

# Attitudes towards Sexual Violence in a Sri Lankan Immigrant Population: The Influence of Culture and Context

Author: Nina Melanie Sathasivam-Rueckert

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# BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology

Counseling Psychology

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN A SRI LANKAN IMMIGRANT POPULATION: THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE AND CONTEXT

Dissertation

by

NINA M. SATHASIVAM-RUECKERT

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Attitudes towards Sexual Violence in a Sri Lankan Immigrant Population: The Influence  
of Culture and Context

Nina M. Sathasivam-Rueckert

Dissertation Chair: Usha Tummala-Narra, Ph.D.

Abstract

Women who experience sexual violence are more likely to be diagnosed with a depressive, anxiety, trauma-related or substance use disorder than women who do not experience sexual violence (Kendler et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2012). The negative mental health sequelae that are associated with experiences of sexual violence are related to the types of responses survivors receive from others (Carlson et al., 2002; Littleton, 2010). These responses are informed by attitudes towards sexual violence. Extant literature on Sri Lankan immigrant populations indicates that cultural and contextual factors interface to shape attitudes towards violence. Much of this research, however, has focused on domestic violence in general as opposed to sexual violence in particular. Thus, little is known about how culture and context interact to inform attitudes towards sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

A qualitative methodology, guided by an ecological framework and South Asian feminist lens, was used to examine attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. Participants consisted of 14 first-generation Sri Lankan immigrants. In semi-structured interviews, participants explicated 1) the cultural values and socialization patterns that they were exposed to in Sri Lanka, 2) their experiences of navigating Sri Lankan cultural values and socialization patterns in the United States, and 3) how cultural and contextual factors from pre- and post-migration contexts have

interacted to inform views on sexual violence. The findings of the present study revealed that patriarchal socialization regarding gender roles, sex, and sexuality in Sri Lanka facilitates silence and stigmatization around sexual violence among Sri Lankans. The negotiation of these values within the post-migration context contributed to more progressive views on sexual violence. Participants did not support the presence of silence regarding sexual violence and, instead, encouraged survivors of sexual violence to seek help. They also recommended that survivors receive support from multiple sources (e.g., family, community, legal system). Implications for clinical practice, community level interventions and research are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The various negative sequelae associated with experiences of sexual violence have been extensively delineated in the literature. Research has demonstrated that female survivors of sexual violence are more likely to be diagnosed with a depressive, anxiety, trauma-related or substance use disorder as compared to individuals without a history of sexual violence (Kendler, Bulik, Silberg, Hettema, Myers, et al., 2000; Walsh, Danielson, McCauley, Saunders, Kilpatrick, & Resnick, 2012). These survivors are also at an increased risk for chronic mental illness and poorer physical health (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Coker, Davis, Arias, Desai, Sanderson et al., 2002).

The receipt of social support has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of the presence of negative mental health sequelae among survivors of sexual violence (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Carlson, McNutt, Choi, & Rose, 2002; Littleton, 2010). Survivors of sexual violence who receive positive social support endorse lower levels of depression and fewer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bryant-Davis, Ullman, Tsong, & Gobin, 2011; Littleton, 2010). Negative social interactions, on the other hand, are related to higher levels of PTSD and self-blame as well as to the use of maladaptive coping strategies (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, & Starzynski, 2007).

The responses survivors of sexual violence receive from family and community members are informed by attitudes towards sexual violence. Distinct cultural values shape these attitudes in South Asian populations (Abraham, 1999; Singh, Hays, Chung, & Watson, 2010). In immigrant populations, individuals face contextual barriers after migration that may alter their attitudes towards sexual violence (Abraham, 2000; Bui,

2003; Erez, Adelman, & Gregory, 2009; Lee, 2000; Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002a). Notably, little is known about how cultural and contextual factors impact views on sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

### **Literature Review**

**The impact of patriarchal ideology on attitudes regarding violence against women.** A culture's adherence to patriarchal values and traditional gender roles can be a salient influence on attitudes regarding violence against women. Patriarchal ideologies, and associated gender roles, designate men to positions of power and authority over women. Some patriarchal societies socialize men to be dominant and aggressive (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Morash, Bui, & Santiago, 2000). Several far-reaching implications of this type of socialization have been identified in the literature.

Patriarchy and traditional gendered socialization have been linked to more permissive views on violence against women as well as to elevated levels of violence against women. The gender role socialization that is typically associated with patriarchal ideologies has been found to contribute to the widespread belief that women can control acts of violence committed against them by choosing to act properly when interacting with dominant and aggressive males (Bhuyan, Mell, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005; Bui, 2003; Vidales, 2010). In some patriarchal cultures, a woman's inability to fulfill her traditional gender role is used as justification for acts of violence committed against her (Yoshioka, DiNoia, & Ullah, 2001). Moreover, increased endorsement of patriarchal ideologies has been associated with higher levels of violence against women (Kim & Sung, 2000; Xu, Campbell, & Zhu, 2001).

Adherence to patriarchy has also been found to influence the ways that survivors of violence respond to acts of violence. In some patriarchal cultures, acts of violence against women are believed to be the fate of women. Consequently, as women who are socialized in this manner are encouraged to accept this fate (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Kallivayalil, 2010; Ting, 2010; Vidales, 2010), they often remain relatively silent about their personal experiences with violence within their relationships. Additionally, as divorce is typically viewed as a source of shame and dishonor in these cultures, married women who opt to leave an abusive relationship may be rejected by members of their community. The cultural silencing of survivors of violence, and the stigmatization of women who choose to leave an abusive marriage, often leads women in these contexts to remain in abusive relationships (Abu-Ras, 2007; Bhuyan et al., 2005; Kallivayalil, 2010; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Natarajan, 2002; Ting, 2010; Vidales, 2010).

**Attitudes towards violence against women in South Asian populations.** An alignment with patriarchy in South Asian cultures shapes attitudes regarding sexual violence. In many of these cultures, gender socialization centers on the notions that the sexual needs of men are natural, and, therefore, women are obligated to fulfill the sexual desires of their husbands. This type of socialization can facilitate the belief that forcing sexual access to a woman is acceptable (Abraham, 1999). Consequently, acts of rape often become normalized or condoned. As such, South Asian survivors of sexual violence are frequently unwilling to discuss their experiences of sexual violence with others (Singh et al., 2010).

The silencing of South Asian female survivors of sexual violence has also been linked to cultural expectations regarding a woman's sexual status prior to marriage.

Among South Asian cultures, a woman's purity before marriage is not only a societal expectation, but this purity is held with the highest regard. The loss of a woman's virginity before marriage results in shame for the woman as well as in a loss of honor for her family (Abraham, 1999; Singh et al., 2010). In an attempt to avoid bringing shame upon themselves, as well as to save the honor of their families, South Asian women often choose to remain silent about their experiences with acts of sexual violence.

**Sri Lankan cultural values and experiences of violence among Sri Lankan women.** The socialization of Sri Lankan females and males is a reflection of the patriarchal ideology present in Sri Lanka. Masculinity in Sri Lanka is oftentimes associated with violence, aggression and a lack of fear (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Jeganathan, 2000). Additionally, Sri Lankan men are socialized to believe that they have power over women and, in certain situations, are justified in their use of physical violence against women (Jayasuriya, Wijewardena, & Axemo, 2011). Sri Lankan women, on the other hand, are expected to adhere to cultural and family roles. In particular, women are socialized to maintain deference and obedience in their marriages. Women who embody this prescribed role are treated with a great deal of respect in Sri Lankan culture (Hussein, 2000). This type of socialization, and the expectation of certain behaviors from Sri Lankan women and men, lends to the justification of acts of violence against women who do not fulfill their culturally prescribed roles (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011).

The cultural acceptance of acts of violence against women who stray from their culturally assigned role contributes to the silencing of Sri Lankan survivors of violence. Similar to other South Asian cultures, the act of divorce in Sri Lanka is highly

stigmatized (Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). As a result, many Sri Lankan women choose to remain silent about experiences of violence within their marriages, and opt to stay with an abusive partner, so as to avoid the fear, shame and disapproval associated with leaving one's marriage (Hussein, 2000).

Sri Lankan women who experience sexual violence, specifically, are further silenced. Sexual violence that occurs within the marital context is frequently ignored by the family members of survivors (Hussein, 2000). The lack of acknowledgement of these acts informs a survivor's decision to remain silent about experiences with sexual violence in the future. With regard to women who experience sexual violence outside of the context of marriage, given the value that is placed on chastity and virginity before marriage in Sri Lankan culture, these women often choose to remain silent regarding these experiences in order to avoid the stigma associated with engaging in sexual behavior outside of the context of marriage (Tambiah, 2004).

**Unique contextual factors faced by immigrants.** Scholars have suggested that immigrant women are exposed to several contextual factors that increase their vulnerability to experiences of battering (i.e., physical and sexual abuse). One factor that has been explicated in the literature is level of acculturation. Extant research on the impact of level of acculturation on attitudes towards, and incidences of, violence against women has been mixed. While some studies conducted with immigrant populations have demonstrated a positive relationship between level of acculturation and incidences of violence against women (Lown & Vega, 2001; Yick, 2000), others have revealed a

negative relationship between level of acculturation and acts of violence against women (Bhanot & Senn, 2007;Ganguly, 1998).

Another unique factor that increases the vulnerability of immigrant women to incidences of violence is the disruption in traditional gender roles that may occur after migration. As a result of the financial stressors associated with the process of migrating to a new country, immigrant women who did not work in their countries of origin may be required to obtain employment in their host countries. The adaptation of this new role may create strain on marriages in which both the husband and wife are accustomed to adhering to traditional gender roles. This strain, in turn, may contribute to an increase in acts of violence committed against the wife (Erez et al., 2009; Lee & Hadeed, 2009).

An immigrant woman's legal status in the United States is yet another factor that may increase her vulnerability to violence. As United States' immigration law allows American citizens, or sponsors, to petition for the permanent residency of sponsored individuals (Bui, 2003), immigrant women who depend on their husbands for their legal status in the United States may be more susceptible to incidences of violence. In addition, some immigrant men may threaten their wives with deportation if they fail to submit to acts of violence within the marriage (Bui, 2003; Lee, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002a).

The responses of immigrant women to acts of violence committed against them are further complicated by a lack of social support in the post-migration context. After migration, many immigrants face "othering" by members of the host country (Raj & Silverman, 2002a). Experiences of othering marginalize populations and deny members of marginalized groups sexual rights (Farmer, 2003). In addition to experiences of othering, many immigrants endure social isolation after migration. This social isolation

stems from leaving family members and other social supports in their countries of origin. This isolation can decrease the amount of emotional support survivors of violence receive (Abraham, 2000; Erez et al., 2009).

### **Sri Lankans in the West.**

*Sri Lankan migration to the United States.* Migration from Sri Lanka has typically been categorized as either labor migration or political migration. Labor migration is defined as temporary and voluntary migration to the Middle East for economic reasons (Sriskandarajah, 2002). Sri Lankan labor migrants are largely of Sinhalese descent. Conversely, political migrations have generally been the result of the political conflict in Sri Lanka and are most often permanent migrations to India and the West. The political migrants who leave Sri Lanka are typically of Tamil descent (Sriskandarajah, 2002).

*Violence in Sri Lankan immigrant communities in North America.* Much of the literature on violence against women in Sri Lankan immigrant populations has centered on domestic violence in the Sri Lankan community in Canada. Scholars have suggested that some Sri Lankan women only experience violence within the marital context after migration (Guruge, 2014; Guruge, Khanlou, & Gastaldo, 2010). A number of post-migration factors have been postulated to increase female Sri Lankan immigrants' susceptibility to domestic violence. One factor that contributes to this increased vulnerability is the shift in gender roles that commonly occurs after migration. Changes in gender roles in Sri Lankan immigrant marriages are generally the result of Sri Lankan women's entry into the workforce. For some couples, a woman's employment alters the responsibilities of each partner in the household. In some marriages, this change lends to

elevated levels of stress, which increase the likelihood of a husband's use of violence against his wife (Guruge, 2014; Guruge, et al., 2010; Hyman et al., 2011).

Another factor that has been noted to increase the vulnerability of Sri Lankan immigrant women to violence within a marriage is a lack of social support in the post-migration context. Oftentimes, Sri Lankan immigrants lose significant social supports as a result of migration. As family members and friends in Sri Lanka typically provide married couples with both physical and emotional support prior to migration, a loss of this type of support contributes to higher levels of stress within a marriage after migration. This elevated stress level increases the possibility that Sri Lankan immigrant women will experience violence within the marital context (Guruge et al., 2010; Hyman et al., 2011).

Exposure to systems of oppression in the post-migration context also increases Sri Lankan women's vulnerability to violence after migration. A lack of recognition of the educational degrees obtained by partners in a marriage and experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination from others in the host country lead to higher levels of stress in a marriage. In some marriages, these high levels of post-migration stress lead to the perpetration of violence against women (Guruge, 2014; Guruge et al., 2010)

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.** Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model elucidates the influence of the micro-, meso- and macro- systems, and the reciprocal relationships between these systems, on an individual's development and level of functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem develops through an individual's social interactions and the roles he or she fulfills in different environments (e.g., school,

home, work). Connections between multiple microsystems generate the mesosystem. The exosystem is comprised of interactions between two or more settings, in one of which the individual does not exist. The macrosystem encompasses the microsystem, the mesosystem and the exosystem. This overarching system consists of cultural customs, belief systems and life-styles. These factors are integrated into the systems subsumed by the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model was utilized as an overarching framework in the present study. This model was chosen for use in the present study as it acknowledges the mutual influence of larger cultural and contextual factors and an individual's interpersonal interactions. The explicit focus on the interrelatedness between culture, context and an individual's interactions in Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model was particularly relevant for the data collected in the present study as extant literature on South Asian immigrants suggests that the intersection of pre- and post-migration cultural and contextual factors shape attitudes towards sexual violence (e.g., Abraham, 1999; George & Rahangdale, 1999; Raj & Silverman, 2002a; Singh et al., 2010).

**South Asian feminist perspectives.** South Asian feminism provided a second lens for analysis in the present study. Several scholars have critiqued the applicability of the tenets of Western feminism to South Asian cultures. One of the main oversights of Western feminism, as it applies to South Asian populations, is a limited focus on the collectivistic values embraced in South Asian cultures (Kallivayalil, 2007; Menon, 2004; Yick, 2001). Nesiiah (2012) has also argued that Western feminist ideologies fail to acknowledge familial hierarchies and gender role socialization, both of which are integral components of these cultures.

South Asian and Sri Lankan feminism have been modified over the years in response to social and structural changes. Despite the changes that have been made in these feminist perspectives, the overarching framework that guides these models continues to acknowledge that the identities of South Asian women are shaped by the familial roles that they fulfill and their interpersonal relationships with others (Menon, 2004). Current models of Sri Lankan feminism center on the improvement of the quality of life and the freedom of expression of women while also maintaining a reverence for the collectivistic values that are fundamental components of this culture (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011).

An integration of a collectivistic value system, and an acknowledgement of the influence of patriarchy on the lives of South Asians, made a South Asian feminist lens appropriate to utilize in the present study. This lens helped to illuminate the process through which members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States have navigated identities that were developed in a collectivistic value system (Abraham, 2000; Inman, Constantine, & Ladany, 1999; Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001; Menon, 2004) in an individualistic post-migration context.

### **Rationale and Aims of the Present Study**

Extant research has highlighted the negative mental health sequelae survivors of sexual violence experience (e.g., Kendler et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2012). Scholars have suggested that the psychological consequences of sexual violence are influenced by the responses an individual receives from others (Brewin et al., 2000; Carlson et al., 2002; Littleton, 2010). These responses are shaped by attitudes towards sexual violence. Sexual violence has been defined as:

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002, p. 149).

In South Asian populations, a number of cultural and contextual factors inform attitudes towards sexual violence (e.g., Abraham, 1999; Singh et al., 2010). Despite its admirable contribution to the literature base, much of this research has not differentiated between the diverse subgroups that comprise the South Asian population. Literature on immigrant populations reveals that immigrants are exposed to unique contextual factors that may significantly impact attitudes regarding sexual violence against women (e.g., Bui, 2003; Erez et al., 2009; Farmer, 2003; Lee, 2000; Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Lown & Vega, 2001; Raj & Silverman, 2002a; Yick, 2000). The distinct cultural, religious and sociopolitical histories of the subgroups that comprise the larger South Asian population, and the impact of the post-migration context on attitudes towards sexual violence, suggest a need to more closely examine cultural and contextual influences on attitudes toward sexual violence among specific South Asian immigrant populations.

In the United States, South Asians are the fastest growing ethnic group. Within this ethnic group, Sri Lankans are the sixth fastest growing population (South Asian Americans Leading Together [SAALT], 2012). As the numbers of Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States continue to rise, an examination of attitudes towards sexual violence in this community is vital.

Research has revealed that several cultural and contextual factors contribute to more permissive attitudes regarding violence against women among Sri Lankans and Sri Lankan immigrants (e.g., CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Guruge, 2014; Guruge et al., 2010; Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011). Much of this research, however, has focused on incidences of, and attitudes towards, domestic violence within the context of marriage. Consequently, a lack of literature exists on incidences of sexual violence in particular, in or outside of the context of marriage, or on attitudes towards sexual violence. Even more, no studies exist to date on attitudes towards sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

The present study utilized a qualitative methodology, which was guided by an ecological framework and a South Asian feminist lens, to elucidate attitudes regarding sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. An in-depth exploration of the areas of interest was facilitated by the completion of semi-structured interviews. Participants consisted of 14 first generation Sri Lankan immigrants. Interview questions focused on gender role socialization within Sri Lankan culture, cultural beliefs regarding sex, sexuality and sexual violence and experiences of navigating Sri Lankan cultural values in the post-migration context. The collected data was analyzed from a conventional qualitative content analysis approach so as to allow the researcher to convey the experiences of the participants in the study with as little interpretation as possible (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Findings of this study illuminated the unique cultural and contextual factors that shape attitudes towards sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in

the United States. In particular, participants elaborated on the cultural beliefs and socialization patterns that inform attitudes towards sexual violence against Sri Lankan women. Moreover, responses revealed the ways that these cultural belief systems interface with the cultural context in the United States.

### **Summary**

The findings of this study provide insight into a silenced topic in an understudied population. Through elucidating attitudes regarding sexual violence among Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States, the present study sheds light on the context in which Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence negotiate sexual trauma and related stress in the United States. This information lays the foundation for culturally informed individual and community level interventions that target sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. As this study is the first of its kind in the United States, the findings provide distinct directions for future research with this community.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Sexual Violence and Mental Health**

The impact of sexual trauma on women has been extensively delineated in the literature. Research has shown that experiences of sexual trauma can have deleterious emotional and physical effects on survivors of this trauma. Women who experience sexual trauma at some point in their lives are more likely to be diagnosed with major depressive disorder, an anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder or a substance use disorder (Kendler et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2012). Survivors of sexual trauma are also more likely to exhibit relatively worse physical health and chronic mental illness compared with individuals who have not endured sexual trauma (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997; Coker et al., 2002). Extant literature has revealed that the negative mental health sequelae associated with experiences of violence are influenced by a variety of factors. Coping style is one factor that has been explored in regards to its relationship to the negative mental health consequences of experiences with violence.

The psychological distress that female survivors of violence experience has been tied to the form of coping utilized subsequent to these events. The use of emotion-focused coping by women who experience violence in their interpersonal relationships has been associated with increased levels of emotional distress (Kemp, Green, Hovanitz, & Rawlings, 1995) and higher levels of PTSD (Arias & Pape, 1999; Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003; Lilly & Graham-Bermann, 2010). Emotion-focused coping strategies aim to decrease the psychological distress and negative affect associated with traumatic

experiences. Types of emotion-focused coping include positive reappraisal, prayer, problem avoidance, self-criticism, social withdrawal or denial (Kemp et al., 1995).

Because emotion-focused coping does not involve making changes to the environment to assuage distress, this form of coping may increase the length of time survivors of violence remain in abusive relationships. By staying in an abusive relationship for a longer period of time, a survivor elevates her risk of future abuse and, potentially, the severity of emotional distress (Lilly & Graham-Bermann, 2010). Despite the negative consequences associated with its use, some survivors of violence may utilize many forms of emotion-focused coping as this type of coping is often the only viable option for survivors who lack power or control in an abusive relationship or access to resources (Gavranidou & Rosner, 2003; Lilly & Graham-Bermann, 2010).

As coping is a complex process, the form of coping survivors of violence use is also affected by interpersonal interactions. Extant literature has indicated that the coping strategies survivors of violence choose are linked to the social interactions and support systems of these individuals (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012; Lazarus, 2006). Social support is one of the strongest predictors of the development and presence of signs and symptoms of mental illness subsequent to trauma (Brewin et al., 2000; Carlson et al., 2002; Littleton, 2010). The receipt of positive social support by survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) (i.e., physical, sexual or psychological abuse) has proven effective in decreasing the negative mental health sequelae associated with these acts. Survivors of IPV who receive higher levels of overall social support are at a significantly reduced risk for poorer perceived mental health, depression, anxiety and signs and symptoms of PTSD (Carlson et al., 2002; Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea & Davis, 2002).

Examinations of the impact of social support on sexual trauma survivors, specifically, have revealed similar findings. The presence of social support in the lives of survivors of sexual trauma has been associated with decreased levels of depression and PTSD symptomology (Bryant-Davis et al., 2011; Littleton, 2010).

While much of the research on social interactions subsequent to experiences of various types of trauma has focused on the positive and helpful aspects of these interactions, a small portion of the extant research has explicated the influence negative social interactions have on the mental health of survivors of violence. Negative social interactions have been defined as being blamed for one's assault, being stigmatized subsequent to the experience of assault, the receipt of controlling or distracting responses from members of one's support system and/or enduring egocentric reactions from a supporter (e.g., the supporter becoming upset and ignoring the needs of the survivor) (Ullman, 2000). Perhaps not surprisingly, exposure to negative social interactions subsequent to experiences of sexual trauma have been related to higher levels of PTSD and self-blame as well as to the utilization of maladaptive coping techniques (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman et al., 2007). Similarly, receiving advice to stay with one's abuser is associated with higher levels of maladaptive coping and higher levels of depression and PTSD (Kocot & Goodman, 2003).

Though extant literature has elucidated a relationship between negative social interactions and psychological distress among female survivors of sexual violence, little is known about the social interactions of female survivors of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. This gap in the literature base highlights the need for an exploration of the responses Sri Lankan female survivors of sexual violence

receive from others members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

Importantly, scholars have posited that the responses that survivors of sexual violence receive from others are informed by held attitudes towards sexual violence.

### **Relationship between Attitudes towards, Incidences of and Responses to Violence**

Much of the literature on the relationship between attitudes towards, incidences of and responses to acts of violence against women has focused on acts of violence in general as opposed to acts of sexual violence specifically. Sociocultural theories suggest that the attitudes that a group holds regarding violence against women influence the perpetration of these acts, responses to these acts and survivors' interpretations of acts of violence committed against them (Flood & Pease, 2009; Nayak, Byrne, Martin, & Abraham, 2003).

Several factors have been posited to shape attitudes towards violence against women. Two of these factors are nationality and gender. Individuals from societies that adhere to more restrictive norms for women tend to hold more negative beliefs regarding violence against women (Flood & Pease, 2009; Nayak et al., 2003). With regard to gender, men who endorse more traditional and misogynistic gender role attitudes are more likely to engage in violent behaviors in their marriages (Heise, 1998; O'Neil & Harway, 1997). Across multiple nationalities, men are also more likely to endorse victim blame beliefs in instances of rape and spousal physical violence as compared to women (Nayak et al., 2003). Scholars have suggested that attitudes towards violence against women that blame the victim lay the foundation for increased incidences, and the legitimization, of these acts (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Nayak et al., 2003).

Adherence to patriarchal values and traditional gender roles is another factor that has been noted to inform on attitudes regarding violence against women. The acceptance of patriarchy in male-dominated cultures designates that men hold power, privilege and authority over women. Adherence to traditional patriarchal ideology and gender roles is associated with increased incidences of violence against women (Kim & Sung, 2000; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Xu et al., 2001). Patriarchal cultures that maintain and value traditional gender roles often socialize women to be submissive, to obey and serve their husbands and to maintain family responsibilities (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Morash et al., 2000; Ting, 2010; Vidales, 2010). In some patriarchal cultures, a woman's inability to fulfill her traditional gender role is enough justification for acts of violence committed against her. A study completed on Asian Americans' beliefs about domestic violence revealed that 24% to 36% of the study's sample approved of acts of violence against a wife if she was unfaithful to her husband, irritated her husband or refused to perform household chores (Yoshioka et al., 2001).

The tenets of patriarchal ideologies also affect the ways that survivors of violence respond to acts of violence. Female survivors of violence who endorse traditional gender roles or beliefs that support acts of violence against women are more prone to blame themselves for any acts of violence committed against them. These women also tend to experience long-term negative mental health sequelae subsequent to their experiences of such acts (Flood & Pease, 2009). Harris, Firestone and Vega (2005) found that women who endorse traditional gender roles are also less likely to report acts of violence committed against them.

In some patriarchal cultures, acts of violence against women are considered to be the fate of women. Women in these cultures are encouraged to accept this fate without question or defiance. Accordingly, for many female survivors of violence in patriarchal cultures, the only viable response to acts of violence committed against them is silence (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Kallivayalil, 2010; Ting, 2010; Vidales, 2010). Maintaining silence regarding acts of violence committed by one's husband has been demonstrated across many cultural groups that adhere to a patriarchal value system. More specifically, Asian, Latina and African women typically keep acts of violence that occur in their relationships very private. The combination of the cultural acceptance of acts of violence against women, and the silencing of survivors of violence, oftentimes influences women in these cultures to remain in abusive relationships (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Kallivayalil, 2010; Ting, 2010; Vidales, 2010).

Female survivors of violence are not only faced with the task of personally navigating these acts, but, many times, these individuals are also forced to endure the acceptance of these acts by members of the larger patriarchal community. Males who are socialized in cultures in which men maintain positions of power over women may also be socialized to be dominant and aggressive (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Morash et al., 2000). This type of socialization assists in condoning acts of violence against women and contributes to widespread support of male abusers. Socialization of this type promotes the belief that women can control acts of violence committed against them by choosing to act properly when interacting with dominant and aggressive males (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Bui, 2003; Vidales, 2010). As the act of divorce is oftentimes viewed as a source of shame and dishonor for both the woman and her family in patriarchal cultures,

community members may shun women who attempt to leave abusive relationships. Accordingly, these women typically avoid leaving their abusers so as not to experience rejection by their communities or disgrace themselves or their families (Abu-Ras, 2007; Bhuyan et al., 2005; Bui, 2003; Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Natarajan, 2002).

Extant literature has highlighted the impact of patriarchal ideology on attitudes towards sexual violence across multiple nationalities and gender. However, little is known about the relationship between patriarchal values and attitudes towards sexual violence in immigrant populations in the United States. Thus, as Sri Lanka adheres to a patriarchal value system (e.g., Asian Development Bank, 1999; CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013), an examination of attitudes towards sexual violence among the Sri Lankan community in the United States is imperative.

### **Attitudes towards, and Responses to, Sexual Violence in the United States**

Several cultural and contextual factors influence attitudes towards, and responses to, sexual violence within the United States. Similar to other countries and cultures, studies conducted in the United States suggest that attitudes regarding sexual violence are impacted by adherence to rape myths and traditional gender role attitudes. Rape myths are sustained and false beliefs regarding rape. These myths typically serve to rationalize and excuse acts of sexual violence that are committed against women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Victim blaming is one type of rape myth (Kopper, 1996; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Research that has focused on the experiences of female survivors of sexual violence in the United States has indicated that survivors are frequently faced with victim blaming attitudes from others. Female survivors of sexual violence endure

intentional and unintentional victim blaming attitudes from individuals within their personal support systems (e.g., family members, partner, friends) as well as from professionals from whom they seek support (e.g., police officers, mental health professionals, physicians) (Filipas & Ullman, 2001). These victim blaming attitudes have been found to vary by gender. Specifically, American men are more likely than American women to endorse victim blaming beliefs for incidences of sexual and domestic violence committed against women (Aosved & Long, 2006; Hockett, Saucier, Hoffman, Smith, & Craig, 2009; Kopper, 1996; Nayak et al., 2003).

Another factor that has been identified as influencing attitudes towards survivors of sexual violence in the United States is adherence to traditional gender role attitudes. Research on individuals living in the United States has revealed a positive relationship between held gender role attitudes and beliefs regarding violence against women. A seminal study completed by Burt (1980) indicated that individuals who held more traditional gender role attitudes were more likely to endorse permissive attitudes regarding acts of sexual violence against women. Burt's (1980) findings have been replicated in other studies that have focused on the relationship between adherence to traditional gender roles and lenient views on acts of violence against women in the United States (Johnson et al., 1997; Simonson & Subich, 1999; Szymanski, Devlin, Chrisler, & Vyse, 1993). In this same vein, traditional gender role attitudes have also been positively linked to the use of various types of violence against women in the United States (Reed, Silverman, Raj, Decker, & Miller, 2011; Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche, & Silverman, 2006).

Over time, a shift has been demonstrated in gender role attitudes among individuals in the United States. In recent years, increased support for gender equality and decreased adherence to traditional gender roles has been documented (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Bryant, 2003; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Given the identified link between traditional gender role attitudes and more permissive attitudes regarding acts of violence against women, the shift in adherence to traditional gender roles is an important one to consider. Indeed, participants in a recent study on the relationship between gender role attitudes and beliefs regarding domestic violence endorsed fairly egalitarian gender role attitudes. And, similar to previous studies, gender role attitudes were a significant predictor of attitudes towards violence against women (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004).

Despite the recent shift towards more egalitarian gender role attitudes in the United States, and the demonstrated link between the acceptance of traditional gender role attitudes and more permissive views on violence against women (Burt, 1980; Johnson et al., 1997; Simonson & Subich, 1999; Szymanski et al., 1993), a lack of literature exists on how exposure to more egalitarian gender role attitudes in the post-migration context of the United States shapes attitudes regarding violence against women in immigrant communities that adhered to more traditional gender role attitudes in their countries of origin. The exploration of this relationship is particularly salient for the Sri Lankan immigrant community in the United States as Sri Lankan culture adheres to more traditional gender role attitudes (e.g., Asian Development Bank, Hussein, 2000, Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

**Contextual Factors that Influence Acts of Violence in Immigrant Populations**

As evidenced above, a wealth of literature exists on both the negative mental health sequelae associated with sexual trauma as well as on various influences on attitudes towards, incidences of and responses to acts of violence against women. Despite this abundance of literature, the majority of the extant research within this literature base centers on women from similar cultural backgrounds or on samples in which the majority of women are from European American backgrounds. Consequently, a gap in the literature currently exists on the experiences of sexual trauma among, and social support for, women from immigrant populations.

It has been suggested that immigrant women are more vulnerable to battering (i.e., physical and sexual abuse). Subsequent to migration, many immigrants are tasked with navigating two or more disparate cultures. Moreover, these individuals commonly endure this task while also being othered by individuals in their host countries (Raj & Silverman, 2002a). Othering is a form of marginalization that serves to label individuals who are perceived to be different from oneself (Johnson, Bottorff, Browne, Grewal, Hilton, & Clark, 2004; Weis, 1995). The practice of othering magnifies differences between sociocultural groups and may reify power hierarchies among these groups (Fine, 1994; Johnson et al., 2004). For a large portion of immigrants, living in a new and conflicting culture, experiences of being othered and a lack of power lend to physical and social isolation. And, for female immigrants, in particular, experiences of social and physical isolation can contribute to an increase in this population's vulnerability to acts of violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002a).

As the process of migration involves the sacrifice of close connections with friends and family members in one's country of origin, physical and social isolation is a salient stressor for many immigrant women who migrate with their husbands. Oftentimes, these women migrate with their husbands to areas in which they do not know anyone or areas where they have an extremely limited support system. Subsequently, for many of these women, the only form of social connection they have in their host countries is their husbands (Abraham, 2000). Within the context of this social isolation, some husbands may utilize acts of physical or sexual violence as a method of maintaining power and control in the marriage. A woman's lack of social connection and support in the host country, and her husband's desire to assert his authority in the marriage, can lead to feelings of vulnerability in immigrant women (Erez et al., 2009). Many immigrant women who feel vulnerable in these situations may believe that their only viable option is silent acquiescence to the abuse (Abraham, 2000).

