Introduction

For our politics of gender and sexuality group project, we chose to complete a comparative assessment of the politics of gender and sexuality in the United States and the country of our choosing, India. This country merits consideration because India is still a developing country and can learn from the successes and failures of countries like America. Additionally, Americans should care about issues of gender equality and sexuality politics because many issues which developing countries such as India experience frequently could affect Americans eventually. For example, “Americans should care about violence against women abroad because it will affect them down the line, whether they like it or not. Rapes and other abuses hamper women’s advancement, and since women consist of half of the world’s over 7 billion population, there can be enormous economic, social, and health consequences to all, including Americans” (Borgen Magazine, 2013). This is a good example to consider for relationships between all countries, but especially India, where women experience a great deal of violence and abuse, including many instances of gang rape and assault in a variety of places such as within the privacy of their homes, as well as in the workplace and public transport areas. Additionally, Americans should care about gender equality and sexuality politics in India because it helps them evaluate the status of these factors in their own country. Understanding the status in India can provide useful information for considering improvements the United States could make, in addition to allowing Americans to realize some of the better policies that they have already implemented. In each situation, considering the status and policies in India creates a good point of comparison for the U.S. and prompts consideration of a global standpoint on many issues, which is essential.
Furthermore, in our research paper we will analyze the history and current status of many movements in India such as the women’s, LGBT, and men’s movement. We will also consider the individual status of the men, women, and LGBT individuals in this country, as well as women’s and LGBT individual’s political equality, and the overall attitudes towards women, gender equality, and homosexuality, along with how political participation is divided among men and women.

**Historical Analysis of the Women’s Movement**

Throughout history many traditions in India have affected the lives of women. In India, when a woman loses her virginity before marriage, she brings shame and dishonor to her families (Meyer, 1989). Sexual abuse, rape or incest are not often reported to avoid shame as well (Kalyanwala, Sarna, Sharma, 2013). In addition, the families will also push their children to marry at a young age before they have a chance to lose their virginity and to avoid paying higher dowries (Meyer, 1989).

One common tradition is the dowry tradition. A Dowry is the wealth or property a bride brings into a marriage with her. The Dowry act causes severe violence against women; specifically, when the gift from the bride’s family doesn’t believe the dowry is sufficient. This makes daughters seem like a burden and economic liability on families. Families can go into an economic crisis after giving a dowry, especially when families have more than one daughter. Many families will even go to the extent of having selective abortions, murder, or abandon female babies to avoid having to pay dowry fees later in life. When families do have daughters,
the sons are seen as more valuable than the daughters. As a result, daughters get a smaller percentage of the families’ resources. This prevents daughters from obtaining immunizations, treatment from illnesses, and malnutrition. This also hurts the mental health of the women with depression being 42% of their neuropsychiatric disability when depression only makes up 23% of men’s’ neuropsychiatric disability. Some laws have been put in to prevent dowry, but there are loopholes in the laws that help the practice continue. One law was The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, this first law that made any dowry illegal, but it was vaguely defined. The Dowry Prohibition Amendment Act of 1984 was implemented to get rid of the loopholes and increase punishment for dowry negotiations (Banerjee, 2013).

A more extreme tradition in India is bride burning. This happens as the result of the husband and/or his family doesn’t consider the dowry paid by the bride’s family sufficient. The family will burn the bride alive so the groom will be able to remarry or to punish the bride and the family of the bride. (Bride Burning, 2015). Another practice involving marriage is Sati. This is the practice for killing widows. They are burnt or buried alive with their husband’s corpse or drowned. If the brides aren’t killed, they can be forced to shave their head and wear white for the rest of their life. They also aren’t allowed to take part in any social activities or remarry no matter how young they are when their husband passes away, so sometimes dying looks like the brighter option to the women (Heaphy 2010).

The women’s movement in history isn’t considered to be one homogenous movement, but is thought of as many smaller movements. It is hard to have a strong women’s movement in India because oppressions affect women differently. The amount of oppressions a woman faces depends on the caste they are in, their religion, how poor they are, and what level of education
they have received. The movements began to take place when India was colonized by Britain. The British rule went on a “civilizing mission” against India’s barbaric treatment of women. English education for upper caste men in India also helped give them a view of what women’s rights looked like in other countries compared to theirs and this lead to the social reform movement.

