or getting them "upset" [Female, Ukraine].

(6) Depth of Disclosure Varies Based on Disclosure Target

Similarly, participants reported consciously baring themselves to their close friends and family because "they know you already and you don't have to pretend" [female,

Turkey]. They see them as their “confidants” [male, India] and “support system” [female 1, india], and can be “brutally honest” with their difficulties but with the new friends they made in Sweden, they would be “very cautious”, “more guarded” [Female 1, India] The female participant from India explained further that:

> with old friends, I am carefree enough to share my fears and my insecurities. But with the new ones, I don’t want to show them that side of me. So I tend to appear more confident… more self-assured than I am.

Another participant explained that:

> I rely for that emotional support a lot more on my existing social support system so my childhood friends, my husband, of course, my mother, my in-laws actually because I can be a much more authentic version of myself with them and much more raw and just more comfortable [Female 2, India].

In contrast, they displayed minimal emotion in self-disclosure to international friends they met in Sweden. A participant explained that although he demonstrates his frustration to the international friends in Sweden, the topics they discuss are not “sensitive emotional” topics and he would not complain but rather “play the role of motivator” [Male, Trinidad and Tobago]. Another participant revealed that “within the international community, I don't think I’ve developed relationships strong enough where I can authentically communicate my emotions” [Female 2, India]. The Chinese female participant revealed that she does not discuss her social difficulties with her male friends but does with her female friends.

Since topics of discussion with swedes were reportedly peripheral and about rather less significant difficulties, it followed that self-disclosure was done with minimal or no display of emotions. A participant commented that in her conversations about her difficulties with Swedes, she realised that:

> There are very few Swedes that I've met where vulnerability is accepted… because the culture is so individualistic it's almost an expectation that you manage your problems on your own… so i don't feel comfortable stepping over that line when i can sense that invisible wall in front of me" [Female 2, India].

A participant revealed that disclosure with them was "one-sided" and did not exceed the "threshold" of periphery to the level of sharing "something deeper that you can feel sympathy or sadness" [male, Iran]. Participants reported fearing that they will be "judged", seen as "strange", or "avoid[ed]" if they show too much emotion. Therefore the decision to disclose or not to disclose is crucial for the self disclosure act to yield its intended outcome. A participant explained that:

> because of the thin line you have to walk as an immigrant, like you're in or you're out, if you're not in then you're out, and if I present myself in a way that is not acceptable them I'm out, the unfortunate part is you don't always know what is acceptable and what isn't, and so that constant hyper awareness of self to be able to present yourself in a way that is acceptable among people who you don't even know whether or not is acceptable… is exhausting and it's it's energy draining, and it's stressful and it's anxiety-giving and so it's not a representation of an authentic self [Male, Trinidad and Tobago].

(7) Time And Frequency of Disclosure Reflects the Intimacy of the Disclosure

Closely related to the amount/intimacy of self-disclosure is the time of disclosure. Although participants were able to self-disclose to international friends because of the similarity of experiences and the mutuality of self-disclosure it foresters, there is much consciousness of the appropriateness of the timing because if they disclose "too soon", it will not have a good

impact on your relationship with the person" because they will think the discloser is "strange" [Female, Ukraine]. This is unlike their self-disclosure to close friends and family and nationals because with the former, there is minimal to no time restraint, with the later, there is seldom the disclosure of significant difficulty or the display of emotions let alone the time to do so.

The time of self-disclosure is tied to the intimacy of self-disclosure and reflects the level of relationship between the discloser and the disclosure target as a participant revealed, "I speak to my community in Trinidad every day. I speak to my family every day" [Male, Trinidad and Tobago]. The Turkish female participant revealed that she calls home even "at 1 am".

(8) Self-disclosure is Motivated and Therefore Systematic and Strategic

A common pattern discovered from the data is that all disclosure acts had underlying motivations recognisable as intrapersonal motivations and interpersonal motivations. *Intrapersonal motivations* underlined their expressions of the self, feelings, thoughts, and opinions. Overwhelmed by the psychological impact of the difficulties they faced, they sought to "pour out" their hearts to release the tension of these emotions. To this end, they self-disclosed to their close friends and family. They also disclose to therapists to release their "anxiety" [Female China], "existential crisis" [Female Turkey].