In addition to relying solely on their husbands for social support, immigrant women in the United States may also depend on their husbands for their legal status. United States' immigration law permits American citizens, or sponsors, to petition for the permanent residency of sponsored individuals (Bui, 2003; Erez et al., 2009). In many immigrant marriages, immigrant women are either married to an American citizen or are sponsored by their husbands. Consequently, the legal statuses of these women are dependent on the actions of their husbands. Immigrant women in abusive marriages may feel that the only way they are able to stay in the United States is by remaining in a relationship with their abusive partners. Some abusers may utilize the threat of deportation with their wives in order to obtain silence from them regarding acts of

violence that are committed within the marriage (Bui, 2003; Lee, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002a).

Disruptions in traditional gender roles that often occur subsequent to migration are another contributing factor to the high degree of vulnerability to acts of violence that immigrant women face. As a result of the financial stressors associated with the migration process, immigrant women may be required to obtain their own employment and contribute to household finances. In some marriages, financial contributions by the woman challenge the traditional values of male dominance and control as well as disrupt the balance of power in a marriage. The disruption of power in a marriage may lead to increases in acts of violence against women by men who are attempting to retain their dominance in the marriage (Erez et al., 2009; Lee & Hadeed, 2009).

Yet another unique factor that influences immigrant women's vulnerability to acts of violence is level of acculturation. Acculturation is the internal process of adapting to new cultural contexts subsequent to migration. During the process of acculturation, individuals experience cultural changes within themselves as a result of encounters with members of the dominant culture (Berry & Sam, 1997; Bhanot & Senn, 2007). Extant findings on the relationship between levels of acculturation and acts of violence against women, or permissive attitudes regarding violence against women, are mixed. One segment of the literature has revealed a positive relationship between levels of acculturation to North American culture and incidences of intimate partner violence among immigrant populations (Lown & Vega, 2001; Yick, 2000). Conversely, another segment of literature has revealed the opposite relationship. Specifically, lower levels of acculturation to North American culture have been associated with an increased

vulnerability to acts of violence against women (Champion, 1996) as well as with higher incidences of violence against women in some immigrant populations (Ganguly, 1998).

Though current literature suggests that immigrant women experience increased susceptibility to acts of domestic violence in the post-migration context, little is known regarding the responses immigrant women receive from other members of their communities subsequent to these acts. Moreover, no literature exists to date on the responses Sri Lankan female survivors of sexual violence, in particular, receive from other members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States. As negative social interactions have been linked to psychological distress subsequent to experiences of sexual violence (Kocot & Goodman, 2003; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman et al., 2007), an elucidation of attitudes towards sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States is essential.

### **South Asian Cultural Values and Experiences of Violence among South Asians**

#### **Immigrants**

While a small portion of the literature base on violence against women has centered on the experiences of female, immigrant survivors of violence, the literature that focuses on female, South Asian immigrant survivors of violence, specifically, is scant. Existing research demonstrates the presence of violence against women in South Asian immigrant communities.

A study completed with female members of the South Asian immigrant community on the prevalence of intimate partner violence revealed that 40% of the sample had experienced some form of abuse in their current relationships. Of this group of women, only 11% sought professional mental health services for their experiences

with violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002b). Notably, 16% of the sample agreed that there are certain times during which women deserve to be abused by their partners. As many South Asian cultures embrace patriarchal ideology, a small segment of research has delineated the ways that patriarchal values shape attitudes towards, and responses to, violence in South Asian immigrant populations.

Alignment with traditional gender roles is one value that has been elucidated in the South Asian literature. Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (in progress) found that, among Asian Indians, a stronger identification with one's culture and cultural group (i.e., ethnic identity) was associated with more traditional beliefs about gender roles. A study completed by Bhanot and Senn (2007) explored the influence of adherence to traditional gender roles on attitudes towards violence in the South Asian immigrant population. Findings of this study revealed that South Asian men who hold more traditional views on gender roles within the context of marriage are significantly more likely to endorse support for acts of violence against women within the marital context (i.e., wife beating is justified, wives gain from beatings) (Bhanot & Senn, 2007).

The connection between an alignment with patriarchal values and attitudes towards sexual violence, in particular, has also been examined. In many South Asian cultures patriarchal authority and the control of female sexuality are either valued or condoned. The acceptance of male domination and the gratification of men's desires influences gender relations and socialization regarding sexual violence in South Asian cultures (Abraham, 1999). The socialization of South Asian men facilitates the belief that the sexual needs of men are natural. Conversely, South Asian women are socialized to submit to the sexual desires of their husbands. These culturally prescribed gender

relations serve to defend and excuse forced sexual access to a woman (Abraham, 1999). This frame of reference contributes to the normalization of acts of rape in South Asian cultures. As acts of rape are often normalized in these cultures, female, South Asian sexual violence survivors may feel reluctant to discuss their experiences of sexual trauma with others in their communities.

The influence of patriarchal gendered socialization on the silencing of female, South Asian survivors of sexual violence has been explicated in the literature. Singh and colleagues (2010) utilized a qualitative methodology to examine responses to sexual violence in a female, South Asian, immigrant population. Many of the survivors in the sample experienced blame from others for the incidences of sexual violence that they endured. Much of this blame centered on the belief that they had brought the abuse on themselves. Additionally, after disclosing their experiences of sexual abuse to other members of the South Asian community, participants learned that sexual abuse was not acknowledged or accepted in the South Asian community (Singh et al., 2010). This exposure to the cultural silence around female sexual abuse within the South Asian community likely contributed to the silencing of these women in future interpersonal interactions. Singh and colleagues' (2010) findings warrant increased attention to attitudes concerning sexual violence against women within specific South Asian communities.

Another contributing factor to the silencing of female survivors of sexual violence in South Asian cultures is the patriarchal expectation of a woman's virginity before marriage as well as the reverence for family name in these cultures. In many South Asian cultures, a woman's sexual purity before marriage is a highly valued societal expectation.

The loss of a woman's virginity prior to marriage results in both shame for herself as well as in a loss of familial honor (Abraham, 1999; Singh et al., 2010). As such, South Asian women may remain silent about their experiences with sexual violence prior to marriage so as not to bring shame upon themselves or tarnish the reputation of their families.

The pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology in South Asian cultures not only silences survivors of sexual violence, but it may also dissuade survivors from seeking outside help subsequent to their experiences with sexual violence. In some South Asian communities, the overarching presence of the victim blaming attitudes associated with patriarchal ideologies discourages survivors of violence from seeking help from others. Additionally, the cultural belief that incidences of domestic violence are a private family matter further contributes to the silencing of female survivors of abuse (George & Rahangdale, 1999). Scholars have also posited that some South Asian women choose not seek help for experiences of violence as a result of their sense of responsibility for maintaining the unity of their family or their adherence to traditional gender roles (Guruge, 2010, 2014).

In addition to the influence of patriarchal values on the decision to refrain from seeking help, South Asian, immigrant, female survivors of violence face contextual barriers in the post-migration context that further reinforce this decision. South Asian immigrant survivors of violence may opt not to seek help due barriers that prevent them from accessing appropriate interventions. Many South Asian immigrant women choose to remain silent regarding their experiences with violence due to a sense of discomfort with the domestic violence interventions used in the United States (Raj & Silverman, 2002a). Domestic violence agencies in the United States may support or encourage the

dissolution of relationships in which women experience acts of violence at the hands of their partners. This solution is often in direct conflict with the South Asian value of reverence for the unity of the family. The limited availability of services in the native language of some South Asian, immigrant survivors of violence is yet another factor that may influence the maintenance of silence in this population regarding their personal experiences with violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002a).

Isolation is an additional contextual factor that lends to the silencing of this population. Immigrant perpetrators of violence may intentionally physically or emotionally isolate survivors of violence from other individuals in their host country. Thus, some South Asian immigrant survivors of violence may not be provided with the opportunity to seek help. This isolation prevents these individuals from obtaining any type of support for their experiences with violence (Abraham, 1999, 2000).

The existing literature base on the South Asian population has made great strides in illuminating common cultural and contextual factors that impact acts of, and responses to, violence against women in this diverse community. However, much of this research has focused on the South Asian community as a whole. As each of the subgroups that comprise the larger South Asian population possesses its own sociocultural, political and religious history, there is an undeniable need for the completion of research that focuses on the unique cultural and contextual factors that shape attitudes towards violence against women within each of the subgroups that are encompassed within the larger South Asian population.

## **Sri Lankan Cultural Values and Experiences of Violence among Sri Lankan Women**

**Factors that influence violence against women in Sri Lanka.** A recent examination of violence against women in Sri Lanka revealed the presence of multiple types of violence. CARE International Sri Lanka (2013) explored men's use of violence against women in four districts in Sri Lanka. Findings indicated that 41% of men had engaged in emotional abuse, 18% of men had used economic abuse and 24% of men had committed physical abuse. When asked about sexual violence, specifically, 20% of men admitted to perpetrating sexual violence against women. Among females in the sample, 20% reported experiencing sexual violence, as either a woman or a girl, and 18% endorsed the presence of sexual violence within an intimate partner relationship.

Extant literature indicates that a number of factors contribute to acts of violence against women in Sri Lanka. Some scholars have suggested that the presence of British rule in Sri Lanka prior to 1948 led to the integration of bias against women into Sri Lankan culture and the Sri Lankan legal system (Hussein, 2000). During British rule in Sri Lanka, a family law system was developed that included strict laws regarding marriage, divorce and property. From that period forward, the rights of Sri Lankan women were significantly altered. Prior to the imposition of British law, the Sri Lankan state did not interfere with marital relationships, and divorce was considered to be an acceptable option for both Sri Lankan men and women (Risseuw, 1991 as cited in Miller, 2002).

Some feminists have argued that the introduction of strict family laws impacted the rights of Sri Lankan women and the amount of independence that they were afforded

within their families and communities (Miller, 2002). Conversely, other scholars have posited that placing the blame on British rule for decreasing the rights and autonomy of Sri Lankan women fails to acknowledge the societal factors that were present prior to British rule that contributed to the inequality of women in Sri Lanka. Jayawardena (1998) pointed out that the existence of a monarchy rooted in patriarchal ideology prior to British rule led to the development of a caste system and other hierarchical structures that created inequalities between Sri Lankan women and men.

The acknowledgement of acts of violence against women in Sri Lanka is a relatively recent phenomenon. For the large majority of the population, domestic violence remained unknown as a societal problem until the introduction of feminist interventions in the 1970s (Leanage, 2010). Since this recognition, a number of sociocultural factors have been linked to increases in acts of violence against women. For instance, lower levels of education, young age at marriage, having children and/or being married for more than seven years were found to increase a Sri Lankan woman's risk for experiencing acts of violence within her marriage (Jayatilleke et al., 2011).

The long-lasting civil unrest in Sri Lanka has been identified as another significant influence on acts of violence against women. As a result of the civil war, the gender roles, financial responsibilities and level of independence of Sri Lankan women were significantly altered (Tambiah, 2004). These familial structural changes contributed to an increased vulnerability among Sri Lankan women to sexual harassment and acts of domestic violence (de Alwis, 2004; Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003). Moreover, during the civil war, significant portions of Sri Lankan citizens, both Sinhalese and Tamil, experienced displacement, exposure to violence and increased levels of fear and terror

(Somasundaram, 1998, 2004; Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 1994). This accumulated stress contributed to elevated levels of trauma in some citizens. This trauma facilitated behavioral changes, including the perpetration of violence against women (Leanage, 2010; Somasundaram, 2004).

The Sri Lankan civil war has also been blamed for impacting the types of violence that men use against women. It has been postulated that exposure to war-related violence, and media coverage of the conflict, increased the likelihood that men would resort to more severe forms of violence against women (Leanage, 2010). While the war may have contributed to increases in the severity of violence against women, this increase did not lead to higher levels of awareness or to the creation of strategies to prevent acts of violence against women. Instead, the ongoing Sri Lankan civil unrest created a dynamic in which the war became the primary concern of the Sri Lankan citizens. Consequently, acts of violence against women were placed in the periphery during the time of war (Wijayatillake & Guneratne, 2002 as cited in Leanage, 2010).

**Sri Lankan cultural values and violence against women.** The large majority of the extant literature on experiences of violence among Sri Lankan women has focused on the experiences of women living in Sri Lanka. In addition, much of this research has centered on violence that occurs within the context of marriage. In the past, family arranged marriages, more frequently referred to as arranged marriages, accounted for the majority of marriages in Sri Lanka. However, since the 1970s, the number of self-selected marriages, also known as love marriages, has increased significantly throughout much of Sri Lanka (Caldwell, 1996). Within the existing literature base on violence against women in Sri Lanka, the main factor that has been found to influence acts of, and

responses to, violence against Sri Lankan women is adherence to patriarchal values within Sri Lankan culture (e.g., CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Jeganathan, 2000). This adherence to patriarchy is infused into many facets of life in Sri Lanka.

The gendered socialization of Sri Lankans reflects one of the ways that patriarchy is expressed in the country. The concept of masculinity in Sri Lanka is associated with being unafraid and with being able to engage in violent and aggressive behaviors (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Jeganathan, 2000). Additionally, Sri Lankan men are socialized to believe that they have power over women and are allowed to demonstrate this power in multiple ways, including physical violence (Jayasuriya et al., 2011). Scholars have suggested that these beliefs regarding masculinity and the higher social status of men contribute to increased incidences of violence by Sri Lankan men, including acts of violence against women (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Jeganathan, 2000).

Society's view on the role of Sri Lankan women generally centers on their obligations within the family. Sri Lankan women are expected to serve as the core of the family, maintain cultural and family values, act in a manner that does not bring shame upon their families and keep the family together (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Hussein, 2000, Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Additionally, they are socialized to be obedient and submissive to men. Women who maintain their obedient and submissive position are assigned a great deal of respect and loyalty. Women who stray from this role, on the other hand, are often seen as outsiders in the culture and may receive little to no support from their family members or community (Hussein, 2000).

The socialization of Sri Lankan women has a significant impact on how Sri Lankans view interactions between women and men and acts of violence against women. Findings from a study completed in Sri Lanka indicated widespread support for the presence of a hierarchal relationship between women and men (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013). On a community level, both Sri Lankan women and men noted that the use of masculine force against women is justified in certain situations. Over a quarter of men and 38% of women believed that there are certain circumstances during which it is acceptable for men to use physical violence against women. Within the marital context, over three-quarters of men and 87% of women agreed that a woman should obey her husband. Additionally, over 40% of men and nearly 60% of women reported that a woman should endure acts of violence within a marriage in order to maintain the unity of the family (CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013).

Other research has delineated additional ways that the acceptance of a hierarchal relationship between a husband and wife influences beliefs regarding appropriate behaviors within a marriage. Similar to the findings from the CARE International Sri Lanka study (2013), a study completed with Sri Lankan women on incidences of intimate partner violence revealed that the majority of the sample believed that a good wife obeys her husband regardless of her own beliefs (Jayasuriya et al., 2011). Over 50% of women in the sample also agreed that the refusal of sex, insubordination, asking one's husband about infidelities and a husband's suspicions regarding a wife's engagement in sexual behaviors outside of the marital context were all valid reasons for acts of violence against a wife (Jayasuriya et al., 2011).

A study conducted with both female and male Sri Lankans revealed parallel results. Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa (2007) examined beliefs regarding the use of violence against women within the marital context among a group of Sri Lankan medical students. Approximately one-third of the study's sample agreed that on some occasions a husband's use of violence against his wife is acceptable. Similar to other literature on the relationship between adherence to patriarchal values and the acceptance of acts of violence against women (e.g., Bhanot & Senn, 2007, Jewkes, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002a), students who held more traditional views on gender roles were more likely to justify acts of violence against women. The majority of the sample agreed that women are responsible for the acts of violence committed against them, and nearly a quarter of the sample believed that women benefit from these acts (Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007). Notably, in line with the Sri Lankan cultural value that the unity of the family should be preserved at almost any cost (Hussein, 2000; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012), only 10% of the study's sample agreed that divorce is an appropriate solution for the problem of wife beating (Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007).

While some research has indicated that adherence to Sri Lankan cultural values may promote acceptance of incidences of violence against women, other research has revealed that an alignment with these cultural values may actually serve as a protective factor against these acts. Sri Lankan women are socialized to respect and obey their husbands (Asian Development Bank, 1999). Additionally, Sri Lankan culture emphasizes the importance of privacy around conflict that occurs within a family (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Hussein, 2000; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Jayatilleke and colleagues (2011) found that women who adhered to cultural expectations regarding the

importance of family privacy, and agreed that outsiders should not interfere with family problems, were less likely to experience acts of violence from their husbands.

Alternatively, wives who did not endorse the belief that a good wife always obeys her husband were more likely to experience acts of violence within their marriages. It was suggested that this increase in the likelihood of experiencing abuse was related to the possibility that a woman who is less aligned with traditional gender socialization may be more likely to be confrontational or disobedient in interactions with her husband. These actions may lead a husband to become angry and potentially use abusive behaviors against his wife (Jayatilleke et al., 2011).

Sri Lankan patriarchal values not only influence the actions of Sri Lankan women and men through socialization, but these values also impact the responses of community members to acts of violence against women. A study completed by Jayasuriya and colleagues (2011) revealed that willingness to support female survivors of violence varied by socioeconomic status. Women who resided in urban slums, fishing villages or tea estates were more likely to receive support from family members or neighbors. Alternatively, for women in the middle to upper classes, neighbors were hesitant to intervene in instances of violence within the context of marriage, even if they were explicitly told about the abuse (Jayasuriya et al., 2011).

The infusion of patriarchal ideology into Sri Lankan culture also informs the responses to violence that are considered to be acceptable by community members. Extant literature reveals that some Sri Lankans do not support survivors who decide to seek help from professionals subsequent to acts of violence. Sri Lankan survivors of violence who acquire professional help may be stigmatized by members of their

community (Jayasuriya et al., 2011). Some community members believe that women who receive outside help are trying to publicize family secrets (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). These beliefs lead to the marginalization of some these women in their communities. Once marginalized, these women are tasked with proving their chastity and moral virtue to their communities (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

The patriarchal ideology present in Sri Lanka also impacts how Sri Lankan survivors of violence perceive acts of violence committed against them. Within the Sri Lankan Tamil community women are more respected for adhering to their prescribed gender role than for speaking their minds (Goel, 2005). Sri Lankan Tamil cultural belief systems socialize women to remain in abusive relationships as well as to endure and prevent acts of violence committed against them within these relationships. This social responsibility contributes to self-blame in women who experience acts of violence from their husbands (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

In addition to increased levels of self-blame, Sri Lankan women who experience acts of violence within the context of marriage may not interpret these acts as abusive. In Sri Lankan culture, the position of women in society, as compared to men, is relatively low. Because of the existence of this hierarchy, Sri Lankan women who experience sexually degrading acts or emotional abuse within the context of marriage may not interpret these behaviors as abusive or violent (Jayasuriya et al., 2011). The discrepancy between the social positions of Sri Lankan males and females also shapes views on sexual violence that occurs outside of the context of marriage.

The responses of sexual violence survivors and community members to sexual violence that occurs outside of the context of marriage are significantly influenced by the

value that is placed on a woman's virginity before marriage in Sri Lankan culture. Sri Lankans are socialized to value a woman's virginity before marriage and her sexual chastity (Tambiah, 2004). As such, unmarried sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka may be subjected to social ostracism and victimization throughout their lives. These types of social responses can cause a woman to remain single and unmarried throughout her life. Single Sri Lankan women are often characterized as sexually promiscuous and do not neatly fit into the traditional Sri Lankan family structure (Hussein, 2000; Miller, 2002). Given the stigma surrounding remaining single in one's adult years, some Sri Lankan sexual violence survivors agree to marry their rapists as they believe that their chances for marriage in the future are extremely low. These women may also be encouraged by family members or other community members to marry the perpetrator of their sexual violence so as to avoid the ostracism that sexual violence survivors and single women face in Sri Lanka (Hussein, 2000).

Yet another way that patriarchy is infused into the lives of Sri Lankans is through its integration into the Sri Lankan legal system. While Sri Lankan law does contain prohibitions against acts of violence against women, laws prohibiting acts of violence against women function differently when the survivor of violence is a married woman. Under Sri Lankan law, the family is recognized as a unit. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of the state to protect the unit of the family (Hussein, 2000). This priority to protect the family unit has major implications for female survivors of domestic violence. In Sri Lanka, when a woman files a domestic violence claim, she and the perpetrator of the violence typically participate in an informal mediation process. Through this informal process, the accounts of both parties are heard, and male offenders

are often warned against continuing to inflict violence upon their wives. In cases that proceed to a full mediation board after this informal inquiry, police, judges or state committees may force a husband and wife to resolve their differences or encourage a woman to endure violent living conditions if her presence allows the family to remain intact. These types of responses from officials may cause women to return to the same environment in which the violence is occurring with a sense of shame as opposed to a sense of safety or relief (Hussein, 2000).

Similar to the way in which Sri Lankan laws against domestic violence do not support the well-being of married women, Sri Lankan laws against sexual assault and rape do not often function in the best interest of sexual violence survivors. For women who report incidences of sexual violence, and wish to pursue a legal trial, the burden of proving that the assault occurred falls on the woman (Hussein, 2000). These women are tasked with providing medical evidence, filing a police report, finding unbiased witnesses and/or reliable friends or relatives who can support their claims of sexual assault.

Notably, married women who experience sexual violence within the context of their marriages are also responsible for obtaining these forms of evidence to corroborate their claims (Hussein, 2000). In addition to elucidating the impact of patriarchal ideology on acts of, and responses to, violence against women in the larger Sri Lankan community, a portion of the literature on violence against Sri Lankan women has centered exclusively on the responses of Sri Lankan women to acts of violence committed against them.

**Sri Lankan women's responses to acts of violence.** The rates of reporting acts of violence committed against oneself are low among Sri Lankan women. In part, these low rates of reporting have been attributed to social and familial pressures (Hussein,

2000; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Many women refrain from reporting acts of violence committed against them as they would prefer not to publically expose their familial problems. Women who report instances of violence that occur within the context of their marriages may be viewed as attempting to shame their husbands or ruin their marriages by exposing private matters (Hussein, 2000; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Other female survivors of violence prefer not to talk about instances of abuse for religious reasons. More specifically, discussing the negative aspects of one's husband or one's marriage may be considered a sin in some religions (Jayasuriya et al., 2011).

The unique barriers that women face within the Sri Lankan legal system also influence survivors' rates of reporting incidences of domestic violence. Women who choose to report domestic violence are likely to face biased interventions (Hussein, 2000; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). When police respond to domestic violence situations, their interventions are often tailored around traditional gender roles and stereotypes about women. These types of interventions may cause survivors to feel unsafe speaking to the police or may lead them to view the justice system as inaccessible to them (Hussein, 2000). Consequently, Sri Lankan survivors of violence may prefer to seek solace through religious channels as opposed to seeking justice from a legal system that frequently acts based on gender bias and the acceptance of rape myths (Hussein, 2000; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

Sri Lankan cultural values and the response of the legal system not only impact the rates of reporting incidences of domestic violence, but these structures also influence a woman's decision to remain in her marriage despite the presence of violence. Sri Lankan women in abusive relationships typically do not seek a separation or divorce as a

high level of stigma exists for the act of divorce and divorced women in Sri Lanka (Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). A study completed by Hussein (2000) on acts of domestic violence within the context of marriage indicated that the majority of married women in the study's sample opted to remain in abusive relationships with their husbands. The women who chose to stay in these relationships did so because they were unable to obtain long-term support from their families, communities or the government (Hussein, 2000).

Close to 90% of the women in the study's sample initially received support from their family members after incidences of violence in their marriages. Though, in a number of these cases, the support provided by family members was provided reluctantly. Additionally, nearly half of the domestic violence survivors in the study's sample experienced some form of sexual assault (i.e., marital rape, incest, rape, sexual assault). Despite the presence of sexual violence, the families of these survivors frequently failed to acknowledge these acts. For many families, their main objective was to prevent the dissolution of the family of the survivor of domestic violence (Hussein, 2000).

In addition to limitations in long-term support across multiple levels, the women in Hussein's (2000) study cited a number of cultural and contextual reasons for remaining in abusive marriages. These women noted that social stigma, fear, shame, disapproval from family members and others in society and the fear of losing one's children were all significant factors in their decision to remain in a marriage with an abusive partner. A majority of the women in the study also reported that shame, respect, a lack of financial independence, coercion from their families and community and/or the presence of

children in the marriage provided them with enough motivation to stay in an abusive marriage (Hussein, 2000).

Hussein (2000) found that the decision of married Sri Lankan women to endure an abusive marriage was also guided by a range of attitudes regarding domestic violence. The belief that domestic violence in Sri Lanka is common was pervasive among the women in the sample. Some women endorsed the belief that many women get battered by their husbands, however, choose not discuss these instances of abuse. A significant number of women in the study also felt that there was no point in attempting to deal with acts of violence committed against them (Hussein, 2000). Within this particular group of women, some women struggled with determining whether being a passive victim of violence was a woman's responsibility in Sri Lankan culture. Other women believed that once married it is the woman's responsibility to endure acts of violence within the marital context (Hussein, 2000). Though large strides have been made in increasing awareness of the cultural values, socialization patterns and contextual factors that influence acts of violence against Sri Lankan women, little is known regarding incidences of, or responses to, violence against Sri Lankan immigrant women in the post-migration context.

**Violence against Sri Lankan immigrant women.** As the numbers of Sri Lankan immigrants in North America grows, literature on the post-migration experiences of this population has slowly begun to expand. Much of this literature has centered on Sri Lankan immigrants in Canada. Additionally, similar to research completed in Sri Lanka, the lion's share of this research has focused on domestic violence in general as opposed to sexual violence in particular. Given the unique sociocultural histories of the different ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, as described in the Systems of Oppression in Sri Lanka

section below, each study that has been completed with a Sri Lankan immigrant population has centered on a single ethnic group – the Sinhalese or the Tamil.

A handful of studies have explored Sri Lankan immigrants' perceptions of factors that influence incidences of domestic violence in the post-migration context. A qualitative study completed with members of the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrant community in Canada found that stressors in the pre- and post- migration contexts were believed to influence acts of domestic violence after migration. In regards to pre-migration stressors, participants identified exposure to war and other distressing events as risk factors for the perpetration of violence after migration (Guruge et al., 2010). Interestingly, participants reported that some immigrant Tamil women only experience acts of domestic violence after migration.

The post-migration contextual factors that were suggested to influence incidences of domestic violence included changes in the power dynamics in a marriage, a lack of social support, expectations associated with gendered socialization and experiences with systems of oppression (Guruge et al., 2010). Similar to findings for other immigrant populations (e.g., Abraham, 1999, 2000), participants suggested that changes in a married couple's socioeconomic status after migration led to shifts in the balance of power in the marriage. This shift in power could come in two forms – the husband could gain predominant control in the relationship by becoming the family's sole wage earner, or the wife could expand her power in the relationship by obtaining employment and beginning to financially contribute to the family. Both scenarios were believed to lend to the perpetration of domestic violence (Guruge et al., 2010).

In line with literature on immigrant populations (e.g., Abraham, 2000; Erez et al., 2009), limited family support in the post-migration context was also believed to increase immigrant Tamil women's vulnerability to acts of domestic violence. Moreover, this population was considered to be at increased risk for experiencing acts of domestic violence as a result of expectations associated with gendered socialization. Tamil women are socialized in the pre-migration context to care for the family and the home; however, changes in a woman's ability to fulfill these roles due to additional obligations in the post-migration context (e.g., employment) frequently contributes to an increase in men's responsibility for household tasks. Participants explained that, for some couples, this shift in traditional gender roles can raise the level of stress within a marriage. This elevation in stress was posited to increase the perpetration of domestic violence. Participants also highlighted exposure to systems of oppression in the post-migration context, including a lack of recognition of educational degrees and racial or ethnic discrimination from others, as an additional factor that contributed to Tamil men's use of violence against women (Guruge et al., 2010).

A number of the findings from Guruge and colleagues' (2010) study have been replicated in other Tamil immigrant samples. An examination of perceptions of factors that influence incidences of domestic violence that was completed with female Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants in Canada found that a lack of social support and the changes that resulted from women entering the workforce after migration were believed to increase acts of domestic violence (Hyman et al., 2011). Participants noted that a lack of social support in the post-migration context led to higher levels of stress in a marriage. Additionally, increased access to employment for women required women to juggle

household and employment responsibilities. In some marriages, the entry of women into the workforce contributed to changes in gender roles after migration (Hyman et al., 2011). These changes in the post-migration context were suggested to contribute to elevated levels of stress in immigrant marriages, which increased levels of domestic violence. Interestingly, despite acknowledging the impact of changes in gender roles on acts of domestic violence in the post-migration context, participants endorsed the belief that women, at times, provoke violent behaviors from their husbands by failing to maintain tranquility and stability in the family and, thus, are responsible for acting in ways that prevents this type of behavior (Hyman et al., 2011).

Perceptions of factors that contribute to domestic violence, and women's responses to these acts, have also been explored in the female Sinhalese immigrant community in Canada. A recent study completed by Guruge (2014) indicated that, similar to Tamil immigrants, female Sinhalese immigrants believed that, in some marriages, acts of domestic violence only began after migration. A number of stressors present in the post-migration context were identified as catalysts for domestic violence. Congruent with previous research on Sri Lankan immigrants (e.g., Guruge et al., 2010; Hyman et al., 2011), participants noted that expectations regarding traditional gender roles in a marriage, and changes that occur to these gender roles after migration, increased Sinhalese immigrant women's vulnerability to acts of domestic violence. In addition to these changes in gender roles, changes in socioeconomic status and financial stress in the post-migration context were believed to lend to higher levels of frustration, depression and anxiety among Sinhalese immigrant men, which precipitated the perpetration of domestic violence (Guruge, 2014).

Sinhalese immigrant women's discussions on responses to domestic violence in the post-migration context revealed a reluctance to leave an abusive marriage. Participants reported that most Sinhalese immigrant women who experience domestic violence choose to remain silent about the abuse and find ways to stay in the relationship (Guruge, 2014). The decision to remain silent was noted to be an attempt to save face within the Sinhalese immigrant community. Several factors were posited to influence a woman's decision to stay in an abusive relationship. Participants explained that a woman's consideration of her children's future and safety, financial dependence on her husband and encouragement from her social support system to maintain her traditional gender role all likely influenced her decision to remain in a marriage in which domestic violence was present. On a community level, participants reported that language barriers, limited awareness of services available and a lack of culturally relevant services also reinforced some survivors' decision to endure an abusive marriage (Guruge, 2014).

Research completed with Tamil immigrants in Canada on interpretations of and responses to domestic violence have demonstrated parallel results. Findings from a study completed by Guruge (2010) revealed that, while the immigrant Tamil community tends to maintain a focus on physical violence, immigrant Tamil women report various types of domestic violence, including verbal, emotional, sexual and financial abuse. In addition to examining the types of domestic violence that are present in this community, Guruge (2010) explored community beliefs regarding domestic violence. Both female and male participants acknowledged that in the Tamil community a husband's use of violence against his wife is justified if it prevents future problems.

In their discussions on immigrant Tamil women's responses to domestic violence in the post-migration context, participants noted that several cultural and contextual factors inform a woman's decision to not seek help subsequent to experiences with domestic violence (Guruge, 2010). The higher status of married women in Sri Lankan culture and the belief that a woman's decision to leave her husband could have negative consequences for her children were identified as cultural values that influenced this decision. In regards to contextual factors, a woman's lack of financial independence in the post-migration context, physical isolation resulting from limited knowledge of the public transportation system or an inability to speak English fluently and concerns regarding the presence of racism or othering in support services prevented a woman from seeking help subsequent to domestic violence (Guruge, 2010).