The social movement was not focused on equality between the sexes, but equality between all humans. It was also considered a battle between rights and religion. This movement abolished Sati and gave widows the right to remarry. Although the practice was abolished, it wasn’t always enforced. The movement was also on male terms and with male leaders. The only women that actually benefited from this movement was upper caste women (Verden).

In the 20th century, many associations for women emerged. In 1917, the Women’s Indian Association formed and in 1925, The National Council of Indian Women was formed. Both of these associations represented limited caste and class, making them unsuccessful at representing all Indian women. In 1927, the All India Women’s Conference was formed. They had an alliance with the Indian National Congress. Although they still had little influence, this association helped women increase their involvement in politics (Verden).

In 1983 women were granted twenty-five percent of the seats in local councils by law in a state in India called Kamataka and in 1993 the seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendments were passed requiring one-third of all panchayat and municipality seats nationwide and one-third of the chairperson positions to be held for women. It also helped strengthen the campaign for the Child Marriage Bill that banned marriage below age 18 for girls and 21 for boys.
The next movement was called the new social movement and this is when women’s voices began to be heard. New equality organizations with women leaders began forming and the Uniform Civil Code was put forward. This replaced personal laws based on scriptures, customs, and religion with a common set to govern every citizen (Sen 2000).

**Historical Analysis of the LGBT Movement**

The LGBT movement in India is a very young and mostly invisible movement. The LGBT individuals that were open about their gender and sexuality were not visible in the country until 1990. Nevertheless, stories and poetries included same-sex relations trace way back to pre-independent India. Some non-governmental organizations and civil society institutions have been campaigning against laws that discriminate against the LGBT community. However, many parts in Indian society believe that supporting LGBT rights is a threat to the social and cultural integrity of India (Kole 2007).

The first academic book on homosexuals in India was written by Shakuntala Devi, in 1977. The book describes homosexuality with a positive outlook, while comparing the homosexuality movement in India to the movements in the United States. This has led many authors to “coming out” in their writings in the late 1980’s and 1990’s (Kole 2007).

In 1990, India’s first exclusive gay magazine was published by Ashok Row Kavi, who was openly gay, and eventually established his own non-governmental organization named Humsafar Trust, which worked with LGBT groups. *Bombay Dost* magazine was published in Hindi up until 1994, but is now only published in English. In addition, the magazine only benefits upper class and educated Indians in urban India. This is another example of oppressions
in India because the lower class gays cannot afford the magazine; this prevents them from potential networks that came from the magazine’s information on gay groups (Kole, 2007).

Although being homosexual is not illegal, the practice of homosexual behavior, such as sodomy, is a criminal offense due to Section 377 of the Indian Penal code, which states “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable with a fine.” This law was first put in place by the British in 1861 (Kole, 2007, p. 4). Even though this law only bans homosexual practices, same-sex adoption and homosexuals serving openly in the military is illegal in India.

In 1991 a human rights activist group was formed called, Aids Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan. This movement was an Anti-AIDS Discrimination Movement. A report was published by this activist group called Less than Gay: A Citizens’ Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India. This advocated for civil rights for the LGBT community including, educating schools on homosexuality, same sex marriage, parenting, the repeal of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, change in the Special Marriage Act, and the AIDS Prevention Bill of 1989 (Kole 2007)

On July 2, 2009, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was repealed by the Delhi High court. The law was held to be violating Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the constitution because it criminalizing private adult behavior. Furthermore, homosexuality acts were recriminalized on December 11, 2013 when faith-based groups and individuals appealed the High Court verdict of 2009. (Jacob, and Rao 2014).
As of April 15, 2014, the federal and state government legally has to include transgendered people in all welfare programs, education, healthcare, and jobs. This only applies to individuals who have gone through with the surgery and have the physical characteristics of the opposite sex (Supreme Court recognizes transgenders as ‘third gender,’ 2014).