Furthermore, they self-disclosed their opinions and thoughts about common social challenges to people with similar experiences as a participant explained "it's easier for me to be totally open with my Chinese friends because most of us share the same kind of feelings about the Swedish society" [Female, China]. Another reported disclosing to internationals who can relate to his difficulties because "it is important to me that you understand me"

[male, Iran]. The male participant from Trinidad and Tobago reported disclosing to his mother because “she understands what it is like to be in Sweden”. This automatically excludes most nationals because they “are unaware of the invisible difficulties of the migrants” and therefore lack the necessary “empathy” to understand their situation [Male, Trinidad and Tobago].

For motivation relating to seeking specific support, some participants reported disclosing to people “with respect to how much they can do to help me” [male 1, Nigeria]. Other reasons include to get “advice” [female, China]; to get “company for my kids” [Female, Ukraine]; “career”, “mental health” and “understanding of how to raise my child” [Male, Trinidad and Tobago], “because networking is key here” [Male, India], and to grow “work connection” [Male, Yemen].

Interpersonal motivation strives towards relational development with another person. To this end, participants self-disclose to other migrants. Some socialise with nationals to try to be “a part of the society not just a minority in the society” [Male, Yemen].

A pattern common to the participants is that they self-disclose online and offline (11 participants). Due to the geographical locations of some of their close friends and family living in countries other than Sweden, they often communicate with their friends and family back home using computer-mediated means such as phone calls, social media, and emails. Essential to point out is that the means of communication did not limit the frequency of communication as some participants reveal that they *call* home “every day” [Male, Trinidad and Tobago] and “very often” [Female 2, India].

Impact of Self-Disclosure on their Coping Abilities

(9) Psychological Impact

This theme is wrapped around the observed emotional and mental affect of self-disclosure. The 11 responders who self-disclose reported positive psychological impact from disclosure. And the psychological authenticity associated with disclosing their true selves and emotions to their close friends and loved ones yielded the most psychological impact on their coping abilities. They expressed that talking to people was “reassuring” [Female 1, India]; “a way to let my negative feelings go out” and “to ease my kind of personal anxiety” [female, China]; “ease my feelings” and “calm me down” [Female 2, India; Male, Iran]; become “more motivated” to do things in ways that would “help me cope with the problems that I have” [Male, India]; become “able to form a more clear picture of what is happening” [Female 3, India]; and better able to “process” and “ navigate that situation” [Female, Turkey]. Four participants [female 1, India; female, Ukraine; Female 2, India; and Male, India] reported feeling ‘light’ after a heartfelt self-disclosure of their social difficulties.

Self-disclosing to close friends and families and other migrants resulted in great perceived social support in terms of always having someone to lean on for advice, information, and actual assistance. For instance, [female 1, India] explained that sharing about these difficulties, opens doors for “different perspectives or solutions or possibilities or opportunities…whether they’re actual solutions or you know, mental support solutions”.

The second most reported psychological impact resulted from self-disclosure to other migrants. It fostered “a sense of safe space” [Female 3, India], “good potential for friendship” [Female, Ukraine] and “understanding” [Male, Iran]. It positively impacted their coping abilities “because I feel that I’m not the only one. There are others who faced similar

challenges. And that's comforting" [Female 1, India]. It also encouraged them because when they see people in "the same social category… and similar challenges overcome them" [Male, Iran].

Although conversations with nationals can hardly be called self-closure (the richness of self-disclosure pales in comparison to the conversation with international migrants and their close friends and loved ones), their conversations have relational outcomes that impacted their coping abilities. Conversations on shared interests tended towards friendships "my two best friends are swedes" [male Yemen] and workplace relations tended towards fruitful acquaintances [Female, Turkey]. This produced feelings of optimism, certainty and even a sense of relational closeness that somewhat closed the gap of not having friends who are nationals.

