Article

Sri Lankan Americans' views on U.S. racial issues are influenced by pre-migrant ethnic prejudice and identity

Isuru D. Gunawardena[1], Amanda M. Petersen[2]
[1]Ocean Lakes High School, Mathematics and Science Academy, Virginia Beach, Virginia
[2]Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia

SUMMARY

The population of South Asian immigrants is growing in the United States (U.S.), and with it, their involvement in U.S. racial issues are becoming increasingly important to recognize and understand. Additionally, subpopulations of these immigrants will have unique experiences from their home countries that likely influence their views on U.S. race relations. In this study, we examined how Sri Lankan Americans (SLAs) view racial issues in the U.S. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was an area of interest because of its similarities to racial and ethnic struggles in Sri Lanka. Our main hypothesis is that SLAs, as a minority in the U.S., are supportive of the BLM movement and its political goal, challenging the common notion that SLAs are anti-Black. In this research, we surveyed 310 SLA participants living in the U.S. on four focal areas: racial issues in the U.S. and Sri Lanka, SLAs' civic engagement in the U.S., ethnic identity, and how SLAs perceive themselves as model minorities. Our study found that a majority of SLAs believe the U.S. has systemic racism, favor BLM, and favor affirmative action. We also found that Tamil SLAs have more favorable views of BLM and affirmative action than Sinhalese SLAs. SLAs have very low civic engagement and a strong sense of ethnic identity, seeing themselves as a model minority. Furthermore, Tamil and Sinhalese SLAs' views on racial issues in the U.S. are significantly influenced by past experiences in ethnic conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Today, one in every fifty human beings is a migrant worker, refugee, asylum seeker, or immigrant living in a foreign country (1, 2). One in eight U.S. residents (13.7%) is foreign-born—6% of whom are from South Asia (3). Immigrant views on racial issues in America are becoming more complex every day. For example, all immigrant ethnic groups have been marginalized by systemic racism in the U.S. (4–6). Asian Americans are not monolithic, as they comprise a vastly diverse ethnic group (7). When it comes to sub-populations like Sri Lankan Americans (SLAs), views on racial issues are growing even more complex due to the ethnic conflicts they faced before migrating to the U.S. Currently, there are approximately 70,000 SLAs

living in the U.S., making them part of the workforce in most metropolitan cities (9). Most SLAs belong to two main ethnic groups: 60% of them are Sinhalese and 36% are Tamil (8, 9).

Sri Lanka is an island with a land area of 65,610 square kilometers at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. The population of the island is close to 22 million (2020 World Bank estimate). Sri Lanka has three major ethnic groups and four religions. The Sinhalese are the majority ethnic group, consisting of 72% of the population, having descended from northern India; they speak Sinhala, and the majority are Theravada Buddhists. Tamils are the second largest ethnic group, consisting of 16% of the population, descending from southern India; they speak Tamil, and a majority are Hindu (10). Sri Lankan Muslims consist of 9% of the population. They speak the Tamil language and are predominantly followers of Islam. About 7% of Sri Lanka's population of 22 million are Christian, with most identifying their specific denomination as Roman Catholic (10).

Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948 after being colonized for 450 years by the Portuguese, Dutch, and English. After regaining independence, the post-colonial Sinhala-dominated government gradually alienated the Tamil minority. The main political parties implemented discriminatory policies to please the Sinhalese and stay in power, such as making Sinhalese the official government language. Years of the Tamil people's complaints were ignored by both the Sri Lankan government and their own politicians (11). After decades of ethnic tension, Tamil youth launched an armed uprising and started a civil war between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil separatist groups (1983–2009).

The war continued for 30 years. It caused significant hardships for the population, environment, and economy of the country, especially in the northeast (NE) part of Sri Lanka where the Tamil minority is concentrated. The war was estimated to kill at least 80,000, if not over 100,000, people throughout its duration, with a UN panel estimating 100,000 civilians dead (12, 13). Most of the Sri Lankan immigrants came to the U.S. after the civil war erupted in Sri Lanka. These Sri Lankans were able to migrate into the U.S. through a diversity visa program, political asylum, and nonimmigrant visa program (15). The war resulted in long-lasting changes in beliefs about other ethnic groups, particularly racially discriminatory ideas.

When Sri Lanka was colonized, the British introduced their

own anti-Black beliefs into Sri Lankan culture, partially through the British preference that lighter-skinned Sri Lankans take roles in the new government. These beliefs and preference remain today in many different forms. For example, it manifests strongly in the prestigious and exclusive international schools, as well as the major missionary schools, which dictate much of Sri Lanka's social conditioning long after the completion of high school. Additionally, light skin is still preferred to dark skin since the latter is associated with those who do outdoor manual labor (16). Proximity to whiteness via a fairer skin tone has conferred privilege in Sri Lankan society, resulting in practices such as skin bleaching, which has vast physical and mental health consequences (17).

As in Sri Lanka, racial and ethnic conflicts are common in U.S. society, with many individuals in the U.S. expressing negative attitudes or views of other racial or ethnic groups. This has been reflected, for example, in discriminatory laws, practices, actions, and acts of violence against certain racial or ethnic groups (18). Throughout American history, White Americans have seen privileges and rights often denied to various ethnic or minority groups. Even while slavery has long been abolished, anti-Blackness remains a significant part of U.S. culture. Indeed, over half of Americans believe race relations in the U.S. are bad and are getting worse (19). Further, African Americans (82%) and Asian Americans (about 60%) both tend to agree that African Americans are the racial group that experiences the most discrimination (18).