The decision that is made by some Sri Lankan immigrant women to stay in an abusive relationship is likely reinforced by the strategies that are considered to be appropriate for coping with incidences of violence in a marriage. Kanagaratnam and colleagues (2012) explored perceptions of coping with domestic violence among female Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants in Canada. Participants' responses indicated that cultural values influence the methods of coping that are deemed to be acceptable. In general, participants tended to emphasize emotion-focused methods of coping. These methods of coping included self-blame (i.e., attempting to understand the husband's behavior and trying to change one's own behavior), relying on faith, diverting the mind (i.e., actively avoiding thinking about the abuse by engaging in different hobbies and activities), normalizing the abuse (i.e., viewing the abuse as a part of daily life), endurance (i.e., attempting to be patient and resilient to deal with the abuse) and being strategic (i.e.,

refraining from engaging in situations that provoke violence from one's husband) (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

Problem-focused, or more active, methods of coping were recommended if a woman was experiencing an increase in abuse or if her husband was unfaithful. The problem-focused methods of coping that were identified included gaining more independence when living with one's spouse (i.e., becoming independent when living with one's husband in an attempt to make the transition to living alone smoother), getting a separation and getting treatment for one's spouse (i.e., identifying the reasons a husband may be abusive and finding ways to change the behavior) (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Another problem-focused method of coping identified in Kanagaratnam and colleagues' (2012) study was seeking help from outsiders or obtaining professional help.

Women in the study's sample noted that receiving professional help for incidences of domestic violence was not beneficial as this action often resulted in the separation of families. Moreover, participants believed that if a woman wanted to stay with her husband, she should not seek outside help because it would only further negatively impact her relationship. The study's sample also indicated that experiences of sexual violence were even more shameful and posed an additional barrier to seeking professional help (Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Taken together, the findings of Kanagaratnam and colleagues (2012) illustrate the tendency of Tamil immigrant women to first utilize indirect methods of coping in an attempt to endure abuse and only turn to direct methods of coping if the abuse worsens.

Though tremendous progress has been made in the completion of research on incidences of, and responses to, domestic violence among Sri Lankan immigrants in

North America, all of this research has focused on Sri Lankan communities in Canada. In addition, much of this research has lacked an explicit focus on sexual violence. These limitations in the existing literature base point to the necessity of the completion of research on attitudes towards sexual violence among members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

**Religious beliefs regarding sexuality and sexual violence.** The population of Sri Lanka is comprised of four major religions: Buddhism (70%), Hinduism (12.6%), Islam (9.7%) and Roman Catholicism (6.1%) (Department of Census and Statistics – Sri Lanka, 2012). While little is known regarding the precise religious composition of the Sri Lankan community in the United States, recent literature indicates that religious diversity exists among members of this community (Ciment, 2010).

In each of the prominent religions in Sri Lanka, religious writings or belief systems lay the foundation for gender socialization and the status of women (Franiuk & Shain, 2011). Given the influence of religion on the presence of a gendered social hierarchy, it is not surprising that the reverence for female chastity and the descriptions of the ideal woman that are found in the texts of various religions are utilized to excuse acts of sexual violence against women (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Niaz, 2003).

**Buddhism.** A central tenet of Buddhist teachings is the circularity of one's actions. Individuals who are unable to avoid succumbing to their desires in their current lives are destined to repeat their suffering in their rebirths (Gross, 1994). As the teachings and writings of Buddhist culture tend to adhere to a patriarchal value system, women in Buddhist culture are expected to maintain a deference to men (Khuankaew, 2007; Niaz, 2003). Since women hold a lower social position than men in Buddhist culture, one's

rebirth as a woman is believed to be a form of punishment for one's transgressions in a previous life (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Gross, 1994).

Despite the lower social position of women in Buddhist culture, acts of violence against women are not frequently addressed in Buddhist texts. Buddhist teachings around sexuality tend to center on the regulation of the sexual behavior of monks and nuns as opposed to sexuality within the marital context. The rules that do exist for the sexual activity of men and women outside of the monastic life are fairly lenient (Gross, 1985). While the guidelines for the sexual behaviors of men are less defined, women are solely expected to engage in sexual activity within the context of marriage. Though it is not considered inappropriate for males to engage in sexual activity outside of the context of marriage, the act of rape is forbidden (Gross, 1985). Regardless of the fact that Buddhist texts place fewer restrictions on female sexuality, and explicitly prohibit the act of rape, scholars have suggested that some of the tenets of Buddhism contribute to the oppression of women. The patriarchal values of Buddhism have been postulated to indirectly control female sexuality and, in male-dominated cultures, contribute to the use of the concepts of karma and rebirth to justify placing the blame on survivors of sexual violence for acts of violence committed against them (Franiuk & Shain, 2011).

***Hinduism.*** The central tenets of Hinduism arise from several religious texts that were written over many centuries. The image of the Hindu woman in these texts has ranged from goddess to impure during pregnancy and menstruation to inferior to men (Sugirtharajah, 1994). Importantly, the status of women in Hindu texts, and adherence to these diverse ideals, has varied over time and across different cultures. The adaptation of Hinduism in different cultures has fluctuated with local customs, practices and

sociocultural context (Chanana, 2001). Irrespective of sociocultural context, or the status of women in the various Hindu texts, there are a number of attributes that are believed to represent the ideal Hindu woman. These attributes include fidelity, chastity, truthfulness and forgiveness (Mukherjee, 1983; Narasimhan-Madhavan, 2006).

The attributes associated with the ideal Hindu woman have contributed to a gender socialization in some Hindu cultures that restrains the expression of female sexuality. In some Hindu cultures an explicit association exists between a woman's sexuality and her and her family's honor, shame and power (Narasimhan-Madhavan, 2006). As the virgin is worshipped in the Hindu religion, the virginity of a woman at marriage is paramount. The purity of a woman at marriage not only maintains the honor of her family, but it also helps to ensure the maintenance of the purity of the group, class or caste into which she is marrying (Chanana, 2001).

The link between the purity of a woman at marriage and the purity of the group into which she is marrying contributes to oppressive practices that aim to control female sexuality. Women whose sexual activity is disparate from the dictated norms and jeopardizes the honor of the family are stigmatized by members of the Hindu community (Narasimhan-Madhavan, 2006). To avoid this stigmatization, Hindu women in some cultures are subjected to social practices (e.g., seclusion, segregation, early marriage) that aim to control their behaviors, and thereby their sexuality, in the interest of ensuring their purity at marriage (Chanana, 2001).

**Islam.** The tenets of Islam are built upon the notion that all beings are equal. Unlike the Hindu and Buddhist texts that relegate women to a lower social status, the Qur'an identifies men and women as equals. Based on this Qur'anic prescription of the

status of men and women, previous generations of Islamic women were afforded the same rights as Islamic men (Franiuk & Shain, 2011; Narasimhan-Madhavan, 2006; Niaz, 2003). With time, however, the status of Islamic women rapidly declined. The freedoms that Muslim women once had were quickly stripped away, and Muslim women became isolated, secluded and excluded. This decline in the status of women in the religion of Islam has persevered into current times (Sechzer, 2004).

Scholars of Islam have directly connected the decline in women's status in Islam to the passing of Islam's prophet and founder, Muhammad. The status of Muslim women deteriorated upon the succession of Muhammad by Umar and was maintained by Umar's successors (Sechzer, 2004). One component of the declined status of women that has been identified is the increased control over female attire. While the Qur'an dictates that both men and women should dress in a manner that conveys modesty and does not entice the opposite sex, the interpretation of the modest dress of women changed following the passing of Muhammad. Women in this era of Islam were strongly encouraged to cover both their faces and bodies so as to avoid enticing men. This manner of dress aimed to ensure the chastity of Muslim women as well as to communicate that the main value of Muslim women is procreation (Sechzer, 2004).

The control over female dress stemmed from beliefs regarding female sexuality in Islam. Discourse around female sexuality in the Qur'an often centers on the notion that females possess a destructive sexual energy that causes men to lose self-control. It is also posited that women have no control over this destructive sexual energy (Narasimhan-Madhavan, 2006). These generalizations of the nature of women have led to the implementation of practices that aim to restrict the sexuality of Muslim women. Similar

to Hindu women, Muslim women are expected to engage in behaviors that ensure their purity and chastity. The oft cited reason for practices that control the sexuality of Muslim women is the maintenance of family honor (Narasimhan-Madhavan, 2006).

The implementation of practices that contribute to the oppression of Muslim women has been significantly influenced by the larger contexts within which Islam has existed in the past. In a number of countries, oppressive Islamic practices have been adopted and made more extreme (Denmark, 2004; Sechzer, 2004). Islam's teachings of tolerance and respect for alternate religious views have enabled local cultures and religions to influence the implementation of the teachings of Islam. In Asia, Islam grew to adopt many of the patriarchal values associated with Hinduism. This influence of Hinduism contributed to newer generations of Muslims in this region of the world being socialized to support female inferiority (Niaz, 2003).

***Christianity and Roman Catholicism.*** The patriarchal hierarchy that has been embraced in Christianity throughout the years is the result of contextual influences on the religion. In early Christian scripture, Jesus Christ is described as an egalitarian leader who supported the work of the women who followed him (Jung, 2010). These views, however, were quite contrary to the patriarchal context in which Christ practiced and, thus, elicited intensely negative reactions from members of the community and the state. Religious scholars have postulated that some of the patriarchal beliefs and behaviors of the time were adopted by households that followed Christ in an attempt to make Christianity more attractive to individuals with power in the patriarchal system (Jung, 2010). These tenets of patriarchy were eventually incorporated into many denominations of Christianity.

A number of values associated with patriarchy were absorbed by the Roman Catholic denomination of Christianity. Within the Catholic Church, women are believed to be innately subordinate to men (Heggen, 1996; Jung, 2010; Ruether, 2000). Because of this inferiority, Catholic women are encouraged to submit to the authority of males and lead lives free of insubordination (Ruether, 2000). Catholicism also views women as being created solely for the purpose of procreation. Together, these views on women contribute to the belief that Catholic women who make independent decisions about their sexual behaviors are sinners. This value provides justification for the control of the sexual behaviors of women by men as well as the belief that Catholic wives should fulfill the sexual desires of their husbands (Ruether, 2000).

Since its inception, the Catholic Church has maintained strict guidelines for the sexual behaviors of its followers. In the early years, Catholics were encouraged to practice complete abstinence (Jung, 2010; Thatcher, 2011). This view on sexual behavior, however, changed under various leaders of the religion. With time, it was realized that complete abstinence was not an option for each Catholic. As such, sexual behavior within the context of marriage was deemed appropriate. However, prior to entering into marriage, it was, and continues to be, the expectation that Catholics remain virgins. Even within the context of marriage, to this day, sexual behavior is viewed as appropriate only if procreation is a viable option (Jung, 2010).

Beliefs on sexuality in the Christian religion contribute to views on sexual violence within the religion. The Christian writings on the creation of man and woman have been interpreted to mean that, as woman was created after man, she is secondary and subordinate to him. Some leaders within the Christian faith have used these writings

to recommend that female survivors of sexual violence submit to male authority and accept acts of violence committed against them (Heggen, 1996). In addition to being encouraged to submit to acts of sexual violence, some survivors within the religion have been tasked with blame for these acts. Male perpetrators of sexual violence, on the other hand, have faced minimal accountability within the religion for their actions (Fortune, 2001).

### **An Ecological Framework**

It has long been acknowledged that an individual's development does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, a reciprocal relationship exists between an individual and the context within which he or she lives. Bronfenbrenner (1994) developed an ecological framework that identifies and elucidates the unique systems that interact to influence human development and level of functioning. In his ecological model, Bronfenbrenner (1994) identified four separate systems within which an individual functions: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem.

Each system in Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model is mutually influenced by the other systems in the model. The microsystem encompasses one's interpersonal interactions and the roles he or she fulfills in his or her immediate environment (e.g., family, school, work, peers). These experiences impact an individual's engagement with his or her environment, which, in turn, creates changes to the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Relationships that exist between multiple microsystems comprise the mesosystem. For instance, connections between the home and work environments lead to the development of the mesosystem. Interactions between two or more settings, one of which has an indirect impact on the individual's immediate

environment (e.g., the relationship between one's home and a spouse's workplace), create the exosystem. Lastly, the macrosystem is the overarching system that subsumes the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem. This broader system is comprised of culture specific factors (e.g., customs, belief systems, life-styles) that are embedded into the systems it incorporates (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

### **South Asian Feminism**

**Social and structural changes.** Feminist thought and theory in South Asia have been significantly influenced by changes in social and political structures. Early South Asian feminist thought centered on removing the influence of colonial epistemologies (Loomba & Lukose, 2012). With time, the societal shifts that resulted from political changes and globalization informed a new wave of South Asian feminist thinking. This new wave of South Asian feminism centered on elucidating and supporting female agency. Similar to Western feminism, current South Asian feminist thought aims to understand the intricacies and impact of patriarchy on women (Loomba & Lukose, 2012).

**Limitations of Western feminism for South Asian women.** Traditional feminist theory was founded on a Western value system. Many of the tenets that were embraced in early feminist thought focused on individualism and autonomy. Moreover, these early theories proposed a White, Western approach for addressing issues of sexism and violence against women. This traditional form of feminism has been criticized for many reasons. One of the main critiques of Western feminist thought is its lack of acknowledgement of other aspects of a woman's identity that may result in oppression (e.g., race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation) (hooks, 2000; Singh & Hays, 2008). Despite its limited recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of women's identities, this

particular framework attempts to generalize the experiences of a select group of women to all women.

While several scholars in the past have denounced Western feminism for its tendency to focus on gender as the source of oppression for all women (Espin & Gawelek, 1992; Nesiiah, 1993), the landscape of feminism has since changed. Though some feminist scholars still fail to question whether their beliefs regarding the experiences of women are applicable to women from all backgrounds (hooks, 2000), other feminist scholars have acknowledged the importance of integrating all aspects of women's identities (e.g., class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation) into feminist theories and frameworks (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Lykke, 2010).

Despite recent changes in Western feminist theory, the applicability of Western feminist thought to the lives of South Asian women, in particular, remains limited. The tenets of individualism that underlie Western feminist ideologies have been identified as one reason that Western feminism is not embraced by women from South Asian cultures (Kallivayalil, 2007; Menon, 2004; Yick, 2001). The main oversight of Western feminism, as it applies to South Asian cultures, is a limited focus on collectivism and support. Traditional Western feminist models fail to incorporate the values of collectivism and the hierarchy that is present in many South Asian families. South Asians families highly regard close family ties and hierarchy. As such, individuality is defined and determined within the limits of the family context. Members of South Asian families are expected to adhere to their hierarchical role within the context of the family and to respect individuals above them in the familial hierarchy (Ibrahim et al., 1997).

The identity development that occurs within the context of the family in South Asian cultures is particularly salient for South Asian women. South Asian women develop their identities through their relationships with others, and, therefore, the familial roles that they fulfill are viewed as integral components of their identities (Menon, 2004). These women are often discouraged from forming an identity separate from their families and are encouraged to place the needs of their families above their own (Abraham, 2000; Inman et al., 2001). Women who are socialized in South Asian cultures, and subsequently develop an identity that centers on the ideals of a collectivist culture, may not resonate with many of the tenets of Western feminist thought. Specifically, it has been suggested that some South Asian women may not align with the Western feminist values of empowerment, self-determination and autonomy (Kallivayalil, 2007; Yick, 2001).

**Feminist frameworks in Sri Lanka.** Feminist thought has been present in Sri Lanka for many decades. Initially, Sri Lankan feminism was largely shaped by the European colonization in Sri Lanka. During British rule, foreign activists worked with Sri Lankan women to advocate for women's rights (Jayawardena, 1995). With time, the status of Sri Lankan feminist thought shifted due to the internal conflict that dominated the nation for nearly three decades.

During the period of civil unrest, Sri Lankan feminists were often at the forefront of antiwar efforts and advocated for a peaceful resolution to the ethnic conflict (de Alwis, 2012; Hensman, 1992; Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003). Beginning in the 1980s, to address the presence of violence in the country, large numbers of Sri Lankan women banded together to politically mobilize the concept of "motherhood." This concept of

“motherhood” celebrated women’s ability to reproduce and their roles as moral guardians, caregivers and nurturers (de Alwis, 2012; Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003).

Though the concept of “motherhood” was applicable to women across the nation of Sri Lanka, separate feminist groups were formed to support the differing ideologies of the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). With time, political parties began to support some of the feminist groups that were already in existence (de Alwis, 2012). This political backing, and in some cases funding, changed the focus of some feminist groups to be more in line with the ideology of the supporting political group. Consequently, some Sri Lankan feminist organizations no longer primarily focused on antiwar efforts. Instead, the missions of these groups became fragmented as these organizations were often used to advocate for various causes (de Alwis, 2012).

Towards the end of the civil war, Sri Lankan feminist thought was transformed. Instead of separate ideologies, feminist groups began to support initiatives that sought harmony between communities. During the Sri Lankan civil war, women suffered disproportionate consequences. Through navigating these experiences, Sri Lankan women learned to utilize empathy and reconciliation skills to negotiate their behaviors within conflict. The use of these skills over a long period of time provided Sri Lankan women with the ability to contribute to efforts of establishing and sustaining peace in Sri Lanka. Because of this ability, in this era of feminist thought, Sri Lankan women were encouraged to work as agents of peace. Through its use of women as agents of peace, this wave of Sri Lankan feminism aimed to promote the acceptance of the differences among the citizens of Sri Lanka (Nesiah, 2012).

As the experiences of Sri Lankan women during the country's civil war could not be understood without considering ethnicity, region, socioeconomic status and party affiliation, efforts that sought to foster positive interactions between communities ignored the interethnic injustices that led to the conflict in Sri Lanka (Nesiah, 2012). Instead, to remain cognizant of the sociocultural differences that impacted citizens' experiences during the Sri Lankan civil war, Sri Lankan feminists in this era suggested that women work to build understanding and relationships between communities as opposed to addressing systemic or structural issues. Sri Lankan women were encouraged to move away from attempting to implement political or socioeconomic change and, instead, aim to facilitate respect and reconciliation among citizens (Nesiah, 2012).

More recently, Sri Lankan feminist scholars have shifted away from a focus on women as peacemakers. This newer wave of feminism has advocated for the consideration of context in Sri Lankan feminist thought. Given the history of ethnic conflict in the nation of Sri Lanka, gender identity in Sri Lanka does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, the gender identity of Sri Lankan women is largely influenced by the national identity of these women (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003). Therefore, it has been recommended that contemporary feminist thought in Sri Lanka acknowledge the multiple contexts in which Sri Lankan women exist as an exclusive focus on gender is not enough to promote significant change. Feminist thought that recognizes the multiple facets of the identities of Sri Lankan women provides feminists with better insight into how to alter relationships that contribute to violence and inequality amongst groups (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003).

Current day feminism in Sri Lanka takes various forms. While some Sri Lankan feminists advocate for concerns that have been traditionally considered goals of Western feminism, such as the autonomy and independence of women, other Sri Lankan feminists support the growth of women within their cultural belief system (i.e., encouraging solidarity among women while acknowledging the influence of cultural context) (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Regardless of the approach taken by current day Sri Lankan feminists, the overarching goal of most Sri Lankan feminists is to identify and address sources of distress and promote an increased quality of life for Sri Lankan women. This goal has led Sri Lankan feminism away from working with individuals to affect change. Instead, current Sri Lankan feminism aims to embrace psychosocial and community-based strategies of change (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011).

***Current status of Sri Lankan women.*** In Sri Lanka, education is viewed as an important factor in the lives of both boys and girls. The literacy rate for Sri Lankan women is nearly 90%, and Sri Lankan females have high levels of educational attainment. Despite the importance that is placed on the education of Sri Lankan girls, a strong division of labor continues to exist in Sri Lanka (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Miller, 2002).

Changes in Sri Lanka's economy over the years have contributed to new employment opportunities for women. Regardless of these new opportunities, when Sri Lankan women are in the labor force, they most often occupy the lowest paying jobs. As the nature of employment in Sri Lanka is highly gendered, Sri Lankan women generally work in garment factories, plantations or as domestic aides (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Miller, 2002). For women who are unable to work in these settings, the commercial

sex industry offers them an opportunity to provide for themselves and their children after divorce or abandonment (Miller, 2002).

The type of employment a woman secures can significantly impact many areas of her life. For married women who seek employment overseas in domestic service, changes in family structure often arise. Married women who work abroad as domestic aides may become the main wage earner for their families. Moreover, as these women work overseas for long periods of time, the families of these women are often forced to adopt new forms of childcare (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Alternatively, women who enter the commercial sex industry as the sole wage earners for their families are faced with the stigmatization associated with sexually promiscuous women as well as with formal and informal social controls over their behaviors (e.g., legal involvement) (Miller, 2002). Along with enduring lifestyle changes related to employment, Sri Lankan women have also faced disruptions in their lives as a result of the country's ethnic conflict.

Many aspects of the lives of Sri Lankan women changed as a result of the civil war. For some women, traditional Sri Lankan gender roles and family arrangements shifted over the course of the war. Significant numbers of Sri Lankan girls and women actively participated in the war as soldiers (de Alwis, 2012; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). In areas in which conflict was prevalent, large numbers of married men were killed, forced to leave or imprisoned (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). The loss of these men resulted in many young women becoming widows and in the disruption of traditional Sri Lankan family structures. In addition to facing societal stigma as a widow, these women were tasked with the responsibility of financially supporting and nurturing their families (Asian Development Bank, 1999; de Alwis, 2002).

### **The Sri Lankan Context**

**Systems of oppression in Sri Lanka.** Sri Lanka has been an independent democracy since 1948. Since declaring independence from British rule, tensions have existed between the ethnic majority group, the Sinhalese, and the Tamil ethnic minority. In the decades that followed the declaration of independence, members of the ethnic majority group, whose expression of language and culture had been restrained during the rule of the British, sought to reestablish their place in society. In their attempts to restore their position, the Sinhalese implemented Sinhala as the national language, thus introducing barriers to employment for individuals who spoke Tamil, restructured the university admissions processes, thereby making it more difficult for Tamil citizens to gain admission, and seized land with large numbers of Tamil inhabitants (Orjuela, 2003). Initially, Tamils utilized non-violent means to dispute their oppressed position in society. These non-violent protests eventually progressed into the formation of militant groups and calls for a separate Tamil state (Orjuela, 2003). The longstanding interethnic hostilities culminated in the onset of a civil war in 1983 between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil separatists' group. This civil war lasted 26 years and claimed over 70,000 lives (Sriskandarajah, 2005).

**Incidences of violence during the war.** Extant literature has demonstrated the prevalence of violence throughout the civil war. Civilian members of both ethnic groups endorsed witnessing acts of violence during the war (Catani, Jacob, Schauer, Kohila, & Neuner, 2008; de Jong, Mulhern, Ford, Simpson, Swan, & der Kam, 2002; Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 1994). Acts of sexual violence, in particular, were not uncommon in the context of the interethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. In fact, recent reports

reveal that sexual violence was widely employed by members of the Sri Lankan security forces against Tamils. Both Tamil men and women were subjected to this particular form of violence throughout the civil war (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Though little has been documented on the influence of interethnic incidences of sexual violence on attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankans, Murthi (2009) has posited that interethnic prejudices are related to increased levels of victim blame for survivors of sexual violence outside of one's ethnic group.

**History of Sri Lankan migration.** The longstanding ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka led to the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lankan Tamils are consistently one of the largest groups seeking asylum in Europe, North America and Australia. Over 200,000 Tamils have sought political asylum in Western countries (Sriskandarajah, 2002, 2005). In all, the conflict-induced displacement of this population led to the emigration of approximately 800,000 Tamils over the course of 20 years. Due to this forced migration, nearly one in two Tamils has been displaced, and approximately one in four Tamils lives outside of Sri Lanka (Sriskandarajah, 2005).

The migration of Sri Lankan Tamils to other parts of the world has been separated into three categories. The first category of migration includes Sri Lankan Tamils who migrated prior to 1983 and were hesitant to return to their country of origin due to the civil war. This group of migrants was typically comprised of students and guest workers in Europe and North America. After the beginning of the civil war, many of these individuals submitted asylum claims in the countries in which they were temporarily residing (Sriskandarajah, 2005). The second category of migrants includes professional and middle-class Tamils. Many of these individuals migrated for education and

employment purposes. The rates of migration of this group of individuals increased subsequent to the beginning of the civil war. The final, and largest category, of migrants includes Sri Lankan Tamils who sought asylum overseas as a result of the civil war (Sriskandarajah, 2005).

Another type of migration that is present in Sri Lanka is labor migration. The temporary migration of Sri Lankan citizens for economic reasons began in the late 1970s and continues to this day. Sri Lankan labor migrants are largely of Sinhalese descent (Sriskandarajah, 2005). The majority of Sri Lankan emigrant workers are female domestic aides from low socioeconomic backgrounds who emigrate to the Middle East, Singapore and Hong Kong (Arunatilake, Jayawardena, & Weerakoon, 2011; de Alwis, 2002). Oftentimes, these women choose to migrate overseas due to the lack of employment opportunities and earning potential for women in Sri Lanka. The wages that Sri Lankan women earn in Sri Lanka are significantly lower than those they earn as domestic aides in other countries (de Alwis, 2002; Kottegoda, 2006). The increased earning potential associated with working as a domestic aide in another country is a significant draw for many women as it provides them with an opportunity to increase their financial support to their families. This occupation, however, requires Sri Lankan women to remain overseas for long periods of time. Moreover, due to their families' dependence on their wages, these women frequently feel pressure to extend their contracts overseas so that they are able to continue to financially support their families (de Alwis, 2002).

**Present Study**

Subsequent to experiences of sexual violence, survivors frequently face tremendous changes in their lives. These individuals experience deleterious effects on their mental health and endure negative social interactions with others. Extant literature has indicated that sexual violence survivors are more likely to be diagnosed with a depressive, anxiety, trauma-related or substance use disorder than individuals who have not experienced sexual violence (Kendler et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2012). These psychological consequences have been linked to negative social interactions subsequent to sexual violence (Kocot & Goodman, 2003; Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006; Ullman & Filipas, 2001; Ullman et al., 2007). Underlying the negative responses survivors receive from others are attitudes regarding sexual violence. These attitudes are often a reflection of a variety of cultural and contextual factors.

Previous research has delineated a variety of unique cultural and contextual factors that shape attitudes towards sexual violence in South Asian immigrant populations (e.g., Abraham, 1999; George & Rahangdale, 1999; Singh et al., 2010). While these studies have made a substantial contribution to the literature base on South Asian immigrants, they have not frequently distinguished between the various cultures that comprise the larger South Asian community. The diversity present within the South Asian population necessitates the completion of research with each of the subgroups that comprise the South Asian community in the United States. Through the completion of this type of research, a better understanding will be reached on the ways that the distinct cultural, religious, and sociopolitical histories of each of these smaller communities intersect with the post-migration context to inform views on sexual violence. To this end,

the present study aimed to explicate the ways that Sri Lankan immigrants' views concerning sexual violence against women are shaped by their Sri Lankan and United States contexts.

A number of cultural and contextual factors lay the foundation for attitudes regarding sexual violence in the Sri Lankan immigrant community. As a result of the civil war, access to power and privilege in Sri Lanka varied across ethnicity and gender. Members of the Tamil ethnic minority group faced disparate access to educational, social and political resources as compared to the Sinhalese majority group (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003). Within the context of this differential access to power and privilege, women were disproportionately affected. Women of both ethnic groups endured increased vulnerability to sexual harassment and incidences of domestic violence during the war (de Alwis, 2004; Hyndman & de Alwis, 2003).

The elevated stress that Sri Lankan citizens endured as a result of the disruptions that occurred in their lives during the war has been linked to heightened levels of trauma. This trauma has been posited to lend to behavioral changes, including the perpetration of violence against women (Leanage, 2010; Somasundaram, 2004). Despite this increased likelihood for the perpetration of violence against women, as the war was the primary concern of the majority of the citizens, acts of violence against women that occurred during wartime were often overlooked by Sri Lankans (Wijayatillake & Guneratne, 2002 as cited in Leanage, 2010).

Another significant factor that has far reaching implications for attitudes towards violence against women among Sri Lankans is the culture's adherence to a patriarchal belief system. An alignment with patriarchy among Sri Lankans lends to the socialization

of Sri Lankan women to maintain a deference to men (Jayatilleke et al., 2011) and to revere the unity of the family above all else (Hussein, 2000). A broad understanding and acceptance of this socialization of Sri Lankan women contributes to permissive responses among Sri Lankans regarding acts of violence against women as well as to a tendency to not label certain types of interactions as violence. The widespread patriarchal beliefs that contribute to permissive attitudes regarding acts of violence against women also promote the silencing of female survivors of violence (Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011).

Much of the research on acts of, and attitudes towards, violence against Sri Lankan women has centered on domestic violence that occurs within the context of marriage (e.g., Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Consequently, little is known regarding attitudes towards sexual violence against women, and, in particular, views on sexual violence against women within the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Moreover, as feminists in Sri Lanka have shifted their efforts towards creating a better life for Sri Lankan women in recent years (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011), an understanding of how these feminist frameworks have impacted the views of the Sri Lankan population in the United States is virtually nonexistent.

The Sri Lankan population in the United States increased 92% between the years 2000 and 2010. Additionally, Sri Lankans are the sixth fastest growing South Asian group in the United States (SAALT, 2012). In light of the dramatic growth in the Sri Lankan population, and the paucity of research concerning the potential influence of sociocultural context on views on sexual violence among Sri Lankans in the United States, an increased understanding of attitudes towards sexual violence against women in

this community is imperative. The present study aimed to examine how the unique cultural values and socialization patterns present in Sri Lanka interact with the post-migration context to shape attitudes toward sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

An in-depth examination of attitudes towards sexual violence within this understudied population required a methodology that allowed participants to share their personal narratives on this topic. Qualitative methodologies are a preferred approach for collecting data from communities of color. A qualitative approach enables researchers to extend beyond the limits imposed upon communities of color by quantitative instruments that force individuals to select pre-identified responses that are representative of individualistic attitudes. Through conducting qualitative research, the attitudes, worldviews and feelings of individuals from more collectivistic communities are able to be explored in an open manner that utilizes the participants' own words (Ponterotto, 2010). The use of qualitative methodologies with Asian populations, in particular, allows researchers to elicit and analyze the complex and nuanced communication patterns used by this population (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model provided an overarching framework that situated the findings of the present study in multiple Sri Lankan cultural contexts as well as elucidated the interrelatedness of the pre- and post-migration contexts. The utilization of a South Asian feminist lens illuminated the relationship between attitudes regarding gender and sexuality and attitudes towards sexual violence in the pre- and post-migration contexts. The present findings contribute to the sparse literature base on Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. Moreover, the results of this study clarify how

the navigation of cultural beliefs and socialization patterns in the pre- and post- migration contexts influence attitudes towards sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. The completion of this in-depth analysis of these issues has significant implications for research and practice with Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The present study utilized a qualitative descriptive method to explore attitudes towards sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Qualitative descriptive studies are a type of naturalistic inquiry and have been identified as the method of choice for researchers whose aim is to elicit detailed descriptions of a phenomenon. This type of inquiry is preferred when conducting research with individuals who have been underrepresented in the psychological literature base as it allows a phenomenon to be studied as it naturally occurs, without purposeful manipulation (Sandelowski, 2000).

A constructivist/interpretivist framework and conventional qualitative content analysis were used for the data collection and data analysis phases of the present study. Working within a constructivist/interpretivist framework is beneficial when conducting qualitative research with under-researched populations as this framework allows researchers to acquire a fuller understanding of the experiences of these individuals (Cresswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2005) without having to yield to the constraints introduced by quantitative methodologies or other types of qualitative methodologies (e.g., phenomenological, theoretical, ethnographic, narrative) (Sandelowski, 2000).

Increasingly, the benefits of conducting qualitative research with immigrant populations have been documented in the literature. Qualitative methodologies give voice to marginalized or silenced populations by allowing members of these groups to share their personal worldviews and “lived experiences” in their own words (Ponterotto, 2005). This methodology is also particularly well suited for capturing the indirect and circular

storytelling communication patterns that members of the South Asian community use when conveying their experiences to others (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

### **Paradigmatic Underpinnings**

A variety of paradigms are embraced within the continuum of qualitative methodologies. Within the context of qualitative methodologies, a paradigm is a set of shared understandings regarding a particular worldview and what is considered to be reality. Thus, the paradigm within which one works creates the assumptions that guide one's research. Within each paradigm, assumptions are made regarding ontology (i.e., the nature of reality), epistemology (i.e., what counts as knowledge), axiology (i.e., the role of values in research) and methodology (i.e., the process of research) (Morrow, 2005, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Postpositivist and constructivist/interpretivist paradigms are frequently used in qualitative research. Given the assumptions made about ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology, the paradigm that most closely aligns with the objectives of the present study is the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm.