However, while the cathartic effect of honest, intimate, and authentic disclosure calmed their anxiety, it also intensified their internal wrangling and magnified their difficulties in their minds' eyes. For instance, the male participant from Trinidad and Tobago revealed that unpacking these hard experiences and intense emotions "reminds me that I'm in an uphill situation". Similarly, the third Indian female participant revealed it "makes me realise while I'm talking that I have really tall mounting to climb and makes me question whether I have it in me to continue climbing".

(10)Solution-Oriented Impact

Participants reported receiving information or actual assistance that addressed specific difficulties. For instance, the Turkish Female participant recalled getting "ideas" that "helps me to navigate that situation" [Female, Turkey]; the first Female participant recalled various instances of getting "suggestions" that led to resolving various difficulties with shopping, massage, personal care, and healthcare. The second Indian female reported

getting ideas to be able to “figure out what works and what doesn’t”; the male participant from Yemen reported getting “extra information that will help us” after mutual disclosure.

Enacted social support and actual solutions also emerged as an outcome of disclosure that impacted their coping ability. The first Indian female participant explained that “the minute you start talking about your challenges… things start sometimes resolving themselves”. Similarly, the male participant from Yemen revealed that by discussing difficulties with his wife, they “find solution for it” and “we start working on it”. Participants reported feelings “safe”, [Female 3, India] “encouraged”, ‘Male 1, Nigeria] “motivated” [Male, Iran] and “reassured” [Female 1, India] after self-disclosing.

Discussion

In terms of highly skilled transnational migrants' social difficulties (RQ1), the study agrees with the literature (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Kilinç, 2021), and previous empirical studies in Sweden (Ayuk, 2020; Barbarich, 2024), and show that contrary to assumptions that highly skilled transnational migrants' social standing and education immunises them from social difficulties, they do in fact experience social difficulties like any other migrant group. Common social difficulties uncovered included language barrier (Theme 1), difficulty making friends (Theme 2), establishing workplace social relations (Theme 3), and navigating the Swedish society and social situations (Theme 4).

The commonality of these social difficulties and their implications suggest that they are recurring challenges that are part and parcel of being a transnational migrant. For instance, as highly skilled transnational migrants, they are naturally disadvantaged by the language school system that banks on their high level of education and professionalism in assigning them to classes. Whereas, the reality is that high education level does not automatically imply high language aptitude because learning a new language entails comprehending and re/constructing new cognitive frameworks and a generous time commitment. While the cognitive process that goes into language learning to the extent of acquiring competence and mastering performance is not always a natural given (hence the varying degrees of language aptitude), time is a scarce commodity with highly skilled transnational migrants, what with their commitments. This realisation echoes Kilinç's (2021) position that their higher level of education and skill is the very reason why they are disadvantaged.

As for the impact of self-disclosure on their coping abilities (RQ2), starting from the analysis of the disclosure patterns, it becomes obvious that the enactment of self-disclosure

through different strategies has implications for their coping abilities. Essentially, two types of impact emerged: psychological and solution-oriented. For psychological impact, the study found a stress-buffering and cathartic effect of self-disclosure. It suggests that honestly and frequently self-disclosing a wide range of social difficulties with intimacy to close friends and family, and talking to therapists, helps to relieve psychological distress such as despair and anxiety, leading to increased motivation and positive outlook. This echoes Derlega et al. (1993) and Pennebaker's (1995) assertions that self-disclosure has stress-buffering effects on those who self-disclose emotionally and lead to psychological resilience. It suggests that people are more likely to discuss negatively valenced topics with their trusted and close friends and family and herein lies the emotional relief. A possible explanation that aligns with Zhang's (2017) finding is that negative disclosure topics usually have a sense of urgency given their severity and the emotional and mental weight it bore on them, hence the need to share them to release the fever of the stressful experiences.

Whereas honestly and intimately disclosing social difficulties led to increased self-awareness and emotional comfort, it also enhanced the salience and significance of the difficulty resulting in added negative effect on affect and perception of the difficulty. This bidirectional effect of self-disclosure foregrounds it as a paradoxical phenomenon with the tendency to yield divergent results depending on the dynamics of its enactment. This outcome echoes previous research that self-disclosure has a negative effect on disclosers, albeit short-term (Luo and Hancock 2020). Although the duration of the negative impact could not be adequately deciphered in this study, the evidenced continuous engagement in emotional self-disclosure and the abundance of positive outcomes suggests that its positive impact outweighs and outlives its negative impacts.