Racialization is the process through which racial categories are constructed and through which characteristics are assigned to those racial groups (20). While some racial groups are marked in negative ways (such as being seen as criminal, dangerous, lazy, or unintelligent) others are seen in a positive light (such as being intelligent, family-oriented, or hard workers). It has been argued that Asian Americans experience the latter, often being labeled a "model minority" (20). While this label seems positive, it suggests that Asian Americans have succeeded despite racial discrimination and that other racial groups, especially African Americans, should be able to do the same.

The primary aim of this study was to understand how SLAs perceive the issues facing African Americans, as well as their own ethnic identity. Secondarily, we worked to understand how the life experiences of SLAs influence these views. Based on our understanding of SLA history, we predicted our analysis would reveal that a) given their minority group status in the U.S., SLAs will be generally supportive of African Americans and their political goals, b) Tamil SLAs, who experienced minority-group status in the U.S. as well as in Sri Lanka, will be more supportive of African Americans than Sinhalese SLAs, c) civic engagement and sense of ethnic identity among SLAs will positively correlate to support of African Americans, and d) SLAs will perceive themselves as a model minority.

Our survey data supported many of these hypotheses. Overall, SLAs are in favor of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and affirmative action, but significant differences emerge between the data from the two ethnic groups. The war in northeast Sri Lanka appears to have positively affected SLAs' views on racial issues in the U.S., supporting our second hypothesis. The results of our study indicate a remarkably high correlation between civic engagement and support of African Americans, but a moderate relationship between ethnic identity and support of African Americans. Finally, our data strongly supported the idea that the ethnic identity of SLAs made them feel trapped within the model minority myth.

RESULTS

Participants' demographic characteristics

A total of 310 SLAs participated in the study. Over 230 respondents responded through mail, with physical copies, while 70 respondents filled out the online survey. To answer survey questions, respondents were given a continuum of five options. For example, for some questions the possible responses ranged from "never" to "always," and others ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

The largest proportion of participants at 40.2% (n = 121) lived in New York, while 23.6% (n = 71) lived in Virginia, 8.6% (n = 26) in Maryland, 5.3% (n = 16) in New Jersey, 4% (n = 12) in either Massachusetts or California, 2.3% (n = 7) in Illinois, and 1% (n = 3) in Washington, DC.

Of these participants, 166 (54.25%) were female and 140 (45.75%) were male. Regarding ethnicity, 224 (73.2%) identified as Sinhalese, 76 (24.51%) identified as Tamil, 2 (0.65%) were Muslim, and 3 (0.98%) were ethnic Burgher. Their religious distribution was as follows: Buddhist, 58.5%; Hindu, 22.55%; Catholic, 15.69%; Muslim, 0.33%; and Atheist, 0.65%. Of seven age categories, the majority (27.78%) were in the 45–54 age group. Concerning income, 13% did not report their average household income and 40% of respondents' household income exceeded $60,000. Regarding immigration, 68% of SLAs left Sri Lanka before 2009. While 17% of all SLAs reported the Northeast (NE) Civil War as their main reason for migrating, 59% of Tamils attributed their migration to the civil war. Among Sinhalese, most claimed to leave Sri Lanka to further their education.

Effects of the NE Civil War in Sri Lanka

Tamil SLAs reported significantly more severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression due to the NE civil war than Sinhalese SLAs (Mean score (M) = 4.52 ± 0.86 for Tamil; M = 1.33 ± 0.75 for Sinhala, t-test p < 0.001). Additionally, Tamil SLAs were more directly affected by the NE civil war in Sri Lanka than Sinhalese (M = 4.75 ± 0.79 for Tamil; M = 2.61 ± 1.21 for Sinhala, p < 0.001).

Race relations in Sri Lanka

Data were analyzed to determine whether any difference in the perceptions of ethnic issues in Sri Lanka existed between Sinhala and Tamil SLAs. More Tamil SLAs agreed

than Sinhalese SLAs that Sri Lanka has systemic racism (M = 4.84 ± 0.47 for Tamil; M = 2.95 ± 1.24 for Sinhala, t (287.96) = -18.93, $p < 0.001$). Tamils had a significantly greater belief than Sinhalese that Sri Lanka's NE region, where most Tamils were from, received less priority in development and allocation of resources (M = 4.85 ± 0.40 for Tamil; M = 2.74 ± 1.14 for Sinhala, t (292.64) = -23.69, $p < 0.001$).

Compared to Sinhalese participants, Tamils far more commonly read books, articles, or web content to learn about the history of Sri Lankan ethnic issues (M = 3.65 ± 0.69 for Tamil; M = 2.91 ± 1.06 for Sinhala, t (197.78) = -6.97, $p < 0.001$) and discussed racial issues affecting Sri Lanka with their spouse or partner, family members, friends, children, or coworkers (M = 3.69 ± Standard Deviation (SD) for Tamil; M = 2.91 ± 0.96 for Sinhala, t (200.81) = -8.22, $p < 0.001$).