Within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, research is conducted under the overarching ontological belief that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live. In doing so, individuals develop varied and complex subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings result from social interactions with others and are negotiated within multiple contexts. The creation of subjective meanings lends to the formulation of several, constructed realities. Thus, the aim of researchers who work within this framework is to obtain a rich understanding of these subjective meanings and realities and, subsequently, deduce a pattern of meaning (Cresswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). The view on the nature of reality that is embraced by the

constructivist/interpretivist paradigm is in contrast to the ontological belief of the postpositivist paradigm. Within the postpositivist paradigm, it is believed that there is, in fact, a single, true reality that is to be studied (Cresswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005).

The constructivist/interpretivist framework also adheres to the epistemological and axiological beliefs that both the researcher and participants influence the research process. Within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, it is believed that the values, biases and attitudes of the researcher are unable to be disentangled from the research process (Cresswell, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005). As such, it is not reasonable to expect a researcher to eliminate the influence of his or her views from the research. Instead, researchers are encouraged to recognize the ways that their personal and cultural histories influence the data collection and data analysis processes. Researchers who embrace these epistemological and axiological beliefs often utilize naturalistic designs. When working with a naturalistic design, researchers frequently collect data by conducting one-to-one interviews or engaging in participant observation (Ponterotto, 2005). Additionally, these individuals often situate themselves within the research so as to better allow themselves to acknowledge the ways that their personal histories influence the interpretations they make throughout the research process (Cresswell, 2013, Ponterotto, 2005).

The assumptions made regarding axiology, epistemology and methodology within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm are quite different from those made in the postpositivist paradigm. The goal of the postpositivist paradigm is objectivity on the part of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). This overarching goal lends to the methodological approach typically utilized within this paradigm. In the postpositivist

paradigm, the researcher often uses strictly standardized procedures so as to avoid introducing the influence of his or her personal biases into the research process (Ponterotto, 2005).

As the present study aimed to explore an issue that is significantly influenced by cultural factors in an under-researched population, the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm was most appropriate. The utilization of this approach allowed the researcher to acknowledge that each participant had his or her own unique construction of reality that influenced held attitudes regarding sexual violence. Accordingly, the researcher used a method of data collection that encouraged participants to narrate their personally constructed realities (i.e., one-to-one interviews). The recognition within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm that the researcher and participants co-construct reality during the process of data collection was also appropriate for the present study. Given the similarity between the researcher's and participants' cultural background, working within a constructivist/interpretivist framework enabled the researcher to remain cognizant of her own influence on the research process while also valuing the role her cultural history and background played throughout the research process.

### **Qualitative Description and Content Analysis**

The objective of qualitative descriptive studies is to provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular event or experience. With this goal guiding the research, collected data is thoroughly detailed, as opposed to interpreted, so as to provide a full description of a phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). The framework that guides qualitative descriptive approaches closely aligned with the aims of the present study. As the present study sought to explicate attitudes towards sexual violence against women in the Sri

Lankan community in the United States, a topic on which a dearth of literature exists, qualitative description allowed the researcher to expound this topic with minimal interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000).

Within the domain of qualitative description, qualitative content analysis is the preferred analysis strategy (Sandelowski, 2000). The conventional qualitative content analysis approach was best suited for the present study since this approach is ideal for analyzing data on a topic on which there is a lack of adequate literature. This approach allows researchers to obtain a richer understanding of a particular phenomenon by remaining as close as possible to the words utilized by participants (Sandelowski, 2000). Through engaging in conventional qualitative content analysis, researchers allow categories and themes to emerge from the data collected (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, this analysis strategy assists in elucidating the unique experiences of participants.

Consensual qualitative research and grounded theory are two frequently utilized qualitative analysis strategies. The end goal of both of these approaches is the development of a theory (Fassinger, 2005; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). Through the process of developing a theory, data analysis moves away from a focus on the words of the participants and, instead, calls for a personal interpretation of the words or experiences of participants (Ponterotto, 2005; Sandelowski, 2000). And, while theory development of this type is useful for the completion of research with certain populations, qualitative content analysis is most appropriate for the present study as its aim is to identify major content areas that are narrated by the

participants, rather than to develop a more comprehensive theory regarding the observed phenomena.

### **Sample**

**Recruitment.** Participants for the present study were recruited via two methods. First, the researcher sent an e-mail that outlined the details and inclusion criteria of the study to the listservs of agencies and organizations that work with South Asian or Sri Lankan populations. These organizations and agencies were located across the United States. Through this recruitment method, the researcher obtained three participants. As this initial method did not yield many participants, the researcher utilized snowball sampling to recruit the remaining participants.

Snowball sampling has been recommended as a technique for recruitment when researching topics that are frequently silenced and when working with hard-to-reach populations (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). For the present study, the researcher began the snowball sampling process by asking family members to provide first generation Sri Lankan immigrant friends or colleagues with the recruitment letter for the study (see Appendix A). Next, the researcher personally contacted these individuals to answer any questions they had about the study and to determine if they were interested in participating in the study. This method of recruitment yielded nine participants. The remaining two participants were referred to the researcher by a previous participant. This participant passed information regarding the study on to two colleagues. The researcher then provided these individuals with the recruitment letter for the study and asked if they were interested in participating in the study.

***Saturation.*** Saturation has often been used as an indicator of quality and the adequacy of a sample in qualitative research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). This concept was first introduced as a component of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In grounded theory, researchers collect data until theoretical saturation is reached. Theoretical saturation occurs when the process of data analysis does not yield additional information about the identified categories or new connections between categories (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008; Fassinger, 2005). Over time, different forms of saturation have emerged for other qualitative methods. One of these forms is data saturation, which was used in the present study. To reach data saturation, researchers continue to add participants to a study until the collected data fails to produce new categories (Bowen, 2008). Importantly, scholars have noted that the process of data saturation lacks systematization and is dependent on the objectives of a study (Bowen, 2008; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

Given the amorphous nature of data saturation, the researcher in the present study utilized multiple methods to determine when saturation was reached. Throughout the process of data collection, the researcher used her personal notes from interviews to gather a general sense of the concepts that were consistently surfacing in the collected data. Once the researcher independently concluded that no new information was emerging from the interviews, she consulted with her dissertation chair. After this consultation, the researcher completed two additional interviews to further solidify her impression that data saturation had been reached. The researcher's beliefs regarding the presence of data saturation were confirmed during the data analysis process when no new domains or themes emerged from the collected data.

**Participants.** Participants in the present study included 14 first generation Sri Lankan immigrants living in the United States (see Table 1 for a summary of participants' demographic information). All participants were fluent in English. Seven participants identified as female, and the other seven identified as male. The ages of participants ranged from 40 to 66 years, with a mean age of 54.79 years. The large majority of participants (n=11) identified as Tamil. Among the other three participants, one identified as Sinhalese-Tamil, one identified as Sri Lankan and one identified as British-Sri Lankan. With regard to religion, nearly all participants (n=11) were Hindu. The other religions that participants aligned with included Rinza Buddhism (n=1), Catholicism (n=1) and multiple religions (n=1).

Years of immigration spanned from 1964 to 1999. Nearly half of the participants (n=6) immigrated to another country before moving to the United States. These countries included India, England and Canada. All participants migrated to the United States after the age of 18. Ages of migration to the United States ranged from 18 to 44 years, with a mean age of 27.79 years. The number of years participants have resided in the United States spanned from eight to 37 years, with a mean of 25.93 years. The participant who has resided in the United States for eight years has a combined total of eight years of residence as he first came to the United States at age 16 and has resided in the United States on and off since that time. The majority of participants (n=9) self-identified as Both Sri Lankan and American. Among the remaining participants, three identified as More American than Sri Lankan, one identified as Very Sri Lankan and one identified as Open to All Cultures.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Number of Years Living in the United States
F1	60	Female	Tamil	Hindu	28
F2	46	Female	Tamil	Hindu	28
F3	59	Female	Tamil	Hindu	35
F4	45	Female	Tamil	Hindu	12
F5	54	Female	Sinhalese and Tamil	Rinzai Buddhist	32
F6	54	Female	Sri Lankan	Hindu	30
F7	52	Female	Tamil	Hindu	29
M1	61	Male	Tamil	Hindu	37
M2	52	Male	Tamil	Catholic	12
M3	40	Male	Tamil	Hindu	20
M4	66	Male	British-Sri Lankan	Judeo-Christian-Hindu-Buddhist-Islamo-Shaman	8
M5	54	Male	Tamil	Hindu	33
M6	65	Male	Tamil	Hindu	35
M7	59	Male	Tamil	Hindu	24

**Data Collection**

**Protection of the Rights and Welfare of Human Subjects.** The researcher obtained approval from the Boston College Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to engaging in recruitment for the present study. Before beginning the process of data collection, the researcher completed an ethics training through the Collaborative

Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and obtained a CITI human subjects training certificate. The co-coder in the present study also completed the CITI training and received a CITI human subjects training certificate prior to beginning data analysis.

All participants were provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) a minimum of three days before their scheduled interview date. Participants were asked to review the form and send a signed copy of the form back to the researcher before their scheduled interview. Prior to beginning each interview, the researcher reviewed the content of the Informed Consent Form with participants. In this review, the researcher highlighted the methods that would be used to ensure confidentiality. Participants were notified that the researcher would be independently transcribing all of the interviews. They were also informed that any names of people or places that emerged during the interview would not be transcribed. Participants were told that the only identifying information that would be used in the present study was the information that they provided on the Background Information Form (see Procedure section below).

As the consent form noted that the interviews would be audio-recorded, participants were informed that the audio-recordings, consent forms and Background Information Forms would be stored separately and would only be accessible to the researcher. Participants were also told that only the researcher and the co-coder would have access to the transcripts, which would be stored as password protected electronic files. Lastly, the researcher emphasized that no participant would be individually identified in publications or any other documents related to this study.

The review of the Informed Consent Form also included a discussion of the risks and benefits associated with participation in the study. Participants were told that

potential benefits included a better understanding on one's own views of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community as well as a possible contribution to culturally sensitive research and clinical work with the Sri Lankan community in the United States. The researcher also notified participants that there were minimal physical, social and economic risks associated with their participation in the study. She highlighted the potential for experiencing discomfort when being asked or answering certain questions during the interview. Participants were informed that if this occurred the researcher would provide them with brief support and a list of referrals for counseling services. However, as this did not occur, no participant was provided with a list of referrals for sources of additional support.

**Procedure.** In the present study, the researcher, who is from Malaysian and Sri Lankan backgrounds and was born in the United States, conducted one-to-one interviews with participants in English. Interviews ranged from 43 minutes to 152 minutes and focused on beliefs regarding gender, sex and sexual violence in the pre- and post-migration contexts. Prior to their scheduled interview, participants were provided with a copy of the Informed Consent form and asked to sign the form. Before beginning the interview, participants were given a verbal explanation of the form and were provided with the opportunity to ask questions about the content of the form. Next, participants verbally completed a Background Information Form (see Appendix C). On this form, participants were asked to report their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, year of immigration, age at immigration, number of years living in the United States and their cultural self-identification (i.e., Very Sri Lankan, More Sri Lankan than American, Both Sri Lankan and American, More American than Sri Lankan, Very American).

When scheduling the interviews, the researcher provided participants with the option to complete face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews or interviews through video-conferencing services (e.g., Skype). Scholars have noted that both telephone interviews and video-conferencing interviews maintain the integrity of the data collected while also allowing researchers to collect data from a broader range of individuals (Hanna, 2012; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Nearly all participants (n=12) elected to complete telephone interviews. One participant completed an in-person interview, and another participant completed an interview via Skype. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher for purposes of data analysis.

*Interviews.* Conducting interviews with individuals from one's population of interest is a highly recommended technique when attempting to gather rich and detailed data about the ways that people construct the world around them (Hill et al., 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). As the present study is one of the first on this topic, the use of interviews to elucidate the multi-faceted attitudes held by the population of interest was fitting. Scholars have advised that researchers follow a pre-established interview protocol when using interviews to collect data (Hill et al., 2005). Most often, interview protocols take the form of a scripted list of questions. Hill and colleagues (2005) have suggested that interview protocols for interviews lasting one hour contain eight to 10 scripted questions. Within the interview protocol, it is recommended that both probes and questions remain open ended (e.g., tell me more about that) (Hill et al., 2005; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Interview questions for the present study were developed in alignment with the overarching objective of the study – the exploration of attitudes regarding sexual violence

against women in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. In particular, the researcher aimed to clarify: 1) the cultural values and socialization patterns that participants were exposed to in the pre-migration context, 2) how participants have navigated cultural values and socialization patterns from their culture of origin in the post-migration context of the United States, and 3) how cultural and contextual factors from pre- and post-migration contexts have interacted to inform attitudes regarding sexual violence.

Multiple factors facilitated the development of the interview questions. First, the content areas covered in the interview were informed by extant literature on the cultural beliefs and socialization patterns of Sri Lankan and South Asian women and men. Next, two larger frameworks directed the development of specific interview questions. With Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994) as a guide, interview questions were created to elicit information on the reciprocal relationships between an individual, his or her interactions and pre- and post- migration contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). A South Asian feminist lens assisted in developing interview questions that expounded the influence of participants' pre- and post- migration views on social roles and obligations, as guided by gendered socialization, on attitudes regarding sexual violence. Two interview protocols were used in the present study (see Appendices D and E). Participants who were survivors of sexual violence completed an interview protocol in which they were asked about their personal experiences with sexual violence (see Appendix D). Two female participants completed this protocol. The interview protocol for participants who were not survivors of sexual violence contained questions regarding their beliefs about the experiences of survivors of sexual violence (see Appendix E). During the interview,

the researcher utilized open-ended probes when necessary to gain a fuller understanding of participants' experiences (Hill et al., 2005). If, at any point during the interview, participants were unsure of the definition of sexual violence, they were told that, for the purposes of this study, sexual violence was defined as childhood sexual abuse, molestation, unwanted or forced sexual contact, sexual assault and rape.

### **Data Analysis**

**Conventional qualitative content analysis.** Qualitative content analysis is a flexible approach to analyzing text data. In this type of data analysis, researchers identify themes and patterns that emerge from participants' responses. The aim of this type of analysis is to create a broader understanding of the setting or situation from which the data is collected (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A number of approaches have been recommended for qualitative content analysis. Despite the existence of several nuanced approaches to this method of analysis, most approaches typically include a review of the data to elicit codes, an identification of larger categories that represent the codes and an elucidation of relationships between the larger categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) outline three distinct methods of qualitative content analysis: conventional, directive and summative. Though codes and coding schemes are developed differently in each of these methods, all three methods encompass the broader components of content analysis. The conventional content analysis approach was most appropriate for the present study as its use is recommended for thorough examinations of a phenomenon for which there is a dearth of adequate theory or literature. Through the completion of conventional content analysis, the researcher derives categories from the

data with the intention of describing a specific phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In comparison, the goals of directive content analysis and summative content analysis were in contrast with the objective of the present study. The aim of directive content analysis is to corroborate or expand upon an existing theory. The summative content analysis approach, on the other hand, is best suited for studies that explore the use of words (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

When engaging in content analysis, Krippendorff (2004) recommends the use of at least two coders to increase the reliability of findings. To this end, the researcher in the present study recruited a female, master's level mental health counselor of Asian Indian descent to assist with coding the collected data. The co-coder was selected for the present study as she has an interest in sexuality and sexual violence in South Asian populations. Prior to engaging in the data analysis process for the present study, the co-coder had previous experience with coding for other qualitative studies that utilized conventional qualitative content analysis.

The present study used Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) recommended strategy for conventional qualitative content analysis. Data for the present study was collected through the completion of one-to-one interviews. After all interviews had been conducted and transcribed, each member of the research team (i.e., the researcher and co-coder) immersed herself in the data. In an attempt to gain a comprehensive sense of the data, each member of the team independently read through the collected data several times. Next, each team member read through the data again with the intention of deriving codes that represented main concepts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

To derive codes, each member of the research team identified exact quotes from the transcripts that highlighted cultural beliefs, socialization patterns or contextual factors that informed attitudes towards sexual violence. Each team member then identified her personal impressions and a preliminary analysis of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Once this was achieved, the researcher and co-coder spoke as a team to discuss the initial findings.

During this meeting, the research team combined and condensed the codes identified in the first round of coding. Next, labels were created for the codes that remained. Disagreements about codes were discussed amongst both members of the research team until a consensus was reached for each code. To assist in reaching a consensus on a particular code, both team members noted the personal impressions and thoughts that influenced her decision about the code. The appropriateness of codes was determined by how closely they fit the data and answered the research questions with as little interpretation as possible (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An initial coding scheme was created when the team agreed on a list of codes.

Using the initial coding scheme, the research team coded all of the transcripts (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During this process, each coder continued to identify her thoughts on and impressions of the data. Once all of the transcripts were coded using the initial coding scheme, the research team spoke again to discuss the appropriateness of the coding scheme as well as identify new codes that emerged in the coding process. During this conversation, the research team noted the changes that needed to be made to the initial coding scheme. The team then revised the initial coding scheme and used the new coding scheme to re-code the data. As the process

of coding in the present study was iterative, this process was repeated until the coding scheme accurately represented the data and no new codes emerged (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

Once the research team identified a final list of codes, the codes were organized, based on similarities, into larger themes. These themes were then grouped into domains (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Similar to the process outlined above for code identification, themes and domains were created through team discussions. Disagreements among research team members regarding themes and domains were handled in the same way as disagreements regarding codes. The appropriateness of themes and domains was determined by evaluating how reflective they were of the data with little incorporation of researcher interpretation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The research team aimed to create themes and domains that represented the data and answered the research questions (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). Once the codes, themes and domains were identified, the research team developed definitions for all three (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **Standards of Quality**

Several recommendations have been made over the years regarding how to produce well-crafted qualitative research. These recommendations have centered on how to assess and demonstrate the reliability and validity of this particular research methodology (Seale, 1999). Qualitative scholars have proposed that the presence of rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative research is indicative of high-caliber research. The strategies of subjectivity and reflexivity have been identified as practices that help to ensure the merit of qualitative research.

**Rigor and trustworthiness.** Qualitative scholars have used the terms rigor and trustworthiness both interchangeably and separately. Despite the different uses of these terms, more broadly, the presence of rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative studies is indicative of quality qualitative research (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Morrow, 2005). Guba (1981) highlighted four distinct criteria that assist in demonstrating trustworthiness in qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The term credibility is akin to the scientific term of internal validity. Through establishing credibility in qualitative research, researchers demonstrate the plausibility of their findings. Transferability refers to the external validity and generalizability of a study. For qualitative studies, this is indicative of the relevance of the findings to the specific context in which the study occurs (Guba, 1981). Dependability and confirmability represent the reliability and objectivity of the study. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the presence of dependability attests to the stability of the data while still acknowledging that, as realities shift, instabilities in data may arise. Lastly, confirmability is not concerned with the objectivity of the researcher but, instead, is concerned with the confirmability of the data (Guba, 1981).

A number of strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative studies have been explicated in the literature. These strategies include audit trails, member checking, confirmation of results with participants and peer debriefing (Guba, 1981). Scholars have also highlighted the importance of engaging in triangulation, reflexivity and subjectivity when attempting to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Guba, 1981; Morrow, 2005).

**Subjectivity.** Unlike quantitative research, in which complete objectivity is ideal, qualitative research acknowledges the presence and influence of subjectivity. Qualitative researchers recognize that their personal histories shape the data collection and data analysis processes (Morrow, 2005, 2007). The way that this subjectivity is addressed varies by paradigm. Within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, researchers are more likely to value their influence on the interpretation of data as well as their role in the meaning-making process throughout a research study (Morrow, 2005).

A limited, or absent, description of the presence of subjectivity in qualitative research may lead to concerns regarding the quality of the research. Morrow (2005) noted that by failing to adequately describe subjectivity in qualitative research, consumers of this research are likely to question whose views are being delineated in the findings. To circumvent these concerns regarding the intentional, or unintentional, influence of the researcher on the findings of a study, scholars have recommended that researchers make their personal assumptions and biases explicit to others throughout the research and dissemination processes (Hill et al., 2005; Morrow, 2005).

In an attempt to remain explicit regarding the subjectivity of the researcher in the present study, the researcher utilized the methods of reflexivity (described in further detail below) and member checks. Member checking is the process by which researchers aim to ensure an accurate reflection and interpretation of the meanings of participants (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Morrow, 2005, 2007). In the present study, member checking consisted of participant reviews of the collected data. Participants were asked to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy and provide the researcher with information on corrections that should be made. Participants were also provided with the

opportunity to clarify their interview responses if they believed that their views were not accurately represented in their initial responses. Four of the participants in the present study provided the researcher with feedback during this member checking process. This feedback was incorporated into the transcripts of these participants before they were used in data analysis. All participants were provided with the option to receive a summary of the findings of the present study. A large portion of the participants (n=9) reported they wanted a summary of the findings.

**Reflexivity.** An integral component of qualitative research is reflexivity. Reflexivity is a recommended strategy for managing one's subjectivity in the research process (Morrow, 2005). Through engaging in the process of reflexivity, the researcher explicitly acknowledges that he or she enters into the research process with a personal history and social location that influences the research in a variety of ways (Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Morrow, 2005). In an attempt to remain cognizant of one's personal influence on the research process, the researcher considers his or her biases, values and background throughout the qualitative research process. More specifically, the researcher examines how these various constructs influence the study design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation of the study (Cresswell, 2013).

In the present study, one component of the process of reflexivity was journal writing. Throughout the design, data collection and data analysis processes, the researcher kept a journal on the influence of her values, biases and assumptions. The co-coder was also encouraged to keep a journal on the influence of her values, biases and assumptions. The process of keeping a journal regarding one's experiences, reactions and biases is a preferred method of reflexivity. Through engaging in this process, the

researcher is able to remain cognizant of his or her personal influence on the research process. As a result, he or she is able to make an informed decision regarding whether to deliberately set aside his or her impact on, or integrate this influence into, the analysis of the data (Morrow, 2005).

A second practice that facilitated reflexivity in the present study was verbal discussions. Hill and colleagues (2005) recommend that all members of the research team discuss their assumptions, biases and reactions with each other throughout the research process. With this recommendation in mind, during the data analysis phase of the present study, the researcher and co-coder engaged in several verbal discussions regarding their potential personal influences on this portion of the research process.

*Personal reflexivity.* The researcher in the present study examined the impact of her personal histories on the dissertation project during the initial phases of research design. Being of Malaysian and Sri Lankan immigrant backgrounds, the cultural background of the researcher influenced the selection of the topic of study. More explicitly, an upbringing strongly influenced by Sri Lankan cultural values exposed the researcher to the ways in which sexuality and sexual violence are viewed in the Sri Lankan community. Moreover, this upbringing increased the researcher's awareness of the cultural silence that is maintained around issues of sexuality and sexual violence in Sri Lankan culture. These experiences, combined with extant literature and theoretical frameworks, informed the development of the interview questions used in the present study.

Given the impact that the cultural background of the researcher had on the research design phase, it was essential that the researcher keep a record of her personal

experiences throughout the research process so as to remain cognizant of her intentional or unintentional personal influence on the data collection and data analysis processes. A fuller description of the researcher's reflexivity throughout the processes of data collection and data analysis is provided in the Reflexivity section of the Discussion.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Overview of the Data**

Analyses of the interview data revealed five broad domains related to cultural and contextual factors that influence attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankan immigrants. These five domains include: sexuality in Sri Lanka, sexual violence in Sri Lanka, cultural socialization in Sri Lanka, attitudes post-migration and current views on sexual violence.

Responses within the first domain included participants' descriptions of the cultural expectations for the sexual behavior of women and men in Sri Lanka. In particular, the importance of the maintenance of virginity prior to marriage and the ways that this expectation varies by gender were discussed. Participants also highlighted the early socialization patterns of girls and boys. In regards to the socialization of girls, some participants remarked that girls were faced with more restrictions than boys. Lastly, participants emphasized the prevalence of silence around the topic of sexuality in Sri Lanka.

The second domain encompassed several contextual factors that impact incidences of and responses to sexual violence in Sri Lanka. Participants identified the existence of community level silence regarding acts of sexual violence as one of these factors. In addition, participants relayed that survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka are often faced with shaming and victim blaming. The impact of these larger, community level factors was revealed in participants' responses on the varying levels of support that are provided to survivors of sexual violence by community and family members. This domain also encompassed several stressors faced by Sri Lankan survivors of sexual

violence. In particular, it was noted that sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka struggle financially and psychologically and are forced to navigate their experiences with sexual violence within a community that lacks the appropriate resources for sexual violence. Lastly, participants delineated the impact of the longstanding civil war on incidences of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

Participants described the many facets of the cultural socialization of Sri Lankan women and men in the third domain. Interviews contained information on the traditional gender role expectations for both women and men in Sri Lanka. The importance of all Sri Lankan children receiving an education was also underscored. Interestingly, a number of participants reported that the high value that is placed on the education of girls is often dismissed in adulthood in favor of an adherence to the traditional gender role of Sri Lankan women. Lastly, the responses of some participants centered on how the larger cultural reverence for the name of the family influences the behaviors of individual Sri Lankans.

Within the fourth domain, participants' post-migration attitudes regarding gender and sexuality were explored. In particular, current beliefs regarding gender roles and interpersonal interactions between women and men surfaced. Participants' current beliefs regarding the sexual behaviors of men and women were also expounded. The large majority of participants embraced the belief that each individual should have the freedom of choice when making decisions about their sexual behavior. Interestingly, while ascribing to this belief, some participants stated that, in their own relationships, their personal values still necessitated the maintenance of virginity prior to marriage.

The final domain reflected participants' views on sexual violence. Included within this broader domain were the participants' current beliefs regarding what constitutes sexual violence as well as their personal responses to learning about instances of sexual violence. Participants also detailed their knowledge on the occurrence of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Notably, participants stressed the importance of sexual violence survivors, both in Sri Lanka and in the Sri Lankan community in the United States, seeking help after experiences with sexual violence. Responses also emphasized the necessity of the provision of support for survivors of sexual violence from multiple sources.

#### **Domain I: Sexuality in Sri Lanka**

This broader domain subsumed three themes. These themes were comprised of responses regarding the cultural expectations for sexuality, the socialization patterns of children and adolescents and the presence of silence around sexuality in Sri Lanka.

**Theme: Cultural expectations regarding sexuality.** Responses included within this theme specified cultural beliefs on the sexual behavior of Sri Lankan women and men.

*Expectations for the sexual behavior of women (n=11).* The main expectation participants identified for the sexual behavior of women was the expectation of virginity prior to marriage. Some participants recounted the cultural messages they received on the importance of a woman's virginity.

“We have it that there's no way you can have any sexual relationship until you are married. That is a no-no. That's our strict rules...Marriage is the first day of your sexual relationship with your partner.”

“It was definitely you do not engage in sexual activity outside of marriage.”

“There it is given that pre-marital sex is not at all approved.”

“...[N]ormally the women [do not] engage in any sexual activity prior to marriage...It’s viewed as completely negative.”

Other participants expanded on the influence of a woman’s virginity on her future marriage potential. Participants indicated that, for women, engaging in sexual behavior prior to marriage led to a negative reputation that influenced her ability to be married later in life.

“Most of the women they (the men) were interested in couldn’t have sex for the reason that most of them (the women) were told that they shouldn’t because they wouldn’t be able to get married because they wouldn’t be virgins.”

“When the marriage proposal comes, no man wanted to marry a girl who has been with somebody. It’s in the Sri Lankans’ nature. And, I have seen. I have friends. They were very clean. But, then boys come behind, and they start dating. And, they start an affair. But, then, when the proposal comes, boys are far away. They won’t talk to them. Or, when the wedding talk comes, they won’t come. Now, the girl is kind of named like that...[I]t’s typical men. They are not accepting any woman that they say sleep with other men. Period. They won’t. And, if you have a man that you dated, or you have an affair, that itself will hurt the woman. In their later relationships, it hurts the women. The only way you portray yourself is, ‘I’m clean. I’m this way.’ From the beginning, that was very clear. We know what they are looking for. We get the message from others.”

“Any woman before marriage having sex is considered...if the society finds out, it’s hard for the woman to get a decent male. Because it’s discouraged by the male’s family, relatives...Over there, if woman has any relationship outside of marriage is viewed very negatively...They [are not] very well-respected.”

“If that happened (sex before marriage), then most of the time the [other] family [in the arranged marriage] will not accept her as part of the family. It’s a bad name. Become a bad name in the community.”

*Expectations for the sexual behavior of men (n=12).* Participants elucidated the cultural messages on the sexual behavior of men. A number of participants agreed that men were held to the same cultural standard of the maintenance of virginity prior to marriage.

“There is pressure (for men to be virgins prior to marriage) by the society. It is fairly well understood and known.”

“It’s the same. Because the girls don’t have...so, the men don’t have the opportunity to...[I]n my generation, as I observed, I don’t think men had premarital sex. The chances are very little. In some ways it equalizes.”

“Sexual behavior, I think women and men will have sex after they get married. That was the concept I have always had in my brain when I was growing up back home.”

Some participants believed that men who chose to engage in sexual behavior prior to marriage were faced with the same negative consequences as women who engaged in this behavior.

“[F]rom what I know, it was expected that men would do the same (be virgins prior to marriage)...[I]f a man did have a relationship outside of a marriage, he was not considered to be of good character.”

“If it’s known by the community, it’s affected. Doesn’t matter it’s a man or woman. When the arranged marriage, parents will say, ‘Oh this guy have some of these issues. Or, had some sexual contact with somebody else.’ Then they always try to find someone else better than him. So, it will affect.”

In contrast, other participants observed leniency in the expectation of a male’s virginity prior to marriage. In particular, these participants disclosed that, while men were expected to maintain their virginites prior to marriage, it was easier for them to overcome a negative reputation associated with not being a virgin at marriage.

“They can go (engage in sexual behavior prior to marriage). But, you think the girl who married him can ask a question, ‘Did you have a relationship like that?’ No. The girl who married to that boy, there’s no way that she’s going to ask such a question to him. They know, all the people knows about it. But, still they marry...I have seen the best of the best girl...get into a relationship. And, they will have an affair for five years. On the fifth year, when the parents started to talk about marriage, where’s the boy? I don’t know anything. The boy’s out. And, the boy’s parents are proposing and with a big dowry. He got married immediately. And, the girl is now named. She’s out. It is very common in Sri Lanka. Men can get away with no name, no stigma. But, the women suffer.”

“That was alright (men engaging in sexual behavior prior to marriage), particularly if nobody knew about it. You could do whatever you liked. There’s

nothing shameful about it. So long as it was with a woman, you could have any kind of sex you liked. That was natural. This is what men do. They want to sow their oats.”

One participant noted that it was the unspoken expectation that men did, in fact, engage in sexual behaviors prior to marriage.

“But, with men, it was more about knowing that they would not be virgins when they got married. There was an unspoken assumption that that wasn’t the first time they were going to have sexual intercourse... There was that assumption.”

**Theme: Culturally appropriate behavior for children and adolescents.** Within this theme, participants summarized the expectations for the behaviors of girls and boys.

***Socialization of girls (n=9).*** The majority of participants endorsed strict treatment of Sri Lankan girls during childhood and adolescence. A number of participants elaborated on the stringent behavioral expectations of girls.

“We had to come in at a certain time. I guess our parents were more protective of girls... Growing up at home, I had a sister also. They were more protective of us. We couldn’t do everything that my brother could do. He could go out with friends and come whenever. But, for us, they were a little bit more protective.”

“I was expected to behave more as what was culturally appropriate for women. Boys had a little more liberties than girls. We still had to follow the cultural decorum... You had to dress very modestly. You were not allowed to speak up loudly and speak your mind.”

“Those days, the way the community is set up, they (girls) were treated differently. They can’t come out. Even back home in Sri Lanka, I remember, the girls don’t even come out and talk. They stay behind the door.”

Some participants said that these restrictions for girls began upon reaching puberty. These responses suggested that the stricter treatment of girls was an attempt to preserve the good reputation of a girl so that her future chances of marriage would not be negatively impacted.

“I had a certain amount of freedom to go out until I was about 12. And, then, ‘No, no. You can’t go everywhere.’”