Furthermore, the positive relational outcome of disclosure to other migrants reduced feelings of social isolation and loneliness and facilitated feelings of acceptance, validation, and perceived social support and sense of belonging which positively impacted their coping abilities. Although less reported, positive relational outcome of socialisation with nationals promoted feelings of social connection. These outcomes agree with Chen's (1993) finding that students who self-disclose were better able to manage relations and cope with the difficulties of living in a new country.

Moving to the solution-oriented impact, informational and enacted support emerged as outcomes of self-disclosure that impact their coping abilities. Participants were able to mobilise social support through conscious disclosure to people with similar situations and/or can contribute to solving the situation. This led to perceived and enacted social support which reduced their psychological distress. Knowing that these social difficulties were not unique to them reduced the feelings of loneliness and helplessness, leading to improved optimism in navigating their social difficulties. This resonates with Zhang's (2017, p.535) findings that self-disclosure on Facebook led to perceived social support and contributed to "increased satisfaction with life, above and beyond the effects of stressful life events"

The theoretical framework offers interesting insights into the study. The study supports SPT's tenet on the different stages of social penetration. Although the study is not longitudinal and cannot observe the dynamics of self-disclosure as relationships evolve, and the participants' relationships are not only romantic, SPT lends explanation to the nature of self-disclosure in different relationships. To their close friends and family, participants' self-disclosure reflects the stable exchange stage characterised by complete openness. Disclosures to other internationals reflect the exploratory affective stage where they can talk

about their social difficulties, opinions, and views but not with the same intimacy as with close friends and family. While discussions with nationals reflect the orientation stage characterised by peripheral and superficial disclosures. This shows that although the theory applies mainly to romantic relationships, its tenet on the nature of self-disclosure in different stages of relationships is applicable for understating the relational aspect of self-disclosure in different contexts.

Furthermore, the theoretical foundation of SPT is its assumption that self-disclosure is intrinsically rewarding. However, the study partially supports this assumption as the positive relational outcomes of self-disclosure were foregrounded in self-disclosure to close friends and family as well as migrants but very minimally to nationals. This highlights the complexity of human relations and the fallibility of theoretical assumptions in an attempt capture such a dynamic and dialectical phenomenon.

Cultural Nuances and Further Research

As explained in the Methodology sections, the participants for the study were strategically selected to provide room for exploring possible gender and cultural diversity in self-disclosure patterns and how it impacts their coping abilities. Rather than cultural differences in participants' self-disclosure, there are observed individual differences in the choices of how much, how intimate, and who to self-disclose to. However, one participant (the second Nigerian male) reported not self-disclosing partly because of the African sociocultural orientation and expectations of men. Men are seen as strong, mentally tough, and providers and therefore "do not complain" but rather "fix the issues". Interestingly, the first Nigerian male respondent reported self-disclosing about his social difficulties to his

family. This divergent disclosure choices from two people from the same culture highlights the significance of individual choice over cultural influence on self-disclosure. Critically looking at this finding, avenues for future research emerged. Perhaps a similar study with a focus on how cultural influence on self-disclosure affects its impact on their coping abilities will yield deeper insight into the cultural dimension of self-disclosure and its implications for coping with social difficulties.

Implication for Social Integration Efforts

The findings provide some practical implications that can re/shape integration efforts geared towards highly skilled transnational migrants. Firstly, the discrepancy between high education levels and language aptitude highlights the need for language programs designed to cater to the needs of highly skilled migrants. Adopting methods that are based on the learner's abilities rather than their assumed qualities would be beneficial for better learning outcomes.