Tamils were significantly more supportive of the idea that underrepresented ethnic groups should receive preference for university admission (M = 4.80 ± 0.59 for Tamil; M = 2.65 ± 1.11 for Sinhala, t (241.12) = -21.00, $p < 0.001$) and for employment (M = 4.71 ± 0.82 for Tamil; M = 2.59 ± 1.19 for Sinhala, t (187.56) = -16.99, $p < 0.001$) in Sri Lanka.

Lastly, Tamils felt significantly worse about the race relations in Sri Lanka today (M = 4.63 ± 0.94 for Tamil; M = 2.80 ± 1.21 for Sinhala, t (164.71) = -13.36).

Views on Black Lives Matter

Overall, SLAs have a favorable view of the BLM movement (M = 4.11 ± 0.975). Further statistical tests were run to determine if differences existed between the views of Tamil and Sinhalese SLAs toward the BLM movement. Tamil SLAs have more strongly supported the BLM movement (M = 4.57 ± 0.92) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 3.65 ± 1.03), with a statistically significant difference (95% CI [0.68, 1.18], t (141.717) = 7.332, $p < 0.001$). In this research, we primarily explored the views of Sri Lankan Americans (SLAs) on racial issues (**Figure 1A**). SLAs agreed with the statement that all lives cannot matter until Black Lives Matter (M = 3.51 ± 1.0). Again, Tamil SLAs had stronger support for BLM (M = 3.91 ± 0.77) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 3.10 ± 1.24), with a statistically significant difference (M = 0.811, 95% CI [0.57, 1.05], t (206.875) = 6.618, $p < 0.001$) (**Figure 1B**).

Views on Affirmative Action in the U.S.

Overall, SLAs agreed with the idea that underprivileged ethnic groups should receive preference for college admission (M =3.48 ± 0.90) and employment (M =3.44 ± 0.6). Tamil SLAs more strongly agreed that underprivileged ethnic groups should receive preference for college admission in the U.S. (M = 3.99 ± 0.63) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 2.97 ± 1.17), with a statistically significant difference (M = 1.019, 95% CI [0.81, 1.23], t (240.307) = 9.502, $p < 0.001$) (**Figure 1C**). Tamil SLAs also agreed more strongly with the idea that underprivileged ethnic groups should receive preference for employment in the U.S. (M = 3.93 ± 0.07) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 2.95 ± 1.13), with a

statistically significant difference (M = 0.979, 95% CI [0.78, 1.18], t (242.172) = 9.482, $p < 0.001$) (**Figure 1D**).

Racial issues, minority myth, civic engagement, and ethnic identity

SLAs agreed that systemic racism exists in the U.S. (M = 3.54 ± 0.92) with Tamil SLAs agreeing more strongly with this statement (M = 3.83 ± 0.69) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 3.25 ± 1.16), with a statistically significant difference (M = 0.577, 95% CI [0.36, 0.80], t (217.618) = 5.207, $p < 0.001$).

SLAs perceived themselves as a model minority, with a mean score of 3.71 and a SD of 0.72. Tamil SLAs believed more in the model minority myth (M = 4.17 ± 0.66) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 3.25 ± 0.78), with a statistically significant difference (M = 0.929, 95% CI [0.75, 1.11], t (148.879) = 10.074, $p < 0.001$).

With relation to civic engagement, overall, SLAs have reported low involvement (M = 1.87 ± 0.48). Sinhalese SLAs had higher civic engagement scores (M = 2.27 ± 0.61) compared to Tamil SLAs (M = 1.46 ± 0.35), with a statistically significant difference (M = 0.802, 95% CI [0.69, 0.92], t (221.632) = 13.894, $p < 0.001$).

SLAs' mean score for ethnic identity was 4.0, with an SD of 0.67. Tamil SLAs scored higher in ethnic identity (M = 4.43 ± 0.43) compared to Sinhalese SLAs (M = 3.58 ± 0.91), with a statistically significant difference (M = 0.845, 95% CI [0.69, 1.00], t (265.432) = 10.778, $p < 0.001$).

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between U.S. racial issues, belief in the model minority myth, civic engagement, and ethnic identity. The findings showed a statistically significant, moderately positive correlation between U.S. racial issues and belief in the model minority myth (r_s (304) = 0.325, $p < 0.001$). There was also a strong positive correlation between U.S. racial issues and civic engagement (r_s (304) = 0.615, $p < 0.001$), as well as a moderately positive correlation between U.S. racial issues and ethnic identity (r_s (304) = 0.340, $p < 0.001$). Further, there was a strong negative correlation between the model minority myth and civic engagement (r_s (304) = -0.565, $p < 0.001$). There was also a strong positive correlation between the model minority myth and ethnic identity (r_s (303) = 0.529, $p < 0.001$). Finally, there was a statistically significant, strong negative correlation between civic engagement and ethnic identity (r_s (303) = -0.417, $p < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

In support of our first hypothesis, SLAs have overall favorable views on the BLM movement and affirmative action in the U.S. In support of our second hypothesis, as a minority group, Tamil SLAs have a more favorable view of both the BLM movement and affirmative action in the U.S. than Sinhalese SLAs. Our study therefore does not support the common notion that SLAs are anti-Black. The findings indicate that anti-Black sentiment in Sri Lanka is less prevalent than previously thought. We believe that the recent police