“When you reached puberty...before you can play and do everything until you reach puberty. Then there will be a stigma. When you are small and you play around with boys and girls it doesn’t matter. But, once you reach puberty, they will look around. There will be restrictions for us. What we can do, what we cannot do.”

“I couldn’t say explicitly, but this idea of protecting daughters, female children, all the way up to marriage is an important role parents play. So, in that regard, I think [girls] are protected much more directly and consciously and openly than boys.”

***Socialization of boys (n=6).*** In comparison to the socialization of girls, fewer participants discussed the ways that Sri Lankan boys are socialized. Some participants mentioned the increased freedoms boys in Sri Lanka have during childhood and adolescence.

“I guess they (boys) were able to do more than we (girls) were. You know, go out and play at odd times.”

“So, [my brothers] got to do many, many things that I didn’t. They got to play outside on the street with all the boys in the neighborhood. And, they got to bike around, and I didn’t.”

This same participant thought that parents were also more encouraging of boys.

“I do think that the general fact that the parents are less critical [of boys]...they just give them a lot more leeway than maybe the girls.”

Two participants described the socialization of boys related to interpersonal interactions.

“I’m just thinking of my brother... [He was taught to] have respect for his family and respect for women. He was told all that.”

“I think the expectations in my childhood were very much British expectations. That stiff upper lip, boys don’t cry...”

***Restriction on dating activities (n=8).*** Responses within this subtheme illuminated the impact of the larger cultural expectation of participation in an arranged marriage. Participants spoke about the different ways that the expectation of an arranged marriage contributed to limited engagement in dating behaviors.

“From my childhood itself, I know what is it women do. Dating is not allowed in our culture. Our parents were very strict about it... Because dating was not allowed, so you have to wait for the parents to find the partner.”

“Because the thing is it’s not an open society. And, a lot of the females are very conservative. And, then most of the marriages are arranged marriages. So, even

when Sri Lankan girls come here to go to school, they are very conservative. And, they stick with the family values and how they grew up back in Sri Lanka.”

“There is no such thing as dating. So, mostly it’s arranged marriage. In some cases, very rare, you see people, see them and like them. They call it love marriage...But, mostly the families oppose that. So, they like to have arranged marriage.”

**Theme: Silence regarding sex and sexuality (n=10).** Interview responses encompassed in this theme centered on the lack of dialogue regarding sex and sexuality in Sri Lanka.

“Nothing. Back home in Sri Lanka, before they get married, they cannot do anything like that. We don’t even talk about it.”

“It wasn’t talked about at all...sexuality in general.”

“Very limited. Not opportunity to learn [about sexual] behaviors or even know more about it. It’s very limited...If somebody says things, we learn. That’s about it...It’s not exposure to them. It’s not openly people speak about it.”

For two participants, their only exposure to discussions regarding sex occurred in school and focused on the biology of sex.

“[We] didn’t even talk about it (sex)...I didn’t know a whole lot about sex before I left (Sri Lanka). I only knew about it when I was in my last year at school. And, they taught biology. I didn’t know much because it wasn’t really talked about, I guess.”

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I mean nothing. And, I came to the U.S. at 18.

Because nobody had ever talked about it. Except in diagrams in my biology class, I think... We didn't talk about sex at all.”

Two participants reflected on how this silence regarding sex and sexuality impacted the behaviors of Sri Lankans.

“I think expression of desire is not something socially accepted. The only people I saw holding hands when I was growing up was my parents... You don't see necessarily affection... I think that we don't consider physical affection healthy. We've repressed that in Sri Lanka... And, people enjoying sex is not what people talk about... So, just having a healthy attitude towards sex, and enjoying sexuality and physical relationships, is taboo.”

“[I]f you go to Colombo, and you go by the beach, there are people hugging and kissing each other on the beach. Sitting and watching the waves. But, what I saw was they are not very openly laying on the beach or sitting on a beach chair and openly doing that. They were under the trees and hiding in a corner, sitting on top of the big rock or something. And, they were doing it in that nobody will see them.”

### **Domain II: Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka**

The second domain included themes comprised of responses regarding community responses to survivors of sexual violence, struggles faced by sexual violence survivors and the influence of the longstanding civil war on incidences of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

**Theme: Community response to sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka.**

Participants' observations of community level silence, stigma and victim blaming related to sexual violence were included in this theme. In addition, this theme encompassed beliefs on the level of support that survivors of sexual violence receive as well as the struggles that they face in Sri Lanka. Participants also explained how the Sri Lankan civil war impacted incidences of sexual violence in the country.

*Community level silence regarding sexual violence (n=14).* All participants acknowledged the pervasiveness of silence regarding sexual violence in Sri Lanka. Five participants indicated that this silence took the form of a lack of concern for incidences of sexual violence among individuals in power.

“It is horrendous, and I think we are way behind as Sri Lanka in responding to violence. I don't know whether you saw the report that came out two years ago around sexual violence, and the highest rank in Sri Lankan government officials in the United States said that, ‘There's no such thing. We love our mothers.’ And, there's no rape. This is what the guy said. ‘We love our mothers. There's no rape.’”

“But, when they (survivors of sexual violence) reach out for help, if you're in Sri Lanka, you won't get the right judgment. They don't reach out for help because all the systems are corrupted. They all looking for money and bribes. They don't get treated well.”

“Fact is, there might be a lot of people who have been raped...And, I think the problem is that those in power simply don't take any notice of it. It doesn't touch them...It really is problematic that so little attention is paid to something that

really impacts somebody for the rest of their life. And, I think it's the power structure."

Other participants reported the presence of a general lack of recognition of the significance of acts of sexual violence across other levels of society.

"No, they won't call it violence. Because I have heard men using, 'They're just taking these Western notions of violence, sexual violence.' And, making, 'It's just all the Westerners putting thoughts into your heads.'"

"I think in the U.S. they have a support structure that wouldn't probably exist in Sri Lanka. I don't even know if they pay a lot of attention to it (sexual violence) in Sri Lanka."

"The media, through the radio or TV, they don't report any of these things in Sri Lanka...So, basically the reporting of sexual violence, I don't think it's being very much covered or even taken as a big issue when I was growing up."

"Not good at all...Nothing is addressed. It's like a regular process there. If somebody get raped, so what...Ignored. It is ignored. It is not bring it up to the light."

Another factor that was posited to influence community level silence regarding sexual violence was the deliberate decision to remain silent subsequent to sexual violence. Several participants stated that survivors of sexual violence make the choice to remain silent about their experiences with sexual violence.

"A lot of the sexual violence they (survivors of sexual violence) just keep it hush-hush."

“I think even in Sri Lanka you don’t talk about it...Unless it’s a very public thing, I don’t think it’s addressed. People don’t talk very much about it...As much as possible, I don’t think people talk about it outside the family.”

One participant conveyed that this decision to remain silent was related to fear. “[S]exual violence is very difficult for a woman to come out and tell anybody. They won’t come out. The fear...It may be still existing, pretty much. But, the women won’t come out...It is silenced...No one is going to talk. Women in Sri Lanka are always very fearful.”

Another participant recounted the implicit influence of the cultural socialization of Sri Lankan women on a woman’s decision to remain silent regarding her experience with sexual violence.

“Especially Sri Lankan women, they don’t want to come out and talk. Here the people have more opportunity to do that. They come out and talk. Reach out community and tell them. Or, come out and go to the court and talk to them. But, Sri Lankan women, they don’t do that usually. That’s a cultural thing.”

Some participants expanded on the influence of family members of survivors of sexual violence on the decision to keep incidences of sexual violence silent. One participant reviewed her knowledge of a family’s response to learning about sexual violence.

“I’m talking about sexual molestation. And, I guess the reaction of everyone was to not talk about it. Keep quiet.”

Two participants noted the tendency of families to attempt to cope with incidences of sexual violence without the assistance of outside parties.

“I think there is sympathy. But, on the other hand, it is not talked about or explicitly discussed...If there is some sort of violation, family deals with it and it goes quiet. It’s not brought out in public forums.”

“They (sexual violence survivors) might not come forward...Unless it is a high profile type of rape or other violence, they might come forward. If not, probably nobody knows other than the immediate family. The immediate family would not inform, so nobody knows. That kind of hidden thing is there.”

One participant pointed out the underlying cultural value that influences the community level silence around incidences of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

“The willingness to face the problem [of sexual violence] head on is not there. I think there is a sort of a general emphasis on tranquility. Tranquility. The society loves peace and tranquil lifestyles of anything. It’s not only this (sexual violence). Anything that creates tension and disharmony is sort of avoided.”

***Stigma related to sexual violence (n=6).*** Participants clarified the community’s view of survivors of sexual violence as well as the disadvantages these individuals may face when their experiences with sexual violence are made public. Some participants recognized the general societal stigma associated with sexual violence.

“I feel that as a society we don’t have the mechanisms that provide women with support to get to that point of actually filing (a legal complaint). And, once she files, there’s a certain isolation...I think it would be much worse, I can imagine, in Sri Lanka because I think it’s connected to a lot more stigma.”

“Sometimes they might be helpless. There is some social shamefulness.”

Two participants elucidated the impact of a woman's experience with sexual violence on her ability to progress within society.

“This information remains intact because the society...the mobility [for sexual violence survivors] is not very high.”

“I think they're probably just ashamed that it's happened to them...I think they're worried about society's view on them...[T]hey might not be able to progress socially or economically or professionally by bringing this up.”

Two participants delineated the impact of societal stigma related to experiences of sexual violence on survivors' silence.

“I've known of older people who have not done anything because of the stigma around them. Just gone through life.”

“Otherwise the community is going to look down upon you...[Y]ou don't want people to know...In Sri Lanka the community kind of looks down on you if they get to know. That's why a lot of people kind of keep it quiet.”

***Victim blaming in Sri Lanka (n=7).*** Half of the participants in the sample agreed that community members blamed survivors of sexual violence for their experiences with sexual violence.

“I think it does taint you. It is obviously either your fault or the flaw of that incident falls on you more as a woman...I think underlying it all is the fundamental issue of blaming the victim. I think it's...everywhere at different levels. So, it could be very subtle or very explicit.”

“If they have a network, and you are married and you separate, they won’t go back and ask what the husband did. They will only blame the woman. ‘She left, she left.’ That’s all they will say.”

“They (survivors of sexual violence) are the ones with the problem. It’s how they dressed, it’s how they behave, it’s the signals that they put out. It’s all their fault. Poor man, what can you expect? He’s got all this testosterone. You tease him like that, naturally he’s going to rape you. It’s that sort of attitude.”

“...[T]he thing I don’t like is once it happens, all the community normally go against the victim rather than the suspect or whoever committed the violence. Most of the time they try to blame the victim...Because the first thing the people blame the victim more than whoever committed the crime...It’s really bad. There is no help. Physically or mentally they don’t get any help. But, they get so much blame.”

***Community and family support for survivors (n=6).*** A number of participants endorsed the belief that survivors of sexual violence receive support subsequent to experiences with sexual violence. Some participants highlighted the willingness of family members to provide support to survivors of sexual violence.

“I think the families will be supportive.”

“I’m sure that they talk to their family members,...and they try to help each other to save the family. Save the person, whoever they can...If some abuse happening within the family, I’m sure the family members will try to help them as much as they can.”

Two participants emphasized the supportive role the elders of a family play in incidences of sexual violence.

“If it was a rape, or something like that,...I think they would be treated as an unfortunate thing to happen...[I]f the woman did speak up, I do feel that they would get the support that they needed. There would [be] a family intervention...The elders of the family talking to the person initiating the violence.”

“Usually elders will come in and provide advice or interfere and try to stop it. But, there are insidious situations where it is not known, it is not that explicit, or not blatant, but it could still happen.”

One participant disclosed that she received support from her family after personally experiencing sexual violence.

“I was molested by my uncle as a kid...And, my family was actually pretty supportive of it when I did tell them...I did tell a bunch of family members. And, a lot of my family members, they didn’t talk about it to the rest of the community. They did try to talk to him and ask him to go to counseling and stuff, but he didn’t of course. But, they did kind of cut him off a little bit. My immediate family did cut him off. And, it did mean a lot to me that they did that.”

Two participants spoke about the level of support survivors of sexual violence receive from the larger community.

“Where the person who is victimized, people will be very sympathetic to you and more helpful and more concerned...I would say they’ll be sympathetic to the survivors.”

“The community is very sympathetic and very helpful, in general. In general, they would be supportive...Very supportive. They don't view as that is her fault.”

*Lack of support from community and family for survivors (n=13).* Though some participants thought that survivors of sexual violence were provided with support from family members and community members in certain situations, almost all participants felt that limited support is available for survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka. The majority of participants believed that the interpersonal interactions of survivors of sexual violence lack emotional or physical support.

“Because family members could tend to say, ‘Just go along with it, and don't provoke him,’ or whatever...Just don't rock the boat.”

“...[I]f people (survivors of sexual violence) are living, those people probably treated badly...I guess people avoid them...Community will put the woman down...If something happened to a lady, she won't go into the community and talk to them because she knows they will make her feel bad and put her down.”

“If they go public they are probably ostracized. I don't think they are treated well. And, I say that from what people have told me about what things have gone on over there.”

“They're raped. Physically affected...The community ignore them...No one is taking care of. They look down by community. They lost their whole life.”

Some participants reflected on the barriers to seeking justice through the legal system for experiences of sexual violence. Three participants discussed a general lack of emotional support for survivors during the process of prosecution.

“Many times, they don’t want to go to the court because of the questions they ask. The sexual violence victim will never get the chance to go to court because the girl doesn’t want to go to the court, in front of everybody answering those questions. When I was there, real cases, they went in and it was very sad. No support.”

“...[S]ome women might choose not to pursue the legal tools because they think it’s hard to convince the legal system...[S]ome women don’t like to go through, because when you go to prove, witness and everything, you have to relive the whole experience again...They don’t want to go through it. They say, ‘Just forget about it. I’m fine. I’m ok.’ And, just move on. So, they think going there is more disadvantage when already in a bad situation. That might motivate them not to seek legal help.”

“The struggle is bringing the victim to the court and making them open to speak about the experience. And, making them comfortable talking about it. And, making the right decisions. But, the government in Sri Lanka is a corrupt government. So, the judge and the lawyers and the religion become a big issue there...The judgment or the evidence all could be tainted because if the person is from the majority and the victim is the minority.”

**Theme: Struggles faced by sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka.**

Participants identified a number of struggles that survivors of sexual violence endure in Sri Lanka. In particular, responses within this theme centered on financial stressors subsequent to experiences of sexual violence, the impact of experiences of sexual violence on the marriage potential of a survivor, the psychological consequences

associated with experiences of sexual violence, the pressure to remain silent regarding experiences with sexual violence as well as the lack of resources available for sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka.

*Experiences of financial difficulties after incidences of sexual violence (n=6).* A number of participants described the financial stressors faced by survivors of sexual violence. These financial stressors influence some survivors' decisions to remain in abusive relationships.

“There were women who would come to our shelter pretty regularly, but they often went back to their husbands. Because they are so tied in...And, they just needed the extra money...Also, where is your husband? If you can't afford to live in two separate houses, there's that problem too. You can only afford to live in the same house. And, so that was a reality for couples too.”

“There are always situations...where you are trapped in a certain situation, and you don't have a choice. And, you sort of try to trade-off between the economic needs and the level of abuse you are willing to take.”

Some women experience sexual violence at the hands of their employer. In these instances, survivors of sexual violence frequently opt to remain in these employment settings due to financial needs.

“I think what we need would be very different for former cadres who are very capable and confident about leading their lives and knowing exactly what they want [financially]. And, they have no access to it unless they continue to have sex with the rapist (the employer).”

*Negative impact on marriage potential (n=6).* Both female and male participants explicitly acknowledged the negative impact of experiences of sexual violence on a woman's marriage potential.

“If they see one woman who was raped, still it is very difficult for her to get a marriage partner. It will be very difficult, a big trauma for her. It's very difficult to find a husband...Unless they have money or something. If they have money, marriage will happen for the girl. Otherwise, they have no future for them.”

“Their future is affected. In the community, there is this thing that people can't have these type of things (experiences with sexual violence) before they get married. So, the community expectation is they should have a situation like that. Then they have a tough time to get married. No one want to marry her.”

“Sometimes what people does is they move somewhere else. Most of the time, what happens is they can't live in that community. So, they move to some other place where they live [for marriage purposes].”

One participant noted that, though a woman's marriage potential may be negatively impacted subsequent to experiences with sexual violence, these experiences would not preclude her from ultimately finding marriage.

“Say the woman didn't experience sexual violence, men try to marry the woman who hasn't experienced the violence. But, my understanding is that most of them always have marriage. Because, sometimes she marries a widower or a man that probably wouldn't be able to marry her as, whatever the society thinks as, a successful man. In terms of economically. But, eventually she will marry.”

*Acceptance of violence within a marriage to preserve family honor (n=5).*

Included within this theme were responses related to acquiescence to acts of sexual violence within the context of marriage. Participants relayed that Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence may opt to remain in abusive relationships in an attempt to preserve the family name through ensuring the maintenance of the unity of the family.

“When children are involved, trying to keep the family together. [That] would probably be the [reason] they may not say anything or get out of it. Or, do anything about it.”

“I think you are made to live with it, because of the culture...Let’s say the person has kids, they would be worried about how my children are now going to be affected by what’s going on, and I don’t want that to happen to them.”

Other participants explained that many times family and community members encourage survivors of sexual violence to preserve the family unit by remaining in an abusive marriage.

“...[I]f you live in a more traditional community, you are expected to stay married to your husband no matter what. Or, you will be judged if you leave your husband. So, then you have to live with ongoing violence or threats of violence everyday...[T]here’s a difference between considering it unacceptable and bad and then considering it bad enough to leave your husband.”

“Because dating was not allowed, so you have to wait for the parents to find the partner. And, when the parents find the partner, if that goes wrong, you still have to stay. There’s no choice...They (survivors of sexual violence) just learn to live with it...But, the initial approach, if the girl goes and tells the parents, parents will

approach...But, they won't encourage divorce or separation. And, mainly, they will say to the girl, 'You learn to live with it. You have to bend. You have to do.'"

***Psychological consequences (n=8).*** A number of participants elaborated on their beliefs regarding the psychological consequences of experiences of sexual violence. Specifically, the majority of participants thought that survivors of sexual violence would likely experience increased depression and shame or decreased self-worth subsequent to experiences of sexual violence.

"Their self-worth is going to be the first thing that goes...So, the mental struggle of saying to themselves that, 'No, this can be different,' would be the first thing, I would think that they would go through...[They will] not [have] the inner empathy to see themselves as blameless or worthy of something else."

"Embarrassment, ability to speak about it. There instantly is psychological impact. A devastating impact."

"It's much harder for them to deal with. They could go into depression, they could have all kinds of other problems related to that."

The potential behavioral outcome of the psychological consequences associated with experiences of sexual violence was explicated by one participant.

"Their whole life is gone. Future is done. There is no way they get out of it and respected by the community. If something happen to these ladies like that, so many of them have committed suicide."

***Lack of professional and community resources in Sri Lanka (n=13).*** Nearly all participants recognized the limited availability of community resources for survivors

subsequent to experiences with sexual violence. In particular, several participants recounted the lack of mental health services available to survivors of sexual violence.

“Survivors of sexual violence there have no real recourse. There is no counseling, there’s no treatment. It’s not treated like something you can recover from.”

“So, if they go to a hospital, they might be treated for it from a physical injury standpoint. I have never known anyone, or had anyone tell me that, these things are addressed from a mental or emotional standpoint, how do you get them back into life to be normal.”

“They cannot seek therapy, who can give psychiatric help, or psychologist or anything like that. Those are the holes in the system that doesn’t exist in Sri Lanka.”

Other participants pointed out the lack of legal support for survivors subsequent to experiences of sexual violence.

“Say any kind of abuse happening, and you don’t want the man to come to the house. Here they put restraining orders, and they cannot come to the house around this neighborhood. From the house they cannot come within a certain time, so they have restraining orders. But, there even if they put the restraining order, they don’t carry that. They don’t keep track of it. It doesn’t work that way in Sri Lanka.”

“I think they should make it explicit and easy for people to apply. You should have female women in the police force who are trained to take complaints...So, if the society wants to mitigate this problem, then make it easy for people to

complain...All of those are...tools we have here. And, none of that is there to be witness to anything.”

“And, then even the police and the other treatment, there is nothing like that there. There is no help.”

***Pressure to remain silent about sexual violence outside of marriage to preserve the family name (n=6).*** Responses in this subtheme revealed the impact of the reverence for the family name in Sri Lanka on the decision to remain silent regarding experiences with sexual violence. In some situations, family members strongly encouraged survivors of sexual violence to remain silent about their experiences with sexual violence outside of the context of marriage so as maintain the family name.

“I [told her], ‘Their only intention is that their daughter gets married. And, that will be their primary motivation as their girls grow up.’ So, if there is anything that comes as a barrier for that, they are going to sweep it under the carpet.”

“If something happen, sexual assault, or something happen, then the woman doesn’t come up and tell because they’re afraid. Most of the time, the family don’t want to tell outside their family because they are really scared about what the other people are going to tell.”

One participant spoke about the relationship between changes in family honor subsequent to sexual violence and one’s personal sense of shame.

“They might feel ashamed or thinking of family honor...They feel that, if they were raped, they think that that’s something that shouldn’t be shared.”

**Theme: The impact of war on incidences of sexual violence in Sri Lanka (n=14).** All participants in the sample agreed that the Sri Lankan civil war had some

impact on the incidence of sexual violence in the country. The majority of the participants believed that sexual violence increased as a result of the civil war.

“I think anytime there is a war, it justifies sexual violence. Wars always justify. And, Sri Lanka is no exception. When there’s war, women’s bodies become battlegrounds...And, during war it’s justified because there’s no order. When there’s that much chaos, and those in power and those who control that chaos have complete access to vulnerable citizens. Sri Lanka has proven that.”

“If I read the news, absolutely [sexual violence has increased]...It’s made it worse for them (women). They’re probably taken advantage of when there is no civil structure in society. I can’t believe it’s safe for them to just go out and do things you could do here.”

“It’s affected really bad. There is lawlessness. So, most of the time there is no law. So, lot of sexual violence happen when the war happening.”

Two participants delineated the ways that war-related sexual violence has been ignored.

“The government went and killed and raped so many people at the end of this war, 2009. And, the international world is still debating. What is the right thing to do? Look at all this evidence given in video forms and photograph forms...Videos and photos came implicating the military doing all of this...This kind of...explicit proofs are not being taken seriously by neither government nor international forums.”

“Soldiers are different. And, their behavior is different. Places where they are supposed to protect the women and children, but they take the opportunity to

abuse them... There is no protection. Law don't protect, government won't protect. It's like an open book for them. They do whatever they want with the people."

### **Domain III: Cultural Socialization in Sri Lanka**

Domain III encompasses three themes: the value of education, gender role expectations and the reverence for the family. Within these themes, participants elucidated the high value that is placed on the education of all children and the explicit gender role expectations for women and men in Sri Lanka. Participants also emphasized the level of respect for the family that exists in Sri Lanka.

**Theme: High value on education for boys and girls (n=12).** Nearly all of the participants underscored the significance that is placed on the education of girls and boys. All children in Sri Lanka are strongly encouraged to obtain an education.

"In general, everyone had to go to school and educate themselves and go to university. That was a non-negotiable where I came from."

"When I was growing up, it was expected they (girls) would pursue a degree. Unless there were extenuating circumstances where it was needed in the family."

"Everybody has to go to school and get a higher education and be independent and do good for the family and the society."

One participant reported that, while education was highly valued for all children, some individuals did not have the opportunity to utilize the degree they earned. This concept is explored more in the subtheme Gender Role Expectations for Women.

"Certainly education was very, very highly emphasized for girls and for boys.

Very highly emphasized for both. What they did after education was something

different. So, there might have been [women] who were graduates who could have gone on to do teaching, but that doesn't mean that they did teaching. If they were married, they were housewives.”

**Theme: Gender role expectations.** This theme was comprised of responses regarding the expectations for the behavior of women and men in Sri Lanka.

*Gender role expectations of women (n=14).* All participants were able to summarize the specific social and behavioral expectations for Sri Lankan women. Half of the participants indicated that the expectations for Sri Lankan women mainly centered on taking care of the home and nurturing the family.

“Growing up in Sri Lanka,...everyone I knew as far as women, mostly, were housewives. Food, food to the table, more or less all of the housework. I remember I was asked to sweep the house. My brothers were not.”

“Women were considered more to be the nurturer. That's how I grew up. And, that's what my surrounding was and what I saw most of my growing up in Sri Lanka.”

“Women expected to stay home, take care of kids, cook...looking after like a housewife. ...You can say mostly expected to stay home.”

Some participants highlighted the primacy of a woman's responsibilities in the home. In particular, these individuals stated that, though education was highly valued for both boys and girls, for women, the responsibilities associated with taking care of the home took precedence over the pursuance of the benefits associated with a higher level of education, such as a career.

“Women, in my family, were certainly expected to get educated and possibly hold jobs. But, never to the point that it would compromise your family or your husband’s welfare. So, definitely, you would have to put your husband’s welfare and your family’s welfare before your own, in terms of your ability to fully execute your job successfully...[If] you can squeeze in some work and a career, that’s great. But, that’s only a secondary role. Women...the housework, took care of the children, did all the cooking, all the cleaning.”

“It was that the women should have a good education so they bring up the children well and certainly could be professionals. But, definitely be subservient to their role as wife and mother. No question about that in my mind.”

Participants also identified the cultural behavioral expectations for women.

“I think most women, especially in Sri Lanka, they were not overly spoken. Even in the community, they were pretty well-behaved...[I]n the community, we were taught to be respectful to everybody.”

“Even though, in general, women are much subdued and polite than men in public settings...[G]enerally, women tend to be a lot more polite in their comments in the presence of, say, outside person...[I]n the presence of outside companies, women tend to be a lot more supportive of, say, entertaining a guest than being forceful about their opinion...As a general expectation, politeness is more valued than an overly assertive role.”

Lastly, a number of participants described the expectation of the subservience of women to men in Sri Lanka.

“It’s a male-dominant community. Women had multiple roles...The Tamil community is woman is not equal to men. Absolutely, it is not equal to men. Men always first-rate, woman is the second.”

“There is clearly a first-class, second-class citizenship relationship. Women always take a backseat role...[T]he normal relationship is very much of being subservient to the husband...There isn’t a problem with women going out and working. There are doctors, there are lawyers, all that kind of stuff. But, in their relations to men, they do seem to have a subservient position in Sri Lanka...[I]f a man comes into the room, you shut up because he is the boss and he leads the conversation. There are all kinds of little, little things where you see women deferring to men.”

“Women depend on men totally in the Tamil ethnicity in Sri Lanka...Basically, of course, all of us were given an equal opportunity to go to school and learn. They are not restricted, they are not being told they cannot lead the family, they cannot be a breadwinner or anything like that. But, usually, the tendency is they stand behind and they let the men to lead a role in the family.”

***Gender role expectations of men (n=12).*** The large majority of participants also outlined social and behavioral expectations for Sri Lankan men. Interestingly, all of the expectations for men were related to their role within the family. In particular, Sri Lankan men are expected to financially provide for the family and serve as the leader of the family.

“They were last say in discipline, in terms of the last say in who gets to do what. That was always there. Work, earning, the breadwinner.”

“[T]heir role was primarily as a breadwinner and [to have] successful careers and just family men, basically. Took care of their families. That was essentially the roles envisioned for the men.”

“Men basically had more to do as the provider... The men provided and mom took care of the home. And, dad provided.”

“Normally, men has to earn money. He has to be the breadwinner... That is expected, and men have to do it. Regardless of the amount of money they bring, they have to do something. They cannot just sit around at home.”

“Most of the time, they look men to do a lot of things. He is the head of the family... Men go out and earn... Mostly the men are wage earners and the head of house.”

**Theme: Reverence for the family (n=4).** This theme included responses that illuminated the high level of respect that is held for the family in Sri Lankan culture. The primacy of the family unit is present in many domains of life.

“Because for us, parents are everything. Yes, we have a very protective environment, but they are there for us for everything. They arrange the marriage and everything. So, we have no responsibility. Even the wedding arrangement, everything they did it.”

“It is very much centered on the family. I can only see the world through the family experience where there is a lot of respect for each other.”

The expectation of participation in an arranged marriage is related to the high reverence for the family in Sri Lanka.

“...[W]hen it comes to marriage, parents have a burden. If you have a girl in the family, they have a burden...[I]f you are not married, also not good for the parents...If you have a child who is a girl and is not married, it’s really sad for the parents.”

“When there is that kind of marriage (love marriage), an exception to the arranged marriage, then the families doesn’t like. Sometimes they go on their own and they need to marry alone. So, they don’t accept that marriage. That happens, doesn’t matter woman or man. If you don’t accept the arranged marriage, you are not part of the family then.”

Two participants made note of the large impact an individual’s behaviors can have on the name of the family in Sri Lanka.

“If we don’t follow their customs, their traditions, then we are not honoring the parents. And, the parents, whatever good things we do, they were welcomed in the community. My parents were welcomed because of what we did.”

“...[L]et’s say a woman has an extramarital affair with another man. And, let’s say she has a daughter. Another respected family would not allow their son to marry the daughter because her mother has this kind of behavior. So, it has some social consequences there.”

#### **Domain IV: Attitudes Post-Migration**

This domain subsumed participants’ current views on gender roles, interactions between genders and changes in attitudes regarding gender roles and gender interactions since migration. In addition, participants’ current beliefs about sexual behavior were included in this domain.

**Theme: Current views on gender.** This theme incorporated participants' current views on the social and behavioral expectations of women and men as well as their perceptions on whether these views have changed since migration.

*Gender roles (n=14).* The responses within this subtheme reflected participants' beliefs about the roles of women and men both inside and outside of the home. A number of participants adhered to the belief that there should be equality and flexibility in the roles that women and men play in the home.

“Now I feel there shouldn't be that such roles (in the home). They should be whatever one can do.”

“It should be equal. They should share the workload. And, both go to work, come home. It should be mutual understanding, help each other and the life goes smooth. Otherwise, one person gets the whole stress. It leads to misunderstandings and problems. It will be happy life if we all understand each other and understand each other's weakness. And, help each other and pull it through.”

“My personal view is whoever is there, whatever is needed. I never define myself to my wife has to do certain things...I think we both are capable of doing everything equally. Sometimes, some of the skills she is better...In terms of essential needs, I don't ask her anything, she doesn't ask me anything. Whoever is there.”

Other responses focused on the idea that women and men should be provided with equal opportunities outside of the home.

“I think women should work, and men should work [outside of the home].”

“In general, I wish the women also can play an equal role in the outside affairs.”

“These customs are very old customs and need to be changed to give equal rights to everybody and treat everybody the same.”

“They (women) should have equal opportunity like everybody else...[T]hey have to have equal rights to everyone, for any views. Anything. Education, job opportunities, political involvement, everything have to be equal opportunity.”

“I think women should be equal, in my opinion. They should have the same, anything and everything. And, they should have at least the opportunities to become a successful career woman.”

*Interactions between genders (n=14).* Participants’ responses within this subtheme detailed their beliefs on how women and men should behave in interpersonal interactions. In particular, participants discussed their views on how individuals should approach interactions with the individuals of the same gender as well as interactions with individuals of a different gender. Eight participants endorsed the belief that there should not be a difference in interactions between individuals of different genders.

“They should give respect first. Respect each other, respect each other’s feelings. That’s the most important thing...It’s humans, right? It doesn’t matter it’s man or woman, I feel that they all have to respect each other...I don’t think it’s a men-women difference. As a human being we should respect everybody in the same way.”

“I think one should express their mind no matter what gender. I don’t think it should be different if it is a man or a woman...And, I don’t have a set definition

of how one should behave. It is always good for people to speak their mind. So, you don't have to be in an oppressive mode.”

“I don't see any difference between the men and the women as far as the behavior. It all has to be same. It's all human being. That's what I feel.”

“What is the difference if you are a woman interacting with a woman or a woman with a man? Behave the same. It doesn't matter woman or man, your relationship interaction should be the same.”

Alternatively, a number of female participants revealed that there are differences in interpersonal interactions between women and men that are not present in interpersonal interactions between women. Two female participants attributed these differences to a general concern regarding physical safety.