Secondly, from the study, it is obvious that the sociocultural differences in friendship/relationship building styles, organisational culture and workplace relations, and social orientation will always manifest in relations and interactions between transnational migrants and nationals in different contexts. Consequently, the easily foreseeable resultant sociocultural clashes that animate these relations and interactions will continuously be points of contention between these groups of people and will have implications for how highly-skilled transnational migrants navigate the Swedish society and social situations. This points to the need for comprehensive cultural orientation programs to enhance highly skilled transnational migrants' understanding of Swedish societal norms and workplace

cultures. These programs should include modules on relationship-building styles, organizational culture, and social etiquette.

Thirdly, the benefits of self-disclosure highlight the need for it to be emphasised and promoted to aid highly skilled transactional migrants' abilities to cope with their social difficulties. As a result, it is essential to encourage open discussion about these social difficulties.

Lastly, giving the poor relational outcome of self-disclosure with nationals, it is for policies to foster environments that encourage open and trusting communication between migrants and nationals. This could include training for employers and community leaders on the benefits of self-disclosure and how to support migrants in their social integration. This resonates with Barbarich's (2024) suggestion that both nationals and transitional should make efforts to improve social relations that will aid migrants' social integration.

Limitations of the Study

Firstly, although the study focused on highly skilled transnational migrants' social experiences, the dimension could have been broader to include low-skilled transnational migrants and perhaps compare their social difficulties and how self-disclosure impacts their coping abilities. Further study is needed to address this gap, especially as studies on highly skilled transnational migrants are scanty.

Secondly, although examining 12 participants (6 male and 6 females) provided a balanced view of the research focus and is an improvement on previous study which interviewed 3 female highly skilled migrants (Barbarich, 2024), the sample size might have led to limited data on factors of interest such as self-disclosure based on gender and culture.

For instance, although a female participant reported not intimately self-disclosing about her social difficulties to her male friends, it is not enough data to examine the significance of gendered self-disclosure in the context of this study. Furthermore, one respondent reported not self-disclosing partly due to cultural orientation, it is not enough data to examine how the cultural dimension of self-disclosure influences its impact on their coping abilities. These are areas where future research could improve on.

Despite these limitations, the study makes significant contributions to knowledge on transnational migrants' social experiences and self-disclosure, especially in Sweden. The method can be replicated in future studies to understand transnational migrants' perception of their experiences and perspectives on social integration in Sweden.

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine highly skilled transnational migrants' social difficulties and how self-disclosure impacts their coping abilities. It provided insight into the social difficulties that highly skilled transnational migrants face in Sweden, an aspect previously overlooked in researches on migrants, thereby challenging the assumption that this migrant category is privileged above others and are exonerated from social processes. Consequently, the study provides useful information that can influence integration efforts targeted at this migrant category. Since the Swedish government has provisions for attracting highly skilled transnational migrants and aiding their integration, the results of this study are vital for them to understand the states and experiences of these migrants and adjust existing methods while implementing new ones to ensure improved success of social integration efforts.

Basing the analysis on SPT, this study extended the application of the concepts of self-disclosure and SPT beyond the traditional research foci of disclosure/nondisclosure and relationship development to coping with the challenges of living in a new country in the context of highly skilled transnational migrants specifically Sweden. The study found that the enactment of different disclosure strategies has positive outcomes for their coping abilities, namely psychological impact and solution-oriented impact. Specifically, it has stress buffering and cathartic effect that helps to relieve psychological distress such as despair and anxiety, leading to increased motivation and positive outlook. Its positive relational outcome reduced feelings of social isolation and enhanced feelings of social connection, acceptance and validation. Additionally, self-disclosure proved to be a tool for mobilising social support leading to its solution-oriented outcomes. Therefore, clearly nuancing the character of self-

disclosure in this study provides an enlightenment opportunity for highly skilled transnational migrants and foregrounds the efficacy of this verbal tool as an aid for coping with social difficulties.

The study's limited sample also led to avenues for future research in the domain of self-disclosure and coping with social difficulties, specifically in culture and gender dimensions. These researches will advance the scholarship on SPT, self-disclosure, and highly skilled transnational migrants at large, and enrich knowledge on the relationship between self-disclosure and coping with social difficulties in a foreign country, a crucial area of study giving the prevalence of migration and on-going globalisation. Although this study proves the limitations of SPT in capturing the complexity of diverse human relationships beyond romantic relationships, its relevance for understanding the character of self-disclosure in different stages of social relations is substantiated.