SLAs Views on Racial Issues in the US.
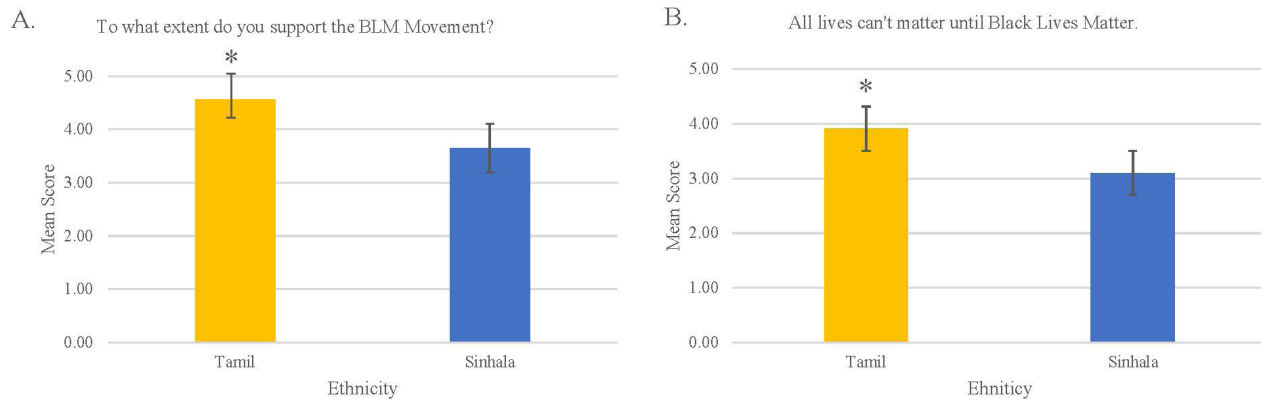

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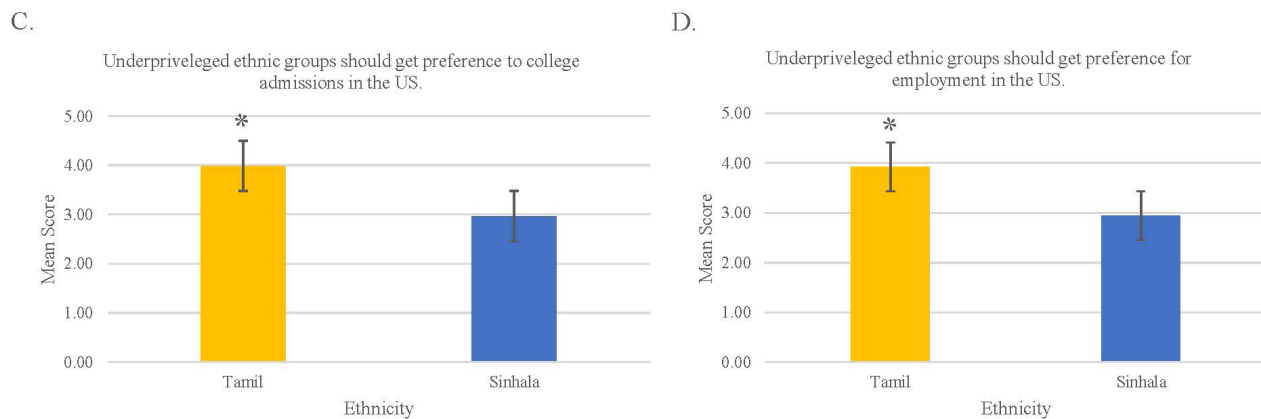
Figure 1. SLAs' views on racial issues and affirmative action in the U.S. Bar graphs show the mean scores of SLA Sinhala and Tamil respondent's views for 4 questions. Graphs **A** and **B** show the views on racial issues in the U.S. and graphs **B** and **C** show the views on affirmative action in the U.S. Error bars represent standard deviations. Y axis indicates mean score of views: 1-strongly oppose, 2-oppose, 3-support nor oppose, 4-support and 5-strongly support. * = $p < 0.001$. SLA Tamils views are significantly different from SLA Sinhala respondents.

brutality and mass protests have made immigrant populations more aware of racial issues in the U.S. In contrast to our data, the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS) indicated that Asian Americans exhibit indifference to supporting the BLM movement (21). However, according to nationally representative surveys, Asian Americans have been more likely to support the BLM movement and less likely to oppose the BLM movement compared to non-Hispanic/Latinx White individuals in 2016 and 2020 (22–24).

Our study indicates that Tamil SLAs were significantly affected by the civil war, which aligns with the findings of existing studies (25). Tamil SLAs are more in favor of the BLM movement and affirmative action, and more strongly in agreement with the statement that "all lives can't matter until Black Lives Matter," than Sinhalese SLAs. As a minority in Sri Lanka, Tamil SLAs face systemic racism (26) and thus, they have firsthand experiences of systemic racism that Sinhalese

SLAs may not have. Their previous experiences in Sri Lanka before migrating to the U.S., then, may influence their views on racial issues in the U.S. Our study indicates that if a particular ethnic group is a minority in their pre-migrant country, they are likely to better support racial equality in the U.S. This finding also supports our second hypothesis that immigrant experiences before migrating to the U.S. have a significant association on their view of racial issues in the U.S. We could not find similar studies on immigration of SLAs or other immigrant populations with similar circumstances to support this finding. Rather, our study proposes this novel idea—the concept that *pre-migrant ethnic discrimination* (PMED) affects U.S. race relations (**Figure 2**).