“I have very mixed feelings about that...I have two daughters. So, I want them to be safe...[B]e careful in interactions (with men).”

“Of course, being a woman and raising two girls, safety is a question. No matter where I am in the world. If there are men, and I don't know them, how I engage with them is very different. I think there's a certain cautiousness if I don't know them.”

One woman felt the need to be less direct in her interpersonal interactions with men.

“If they're still wrong, the woman has to find other ways. I guess men don't want their egos to be hurt. So, we just have to phrase it a different way...So, saying, 'Hey, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it should be done this way.' But, we know for

sure that the guy is wrong. I'm just talking from experience. So, eventually, they will say, 'Oh yeah. I made a mistake.' Rather than saying, 'Hey, you're wrong.'”

Another female participant said that her interpretation of behaviors in interpersonal interactions changes when interacting with men.

“I don't like [men] looking at my eyes and talking. I'm still having difficulties...A different kind of look, I can recognize their view. When they do it, then I really get irritable. [W]omen I don't care...In our society, that means you're not really respecting the person. We grew up this way. If you look at the eyes when talking to them, you are not respecting them.”

One participant's belief that behavioral differences should exist in interactions between women and men was related to her status as a married woman.

“I think that as a married woman, I'm very friendly. You treat them like equals in most respects...Nothing different from the way you'd interact with women in terms of how you converse on whatever topic and whatnot. [But,] as a married women...you have some boundaries with men that you have less [so with women]. Which is normal.”

***Changes in attitudes since migration (n=6).*** A number of participants expressed that their current views on gender roles and interactions between genders changed subsequent to their migration to the United States.

“It shaped me after immigration. Because, when I was there, it's very difficult when you're in the environment, thinking outside the environment. It can be, but it's not normal. So, it shaped me after my immigration...When I saw these things

here I thought, 'Yes, this is fair.'...And, it really shaped me when I was immigrated here.”

“My views have changed after being here so long...I came to these views after being in U.S. for so long and understanding how things are done here...Men and women are treated equal here. So, those are the things that lead you to change your views, how things should be done in our culture too.”

“We learn lots of things after we move here. Humanity basis, equal rights, opportunities, all those things we learn...I wouldn't have a chance to learn about all these things that we have here in U.S. that we know how much we miss there...I have a more exposure here than there. Here I learned lots of things along the way than if I stayed there. I would have opportunities to see what is the real thing is going on.”

**Theme: Current views on sexuality.** This theme was comprised of participants' current attitudes regarding sexual behavior. Within this theme, some participants supported freedom of sexual choice while others maintained that sexual behavior should only occur within the context of a committed relationship.

***Freedom of sexual choice (n=12).*** Almost all of the participants believed that individuals should be able to make their own decisions regarding engagement in sexual behaviors. In particular, for all responses included in this subtheme, participants agreed that both women and men should be able to freely engage in sexual behaviors.

“Women own their bodies and they need to use their bodies respectfully for themselves first to achieve pleasure, achieve what they want in life. I think sexual health is vital for women. And, the more comfortable we are in our being, which

includes sexual, psychological and physical, the stronger we are and better we are as human beings...I think it's the same [for men].”

“If they (women) are comfortable doing it, they should...I don't think there should be any difference between a man and a woman in that sense. If a woman is comfortable pursuing a sexual relationship, or initiating it, or wanting to do it, then that should be it.”

“I think with both men and women there are different levels of sexual energy. And, it should be according to that. I think it's pathetic that men have this idea that men enjoy sex and women are supposed to service them. It's another part of the subjugation of women...It's like it should be that they are free to express themselves in ways that feel natural to them.”

Within this dialogue, some participants emphasized the importance of the presence of an understanding of, and respect for, each partner's preferences within a sexual relationship.

“I would say that if they did have a partner, then they should figure out what their partner and them are comfortable with. So, once you are in a partnership, you got to, to some extent, put importance on that partnership and decide what's acceptable to that partnership. In terms of sexual behavior.”

“It all depends on the partner. As long as each other respect their feelings, it should be ok ...I think it should be mutual. Man or woman, it should be mutual understanding.”

“I don’t think there should be any restriction (on an individual’s sexual behavior). As they please. That’s my view. I don’t want to impose certain...as long as they have both agree.”

Other participants underscored the necessity of remaining cognizant of the consequences associated with engaging in sexual behavior outside of the context of marriage.

“I think both genders should have equal freedom to do what they want to do. Of course, the burden is always on the woman from a sexual standpoint. That mistakes happen and they have to bear the brunt of pregnancy and things like that. So, in that regard, I think there is an extra responsibility on women than men... You have to have a position on all these value systems and decide how you want to have your sexual relationships.”

“And, in a private setting, I feel like they can behave anyway they want if it doesn’t affect somebody else... My only concern would be, the same thing for men, I think it’s a question of a health issue today, to me. So, my view isn’t more of whether you should do it or not. It’s more of, I think you can contract a lot of problems from doing it. Disease, I’m talking about... Outside of that, I do believe that sticking to one person as much as possible, if there are no problems, would be better for you. But, if they want to be promiscuous, sure. I have no problem with it.”

“People can do whatever they want [in regards to sexual behavior]. It’s everybody’s decision... [P]eople decide what’s good and whatever is bad and whether they want to make mistakes in their life... Everybody has to be careful

about what they do because it could damage your career. It could do a lot of harm for you. So, when you become successful in your life, you have to be more careful.”

***Commitment as necessary for sexual activity (n=7).*** While the majority of the participants approved of an individual’s autonomy in making decisions regarding engaging in sexual behaviors, several participants’ personal values dictated that some type of commitment must be present prior to engaging in a sexual relationship. For four participants, the only acceptable form of commitment was marriage.

“I am not favoring a sexual relationship unless you are determined to have a life... Before marriage you have a sexual relationship, and yes you can have another partner and have a sexual relationship. That’s kind of an icky feeling for me.”

“I think they should be married.”

“I think conservative the sexual behavior...In my opinion, you (both women and men) need to wait until you find a person that you’re going to marry. And, then wait until the marriage. It’s always after marriage the sexual contact or relationship happens.”

Two participants thought that sexual behavior outside of the context of marriage was appropriate as long as there was some form of commitment between the two individuals.

“My personal belief is that any sexual behavior or activity should be when you have a lot more...commitment that, you know, you really like each other. That’s not a commitment for marriage or commitment for life. That you want to go to the

next step. That there is mutual liking and mutual respect...[But,] not necessarily marriage, no.”

“I don’t think promiscuity is to be encouraged. But, if a person is in a relationship, and they feel comfortable, it’s up to them. I don’t think you should be hopping from bed to bed...Outside of marriage, I personally don’t believe in having sexual relationships like changing hats.”

### **Domain V: Current Views on Sexual Violence**

The final theme incorporated participants’ opinions on what constitutes an act of sexual violence, their personal feelings about incidences of sexual violence as well as their insights into sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Participants also spoke about their beliefs regarding how incidences of sexual violence should be addressed. Lastly, participants highlighted the benefits associated with the large range of resources available to sexual violence survivors in the United States.

**Theme: Definition of sexual violence (n=14).** Each participant in the study’s sample explicated his or her personal definition of sexual violence. Three participants suggested that sexual violence is a purely physical act.

“I think hitting, I mean, men hitting women...And, rape. Yes, that’s sexual violence.”

“I would somebody get raped, somebody get abused, somebody get beaten. Something like that I would say is a violence.”

“Sexual violence is basically the physically stronger person dominating a physically weaker person through violent means.”

Other participants noted that the lack of consent designates an act as sexual violence.

“Any sexually coerced act. Any non-consensual sexual act I would consider sexual violence. I’m prepared to accept that there are degrees of violence. But, I’d put them all in the category of sexual violence. Anything that is forced on one person.”

“An act that was committed against each other that one was not in consent with. I would consider that sexual violence.”

“If it is not consensual at any point then it is sexual violence.”

“Against your willingness...If I don’t like it, then it’s not good.”

Notably, a number of participants indicated that sexual violence could also occur on a psychological level.

“I would describe it as multiple things. Speech that I would say uses sexual words with the intention of them being derogatory words...I think using words that are not relevant, that are not in their exact meaning, but they have sexual connotations. Withholding sex for an argument, whatever it is. Not only rape, but demanding sex from spouses. Anything with that where yes or no could result from violence, and words that are hurtful. Words, definitely.”

“Violence that a woman faces that is forced upon her that has a sexual impact. It’s not purely physical, but it affects her reproductive system and her ability to enjoy and give pleasure to herself after the violence has occurred. If it has impacted her negatively, that is sexual violence...It’s physical, sexual, psychological.”

“...[A]nything that causes pain, physical, emotional or spiritual, to another person is how I would define violence. And, so if your sexual behavior is causing any of those things, at the point that somebody says no, if you don't respect that, if you're in a sexual relationship with somebody and you beat them up, if you're in a sexual relationship with somebody and you demean them as a human being, always criticizing them or always rubbishing what they do, to me that's violence. And, it can take place at a spiritual, emotional or a physical level.”

“If you try to force somebody, if they are not agreeing with you, doesn't matter if you're married or your girlfriend or someone else, even if you're using some word to sexually abuse somebody, that's sexual violence...Any act, violence or doing verbally. It should be sexual violence.”

**Theme: Response to learning about sexual violence.** Within this theme, participants elucidated their previous responses to incidences of sexual violence and their current attitudes towards sexual violence.

*Previous response to learning about sexual violence (n=9).* Several participants recounted the previous reactions they have had when learning about, or experiencing, incidences of sexual violence. Four participants personally knew someone who had experienced sexual violence. Within this group of participants, one female was a survivor of verbal sexual violence, and one female was a survivor of physical sexual violence. The remainder of the participants described their previous responses to learning about acts of sexual violence from interpersonal interactions or the media. The majority of participants experienced feelings of sadness, anger or helplessness when they first learned about occurrences of sexual violence.

“Anger, I think. Mostly anger and, ‘How dare you.’” (Survivor of verbal sexual violence)

“The only thing we can say is we are sad and crying. That’s all we can do. What else can I do? I can’t do anything. There is no reporting, or nothing.”

“Sadness, disbelief.” (Knows someone who experienced sexual violence)

“I feel sad for them.” (Knows someone who experienced sexual violence)

“I was mad. How could they do that? Like I said, these things happen and they are mentally affected, physically affected. Their future is affected.”

“It’s happening. Always make me sad about things.”

“It’s a kind of anger. The problem with people in power is that they don’t attend to things that don’t touch them. And that really pisses me off. It’s like, ‘Where the hell is your head? Get it out of your ass.’”

***Current feelings about incidences of sexual violence (n=11).*** Within this subtheme, participants elaborated on how their responses to acts of sexual violence have changed over time. For a large portion of participants, their responses to sexual violence have not changed with time.

“I feel the same way. I feel those women should not have been sexually assaulted or anything like that. It’s not fair...I feel that they should respect the women.”

“It should not be allowed. It should be eradicated...I think it’s the wrong thing to do. And, if you can help to mitigate it, one should...I still would feel bad, if that’s the case...Any kind of injustice is bad...[S]o long as it remains an injustice, it is a wrong thing to have happen.”

“Every day these cases are going on. What we could do? We could read and worry about them, cry for them. And, that’s about it. Our hands are tied.”

“Yes, I still have sadness. And, maybe more sad because I heard lot of stories, when here, about the war. And, there’s lot of sexual assault and rape and all kinds of things, killing. There’s lot of people affected, but there’s not consequence for that. Whoever did that, now free.”

The reactions of two participants to acts of sexual violence have changed with time. Notably, both of these participants knew someone who had experienced sexual violence.

“I have learned to put that as it’s nothing to do with me. It’s something to do with the other person. They are upset about something, so it’s coming out in terms of word. My anger is not as intense as it used to be.” (Survivor of verbal sexual violence)

“I think it would be changed to anger at this point...I think as you grow older, you grow stronger. And, you feel you can take on more things. You can stand up to a lot of things... If I heard about it now, I would have more resources to do something about it, I feel. Or, to take a different action.” (Knows someone who experienced sexual violence)

**Theme: Sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.** A number of participants delineated their beliefs regarding the occurrence of, and responses to, acts of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States. A large percentage of the participants were unfamiliar with the broader Sri Lankan community in

the United States, and, therefore, could only make assumptions about sexual violence within this community.

*Silence around incidences of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States (n=8).* Over half of the participants presumed that sexual violence is not openly discussed in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

“I think because people are not talking about it... You might confide in your family or your good friend or something. But, I don't think you're going to publicly say, 'Hey, I got sexually violated.'”

“I don't think they talk about it (sexual violence) at all.”

“Probably, they have learned to adjust to this type of situation here than being in Sri Lanka. So, I would think they would pretend nothing happened and try to have a normal relationship. That's my guess... I would think that if there is anything like this they would try to resolve it without bringing it public.”

“It's going to be the same sort of thing [in the United States]. It's shameful, and they've got to keep it hidden. That's my expectation... They probably just wouldn't talk about it.”

One participant felt that, despite the community level silence, members of the Sri Lankan community were reaching out to the appropriate resources for help subsequent to experiences with sexual violence.

“I think people are addressing it, but they're not doing it publicly. Maybe they're doing it privately, calling whoever they need to for help... Professionals. Calling the police for help. [T]hey're reaching out to the proper people.”

*Sexual violence is not occurring that frequently in the Sri Lankan community in the United States (n=5).* Five participants reflected on their interactions with members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States and concluded that sexual violence does not frequently occur, or occur at all, within this community.

“Not that common. It’s rare. I won’t say they don’t have it, but it’s rare. Not much compared to [the rest of] America...Only our [Sri Lankan] community now, I’m not thinking outside of our community. I haven’t heard much about abuse like that.”

“The few friends I have, we rarely talk about if there is any sexual violence. Many of them are married, and they have kids. I don’t get the sense that they’re dealing with it.”

“When I look at it the outside, I don’t see that something’s happening. So, maybe people don’t tell. I don’t know. And, the other thing, it’s a not big community. There’s a very small number of families here. We do talk to each other, but still I never heard any of these.”

*Survivors of sexual violence receive support from the Sri Lankan community in the United States (n=4).* Four participants postulated that survivors of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States would be provided with support from their family members or community members subsequent to experiences of sexual violence.

“I believe that there are very few instances of that in the Sri Lankan community...But, I do feel if there was something, they will be very supportive of

each other...I know it does, I know it has. It's not prevalent or something that you hear about. It might be one in a few hundred.”

“I think, overall, the society seems to absorb the victims (in the Sri Lankan community in the United States) in a way that they can continue with their life without feeling stigmatized...[T]here are a few who are willing to come out [and] are not penalized or not ostracized from the society as a whole.”

“Here I think the people want to help them. Because it's different here once you come to this country. You learn things, opportunities, communication wise, well-advanced. So, people know things. And, they know what to do, how to help them.”

**Theme: Attitudes about responses to sexual violence.** This theme expands on participants' belief that survivors of sexual violence should seek help. In addition, within this theme, participants emphasized the need for support for survivors of sexual violence across multiple levels and an increased awareness of sexual violence.

*Sexual violence survivors should seek help (n=13).* Nearly all of the participants in the present study believed that Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence should seek support regardless of their location. Participants recommended that sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka seek support from family members, friends and professional resources.

“I personally think that nobody should have to put up with any sexual violence. In an ideal world, they should be able to talk to their parents if it's before marriage. And, they should be able to have a mediated solution or leave their husband if it's after marriage.”

“They should confide in their family. Because at least they would get that support. And, maybe, if they have very close friends.”

“I would say they should seek help as much as legal, as medical, counseling, psychological help, physical help or the legal help and the support from the family members. Regardless of whether here or there, they should seek help as much as available.”

“They need to come out. And, they seek help. They need to seek help from authority and also the community.”

Some participants encouraged sexual violence survivors to take an active role in ensuring that they are being treated fairly within the community in Sri Lanka.

“If there is an opportunity, they should speak up about it so that people around them know that it’s not ok...Nobody wants to listen to women talking about sexual violence, I guess. If there is a forum for them to talk, they should talk about it.”

“Women should fight for their rights and stand up for themselves...They have to speak up and fight for their rights.”

“Sort of along the same line as you get in the West, which is they don’t take it lying down. That they make as big a stink of it as possible. And, really work for getting more people aware and demanding change. They’ve got to convince enough of their brothers and fathers that something has to happen to change either the law or the enforcement of the law.”

In regards to sexual violence survivors in the Sri Lankan community the United States, participants echoed the belief that survivors should seek help subsequent to experiences with sexual violence.

“Yes, instead of just keeping quiet. They do need the support. They need to open up. They need to talk. Otherwise it’s going to be terrible for them.”

“And, getting them help in whatever way they can. It could be financial. It could be, ‘I need to take this person to counseling so somebody is there when they go.’ That’s available. I think they (survivors of sexual violence) should use it (the help) and make the most of it.”

“It’s just do whatever you can to help you to get over the issue and to get through the problem or issue you experience...They should seek anything and whatever they can do to fix the problems they are facing....They should talk about this with somebody to get through the issues that they have seen in the family or friends.”

“Still I see that victims doesn’t come out and report. So, maybe they need to report. Wherever there is a lack of support or things, then they need to have those kind of supports.”

One participant spoke about the potential benefit of seeking professional support from South Asian organizations in the United States.

“I think there are some South Asian based organizations. Those might be a first place to go to. Because when you talk within the community you have to have the trust, confidentiality...[S]ometimes outside the immigrant community may not understand the dynamics...[A] South Asian organization may be better in terms of gaging what it will be like for them to be in the community. Really understand

the pros and cons of the actions that they take and supervise them. Or, suggest other resources.”

*Need for support from multiple levels (n=14).* Responses in this subtheme centered on the belief that survivors of sexual violence should be provided with support from multiple sources. With regard to Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence in both the United States and Sri Lanka, participants agreed that survivors should receive support from family members, the larger community and the justice system. When explicating their thoughts on sources of support for sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka, participants opined that family members and community members should provide survivors of sexual violence with psychological, financial and material supports.

“Family members and friends...should be very supportive of the woman, girl to at least mentally give her the confidence that it’s not her fault. Even if they do nothing about it. Or, if they’re not powerful enough.”

“[The family should] be supportive because it’s not the woman’s fault...Listen to them, be there for them...If the community gets to know..., they should help in any way they could. And, respect the person’s wishes.”

“It should be something that is not tolerated. As a community, the ideal thing would be to support the woman, support the victim by having professional help, listening, trying to remove the person from the situation...[The family should also be] supportive. Help them get out of the situation if it is continuing. And, most of all be supportive...emotionally. Listening to them, guiding them, trying to take them out of the situation.”

“You talk to them (family members who have experienced sexual violence), listen to them, listen to their feelings and guide them. Help them as much as you can. Or, advise them. Or, take them for any kind of consulting. Or, money wise if they need any help, financially whatever we could help, we could help them. Or, even getting a job for them, taking them to interviews. Whatever we can help we should help them out to bring them up from that situation to make it better.”

“The family should help in any form or shape. Whatever happens...The family can console them, and that’s all they can do.”

Some participants expressed that family members and community members should refrain from blaming survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka subsequent to learning of their experiences with sexual violence.

“I think the community also should obviously not judge and penalize a woman for having been the victim of sexual violence. Or, judge her as having been the one responsible for letting it happen or making it happen somehow.”

“Families should respond the way families should respond when there is a problem facing them. With incredible empathy and love and understanding. And, not blaming the victim.”

“[Family members should respond] with a lot of empathy. I think it shouldn’t be viewed as you brought this on yourself. But, hey, you’re a victim of it and it’s unfortunate. I think they should be treated to where they can stabilize them emotionally.”

“Community have to support them. Provide them the resources. Provide them a good life. Forgive them. They have to understand it’s not the victim’s behavior or

anything. Accidents happen. They have to support them. Find ways to give them a good future... The victim should be helped. Find ways to help the victims.”

“They should respect (the survivors of sexual violence) and they should give the opportunity, whatever the opportunity everybody get, same opportunities should be given to the victims. Now they look victims as, ‘Oh, that’s her fault or his fault.’ But, they should change that attitude, and they shouldn’t right away put the fault on the victims. They shouldn’t do that... Not blame. Then they need to put help.”

A great deal of participants stressed the necessity of access to resources subsequent to experiences with sexual violence in Sri Lanka. Some of these participants also highlighted the dearth of services available for survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

“They need a very supportive structure to respond in any way different than they do now. So, that support structure needs to exist first.”

“I think people should be able to go talk in confidence to something like a rape crisis center... [where] people go have anonymous conversations and actually be offered options, some trauma counseling and some result if they are caught in a relationship. But, I know that they don’t have those options, for the most part.”

“But, I want the counseling, I want her to get the support and the counseling.”

A number of participants declared that significant change within the justice system in Sri Lanka needed to occur in order to better address the needs of sexual violence survivors.

“First of all they (the justice system) should stop being biased. The courts are in the hands of the government right now...I think the system is failing women...The justice system is completely messed up. It needs to be overhauled, and it should not go into party politics...I don't think it's just at all. I don't think women are able to rely on it...The people who are practicing the justice system, and the individuals there, have to be more authentic and believe in the rule of law than the politician's pocket.”

“I think both sides should be heard and give the right advice and the right punishment to the proper people. And, help the person who is affected. But, that doesn't happen in Sri Lanka.”

“In Sri Lanka, my concern would be most of those [in the justice system] are politically influenced. So, my response would be the justice system as a whole should respond without being corrupt. And, deal with the facts. And, when I talk about corruption, it is payoffs, it's you know ministers or members of Parliament or the who's who of the world over there. I think there has to be a way to remove that.”

“The other thing that should happen is they should change the laws to make it more punishment for sexual violence. Other thing is, the institution like police, courts and other institutions, they need to train them to identify and bring them out and prosecute the people. Most of the time, if people go report, then police doesn't do nothing.”

When discussing forms of support for survivors of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States, participants asserted that survivors within this

community should receive psychological and material supports from family and community members.

“The family should respond first by accepting their word. And, listen. And, have the space for them to talk about it without any judgments or suggestions or solutions...The community should do the same. Not jump into judgments, not jump into solutions. And, give them space.”

“I think they (the family) should respond to the woman if they actually go. And, talk to the justice people or the police. And, then, they should do what’s right. Take action. [I expect the] same thing [from the community]. Be supportive. Help in any way they can.”

“[The family should] be supportive. Listen to the person. Encourage them to get professional help if needed. And, if it is a keep on going situation, help them to get out of it...They (the community) should acknowledge the fact that these things happen. When it does, be empathetic. And, maybe have a safety net for people who have no family.”

“They (the family) could advise. They could listen to the problem. They could guide. They could help...That should be the starting point...My feeling is that family should be the first step. Then, close friends should be the second step. Then, third just seek trained help.”

“...They (the family) should support them. And, even the community should support them.”

***Need for increased awareness (n=9).*** Over half of the participants identified an increase in dialogue on sexual violence as one method for decreasing incidences of

sexual violence in Sri Lanka and the United States. A number of participants favored education as the main strategy for increasing awareness of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

“There could be structures where you have education of what is violence and what is sexual violence...[T]he good people to recruit are school principals, because they carry a lot of weight...The school principal could have education starting from the bottom up...That type of education to bring awareness would be beneficial.”

“I think human rights education has to happen at the school level. It’s not just about men and women. It’s about society at large around how people are dehumanized.”

“What I really think needs to happen is that children...need to be made aware that it’s a problem...There’s an educational need there to make them aware that this is a problem and how you should handle it...So that when it happens they’re not going to have to start digging the earth to cultivate the field at that point. That it’s already there and they know exactly how to tap into it.”

“There need to be a lot of education to the public. I think the main thing is education. So, the community or people should be educated about sexual violence...And, also, not only that, they need to be educated what to do when that happens. Then also they need to provide tools they can use. They need to be educated what to do, where to report and what are the rights they have.”

Participants also remarked that an increased awareness of sexual violence was needed in the Sri Lankan community in the United States and noted that education was one way to raise this awareness. Two participants suggested that education in this

community should summarize professional and mental health services for survivors of sexual violence.

“Women here have the resources. They can go anywhere anonymously, most of the time. And have the confidentiality. So, in that case, it’s mostly awareness that you could do something about it.”

“It’s also education. You have to let the community know that you have these kind of resources, you can use it.”

*Presence of resources for sexual violence in the United States (n=13).* In this subtheme, participants explained their perceptions of the assistance that is available to survivors of sexual violence in the United States. A number of participants felt that survivors in the United States had access to a wide range of professional resources.

“There are resources here. Especially resources in terms of being able to talk to professionals and people who are not related to you in a very confidential atmosphere. Where they can get the support... That will then allow you to take the next step.”

“Here, when we do rape examinations, we immediately call the social worker, we call the counselor... We provide them. And, then county come into role, and they take care of the family. The woman can go by herself, and the county will support... Again, here the support system is such that you will have a lot of women organizations, and there’s a hotline... There’s so many support systems for the women here.”

“The woman can seek assistance from a rape crisis center (after an experience of sexual violence). Or, the hospitals have clinics. The universities have clinics.

There are places in which she might be able to go to...One thing is about access to resources. And, I feel like in the U.S. there are lot more resources and access to resources...[I]f somebody comes in (to a rape crisis center), you can figure out a team of people who can work with her.”

“So, here, if the woman seeks help, the help is there. Either by non-governmental form or non-profit organizations. Even government, all the help is there. So, they can transition very quickly to recover from that event. As close as possible.”

“There are non-profit organizations, there are hospitals to deal with you, there are centers you can go to. We have facilities, there are special groups set aside where they can address that for you. And, it can be done confidentially to where they can get their life back together. I don't think all of that exists there.”

“Everyone knows what's going on. And, here also resources are available for them to get out of it. Mentally, physically, they have medical treatment, everything available. Consultation available here. The hospitals help, the private organizations help.”

Some participants mentioned the support for survivors of sexual violence that exists within the United States' justice system.

“There's a lot more in place here. You can call, you can get help. If it's a woman, you can talk to the police and get a restraining order. There's a lot of opportunities here for women who have sexual violence...They will do much better here.”

“Here it's like a person can seek help and there are laws that presumably protects you or addresses the problem. There it is not...it hasn't reached that level.”

### **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Attitudes towards sexual violence have a significant impact on incidences of sexual violence as well as on the responses that survivors of sexual violence receive from others. In immigrant communities in the United States, cultural factors intersect with the migration context to shape these attitudes (e.g., Bui, 2003; Erez et al., 2009; Farmer, 2003; Lee, 2000; Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Lown & Vega, 2001; Raj & Silverman, 2002a; Yick, 2000). Previous literature on attitudes towards sexual violence in the South Asian community in the United States has not often differentiated between the various cultures that comprise the larger South Asian community. The diversity of cultural, religious and sociopolitical histories within this community dictates the need for research that centers on the ways that the distinct histories of each subgroup inform held attitudes towards sexual violence.

Sri Lanka is a country with a noteworthy cultural and sociopolitical history. A long period of civil unrest differentially impacted access to power and privilege across ethnic groups in Sri Lanka (Orjuela, 2003) and uniquely shaped the migration patterns of the Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese ethnicities (Sriskandarajah, 2002; 2005). In addition, Sri Lankans are part of the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States (SAALT, 2012). Despite this rapid population growth, and the unique histories of this group, little is known about the ways in which pre- and post- migration contexts interact to inform attitudes towards sexual violence in this community.

The present study aimed to explicate the pre- and post- migration cultural and contextual factors that shape attitudes towards sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model and a South

Asian feminist lens were used to elucidate how the navigation of pre- and post-migration contexts informs beliefs regarding sexual violence. Using these theories as a guide, the cultural beliefs and socialization patterns identified by participants will be summarized and integrated with extant literature. This discussion will also include an emphasis on the unique impact that migration has on these beliefs and socialization patterns. Lastly, the limitations of the present study and the implications for future clinical work, community level intervention and research will be outlined.

### **Summary of Results and Integration with Research Literature**

Given the reciprocal relationship that exists between an individual and the context within which he or she lives, the utilization of theories that recognize the salience of context in the development of attitudes was imperative in this study. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model supports an understanding of participants' responses as positioned in the various systems within which Sri Lankan immigrants exist in Sri Lanka and the United States. Through the use of this model, the influence of individual and community factors on attitudes towards sexual violence emerged. A South Asian feminist lens helped to elucidate how pre-migration contexts contribute to post-migration attitudes regarding gender roles, interactions between genders and sexual violence. Together, these models clarified how the complex interaction between cultural and contextual components informs attitudes towards sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

**Multiple systems of influence.** Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1994) suggested that an individual's development is shaped by interactions with his or her environment. These interactions consist of social roles, interpersonal relations with other people (i.e.,

microsystem), relationships between settings (i.e., mesosystem) and overarching cultural value systems (i.e., macrosystem). The behavior and development that occur in one context influence an individual's interactions in another context (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

In line with Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1994) ecological model, responses revealed that attitudes regarding sexual violence among Sri Lankans in the United States are shaped by a dynamic interplay between pre- and post- migration individual, community and cultural factors. Participants explicated how cultural belief systems (i.e., macrosystem) in the pre-migration context informed community level responses to sexual violence (i.e., mesosystem) in Sri Lanka and how these pre-migration experiences have shaped post-migration attitudes. Additionally, participants described how their attitudes regarding sexual violence (i.e., microsystem) in the post-migration context have been influenced by the values and belief systems (i.e., macrosystem) present in the pre- and post- migration contexts as well as by interpersonal and community level factors in the United States (i.e., mesosystem).

**South Asian and Sri Lankan feminism.** South Asian and Sri Lankan feminism value interdependence and collectivism (Kallivayalil, 2007; Menon, 2004; Yick, 2001). Additionally, the reverence for familial hierarchies and traditional gender role socialization, both of which are central components of South Asian cultures, are acknowledged in South Asian feminist thought (Nesiah, 2012). The overarching framework that guides these models recognizes that South Asian women develop their identities by navigating their roles within their families and their interpersonal relationships (Menon, 2004).

The utilization of a South Asian feminist lens helped to clarify how participants have integrated the components of individualism that are present in the post-migration context (Sokoloff, 2008) into identities that were developed in a collectivistic value system (Abraham, 2000; Inman et al., 1999, Inman et al., 2001; Menon, 2004). Participants delineated the ways that their views regarding gender and sexual violence have shifted since migrating to the United States. Reflections also illuminated how post-migration views on gender roles and interactions between genders shape attitudes regarding sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

**Sri Lankan contextual and cultural influences on attitudes towards sexual violence.**

*Influence of the civil war.* The macrosystem within which Sri Lankans are socialized has a substantial impact on attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankans. The long-standing civil war in Sri Lanka was identified by participants as a significant macro-level determinant of incidences of sexual violence in the country. This notion parallels extant research that suggests that the presence of war destabilizes social relationships and increases insecurity for citizens (Hyndman & de Alwis, 2004). The majority of participants believe that acts of sexual violence increased as a result of the war. Participants emphasized that despite this increase, individuals in power did not acknowledge the sexual violence that was occurring during the war. As all but two participants had left Sri Lanka before the official start of the war, most participants reported that their assertions regarding the influence of the civil war on acts of sexual violence were based on assumptions, second-hand information or reports in the media. Notably, studies have supported participants' conclusions of an increase in incidences of

sexual violence over the course of the war as well as a lack of recognition of the significance of these acts (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Somasundaram, 2004).

*Patriarchy.* An examination of participants' pre-migration experiences illuminated a number of the cultural values that are embedded into the macrosystem within which early attitudes towards sexual violence are shaped in Sri Lanka. Participants described the ways in which patriarchal ideology in Sri Lanka impacts attitudes towards sexual violence through its influence on socialization patterns and behavioral expectations. One embodiment of socialization within a patriarchal value system identified by participants is the increased behavioral freedom of Sri Lankan boys throughout childhood and adolescence. In addition to this increased freedom, findings revealed that Sri Lankan boys experience more encouragement from parents as compared to girls. Patriarchal ideology is also reflected in the expectation that men are the "breadwinner" for, and the leader of, the family. Participants' emphasis on the roles that men play in the family mirror scholarly findings on the expectations of men in Sri Lankan culture (de Mel et al., 2013; Jayatilleke et al., 2011; Moghadam, 1992).