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Appendix 1

Recruiting message

Pitch for Participants

🌟 Call for Participants: Research Project on Self-Disclosure and Transnational Migrant Workers' Abilities to Cope with Social Difficulties in Sweden 🌟

Are you a transnational migrant worker in Sweden? Do you have fascinating stories to share about your experiences, challenges, and triumphs? We want to hear from you!

Project Overview: We're embarking on an exciting research journey to explore how transnational migrant workers navigate social difficulties while living and working in Sweden.

Why Participate?

Be Heard: Your voice matters! By participating, you contribute to a deeper understanding of the migrant experience.

Who Can Participate? You who came to Sweden for work purposes and have been living in Sweden for at least 6 months.

What's Involved?

Interview: Share your insights through a brief interview of approximately 40-45 minutes

How to Participate? Read and sign the consent form and that's it! (Don't worry, it's very short).

For inquiries, please email Confidence on gusevwco@student.gu.se

This project is in collaboration with the International House Gothenburg.

Appendix 2

Consent to Participate in Research

"Barriers that can Drive Someone Crazy"

Self-Disclosure and Highly Skilled Transnational Migrants' Abilities to Cope with Social Difficulties

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the impact of self-disclosure in transnational migrant workers' abilities to navigate social difficulties in Sweden. Transnational migrant workers are people who leave their native countries to earn money through work opportunities in other countries while maintaining ties to their home countries. This study is part of the final degree project at the MSc in Communication at the University of Gothenburg. Evwodere Confidence Happiness, under the supervision of Dr. Wanyu Ou, lecturer (University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University), is conducting the study and asks you to participate in this project because you are a transnational migrant who came to Sweden for work purposes and are living in Sweden.

Project Description – Activities and Time Commitment: If you decide to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Completing the interview will take approximately 40-45 minutes.

Benefits and Risks: there won't be extra, direct benefits to you for taking part in this project. The findings from this project may enable participants to understand the cultural differences in self-disclosure and how best to utilise the tool of self-disclosure in coping with the challenges of living in Sweden as an international.

Confidentiality and Privacy: The interview will be recorded in a password-protected format and stored in a password-protected dedicated computer. Evwodere Confidence Happiness will be the only person who will know the passwords to access the files. My supervisor and the academic personnel appointed to control the quality of the thesis project will be the only individuals who can require me to gain access to those files for academic research purposes only. The data collected during the study will be used only for the project and will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis project. Your responses will be reported in the thesis in an anonymous manner. No names or other identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting data.

Voluntary Participation: You can freely choose to take part or to not take part in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits for either decision. Even if you agree to participate, you can stop at any time.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please email Evwodere Confidence Happiness (gusevwco@student.gu.se) and/or Dr. Wanyu Ou (amywa@chalmers.se).

By agreeing to sign this consent form, you understand the purpose, risks, and benefits of this research study. Your questions and/or concerns have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Name and last name of the participant: _____

Date_____/04/2022

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

1. Can you briefly tell me about yourself, where you are from, your age, gender, when you arrived at Sweden, education background, the industry you work in?
2. Please tell me about your experience with Swedish language (and Swedish learning)
3. Please tell me about your social life since coming to Sweden?
4. What were your expectations about social life in Sweden before you moved here?
5. How closely does your social experience mirror your expectations?
6. How has your workplace influenced your social life in Sweden?
7. How and where do you hangout with people?
8. What would you say are the social difficulties you face and how do you manage them?
9. What is your source of support in the face of these difficulties?
10. How and to whom do you usually talk about your challenges related to navigating the Swedish society?
11. Please tell me how your relationship with the people you talk to impacts the information you share with them.
12. How does the flow of information sharing between you and the people you connect with impact how the relationships develop?
13. What would you say motivates or demotivates you to build social connections with people?
14. How does talking about your challenges influence how you cope with them?

15. How would you describe your connection with your home country since being in Sweden?
16. In light of your social experiences, what are your future plans as regards living in Sweden?