Twelve years after the civil war ended, our study supported that Tamil SLA participants feel that race relations in Sri Lanka are growing worse, which aligns with Sri Lankan experts' views on this matter (27). The end of the civil war
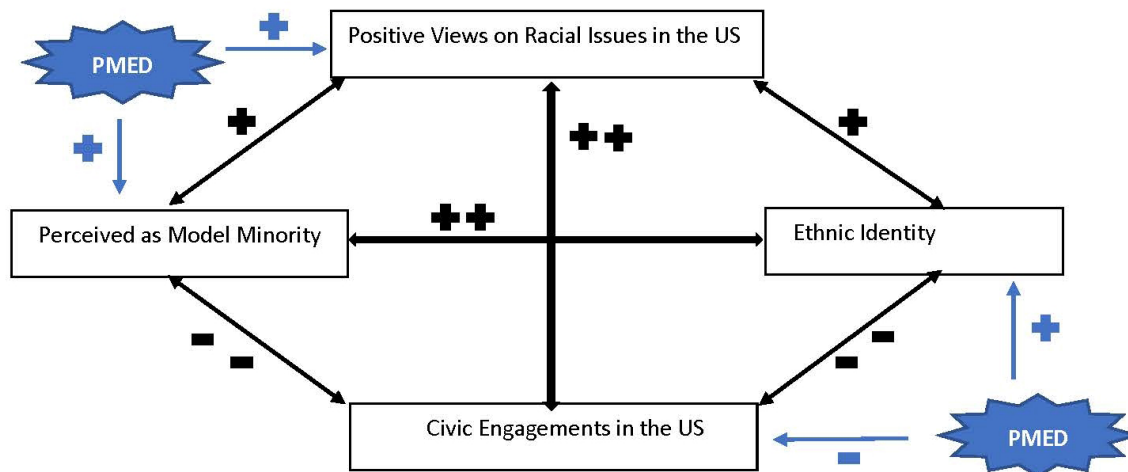
Figure 2. Relationship between four focus areas: race relations in the U.S., ethnic identity, how SLAs perceive themselves as a model minority, and SLA civic engagement in the U.S. Our study shows a strong positive correlation between being perceived as a model minority, ethnic identity and civic engagement in the U.S, and positive views on racial issues in the U.S. There is a positive moderate correlation between: the positive views on racial issues in the US and being perceived as model minority; positive view on racial issues in the U.S. and ethnic identity; pre-migrant ethnic discrimination (PMED) and positive views on racial issues in the U.S.; PMED and being perceived as a model minority; PMED and ethnic identity. There is a negative strong correlation between perceived as model minority and civic engagement in the U.S., and ethnic identity and civic engagement in the U.S. Lastly, there is a negative moderate correlation between civic engagement in the U.S. and PMED.

does not mean that tensions are fine, though. Thus, large-scale dialogue is necessary within the Sinhala ethnic group in Sri Lanka to reach ethnic reconciliation. The Sri Lankan government and western global powers and civil society organizations must bring lasting political solutions to address the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

Regarding our third hypothesis, our study supported a moderately positive correlation among SLAs between ethnic identity and views of racial issues in the U.S. (systemic racism, BLM movement, and the belief that "all lives can't matter unless BLM"). Participants' responses show that a strong ethnic identity and strong views on racial issues has a positive correlation (28). Previous studies indicate that ethnic identity serves as a strong predictor of how African Americans view the BLM movement (29). We found no previous studies demonstrating how South Asian or SLA ethnic identity predicts one's view on racial issues in the U.S. This is the first study to explore this issue within the SLA population, and we hope conducting similar studies will solidify our findings. The strong negative correlation shown between ethnic identity and civic engagement is consistent with previous studies conducted with immigrant populations in the U.S. (30, 31). We believe that SLA immigrants tend to have less interest in civic engagement due to language barriers, inability to vote, their busy work environment and lack of interest in political activity in the U.S. Further, SLAs lack trust in the political system and leadership due to influences from "experiences back home" (32, 33).

Also pertaining to our third hypothesis, civic engagement among SLAs has a positive correlation with racial issues in the U.S., which aligns with the findings of well-grounded prior studies (34). This supports our third hypothesis that an SLA immigrant's ethnic identity (Sinhala or Tamil) and level of civic engagement also influence this individual's view of racial issues in the U.S. Most SLA immigrants come to the U.S. in their mid-forties; their exposure to American history and culture is therefore limited. They hardly know about slavery, segregation, Jim Crow laws, and the civil rights movement. Slavery was abolished over 150 years ago, yet it continues to affect contemporary society—a point SLAs may not understand (36). When engaging in civic activity, SLAs typically meet people from other ethnic groups and develop cordial relationships. Otherwise, most SLAs limit their interaction to their own community. It is likely, then, that when SLAs work closely with people from other communities, they gain more understanding and respect for others and are willing to voice support for their rights as well. As previous studies have suggested, we believe that humanistic psychology, with its foundational commitments to human dignity, empathy, and compassion, can and should make important contributions to understanding social justice issues and the BLM protest movement (35).