Interestingly, when speaking about the socialization of girls within a patriarchal value system, the reverence for arranged marriages in Sri Lankan culture was highlighted. The ripple effect of this reverence was demonstrated in discussions on the differential treatment of girls in Sri Lanka. Participants reflected on the cultural expectation that Sri Lankan girls engage in more reserved behaviors and decreased socialization with boys. It was suggested that through acting in accordance with these cultural expectations, Sri Lankan girls are better able to preserve their good name and retain their chances for future engagement in an arranged marriage.

When exploring the expectations for the behavior of Sri Lankan women, participants emphasized the primacy of their role within the family context. After marriage, it is anticipated that the priorities of Sri Lankan women lie in taking care of the home and nurturing the family. While fulfilling this role, women are expected to remain “subservient” and “second-class” to men. The gender role expectations for Sri Lankan females and males that were identified by participants are particularly noteworthy given the literature that has posited that adherence to patriarchal values and traditional gender roles leads to more permissive attitudes towards sexual violence against women (Abraham, 1999; Raj & Silverman, 2002a).

Also included in the macrosystem within which views on sexual violence are cultivated in Sri Lanka is a sense of veneration for the family. The reverence for the family in Sri Lankan culture is delineated in the literature on violence against Sri Lankan women (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Guruge, 2010, 2014; Jayatilleke et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012) and integrated into the Sri Lankan legal system (Hussein, 2000). Participants emphasized the priority that is placed on the family unit across many domains of life in Sri Lanka. Given the precedence that is ascribed to the family unit in Sri Lankan culture, it is not surprising that participants reported that an individual’s behaviors have “social consequences” for the status of his or her family. Extant research has revealed that the consideration of the honor of one’s family has a significant impact on the behaviors in which an individual chooses to engage (Asian Development Bank, 1999; Guruge, 2010, 2014; Jayatilleke et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

Participants noted that the relationship between one’s actions and the name of one’s

family influences responses to sexual violence. This relationship is described in further detail in the Silence regarding Sex and Sexuality section below.

Discussions on the patriarchal ideology present in Sri Lanka illuminated the influence of this ideology on larger cultural beliefs regarding sex and sexuality. Abraham (1999) has noted that in many South Asian cultures patriarchal values and the control of female sexuality lay the foundation for attitudes towards sexual violence. The societal expectations for the sexual behavior of women in Sri Lanka are quite explicit. According to participants, Sri Lankan women are expected to remain virgins prior to marriage. Participants' emphasis on the high value that is placed on the virginity of women prior to marriage is a reflection of the literature on the expectations for the sexual behavior of women in Sri Lankan culture (Hussein, 2000; Tambiah, 2004) and other South Asian cultures (Abraham, 1999; Singh et al., 2010). As the loss of a woman's virginity prior to marriage was noted to have a direct and negative impact on her marriage potential later in life, findings reveal that the broader cultural expectation of virginity prior to marriage contributes to negative views of women who experience sexual violence prior to marriage.

Importantly, participants endorsed similar expectations for the sexual behavior of men. In particular, Sri Lankan men are expected to remain virgins prior to marriage. However, a number of participants emphasized the notion that it is easier for men to overcome the negative reputation associated with transgressions of this cultural expectation. This finding exemplifies the type of hierarchal relationship between men and women that lends to more lenient attitudes towards sexual violence in South Asian communities (Abraham, 1999).

*Silence regarding sex and sexuality.* The patriarchal values embedded in the macrosystem of Sri Lankan culture are infused into the interpersonal interactions of Sri Lankans. Literature on immigrant and South Asian populations has delineated the impact of patriarchal values on silence regarding sex and sexuality (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Kallivayalil, 2010; Singh et al., 2010; Ting, 2010; Vidales, 2010). Despite the explicit cultural expectation of virginity prior to marriage, dialogue regarding sex and sexuality in Sri Lanka is quite sparse. Nearly all participants spoke about how conversations regarding sex were “limited” or nonexistent. For some participants their only exposure to conversations regarding sex centered on biology and took place in the school environment. The limitations imposed by this community level silence regarding sex and sexuality on the behaviors of Sri Lankans were identified by a few participants. In particular, the overarching silence regarding sex and sexuality was linked to the inhibition of behaviors of “physical affection” and the “expression of desire.”

Included within the lack of discourse regarding sex and sexuality in Sri Lanka is a paucity of dialogue on sexual violence. The presence of silence around the topic of sexual violence in Sri Lanka was endorsed by all participants. Some participants posited that this silence is the result of a limited acknowledgement of the significance of acts of sexual violence by individuals in power in Sri Lanka. This belief is supported by extant research on the dearth of legal supports available to survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka (Hussein, 2000; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Other participants reflected on the absence of dialogue regarding sexual violence in the meso- and micro- systemic levels of society.

Participants highlighted the deliberate decision that is made by some survivors to remain silent subsequent to experiences with sexual violence. One participant spoke about how this is, at times, a personal decision that is informed by the cultural expectations of Sri Lankan women. Indeed, extant literature has explicated the relationship between the gendered socialization associated with patriarchal ideology and the maintenance of silence among South Asian survivors of sexual violence (Abraham, 1999; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2010). In some cases, survivors opt to remain silent subsequent to their experiences with sexual violence at the urging of their family members.

Participants elucidated the influence of the high regard for the family name in Sri Lankan culture on survivors' decisions to remain silent. The negative impact incidences of sexual violence outside of the context of marriage have on a woman's future marriage potential was identified as a significant motivator in the decision to remain silent. Specifically, it was suggested that this social consequence contributes to encouragement from family members for survivors to remain silent regarding their experiences with sexual violence so as to maintain the family name in the community and, thus, preserve the possibility of entering into an arranged marriage in the future. This finding is consistent with literature that indicates that the preference to retain family honor significantly influences South Asian individuals' decisions to remain silent regarding acts of sexual violence (Abraham, 1999; George & Rahangdale, 1999; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2010). In this regard, microsystemic factors, such as interpersonal interactions, are influenced by cultural values embedded in the macrosystem. One

participant noted that the “general emphasis on tranquility” in the macrosystem of Sri Lankan culture dictated these microsystemic responses to sexual violence.

Discussions on sexual violence that occurs within the context of marriage revealed a tendency to acquiesce with these acts. Subsequent to experiences of sexual violence, married survivors may choose to remain silent so as to ensure the unity of the family and, therefore, the maintenance of the family name. Responses indicated that this acquiescence may be a personal choice made by survivors or it may be encouraged by family and community members. The preference of enduring acts of sexual violence within the context of marriage is in line with findings on the acceptance of violence among married Sri Lankan women in order to avoid the stigma that is associated with divorce in Sri Lankan culture (Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Taken together, findings on community, family and individual responses to sexual violence suggest the presence of a general reluctance to engage with issues of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

Importantly, participants did not support the presence of silence around sexual violence in Sri Lanka. It was recommended that the existing silence be addressed on a community level. Over half of the participants noted the necessity of an increase in awareness of sexual violence in the larger community in Sri Lanka. The expansion of dialogue and the education of the public on the topic of sexual violence were identified as the main strategies for increasing this awareness. Participants believed that the use of these strategies would decrease incidences of sexual violence and also lend to the cultivation of public knowledge on the types of emotional and professional support that

are necessary subsequent to experiences of sexual violence. It was proposed that this public knowledge would increase the provision of support to survivors of sexual violence.

*Stigma and victim blaming.* The cultural expectations for virginity prior to marriage and the silence around sex and sexual violence in Sri Lanka were noted to shape attitudes regarding sexual violence against women. Participants acknowledged the presence of societal stigma in Sri Lanka related to incidences of sexual violence. The negative social views of individuals who do not adhere to Sri Lankan society's standards of virginity and chastity have been explicated in the literature (Hussein, 2000; Miller, 2002; Tambiah, 2004). According to participants, this stigma prevents survivors of sexual violence from progressing in society. The consequences of the societal stigma associated with experiences of sexual violence motivate some survivors to "keep quiet" and "just [go] through life."

Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence are not only faced with stigma subsequent to these incidents, but they are also often tasked with blame for these acts. Half of the participants in the present study spoke about the tendency of community members to ascribe fault to survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka. This finding reflects literature on South Asian survivors of sexual violence, which has indicated that these individuals face blame after acts of sexual violence (Singh et al., 2010). These types of responses from community members to survivors of sexual violence provide an example of the interrelatedness between a mesosystem, within which victim blame and stigma are present, and a macrosystem that embraces patriarchal ideology.

In conjunction with being faced with victim blame and stigma, the interpersonal interactions of survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka lack the presence of various

types of support. A large number of participants indicated that survivors of sexual violence are not often provided with emotional or physical aid from family or community members. For instance, participants noted that survivors of sexual violence are frequently “ignored,” “treated badly” and are not “treated well” by members of the community. These findings are consistent with extant literature that has delineated Sri Lankans’ reluctance to provide support to survivors of sexual violence (Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012).

It is important to note that not all participants ascribed to the belief that survivors in Sri Lanka are faced with a complete lack of compassion subsequent to acts of sexual violence. Some participants believed that the community would be “very supportive” and “sympathetic” to survivors of sexual violence. Other participants highlighted the unique and supportive role elders are known to have played in incidences of sexual violence that occur within the context of marriage. While the provision of support to Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence that occurs within the context of marriage has been noted in the literature, this support has often centered on the desire to prevent the dissolution of the marriage within which the abuse is occurring (Hussein, 2000). One participant spoke about her personal experience with the receipt of support from family members subsequent to experiencing sexual violence. The support this participant received was in line with the cultural practice of maintaining a level of privacy around conflicts that occur within Sri Lankan families (Jayatileke et al., 2011) in that her family “didn’t talk about it to the rest of the community.”

***Community resources.*** The values embedded into the macrosystem of Sri Lankan culture and the influence of these values on mesosystemic and microsystemic factors

impact the resources available to survivors of sexual violence. Nearly all participants highlighted the paucity of services available to sexual violence survivors in Sri Lanka. In particular, participants reflected on the lack of mental health services and legal support. It was noted that, as acts of sexual violence are generally not “addressed from a mental or emotional standpoint,” there is “no counseling, no [mental health] treatment.”

In addition to this lack of mental health treatment, survivors of sexual violence are also faced with limited legal options in Sri Lanka. Subsequent to acts of sexual violence, survivors often have little legal recourse as “it’s hard to convince the legal system” that sexual violence occurred. For the survivors who do choose to pursue legal charges, they are forced to do so within a system that provides “no [emotional] support” for survivors throughout the process of prosecution. This finding mirrors extant literature on the lack of assistance available to survivors of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan legal system (Hussein, 2000; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). While larger cultural factors appear to influence the lack of services available to survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka, it is also likely that this lack of resources further reinforces the silence around sexual violence as well as the lack of significance that is placed on acts sexual violence by community members in Sri Lanka.

***Survivors’ responses to sexual violence.*** Participants’ reflections on cultural and contextual factors present in Sri Lanka helped to explicate the varied ways that the integration of macrosystemic, mesosystemic and microsystemic elements informs survivors’ reactions to sexual violence. Financial dependence on one’s husband was identified as a micro-level determinant that influences a Sri Lankan woman’s response to sexual violence. This finding echoes extant research that suggests that limited access to

appropriate financial resources shapes married Sri Lankan women's responses to incidences of violence committed within the context of marriage (Guruge, 2010, 2014; Hyman et al., 2011). A number of participants noted that a woman's financial dependency on her husband contributes to the practical need to remain "trapped" in an abusive marriage. Therefore, these women "don't have a choice" but to remain in a marriage in which sexual violence is occurring.

Macro-, meso- and micro- level determinants were also noted to result in psychological consequences for survivors of sexual violence. Experiences of depression, shame and decreased self-worth subsequent to experiences of sexual violence were among the psychological consequences identified by participants. While little has been documented on the mental health sequelae associated with incidences of sexual violence in South Asian populations specifically, in other populations, scholars have noted that experiences of sexual violence are associated with increased signs and symptoms of mental disorders (Kendler et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2012). In regards to the findings of the present study, the mental health sequelae identified by participants are likely the result of the influence of the patriarchal values that are embedded within the macrosystem on meso- and micro- systemic interactions. More specifically, the negative social responses (e.g., victim blame, stigma) Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence endure from community members likely contribute to the trauma related psychological burden identified by participants.

#### **Attitudes towards sexual violence in the post-migration context.**

***Support from others.*** The exploration of participants' current views on sexual violence revealed overwhelming support for the belief that survivors of sexual violence

should receive help subsequent to experiences with sexual violence. All participants agreed that Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence should be provided with support regardless of location. When reflecting on survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka, it was noted that sexual violence should “not [be] tolerated.” Participants deemed it imperative that survivors of sexual violence receive support from family members, the larger community and the justice system. These views are in direct conflict with the victim blaming and stigma that is at times associated with sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community (Hussein, 2000; Miller, 2002).

Given the lack of interpersonal and professional supports available to survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka, participants explicated the types of micro- and meso-level change that are required to better assist survivors of sexual violence. Participants emphasized the importance of the provision of emotional, financial and material aid to survivors of sexual violence by family members and the larger community. Some participants also noted that after learning about incidences of sexual violence, family members and community members should refrain from blaming survivors.

In addition to delineating expectations for micro- and meso- systemic interactions, participants highlighted the need for macrosystemic change. Several participants underscored the necessity of substantial change within the justice system in Sri Lanka. The justice system was noted to be “completely messed up” and “failing women (survivors of sexual violence).” The inaccessibility of the legal system for survivors of sexual violence has been documented by scholars in Sri Lanka (Hussein, 2000; Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Participants also explained that the presence of “corruption” within the legal system presented survivors of sexual violence with systemic barriers to

justice. An example of one such barrier identified by a participant is the inability to receive a fair trial due to ethnicity. Significant change to this larger system was posited to be necessary in order to address these barriers and to better serve survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

Discussions on the provision of support to sexual violence survivors in the Sri Lankan community in the United States spanned all levels. Participants spoke about the relatively extensive mental and physical health services, financial support and material supports provided to survivors in the United States by community and government organizations. The presence of various types of legal support and laws to protect survivors of sexual violence was also identified as a significant resource. The perception of the integration of support for survivors of sexual violence on both mesosystemic and macrosystemic levels in the United States contributed to the belief among participants that survivors of sexual violence have it “much better here.” In addition to emphasizing the benefit of these resources for survivors, similar to beliefs regarding social support for survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka, participants encouraged family members and community members to provide psychological and material supports to Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence in the United States.

***Survivors should seek help.*** Another salient finding of the present study is the belief that Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence should seek help subsequent to their experiences with sexual violence, regardless of location. Participants noted that Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence should not suffer with trauma related psychological burden alone. This recommendation requires that survivors challenge the cultural silence that exists around sexual violence (Abraham, 1999; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al.,

2011; Singh et al., 2010). When reflecting on survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lanka, participants recommended that these women seek support from family members, friends and professional resources.

Several participants believed that it is imperative for survivors of sexual violence to “come out” and seek help instead of remaining silent about their experiences. In this same vein, survivors in Sri Lanka were encouraged to “stand up for themselves” and “speak up” to ensure that they are being treated fairly in the community. This finding is in contrast to literature that suggests that South Asians encourage familial privacy around conflict that occurs with family members (Jayatilleke et al., 2011; Raj & Silverman, 2002a). Given extant literature on the importance of privacy regarding conflict that occurs within a family, it is important to acknowledge that participants may have provided different responses if the question had been about sexual violence that occurred within their own families.

Similar sentiments on the necessity of seeking help were expressed for Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence in the United States. Participants noted that survivors of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States should seek help from family members and friends as well as from professional resources. One participant reflected on the potential benefit of receiving support from a South Asian organization in the United States. This participant noted that support from this type of organization may be beneficial to Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence because the providers in the organization would “understand the pros and cons” of the various options available in the United States for addressing sexual violence. This response parallels current calls in the literature for the use of sexual violence interventions with Sri Lankan immigrant

survivors that are in line with Sri Lankan cultural values (Guruge, 2010; Hyman et al., 2010)

***Sexual violence in the Sri Lankan immigrant community.*** When reflecting on occurrences of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States, participants remained divided. Similar to the community response to sexual violence in Sri Lanka, approximately half of the participants believed that acts of sexual violence that occur within this community are silenced. This belief is congruent with literature on immigrant populations that suggests that incidences of sexual violence are frequently silenced in these groups (Abraham, 2000; Bui, 2003; Lee, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Contrary to this finding and the supporting literature, other participants concluded that acts of sexual violence either do not occur, or do not occur frequently, within the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Interestingly, these responses are not supported by the literature on incidences of sexual violence within immigrant populations. Instead, scholars have suggested that immigrant women experience an increased vulnerability to acts of violence subsequent to migration (Erez et al., 2009; Guruge, 2014; Guruge et al., 2010; Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002).

**Altered constructions of gender and sexual violence in the immigrant context.**

***Current views on gender and sexuality.*** Current attitudes regarding gender and sexuality provide a great deal of insight into the ways that participants have navigated the values of their culture of origin and the values embedded within the United States' culture. In their discussions on gender roles, the majority of the participants highlighted the necessity of equality in relationships and interactions between women and men. In

regards to gender roles within the home, participants noted that gender roles should be “equal” and determined by “whatever one can do.” Reflections on gender roles outside of the home revealed the belief that women and men should be provided with “equal opportunity” in social, educational and career pursuits. While these beliefs are in contrast to literature that denotes the presence of a hierarchal relationship between women and men in South Asian cultures (e.g., Asian Development Bank, 1999; Goel, 2005; Hussein, 2000; Hyman et al., 2011; Jayatilleke et al., 2011), this finding parallels literature on the fluidity of gender roles among South Asians in the United States (Ibrahim et al., 1997).

The divergence in participants’ views from the culturally accepted hierarchy between women and men in Sri Lankan culture (Hussein, 2000; Hyman et al., 2011; Jayatilleke et al., 2011) was also revealed in responses related to current beliefs on interactions between genders. Over half of the participants noted that Sri Lankans should approach interactions with individuals of the same gender in the same way that they would approach interactions with individuals of a different gender. These participants indicated that individuals should be able to “express their mind” and be treated with “respect” in all interpersonal interactions. In contrast, some female participants endorsed the belief that interpersonal interactions between women and men remain slightly different from interactions between women. These differences result from the ways in which the behaviors and intentions of men are interpreted as well as from the presence of “boundaries” in interactions between a married woman and a man other than her husband. This diversity in participant responses is supported by extant literature that suggests that variability exists in the ways in which one embodies values from his or her culture of origin subsequent to migration (Sokoloff, 2008).

When examining their views regarding gender roles and interactions between genders, some participants noted that these beliefs changed subsequent to migration. The responses of participants mirror extant literature on the intraindividual changes that occur as a result of the process of acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997; Bhanot & Senn, 2007) as well as the documented increase in support for gender equality and decrease in adherence to traditional gender roles in the United States (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Bryant, 2003; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). In particular, nearly half of the participants expressed that their views on gender roles and interactions between genders became more egalitarian after moving to the United States. Exposure to the “equal” treatment of women and men in the United States was identified as a significant influence on the progression of these views.

Participants’ increasingly egalitarian views appear to have influenced their beliefs regarding sex and sexuality. Nearly all participants endorsed beliefs regarding sex and sexuality that represent a shift from Sri Lankan cultural expectations (Hussein, 2000; Tambiah, 2004). Specifically, the large majority of participants believed that both women and men should have the freedom to make their own decisions regarding whether to pursue and engage in sexual behaviors. These views are aligned with the increasingly liberal beliefs regarding sexual behaviors that are held by many “Americans” (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Interestingly, while the majority of participants ascribed to the belief that both women and men should have the freedom of sexual choice, a portion of participants differentiated between their beliefs for the sexual behaviors of others and their personal standards for sex and sexuality.

Some participants noted that their personal value system supported the presence of commitment prior to engagement in a sexual relationship. For some participants, marriage is the only acceptable form of commitment. For others, sexual behavior outside of the context of marriage is considered to be acceptable if the partners are in a committed relationship. This negotiation of views on the sexual behaviors of others and personal preferences for sexual relationships provides another example of how participants integrate values from their culture of origin and the cultural values of the United States.

Together, participants' views on gender roles, gender relations, sex and sexuality have important implications for attitudes towards sexual violence in the post-migration context. Extant literature has indicated that more permissive views on acts of sexual violence are present in South Asian cultures in which the sexual needs of men are believed to be natural, and women are viewed as subordinate to men (Abraham, 1999). The results of the present study reveal that in the post-migration context participants adhere to less traditional views on gender and sexuality. These findings are important to consider in light of research that has demonstrated that individuals in countries that adhere to less restrictive beliefs regarding gender, such as the United States, hold more positive views regarding sexual violence survivors than individuals from countries in which the hierarchal relationship between women and men is more pronounced (Nayak et al., 2003). Participants' current views on sexual violence are described below.

***Current views on sexual violence.*** In their discussions on sex and sexuality, each participant elucidated his or her personal definition of sexual violence. Across these definitions, participants conveyed that sexual violence is executed through both physical

and psychological means. Physical means of sexual violence were identified as “rape” or “hitting.” Psychological sexual violence, on the other hand, was elucidated as the use of “derogatory words” or “demeaning” a sexual partner. A number of participants ascribed to the belief that a lack of consent assists in designating an act as sexual violence. Participants’ explicit acknowledgement of what constitutes sexual violence, and the emphasis placed on consent, serve as a rebuttal for claims that immigrant cultures are “frozen” in time and, thus, culture is to blame for acts of violence against immigrant women (Sokoloff, 2008).

The influence of United States’ culture on participants’ responses to sexual violence was revealed in discussions on previous and current feelings regarding sexual violence. The majority of participants endorsed feelings of sadness and helplessness when they first learned about incidences of sexual violence. A large portion of these participants noted that they currently possess similar feelings regarding acts of sexual violence. Importantly, some participants reported that, with time, they have increasingly become aware of the availability of resources in the United States and their ability to take “action” to provide support for survivors. Taken together, these responses seem to indicate that, while participants’ feelings regarding sexual violence may not have progressed over time, what may be different is participants’ awareness that support can be provided to survivors of sexual violence through various channels in the post-migration context.

The increased exposure to the availability of support for sexual violence survivors in the United States likely normalized the appropriateness of the receipt of help subsequent to experiences with sexual violence. This normalization, in turn, may have

contributed to the belief that survivors of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States should seek help from family and community members as well as utilize the professional resources that are available. In addition, the range of services available to survivors of sexual violence in the United States may have shaped the belief that family and community members should provide support to survivors of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. The influence of contextual factors on attitudes towards sexual violence demonstrated in the present study parallels extant literature that suggests that cultural context is a significant determinant of level of tolerance for acts of intimate partner violence (Bhanot & Senn, 2007; Heise, 1998; Rodriguez Martinez & Khalil, 2013).

**The impact of socialization and the post-migration context on attitudes towards sexual violence.** Participants' responses indicated how pre-migration cultural values, and the associated socialization patterns, interface with the post-migration cultural context to shape attitudes towards sexual violence among members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Prior to migration, participants were raised in a culture that adheres to a patriarchal value system. Within this value system, women maintain a deferential position to men (Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011). The lower status of women in Sri Lankan culture informs the behavioral expectations for women and men. Participants noted that in Sri Lankan culture, the virginity of women prior to marriage is revered. After marriage, women are expected to fulfill responsibilities in the home and nurture the family. Alternatively, men are designated as the main income earner and leader of the family.

In addition to ascribing to socialization patterns informed by patriarchal values, in Sri Lankan culture, silence regarding sex is pervasive. Participants revealed that silence regarding sex, sexuality and sexual violence is common and, at times, expected in Sri Lanka and in Sri Lankan culture. Together, the socialization patterns that are shaped by a patriarchal value system, and the community level silence regarding sexual violence, inform cultural beliefs regarding sexual violence. These cultural beliefs center on the notion that it is not acceptable to endure sexual violence. This larger cultural belief contributes to the presence of stigma and victim blaming related to sexual violence in Sri Lankan culture.

Participants' current views on gender roles and sexual violence are in stark contrast to the socialization patterns and patriarchal values to which they were exposed during childhood and adolescence in Sri Lanka. Nearly all participants valued the presence of equality between the genders, in both the home and work environments, and supported the freedom of sexual choice for both women and men. With regard to sexual violence in particular, participants did not endorse the presence of silence around sexual violence. Instead, participants strongly encouraged survivors of sexual violence to seek support from family members, community members and professionals. Additionally, participants urged family members and community members to provide survivors of sexual violence with any types of support that they may need and highlighted the necessity of refraining from blaming sexual violence survivors for their experiences with sexual violence.

The disparity in participants' current views on gender roles and sexual violence and the patriarchal beliefs regarding gender and sexuality that are present in Sri Lankan

culture has likely been informed by post-migration factors. After migration, immigrants are often exposed to a new cultural context. In the new cultural context, some immigrants may experience a conflict between the cultural values of their culture of origin and the dominant culture in the host country. This cultural conflict can either lead to intraindividual behavioral changes that result in a better fit in the post-migration environment or to a withdrawal from the dominant culture to reduce feelings of cultural conflict (Berry, 2005).

Responses of the participants in the present study indicate that participants coped with cultural conflict by adhering to beliefs regarding gender and gender roles that are more in line with the dominant United States' culture. Specifically, participants' support for equality between genders and less traditional gender roles is consistent with current beliefs regarding gender and gender roles in the United States (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Bryant, 2003; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). As increased support for more restrictive roles for women has been linked to more negative beliefs regarding violence against women (Flood & Pease, 2009; Nayak et al., 2003), it is likely that increased exposure to less traditional gender roles in the post-migration context informed the less permissive views towards sexual violence that were held by the majority of participants.

Importantly, due to the homogeneity in the ethnic background, religion and migration histories of the majority of the participants in the sample, the findings of the present study are not reflective of the experiences of all Sri Lankan immigrant groups in the United States. Given the limited generalizability of these findings, it is imperative to acknowledge additional factors that may influence attitudes towards sexual violence among other Sri Lankan immigrant groups in the United States. For Sri Lankans who

chose to leave Sri Lanka because of the disruptions caused by the civil war, exposure to the inter-ethnic hostilities prior to leaving Sri Lanka may be a salient factor in shaping attitudes towards sexual violence.

After leaving their country of origin, refugees and asylum-seekers face unique barriers in their host countries. Many refugees leave their country of origin suddenly and often have limited knowledge and understanding of the culture of their host country. Moreover, some refugees experience signs and symptoms of depressive, anxiety and trauma-related disorders prior to leaving their countries of origin (Keyes, 2000). For some individuals, an abrupt departure from one's country of origin may result in experiences of cultural conflict that lead to withdrawal from the dominant culture. Furthermore, individuals who experience signs and symptoms of depressive, anxiety and trauma-related disorders prior to leaving their country of origin may experience additional difficulties acculturating to the culture of the host country (Phillimore, 2011).

Though Sri Lankans are unable to receive official recognition as refugees in the United States, Sri Lankans who came to the United States in an attempt to escape the hostilities associated with the civil war likely endured many of the signs and symptoms of depressive, anxiety and trauma-related disorders as individuals who have been formally recognized as refugees (see Silove, Steel, McGorry, & Mohan, 1998; Somasundaram, 2004). For these individuals, signs and symptoms of mental illness, and a limited understanding of United States' culture, may have induced experiences of cultural conflict that culminated in withdrawal from the dominant culture in the United States. This withdrawal may have resulted in a lack of acculturation to United States' culture. As adherence to patriarchal values in Sri Lankan culture lends to more permissive views on

violence against women (e.g., CARE International Sri Lanka, 2013; Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012), for some individuals, low levels of acculturation may have fostered the maintenance of, or perhaps a closer alignment to, more lenient views on sexual violence.

### **Reflexivity**

The inspiration for the present study was drawn from the researcher's personal upbringing. As the child of Malaysian and Sri Lankan immigrants, the researcher was exposed to the Sri Lankan cultural silence around sex and sexuality throughout her childhood. This silence was in stark contrast to the explicit conversations regarding sex and sexuality that the researcher witnessed in the school environment and in her interpersonal interactions with peers. In conjunction with the silence regarding topics related to sex, in the home environment, the researcher observed and was socialized within the patriarchal ideology embraced by the Sri Lankan culture. This cultural socialization provided the researcher with an awareness of the importance of saving face in the Sri Lankan community as well as the high regard for the family name in Sri Lankan culture. Together, these cultural factors influenced the way the researcher approached the present study.

Prior to beginning data collection for the present study, the researcher examined her own biases regarding attitudes towards sexual violence in the Sri Lankan immigrant community. Given her own upbringing, and her knowledge of extant literature on attitudes towards sexual violence in South Asian immigrant communities, the researcher operated under the assumption that members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States would adhere to similar levels of silence regarding sexual violence. With this bias

in mind, the researcher attempted to carefully construct interview questions for participants that aimed to avoid the unintentional infusion of her personal bias into the question while also providing participants with ample opportunity to elaborate on their understandings of and views regarding sexual violence. Subsequent to independently developing these questions, the researcher discussed and revised the interview questions with members of her dissertation committee to ensure that the questions captured the desired information with little influence of the researcher's personal assumptions regarding the participants' attitudes.

Additional biases regarding Sri Lankan culture, and views on sex and sexuality within this culture, surfaced throughout the process of data collection. In some instances, the researcher noticed herself making assumptions regarding the meaning of participants' responses. For example, when participants spoke about gender role socialization in Sri Lanka, the researcher's own experiences with gender role socialization within the Sri Lankan culture were brought to the forefront of her mind. Consequently, in these instances, the researcher needed to remain cognizant of the fact that not all Sri Lankans experienced the same gender role socialization and associated expectations as her. This increased awareness led the researcher to ask participants to provide more explicit explanations of their interview responses so as to avoid the unintentional influence of her bias on the data being collected.

Another personal bias emerged when participants explicated their views on freedom of sexual choice. Given the researcher's personal knowledge of the importance of virginity prior to marriage in the Sri Lankan culture, she was surprised in the first few interviews in which participants endorsed the belief of freedom of sexual choice for

others. Additionally, in other interviews, the researcher found it difficult to reconcile some participants' endorsement of freedom of sexual choice for others with their personal preference for commitment prior to engaging in sexual behaviors. The researcher expected participants to retain consistent expectations regarding sexual behavior, either freedom of sexual choice or refraining from sexual behaviors until marriage, for their personal relationships as well as the relationships of others. Again, in an attempt to avoid the influence of her personal bias during the data collection process, the researcher posed additional questions and asked the participants to be more explicit in their delineation of these distinct beliefs.

The impact of personal histories on the research process was also examined during data analysis. The researcher and the co-coder engaged in explicit discussions regarding their potential influence on the process of data analysis. As both the researcher and the co-coder are of South Asian descent, it was imperative that they acknowledged the impact their own assumptions about, and experiences with, South Asian cultural values had on the analysis of the data. In addition to the researcher's biases noted above, the co-coder shared how her own understanding of sexuality and sexual violence, as shaped through personal experiences, conversations and South Asian media, informed the way she coded participants' responses regarding gender socialization, views on sexual violence and sexuality within the Sri Lankan context.

In their discussions on their influence on the process of data analysis, it was revealed that each coder had made some assumptions about the implicit meaning of participants' responses based on her personal experiences and knowledge. This insight led the coders to remind themselves of the necessity for minimal interpretation, the

underlying objective of the qualitative descriptive approach (Sandelowski, 2000). On several occasions, the coders returned to the data and re-coded responses from participants based on the face value of the response as opposed to attempting to interpret the unspoken meaning within the response.

### **Limitations**

While the findings of the present study provide a wealth of information on a silenced topic in an under-researched population, the present study is not without limitations. These limitations are related to the method of data collection, methods of participant recruitment and the demographic characteristics of the participants. It is quite likely that the responses of the participants in the present study are not representative of all Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. Thus, when interpreting the findings of the study, the consideration of the unique characteristics of the participants is imperative.

The method of data collection in the present study may have imposed some restrictions on the information that was gathered. Participants were asked to complete a semi-structured interview with someone they had never met and to discuss a topic that is generally considered taboo in Sri Lankan culture. A broader cultural silence regarding sex and sexuality and a value of saving face within the Sri Lankan culture may have contributed to reluctance among participants to express their true views on sex, sexuality and sexual violence with the researcher. In addition, given that the majority of participants in the present study have resided in the United States for many years, and the researcher's background as a second generation immigrant, it may be possible that participants felt more comfortable sharing views on sex, sexuality and sexual violence that are in line with the cultural values of the United States.

The process of participant recruitment introduced an additional limitation to the findings of the present study. Given the relatively small size of the Sri Lankan community in the United States, and the high level of silence regarding sex and sexuality in South Asian and Sri Lankan cultures, the researcher experienced significant difficulty recruiting participants through anonymous channels (e.g., listservs of organizations). As a result of this barrier, the researcher utilized snowball sampling to recruit participants. While the researcher did not interview any participants she personally knew, interviewing participants who were referred by people known to the researcher may have influenced the responses participants provided.

The method of participant recruitment also introduced another limitation to the findings of the present study. Because of the way in which participants were recruited, nearly all of the participants in the present study were Sri Lankan Tamils. Given the history of oppression faced by Sri Lankan Tamils, and the unique migration history associated with this particular ethnic group (Sriskandarajah, 2005), the responses of participants should not be taken to be representative of all Sri Lankan immigrants. In fact, it is quite possible that a similar study completed with Sri Lankan Sinhalese immigrants would yield different results.

Another limitation introduced by the nature of the sample in the present study is the number of years participants have resided in the United States. Likely as a function of the way in which participants were recruited, all participants in the present study had migrated from Sri Lanka over 15 years ago. This significant period of time since migration may have had a distinct impact on held attitudes regarding sexual violence. It may be likely that newly immigrated Sri Lankans would ascribe to beliefs regarding

sexual violence that are quite different from those endorsed by the participants in the present study.

### **Implications for Practice, Intervention and Research**

The present study provides a great deal of insight into the unique cultural and contextual factors that shape attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. Though extant research has supported the notion that the experiences of South Asian immigrants in the United States significantly influence held attitudes regarding sexual violence against women (e.g., Abraham, 1999; Raj & Silverman, 2002a), there is a lack of literature concerning the distinct cultural and contextual factors that inform these attitudes in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

Given the dearth of research on this population, the data from the present study has significant implications for clinical practice and community interventions with members of this community. Recommendations for clinical practice and community interventions with members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States are particularly salient in light of extant literature that suggests that services for South Asian survivors of violence in the United States are often in conflict with South Asian cultural values and may have elements of racism embedded within them (Guruge, 2010; Raj & Silverman, 2002b). While several important recommendations for clinical practice and community interventions emerged from the present study, when considering the utilization of these recommendations, clinicians and scholars should remain cognizant of the complexity associated with implementing these recommendations with the Sri Lankan community in the United States. In addition to informing clinical and community

interventions, the present study also helps to lay the foundation for future research on attitudes towards sexual violence among this rapidly growing immigrant population.

**Implications for clinical practice.** The findings from the present study underscore the importance of previous calls for the utilization of culturally tailored interventions when working with Sri Lankan immigrant survivors of sexual violence (e.g., Guruge, 2010; Hyman et al., 2011). Hyman and colleagues (2011) have emphasized the necessity of collaborating with members of the Sri Lankan community when developing culturally aligned sexual violence interventions. This approach to intervention prioritizes one of the core components of South Asian feminist thought – the interdependence between members of the Sri Lankan community (Preisser, 1999). Through working with members of this community, clinicians will be better equipped to develop interventions that address the unique cultural and contextual barriers faced by Sri Lankan immigrant survivors of sexual violence. Responses in the present study shed light on a number of the cultural and contextual factors that shape attitudes towards sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. One factor that was identified by participants is adherence to a patriarchal value system and the gender socialization that occurs within this value system.

As the expression of patriarchal ideology can take various forms in different cultures, it is imperative that clinicians maintain an awareness of the ways that patriarchy is uniquely incorporated into the Sri Lankan culture. Socialization that occurs within the patriarchal ideology present in Sri Lanka outlines expectations for the behaviors of females and males. Findings of the present study reveal that, in regards to Sri Lankan women, expectations center on the primacy of their role in the home, subservience to men

and virginity prior to marriage. For men, serving as the leader for the family and financially providing for the family are expected. Given previous research that has demonstrated a link between adherence to male dominant beliefs and the perpetration of sexual violence among Sri Lankans (de Mel et al., 2013), these findings on gendered socialization have important implications for the development of interventions for the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

Scholars have posited that sexual violence interventions for South Asian immigrants that restructure beliefs regarding traditional gender roles may lead to a decrease in attitudes that support acts of sexual violence (Bhanot & Senn, 2007). Thus, when developing sexual violence interventions for the Sri Lankan community in the United States, clinicians should first work with members of the community to identify and create dialogue concerning gender, sexuality, and sexual violence. This is particularly important in light of the increased support for gender equality and freedom of sexual choice that was noted by participants in the present study. Once this knowledge has been obtained, clinicians can work with both partners in a marriage to alter their constructions of traditional gender roles to be more in line with the important components of these roles that are identified by their community members. Through working with both partners in a marriage on altering their beliefs regarding traditional gender roles, clinicians are able to align with the Sri Lankan feminist tenet of improving the quality of life for Sri Lankan women while also acknowledging the priority that is placed on the marital relationship in Sri Lankan culture (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011; Preisser, 1999).

As de Mel and colleagues (2013) have recommended that sexual violence interventions in Sri Lankan communities focus on interpersonal communication, an

additional component of microsystemic intervention should include communication strategies. Clinicians should educate partners on interpersonal communication skills that allow them to effectively communicate their expectations and needs regarding behaviors in the relationship. Through altering conceptions regarding traditional gender roles and providing education on communication skills, clinicians are able to work within the cultural socialization patterns that are relevant to the post-migration context and potentially promote decreases in incidences of sexual violence.

The reverence for the family unit in Sri Lanka is another cultural value that should be incorporated into sexual violence interventions for the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Participants described how veneration for the family unit is integrated into many domains of life in Sri Lanka. Additionally, South Asian feminism has emphasized the primacy of familial relationships in the identities of South Asian women (Menon, 2004). Thus, when developing interventions for Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence that occurs within the context of marriage, clinicians should help survivors find ways to preserve the unity of the family while also aiming to decrease incidences of sexual violence.

Treatment that includes the survivor of sexual violence, the perpetrator of sexual violence and valued community members is one form of intervention that may help achieve a balance between the maintenance of family unity and a decrease in acts of sexual violence (Kim, 2010). In the present study, participants highlighted the important role that elders play in family matters in Sri Lankan culture. As such, in their interventions for sexual violence that occurs within the context of marriage in the Sri Lankan community in the United States, clinicians should incorporate the input of elders.

For this type of intervention, it will be imperative that clinicians work with elders who support the unity of the family but not the acquiescence of women to acts of sexual violence within a marriage. These elders may be especially helpful in providing insight to both partners on strategies for decreasing incidences of sexual violence as well as feedback on appropriate ways to manage the stressors that may precipitate acts of sexual violence in the marriage. Interventions that integrate input from elders in the community embody a respect for hierarchal relationships, which is a main component of South Asian feminism (Ibrahim et al., 1997, Preisser, 1999).

Interestingly, a number of participants noted that their current views on gender roles and interactions between genders have become less aligned with the traditional socialization present in Sri Lanka. This finding is particularly relevant for clinical work with individuals from the Sri Lankan community as scholars have emphasized the importance of not viewing culture as a static entity. Instead, culture, which can vary based on location and generation, is a flexible construct that shifts in relation to its interaction with one's context (Sokoloff, 2008). As such, it is important for clinicians to remain cognizant of the unique ways in which this process plays out for each individual. Clinicians who work with Sri Lankan survivors of sexual violence should not make assumptions regarding how closely they adhere to the traditional cultural views within which they were socialized. Instead, it is essential that clinicians explore each survivor's alignment, or lack thereof, with Sri Lankan cultural values and incorporate the values with which a survivor identifies into chosen interventions.

**Implications for community intervention.** The importance of intervention within the mesosystem was emphasized by participants as survivors of sexual violence in

the Sri Lankan community often are not supported and are stigmatized. These types of mesosystemic interactions were noted to impact survivors' microsystemic responses subsequent to experiences with sexual violence. Sri Lankan feminist thought has emphasized the benefits of the use of community-based strategies of change to increase the quality of life for Sri Lankan women (Marecek & Appuhamilage, 2011). Together, these findings demonstrate the necessity of community interventions that frame incidences of sexual violence as a community level problem as opposed to an interpersonal or individual problem (Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 2007).

One way to re-frame incidences of sexual violence as a community level problem is through decreasing the silence around sexual violence. All participants endorsed the presence of silence regarding sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community. Importantly, participants did not support the presence of this silence. Silence surrounding incidences of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States can be addressed through community-based interventions that target the cultural values that promote this silence. In particular, scholars have recommended that community level interventions with Sri Lankan immigrants focus on deconstructing community norms that implicitly or explicitly perpetuate victim blaming and gender inequality (Hyman et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). An example of this type of community-based intervention, identified by Hyman and colleagues (2011), is a program for young Sri Lankans that centers on the promotion of egalitarian gender roles and gender interactions. Through targeting the hierarchal relationships between women and men that contribute to more permissive attitudes towards sexual violence (Abraham, 1999; Morash et al., 2000), this

type of intervention may decrease victim blaming and build support for survivors of sexual violence in Sri Lankan community in the United States.

Another strategy to address the silence regarding sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States is the promotion of dialogue regarding sexual violence. Participants identified the need for an increased awareness of sexual violence within the community. Large-scale education efforts were recommended as one way to acknowledge sexual violence on a broad scale. Community level interventions that aim to increase knowledge and understanding of sexual violence should focus on providing members of the Sri Lankan community with information on the definition of sexual violence, a list of culturally competent resources for survivors in the area and the types of legal support that are available to survivors of sexual violence. The need for community level education efforts regarding sexual violence in Sri Lankan and immigrant communities has been identified in the literature (de Mel et al., 2013; Sokoloff, 2008). Through this type of intervention, members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States will be better equipped to provide appropriate types of support to survivors of sexual violence. In addition, a community level education program may strengthen a survivor's connection to the community. This increased level of connection may decrease the risk of isolation for survivors of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States (Hyman et al., 2011). Increasing a survivor's connection to the community is one way to build understanding and relationships within communities. The facilitation of stronger community relationships is a recommended component of Sri Lankan feminist interventions (Nesiah, 2012).

At a systems level, clinicians should work to promote structural changes that aim to reduce levels of post-migration stress in Sri Lankan immigrants. The importance of examining the interconnectedness of incidences of sexual violence in immigrant communities and experiences with structural inequalities and systems of oppression has been emphasized in the literature (Sokoloff, 2008). Interestingly, research on Sri Lankan immigrant communities in Canada reveals that some Sri Lankan women may only experience incidences of domestic violence, including sexual violence, subsequent to migration (Guruge et al., 2010). Thus, in addition to interventions within the micro- and meso- systemic levels, clinicians should aim to facilitate change within the macrosystem. Interventions that target access to childcare, the lack of recognition of international credentials and limited English fluency are posited to reduce levels of post-migration stress (Hyman et al., 2011). As acts of various types of violence, including sexual violence, in a marriage have been noted to be related to increased levels of stress in Sri Lankan immigrants (Hyman et al., 2011), decreasing the stress introduced by systems of oppression in the post-migration context may lead to a decrease in the perpetration of sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

**Difficulties associated with the implementation of recommendations for intervention.** The utilization of culturally tailored clinical and community sexual violence interventions for members of the Sri Lankan community is imperative as it has been suggested that interventions that address the unique backgrounds of South Asian women, and acknowledge the distinct barriers that immigrant women face (e.g., language barriers, isolation), are more successful (Rajan & Jethwani, 2007). Though the utilization

of culturally tailored interventions with Sri Lankan populations is essential, there are several obstacles associated with the development and use of these interventions.

One barrier to the implementation of services for members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States is the procurement of appropriate funding for the development of culturally tailored services. A study completed by Rajan and Jethwani (2007) revealed that one of the most significant barriers to developing organizations that serve South Asian populations is a lack of funds. As a result of a lack of funds, many South Asian organizations have been forced to rely on volunteers and limited resources (Rajan & Jethwani, 2007). With this obstacle in mind, clinicians who attempt to develop and implement clinical and community sexual violence interventions for members of the Sri Lankan immigrant community should actively seek funding prior to attempting to establish these interventions. This funding may be obtained from grants targeted at services for underserved or immigrant populations, community fundraising efforts or donations from community members (Rajan & Jethwani, 2007). Through obtaining the proper funding, clinicians who aim to provide sexual violence interventions to members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States will be better able to obtain office space and hire clinicians who have formal training in implementing sexual violence interventions as well as have some familiarity with Sri Lankan culture.

Another difficulty that presents itself when developing sexual violence services for members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States is the widespread silence that exists regarding sex, sexuality and sexual violence (Hussein, 2000; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). As this silence is integrated into many facets of Sri Lankan culture, the deconstruction of this silence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States will

likely necessitate extensive efforts from clinicians and community members over a long period of time. One way to decrease this silence is through the gradual building of support for services that address sexual violence among members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Community outreach has been identified as an effective strategy for building this support and increasing community motivation for change (Kim, 2005).

Rajan and Jethwani (2007) have suggested that outreach that consists of the dissemination of information on sexual violence in community venues that serve South Asian populations, such as temples and ethnic grocery stores, is a subtle and effective way of communicating the impact sexual violence has on South Asian women. With this recommendation in mind, prior to implementing the community level programming recommended in the Implications for Community Intervention section above, clinicians should conduct community outreach, which consists of providing written information on the prevalence of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States, in Buddhist and Hindu temples, community centers and retailers that serve large numbers of Sri Lankan immigrants. Through this outreach, clinicians should also aim to elicit support from a small number of Sri Lankan immigrants who approve of, and value, the implementation of culturally tailored interventions for sexual violence. Once this group of individuals has been identified, these individuals can continue outreach efforts by communicating the necessity of these interventions to their social networks. This method of building community support will slowly decrease silence around sexual violence. Additionally, through using this method to educate members of the community on sexual violence, clinicians will potentially avoid the disapproval that is likely to be associated

with explicit efforts to educate members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States on sexual violence.

Clinicians can also decrease silence around sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States through integrating services for sexual violence into larger community centers that provide members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States with services (e.g., English as a second language courses, computer courses) and opportunities for socialization. In areas in which such a center exists, clinicians should aim to implement sexual violence interventions within the center. This approach will require the development of a relationship and the building of trust between a clinician and the individuals who run the center. By integrating sexual violence services into an existing center that provides members of the Sri Lankan community with multiple services, sexual violence survivors who seek services from these centers will be able to maintain some form of confidentiality as they will not be receiving services from an organization that is solely devoted to sexual violence survivors.

For clinicians who aim to provide sexual violence interventions to Sri Lankan immigrants in areas in which a community center does not exist, prior to implementing these interventions, it would be beneficial for these clinicians to create an organization that assists members of this community in other ways. For instance, clinicians and other educators in the community could offer members of the Sri Lankan community classes, such as English as a second language or computer literacy courses, instruction on the citizenship application process as well as opportunities for socialization. The construction of this type of organization would facilitate the development of a sense of community among Sri Lankan immigrants in a particular area as well as allow members of the

community to develop trust in the service providers in the organization. Once this sense of community and trust have been developed, and members of the Sri Lankan community feel comfortable receiving services from the organization, clinicians can hold events that provide members of the organization with education on incidences of sexual violence within the Sri Lankan community in the United States and the options that are available to survivors. These education efforts will assist clinicians in decreasing the silence and shame around sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community. With time, clinicians can also begin to offer services for sexual violence within the organization.

In their efforts to create and provide services for sexual violence survivors in the Sri Lankan community in the United States, clinicians are likely to face unforeseen obstacles. In recent years, leaders of South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs) across the United States have held a conference called Aarohan. SAWOs are organizations that serve survivors of gender violence in the South Asian community (Rajan & Jethwani, 2007). In previous Aarohan conferences, staff, advocates, scholars and experts have discussed many of the known and unpredictable challenges that SAWOs face. Additionally, Aarohan conferences have provided SAWOs with an opportunity to engage in community building across organizations (Rajan & Jethwani, 2007). Given the networking and dialogue that occurs during Aarohan, it is imperative for clinicians who aim to provide sexual violence interventions to members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States to participate in Aarohan, or reach out to other SAWOs in the United States, from the initial planning stages to the implementation phase of sexual violence interventions. Through engaging in some form of community building, clinicians will be

provided with ideas for how to address certain barriers as well as with information on how to effectively engage in community outreach.

Taken together, though the results of the present study highlight the need for culturally tailored sexual violence interventions for members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States, there are a number of barriers with which clinicians will be faced during the process of attempting to implement these interventions. Regardless of the approach clinicians use to address these barriers, effectively developing and implementing sexual violence interventions for the Sri Lankan community in the United States will likely require funding, a decrease in silence regarding sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community in the United States and the creation of many relationships. Throughout this process, it is essential that clinicians develop trusting relationships with community members and other organizations. As these types of relationships typically develop over the course of time, providing services that address sexual violence to this community is an effort that requires a substantial time commitment. However, through engaging in the process of networking with community members and other organizations, clinicians will be better equipped to decrease the silence around sexual violence in this community, which, in turn, will lay the foundation for the implementation of culturally tailored interventions for sexual violence.

**Implications for research.** The present study is the first to focus on attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. As such, the findings of this study provide a wealth of information on the unique cultural and contextual factors that shape these attitudes in this population. Building upon the findings of this study, future research should focus on explicating additional sociocultural factors

that inform attitudes towards sexual violence among members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

This study sheds light on the unique ways in which the socialization patterns that are present in Sri Lanka, particularly gender role socialization and silence regarding sex and sexuality, shape first generation immigrants' attitudes regarding sexual violence in a post-migration context. However, little is known about how the transmission of these socialization patterns to later generations of Sri Lankans impacts attitudes regarding sexual violence. Therefore, future research should aim to explore views on sexual violence in this population, with a focus on adherence to traditional gender roles and silence around sex and sexuality. Through the completion of research with later generations of Sri Lankan immigrants, a better understanding will be reached on the continuum of influence of Sri Lankan cultural values on attitudes regarding sexual violence in a broader range of the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

In this same vein, future research should focus on the impact of level of acculturation on held attitudes regarding sexual violence. Participants in the present study were solely asked to choose their level of cultural identification from one of five options. As little is known regarding participants' levels of acculturation, it is difficult to determine from the findings of the present study whether level of acculturation is the factor that underlies the increased support for equality between the genders and the related lack of tolerance for acts of sexual violence. An examination of the ways in which level of acculturation shapes attitudes regarding gender roles, and the impact of these attitudes on beliefs about sexual violence, among members of the Sri Lankan community in the United States may help to situate the mixed findings on the influence of level of

acculturation on attitudes towards, and incidences of, violence in immigrant populations (e.g., Bhanot & Senn, 2007; Champion, 1996; Ganguly, 1998; Lown & Vega, 2001; Yick, 2000).

Relatedly, future research should further explore the role ethnic identity plays in attitudes towards sexual violence. Recent research on the Asian Indian community in the United States revealed that higher levels of identification with one's culture and cultural group (i.e., ethnic identity) impacts attitudes toward women and sex role egalitarianism (Tummala-Narra & Sathasivam-Rueckert, in progress). Notably, this research with the Asian Indian community is the first of its kind. Similar research with the Sri Lankan community in the United States would help to illuminate the potential impact of ethnic identity on attitudes towards women and gender, which can have important implications for beliefs about, and reactions to, sexual violence against women. Furthermore, research within this realm may assist in clarifying the complex relationship between ethnic identity and acculturation (Phinney, 2003).

In addition to exploring the ways that immigrant generation status, acculturation and ethnic identity inform attitudes towards sexual violence, subsequent research should aim to elucidate the influence of gender on these attitudes. While the findings of the present study shed light on an important and silenced topic in the Sri Lankan community, participants' responses provided little insight into men's experiences of the gendered socialization that occurs in Sri Lankan culture. Thus, future research should examine men's perceptions of the gendered socialization patterns that are present in Sri Lankan culture and explicate the ways that this socialization informs current attitudes towards sexual violence. Additionally, as the majority of the extant research on attitudes towards

violence has focused on violence against Sri Lankan women (see Haj-Yahia & de Zoysa, 2007; Hussein, 2000; Jayasuriya et al., 2011; Jayatilleke et al., 2011; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012), research that explores incidences of, and responses to, sexual violence against Sri Lankan boys and men would make a significant contribution to the literature on sexual violence in Sri Lankan communities as well as to culturally informed interventions for the Sri Lankan community in the United States.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, future research on the Sri Lankan community in the United States should aim to separately examine attitudes held by the majority and minority ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Extant research with the Sri Lankan immigrant community in Canada has already ascribed to this approach (e.g., Hyman et al., 2001; Guruge, 2010, 2014; Guruge et al., 2010; Kanagaratnam et al., 2012). Given the silence associated with sex, sexuality and sexual violence in Sri Lanka, recruitment for the present study proved to be a challenge. Therefore, the researcher was unable to find equal numbers of Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil participants.

It is important to keep in mind that while the results of the present study denote attitudes held by “Sri Lankans,” these findings should by no means be taken to represent an amalgamation of the views of Sri Lankans as a whole. In their responses, a number of participants explicitly referenced the differences in attitudes and behaviors between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities. Moreover, given the oppression experienced by the Tamil minority group leading up to and during the civil war, significant differences exist in the migration histories of the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils (Sriskandarajah, 2005). These experiences of domination and oppression, and unique migration histories, may significantly impact held attitudes towards sexual violence

among Sri Lankan Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants. Thus, future research should examine the convergence or divergence of attitudes towards sexual violence between these two ethnic groups.

### **Conclusions**

The navigation of pre- and post-migration contexts assists in shaping extant attitudes towards sexual violence among Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. Patriarchal socialization regarding gender roles, sex and sexuality in Sri Lanka facilitates silence regarding sexual violence among Sri Lankans. For some Sri Lankan immigrants, these cultural values intersect with the cultural values present in the United States to lend to more progressive attitudes towards sexual violence. Despite early socialization within a culture that does not promote acknowledgement of acts of sexual violence, participants in the present study do not support the presence of silence around sexual violence in Sri Lanka or in the Sri Lankan community in the United States. Instead, survivors of sexual violence in both Sri Lanka and in the Sri Lankan community in the United States were strongly encouraged to seek help subsequent to acts of sexual violence. In addition, Sri Lankan community members were advised to shift away from the traditional responses of victim blaming and shaming and move towards providing survivors of sexual violence with extreme empathy and any practical supports they may need.

The responses of participants denote the unique histories of Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. The long-standing civil war in Sri Lanka contributed to differential access to power and privilege and unique motives for migration across ethnic groups. These distinct experiences highlight the need for future research that examines the ways in which attitudes towards sexual violence may diverge between ethnic groups.

Moreover, the cross-generational transmission of Sri Lankan cultural values may be elucidated in future research on attitudes towards sexual violence with later generations of Sri Lankan immigrants. Given the distinct histories of Sri Lankan immigrants, when working with this population, it is imperative to remain cognizant of the multiple factors that influence the navigation of Sri Lankan cultural values in the post-migration context of the United States. Through maintaining an awareness of these factors, clinical work and interventions with this population can be appropriately tailored to thoughtfully integrate salient Sri Lankan cultural values.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear [Contact Person from Organization],

You are invited to participate in a research study on views on gender and sexual violence in the Sri Lankan immigrant community. This study is being conducted by Nina Sathasivam-Rueckert, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology at Boston College. The purpose of this study is to better understand Sri Lankan immigrants' views on men and women and relationships between men and women.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

- Are over the age of 18
- Were born in Sri Lanka
- Immigrated to the United States at age 18 or older
- Have been living in the United States for at least 1 year
- Are English proficient or English fluent

Your participation in this study will involve completing one interview that lasts between one and two hours. Interviews may be completed in-person (depending on location), over the phone or via Skype.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating in this study, or have questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at [sathasiv@bc.edu](mailto:sathasiv@bc.edu). Also, if you know any Sri Lankan immigrants who may be interested in participating in this study, please pass along this information and my contact information.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Nina Sathasivam-Rueckert, M.S.W.  
Boston College

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form



**Boston College**  
**Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology**  
**Informed Consent Form for Participation in “Views on Gender and Sexual Violence**  
**among Sri Lankans in the United States”**  
**Researcher: Nina Sathasivam-Rueckert**

**Introduction**

You are being asked to be in a research study on views on gender and sexual violence in Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States. You were chosen to be in the study because you are a first-generation Sri Lankan immigrant, over the age of 18, who has been living in the United States for at least one year. Before signing, please read this whole form. Please ask the researcher any questions you may have before you agree to participate in the study.

**Purpose of Study:**

This study is being completed by Nina Sathasivam-Rueckert, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology at Boston College. The goal of this study is to better understand Sri Lankan immigrants’ beliefs about men and women, relationships between men and women, and sexual violence against women.

**What will happen in the Study:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete an interview that lasts between one and two hours. During this interview, I will ask you questions about your beliefs about the roles of Sri Lankan men and women, relationships between Sri Lankan men and women, and sexual violence against Sri Lankan women. You do not have to answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can stop the interview at any time.

Interviews will be audiotaped and will be completed in-person in a private location that is convenient for you and the researcher. If you live in another state, or do not want to complete an in-person interview, you will have the choice to complete an interview, in a private location, over the telephone or via Skype.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are minimal physical, social and economic risks associated with being in this study. There are some psychological risks associated with being in this study. It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable when being asked or answering certain questions. If this is the case, you will be provided with some brief support by the researcher and a list of referrals for counseling services, if necessary. Additionally, the study may include some risks that are unknown at this time.

By being in this study, you will help to provide information on the views of Sri Lankan immigrants on the roles of Sri Lankan men and women and sexual violence against Sri Lankan women. By being in this study, you may also come to better understand your own views on these topics. Your responses may also help to inform research and clinical work with Sri Lankan immigrants in the United States.

**Payments and Costs of Being in the Study:**

There is no payment for being in this research study. There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

**Confidentiality:**

All interviews will be conducted by the researcher in a private setting. If you complete a telephone or Skype interview, you will be asked to complete the interview in a private setting. All audio-recordings and interview transcripts will be kept private. If names, or other personally identifiable information, are used during the interview, they will be replaced with fake names in the interview transcript. This form will be kept separately from the information you provide during the interview. This form and audio-recordings will be kept in a locked file drawer. The audio-recordings will be destroyed after the interviews are transcribed. Electronic copies of the interview transcripts will be coded and secured using a password-protected file.

In any sort of scholarly publication or other documents resulting from this research, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. If I quote you, or other participants from the study, I will replace your name with a fake name.

In the event that you disclose information about current physical or sexual abuse of anyone under the age of 18, as a mandated reporter, I am required to report the abuse to the local authorities in the state in which the abuse is occurring.

The data collected from this study will be kept for five years after the results of this study are published. At that time, the consent forms will be shredded and the interview transcripts will be destroyed.

**Choosing to be in this Study and Choosing to Quit this Study:**

Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. You are free to quit at any time, for any reason. There is no punishment for not taking part in or quitting this study. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relationships with me, Dr. Usha Tummala-Narra or Boston College.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher leading this study is Nina Sathasivam-Rueckert. For questions, or more information about this study, you may contact her at (608) 217-3532 or [sathasiv@bc.edu](mailto:sathasiv@bc.edu) or her faculty advisor, Dr. Usha Tummala-Narra, at (617) 552-4491 or [usha.tummala@bc.edu](mailto:usha.tummala@bc.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this study, you may contact Dr. Stephen Erickson, Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778 or ericksst@bc.edu.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read **this whole** consent form. I understand the purpose of the study and have had all of my questions answered. I understand that I do not have to answer all questions asked during the interview, and I am able stop participation at any time, without punishment. I understand that my interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. I understand that my name and any other personally identifiable information will be kept confidential. I understand that there are no payments or costs to me for being in this study. I give my consent to be in this study and allow the researcher to use my responses in scholarly publications. I have received a copy of this form.

Study Participant (Print Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C: Background Information From

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Religion:

Year of immigration:

Age of immigration:

Number of years living in the United States:

Cultural self-identification (please select one):

Very Sri Lankan, More Sri Lankan than American, Both Sri Lankan and American, More American than Sri Lankan, Very American

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Survivors of Sexual Violence

1. Tell me about how the roles of women and men are viewed in the Sri Lankan community.
  - a. What types of things did you learn about women and men while growing up in Sri Lanka?
  - b. How were the roles of women and men talked about in your home?
  - c. How were the roles of women and men talked about in your community?
  - d. How have you come to see these views?
    - i. Has this been different since moving to the U.S.?
2. How do you feel women should behave in relationships or interactions with men?
3. What are your beliefs regarding the sexual behavior of women? Of men?
  - a. What did you learn about the sexual behavior of women while growing up as a Sri Lankan? Of men?
4. Tell me about how you believe women should behave sexually.
  - a. Is this different for women who are married versus women who are not married?
5. Tell me how you define sexual violence.
6. Do you know any woman who has experienced sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community?
  - a. Did you discuss your experience(s) with any members of the Sri Lankan community? Why or why not?
  - b. Did your decision to discuss/not discuss your experience(s) with other Sri Lankans change over time?
  - c. How were you treated by members of the Sri Lankan community after discussing your experience(s)?
  - d. What kinds of struggles did you face after discussing your experience(s) with members of the Sri Lankan community?
7. How do you think other women who have experienced sexual violence are treated in the Sri Lankan community?
  - a. Are there differences in this treatment of women in Sri Lanka versus in the U.S.?
8. What kinds of struggles do you think other women who have experienced sexual violence face in the Sri Lankan community? Are there differences in these struggles in Sri Lanka versus in the U.S.?
  - a. What is your overall impression of sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the U.S.?
  - b. How do you think that the issue of sexual violence is addressed in the Sri Lankan community in the U.S.?
9. What is your overall impression of sexual violence against women in Sri Lanka?
  - a. How do you think the issue of sexual violence is addressed in Sri Lanka?
  - b. Do you think that the Civil War and ongoing political tensions in Sri Lanka are related to sexual violence against women in Sri Lanka?
10. How do you think that Sri Lankan women who experience sexual violence should respond? Should they seek help, and if so, from whom?
  - a. How should the family respond?
  - b. How should the community respond?
  - c. How should the justice system (e.g., police, courts) respond?

- d. Is this different in Sri Lanka versus in the U.S.?
- 11. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that would help me better understand your views about sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the U.S.?

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Participants who have not Experienced Sexual Violence

1. Tell me about how the roles of women and men are viewed in the Sri Lankan community.
  - a. What types of things did you learn about women and men while growing up in Sri Lanka?
  - b. How were the roles of women and men talked about in your home?
  - c. How were the roles of women and men talked about in your community?
  - d. How have you come to see these views?
    - i. Has this been different since moving to the U.S.?
2. How do you feel women should behave in relationships or interactions with men?
3. What are your beliefs regarding the sexual behavior of women? Of men?
  - a. What did you learn about the sexual behavior of women while growing up as a Sri Lankan? Of men?
4. Tell me about how you believe women should behave sexually.
  - a. Is this different for women who are married versus women who are not married?
5. Tell me how you define sexual violence.
6. Do you know any woman who has experienced sexual violence in the Sri Lankan community?
  - a. What were your initial reactions?
  - b. How do you feel about this now?
7. How do you think women who experience sexual violence are treated in the Sri Lankan community?
  - a. Are there differences in this treatment of women in Sri Lanka versus in the U.S.?
8. What kinds of struggles do you think women who experience sexual violence face in the Sri Lankan community? Are there differences in these struggles in Sri Lanka versus in the U.S.?
  - a. What is your overall impression of sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the U.S.?
  - b. How do you think that the issue of sexual violence is addressed in the Sri Lankan community in the U.S.?
9. What is your overall impression of sexual violence against women in Sri Lanka?
  - a. How do you think the issue of sexual violence is addressed in Sri Lanka?
  - b. Do you think that the Civil War and ongoing political tensions in Sri Lanka are related to sexual violence against women in Sri Lanka?
10. How do you think that Sri Lankan women who experience sexual violence should respond? Should they seek help, and if so, from whom?
  - a. How should the family respond?
  - b. How should the community respond?
  - c. How should the justice system (e.g., police, courts) respond?
  - d. Is this different in Sri Lanka versus in the U.S.?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that would help me better understand your views about sexual violence against women in the Sri Lankan community in the U.S.?