The controversial model minority concept was introduced in 1966, describing Asian Americans as more academically, economically, and socially successful than any other racial minority group due to their emphasis on hard work,

perseverance, and belief in American meritocracy (37). Consistent with our fourth hypothesis, respondents perceived Asian Americans as a model minority, and Tamil SLAs perceived themselves as a model minority more often than Sinhalese SLAs. Our data reveals a strong negative correlation between perceiving oneself as a model minority and civic engagement. Furthermore, belief in the model minority myth and U.S. racial issues have a moderately positive correlation, although previous studies on this issue have shown contradictory views (39, 40). The model minority image was used to discredit and deter the civil rights movement of the 1960s as well as silence critics of the systemic racism in the U.S. (37, 38). Thus, the idea that SLAs' perception of being a model minority is linked to support for racial issues in the U.S. appears contradictory. However, we would argue that SLAs not only perceive themselves as a model minority but also as a marginalized minority.

Our study indicates a strong positive correlation between the ethnic identity score of SLAs and the belief in the idea of a model minority. The correlation is stronger among Tamil SLAs compared to Sinhalese SLAs, which supports our last hypothesis. We did not see previous studies targeting this correlation and as such, further research with larger sample sizes will be necessary to confirm this relationship.

In conclusion, SLA immigrants' views of racial issues in the U.S. are complex, and influenced by pre-migrant social discrimination, ethnic identity, and civic engagement in the U.S. Tamil SLAs have been disappointed about ethnic reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka. To achieve reconciliation after migration, we propose that Sinhalese SLAs should befriend Tamil SLAs in their communities in the U.S. To improve civic engagement among SLAs, we suggest that local not-for-profit organizations in areas with a high SLA immigrant population like New York City, New Jersey, and Los Angeles should recruit SLA immigrants to help with their church, temple, blood donation drives, and fundraising events. They should also encourage immigrants to apply for U.S. citizenship and register to vote when eligible. Additionally, they should encourage SLAs to engage in political activity. This myth supports the belief that Asian people are invisible, agreeable, and unlikely to push back when faced with intrusiveness, bullying, and injustice. SLAs should learn that this myth hurts them, categorizing them as one unique and successful model rather than appreciating their diversity. Learning American history pertaining to slavery and the civil rights movement lends much insight into how deeply systemic racism is rooted in U.S. society. Thus, SLA and other immigrant communities should have easy access to cultural and historical museums, books, movies, and documentaries related to U.S. history and culture. We suggest that SLA societies, affinity groups, and organizations should implement programs to educate their communities on the history of the U.S.

SLAs are scattered in multiple states and cities across the U.S. Randomized sampling in the SLA population in the U.S. therefore proves challenging. For this reason, we chose convenience sampling methods. Additionally, potential respondents living in rural areas may not be accounted for, so the results may be lacking alternate views. Also, due to the nature of certain questions, some responses may not have been truthful or fully accurate due to self-reporting. One question asking respondents to self-report the severity of PTSD due to the war may have produced artificially small numbers because some people may be ashamed to admit that they experienced it. Some study participants commented that several survey questions brought up unpleasant experiences of the civil war in NE Sri Lanka. For this, we provided hotline numbers for post-traumatic stress disorder counseling. Also, some might argue that Sinhalese SLAs were overrepresented in our sample. However, this is proportional to SLA ethnic distribution in the U.S. Lastly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we avoided in-person communications, which had a negative effect on survey return rate.

The concept of PMED, which we introduced in this study, can help to explain the SLA population's responses to racial issues in the U.S. Further research must be done to explore PMED in similar immigrant populations. Another way to explore our research questions involves conducting longitudinal studies to determine whether immigrants' views change after living for a time in the U.S. They might address questions such as, "How do SLAs' views on race relations change with time as they live in the U.S.?" "With time, will SLAs perceive the model minority concept as a myth?", and "Will SLAs become more active in civic engagement over time?" This is the first sociological study exploring the views of SLAs on the questions we raised in our hypotheses and so more research therefore must be done to confirm or challenge our findings.

Dismantling systemic racism in the U.S. requires the contribution of every ethnic group. Since immigrants are a growing part of the U.S. population, their contribution is especially important. Thus, it is essential to learn immigrants' views on racial issues, including the BLM movement. We would encourage future research to expand upon the questions we have raised.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Ocean Lakes High School, Mathematics and Science Academy, in Virginia Beach, Virginia, U.S. This investigational study was conducted by a questionnaire between March 2021 and September 2021. A convenience sample method was used for data collection.

Participation was voluntary, and participants were not compensated for their involvement. Survey participants were recruited through community leaders of SLA affinity groups within the U.S and given questionnaires. The focal areas included Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Virginia, and Washington, DC. The questionnaire was a cross-sectional, anonymous, single-respondent survey that was administered in the English,

Sinhala, and Tamil languages. Participants had the option of choosing the language they wished to respond in. They were asked to mail the completed questionnaire and consent form in separate stamped envelopes provided by the investigator. Online participants were sent two separate emails: one for the survey and the other for the consent form. A total of 310 adults completed paper and online surveys, with a response rate of 30%.

Seventy-four questions were included in the survey and each response was scaled from 1 (strongly disagreed) to 5 (strongly agreed). Participants completed background questions about their age, gender, race, religion, the date they left Sri Lanka, education level, occupation, and income as part of the survey. Additionally, four areas of focus were assessed by the survey questionnaire: SLAs' views on ethnic issues in Sri Lanka and the U.S., SLAs' political and social engagement in the U.S., the ethnic identity score of SLAs, and how SLAs perceive the concept of model minorities. Independent variables included the two types of SLA ethnicities among participants: those belonging to the Sinhala and Tamil groups. Dependent variables were composites of variable items: whether SLAs were affected by the NE civil war, whether SLAs were unfairly treated in Sri Lanka based on their ethnic background, SLAs' views on Sri Lanka's ethnic issues and BLM, SLAs' civil engagement in the U.S., whether SLAs believe in the model minority myth, and multigroup ethnic identity measures among the participants.

We formulated six questions (questions B4 to B9) to assess participants' views on U.S. race relations and defined a positive view of race relations as a mean score above 3. The appendix displays all the questions asked to respondents.

We assumed the SLA population in the U.S. is approximately 70,000; therefore, the sample of 310 respondents gave us a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of ± 5.5 people. All analyses were conducted using IBM-SPSS Statistics version 27. Once we had determined the distribution of the variables, appropriate analyses were chosen. All assumptions were satisfied for each analysis. We measured reliability in each focal area using Cronbach's alpha levels. Two sample t-tests were used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the composite scores of the two SLA identities—Sinhala and Tamil—for perceptions of model minorities, SLAs' political engagement in the U.S., SLAs' social engagement in the U.S., and ethnic identity of SLAs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX A

Sinhala and Tamil Sri Lankan American (SLA) views on racial issues in the United States (US)

Isuru D Gunawardena, Ocean Lakes High School, Virginia Beach, VA.

Amanda M Petersen, BA, MS, PhD, Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

Demographics:

- Age (years): 18-24......,   25-34......,   35-44........,   45-54........,   55-64......,   65-74.......,   above 75.........,

- Gender: Male.........,   Female...........,   Non-Binary.........,

- Ethnicity: Burghers.........,   Muslim.........,   Sinhala...........,   Tamil.........,

- Religion : Buddhist ....,   Catholic.........,   Hindu..........,   Muslim..........,   Specify.............,

- When did you leave Sri Lanka to come to the US to live ?............

- Where did you live in Sri Lanka before you come to the US to live?............

  (Please check one) Colombo......,   Western province......,   North......,   East......,   Other................................

- What was your occupation in Sri Lanka?..................

- Where do you currently live in the US? (Please check one)

  Boston…., Chicago….., D/C metro....., Maryland…., LA......, NY......, NJ......, Virginia..... Other........................

- What is the current occupation in the US?...........

- What is your household income in the US? (Please check one)

  Less than $30,000k......, $30,000-$59,999......, $60,000-$99,999......, $100,000 or more..........,

- What was the highest degree or level of education you completed in Sri Lanka?

  Less than 10th grade.....,   O/L......,   A/L......,   University graduate......, Post graduate.........,

- Have you pursued further education after you move to the US?

  Yes…., No…..,   If Yes, What have you studied?...........

What was the main reason you left Sri Lanka? (ok to select more than one)

- North East (NE) civil war.......

- JVP insurrection.........

- Married to a US citizen/Green card holder......

- Family in America.......

- Further education......., 0ther (Please specify) ....

(I realize these questions may bring back stressful and disturbing experiences. Please feel free to skip questions you do not want to answer).

Did you live in Sri Lanka during the North East civil war (1980-2009)?

Yes................,   No................,

1

A(1). How often do you think you were treated unfairly when dealing with public officials due to your ethnicity in Sri Lanka?

Always……, Most of the time ……., Sometime…..., Rarely…….., Never………,

A(2). How often do you think you have been treated unfairly by civilians in the Northeast in Sri Lanka due to your ethnicity?

Always……, Most of the time ….., Sometime….., Rarely…….., Never………, Not been to North-East…….,

A(3). How often did you experience unfair treatment in Sri Lanka due to your ethnicity by civilians in the south?

Always……, Most of the time ….., Sometime……., Rarely…….., Never………, Not been to South………….,

A(4). I feel unsafe in Sri Lanka if police or military personnel stopped me in the street.

Very unsafe……, Somewhat unsafe……., Neither Safe nor Unsafe……., Some what safe……., Very Safe………,

A(5). If you experienced PTSD, Anxiety or Depression due to North East civil war, how severe was it?

Severe……, Moderate……, Mild……, Very mild………., I did not experiences this………,

A(6). How often were you directly affected by North East civil war in Sri Lanka?

Always……., Often ……., Sometime…..., Rarely……., Never………,

A(7). How has North East civil war affected you? (check all that apply)

Loss of close relatives……, Loss of property……., Loss of a job...., Arrested….., Other (please specify)…………..,

A(8). While in Sri Lanka, how often did you interact with other ethnic groups?

Always……, Often …….., Sometime…..., Rarely…….., Never………,

With whom did you interact?: Sinhala….., Tamil….., Muslim….., Other……, Please select all that apply.

A(9). Sri Lanka has systemic racism (that the racial minority is unfairly treated by police, military, and government services, and discriminated against by institutions)?

Strongly agree……, Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree…….., Strongly Disagree………..,

A(10). I believe historically that Sri Lanka, North and East region, were given less priority in development and allocating resources.

Strongly agree….., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree…….., Strongly Disagree……….,

2

A(11). How often have you read books, articles or web search to learn about history of Sri Lanka ethnic issues?

Always……..,   Often……….,   Sometime…....,   Rarely………,   Never………,

A(12). How often do you discuss racial issues of Sri Lanka with your spouse/partner, family members, friends, children or co-workers?

Always……,   Often …….,   Sometime….... ,   Rarely………,   Never………,

A(13). Underrepresented ethnic groups should get preference to university admission in Sri Lanka.

Strongly support……….,   Support………..,   Support nor oppose……..,   Oppose………,   Strongly oppose…………,

A(14).Underrepresented ethnic groups should get preference for employment in Sri Lanka.

Strongly support……….,   Support………..,   Support nor oppose……..,   Oppose………,   Strongly oppose…………,

A(15). How would you describe race relations in Sri Lanka today?

Getting much better……..,   Little better………,   About the same…….,   Little worse…….,   Getting much worse……..,

B(1). In the US, how often do you interact with people from other Sri Lankan ethnic groups?

Never…….,   Rarely…….,   Sometime……,   Most of the time…….,   Always……….,

B(2). In the US, besides at work, how often do you interact with ethnic groups other than Sri Lankans?

(Example: Have a barbeque, go for a drink, or go to a park, the movies, or a bar)

Never…..,   Rarely……,   Sometime……,   Most of the time…….,   Always………   If yes,

select the ethnic groups that you interact with: *White………,   Black…….., Hispanic………,   Indian……,   other……….,*

B(3). How often do you feel you have experienced unfair treatment in the US due to your ethnicity?

Never…….,   Rarely…….,   Sometime…...,   Often……..,   Always………,

B(4). Systemic racism exists in the US (that the racial minority is unfairly treated by police,

military, and government services, and discriminated against by institutions)?

Strongly agree…….,   Agree……,   Neither Agree nor Disagree……,   Disagree…….,   Strongly Disagree………,

B(5). To what extent do you support or oppose the Black Lives Matter movement?

Strongly support……,   Somewhat support……,   No answer…….,   Somewhat oppose……,   Strongly oppose……..,

B(6). How often have you participate in a Black Lives Matter protest?

Always………,   Often ……..,   Sometime……..,   Rarely ………..,   Never………,

3

B(7). All lives can't matter, until black lives matter.

Strongly agree……, Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree………,

B(8). Underprivileged ethnic groups should get preference to college admission in the US?

Strongly agree……, Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree………..,

B(9). Underprivileged ethnic groups should get preference for employment in the US?

Strongly agree…….., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……. Disagree……., Strongly Disagree………..,

B(10). How often do you read books and articles, web search or watch movies to understand systemic racism, history of slavery in the US?

Always………, Often …….., Sometime…….., Rarely …………., Never………,

B(11). How often do you discuss racism in the US with your partner, family members, friends, children or coworkers?

Always………, Often …….., Sometime…….., Rarely …………., Never………,

B(12). Race relations in the US are improving.

Strongly agree…….., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……., Disagree……., Strongly Disagree………,

B(13). If the police stop me in the street in the US, I would feel unsafe.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree………..,

C(1).My boss and coworkers expect more work from me than they do from African-American workers.

Strongly agree……, Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree………..,

C(2). Sri Lankan people living in the USA are generally more successful than African-Americans.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

C(3). I have a better work ethic (e.g. more hard working) than African Americans.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

C(4). I believe I can understand instructions and perform task better than African-America co-workers.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

4

C(5). Unlike my African-American co-workers, I work until my work is complete.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

C(6). A White boss is more competent than a Black/African-American boss.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

C(7). Blacks typically do not take advantage of the education opportunities given to them.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

C(8). Generally, Blacks do not respect law and order.

Strongly agree……., Agree……., Neither Agree nor Disagree……, Disagree……., Strongly Disagree……….,

Political engagement in the US

D(1).Voted: *Always……, Often ……, Sometimes…..., Rarely….., Never…., I am not eligible/not register…….,*

D(2).Contacted public official: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(3).Discussed politics: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(4).Worked for campaign: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(5).Donated money to Campaign: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(6).Volunteered for a political party: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(7). Volunteer poll watcher: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

Social engagement in the US

D(8).Engage in neighborhood society/cleaning: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(9).Engage in church, Temple or Mosque : *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(10).Engage in school association: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(11).Charitable contribution: *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

D(12).Volunteering : *Always……, Often ……., Sometimes…..., Rarely……., Never……….,*

5

Ethnic Identity Measures

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(1) Strongly disagree   (2) Disagree   (3)Neutral   (4) Agree   (5) Strongly Agree

E(1). I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs____

E(2). I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me. ____

E(3). I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to. _____

E(4). I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group. _____

E(5). To learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group. ____

E(6). I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, movie or customs. ____

E(7). I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group. _____

E(8). I am active in organization or social groups that include mostly members of own ethnic group._____

E(9). I think a lot about how my life will be affected by ethnic group membership._____

E(10). I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership mean to me._____

E(11). I have lot of pride in my ethnic group._____

E(12). I feel good about my culture or ethnic group._____

6