India’s government is known to be homophobic and its homophobia is reflected in India’s society. India was tolerant to the issue of homosexuality until the Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which first implemented by the British. When AIDS was discovered in India, the government enacted a policy called AIDS Control Policy. The policy granted testing sex workers and drug users to locked them up if they were found HIV positive. Much of the AIDS outbreaks were blamed on homosexual behavior; as a result, society marginalized homosexuals with fear that they would contract the disease. (Kole 2007).

Many doctors in India have also been known to treat homosexuality as a mental illness to which there is treatment to. They call the treatment conversion therapy. Arguably, the treatment works in a matter of months and includes electric shocks, nausea-inducing drugs, testosterone prescriptions or talk therapy (Sebastian, and Vikram, 2015).

**Current States of Women’s and LGBT Movement**

Through our research we analyzed the current status of the women’s movement and the LGBT movement in India. The women’s movement in India has progressed through written laws, however, we wanted to understand through the analysis of our research if these laws are actually being enforced rather than simply implemented. In addition to studying what major issues the women’s movement is currently organizing around, we hope to explain the major
issues of focus for women in India. Briefly, I will touch on the history of the women’s movement in India which we have already discussed.

According to the LexisNexis public records, during the 1960s and 1970s there were floods of movements to which women took part to campaign against raising prices, obtaining land rights, and equality for peasants. Women from all over the country formed groups inside and outside political parties. Soon enough women were seen participating in large movements everywhere. “In recent years, the euphoria of the 1970s and early 1980s, symbolized by street-level protests, campaigns in which groups mobilized at a national level, the sense of a commonality of experience cutting across class, caste, region and religion ’ all this seems to have gone, replaced by a more considered and complex response to issues” (Assam Tribune 2014).

The organization and movements’ behaviors are very different today in India. In several parts women are no longer protesting on the streets about their injustice. This has caused the women’s movement to be referred to as an invisible movement that is said to be dead or dying; however this does not hold truth. Women have just begun to protest in different ways.

Many gang rape and abuse crimes against women have led to the movement’s current issues of focus. The focus revolves around issues of violence, physical and sexual abuse, and sexual harassment in the workplace and in public transport. The movement also focuses on issues like equal wages and pursuing life with dignity.

The women’s movement has made some progress on these issues, but continues to fight for newly rising issues due to, “the rapidly changing socioeconomic context across the country” (Bagari 2013). According to The New York Times, a recent government ordinance has made some progress after making stalking, voyeurism and acid attacks punishable; however, the
ordinance fails to account for marital rape and acts of rape by armed forces personnel. The main issue that we brought attention to is India’s progress in terms of written laws; nevertheless, women are still facing much discrimination. Flavia Agnes, a women’s rights lawyer, claims that, “while the base issues are the same, how we are dealing with them is different.” This is because the demands of feminists or the women’s movement are getting more sophisticated, more detailed on its needs for change (NY Times, and Bagari 2013). Agnes is hopeful that there will more progress for women’s equality in the future.

When we consider how this movement compares to the women’s movement in the U.S. it is quite interesting. Throughout our research we discovered that in India the women’s movement has actually become more vibrant despite the discrimination and its invisible reputation. On the other hand, in the U.S., the movement has been known to move from vibrancy to silence. According to Monthly Review, there no longer is a mass women’s movement, rather “there are many organizations working for women’s equality in the public arena and in private institutions; these include specifically women’s organizations such as the National Organization for Women, and in environmental, health care, social justice and other areas that address women’s issues” (Epstein 2001). We found that violence against women is still an issue in the U.S. and gender equality is not widespread.

When it comes to the LGBT movement in India the main issue of focus remains on Section 377 of the Indian Penal code, which we have discussed previously. This became such an issue for LGBT individuals since section 377 was reinstated, which prompted arrest and harassment of LGBT individuals. According to the LexisNexis website, on January 17, 2015, “LGBT right activists from across the country launched an online campaign calling on the
visiting U.S. President Barack Obama to raise the issue of the LGBT rights and more prominently, the reading down of section 377” (New Indian Express, 2015). While this issue is at large for the LGBT community in India, political party members have made progress in coming out in favor of decriminalizing homosexuality. There still is much ignorance and bias on homophobic views, but the movement remains persistent.

When we consider this movement in comparison to the U.S. there has been overall progress, especially with the legalization of same-sex marriage. A vibrant movement has formed and many young people’s attitudes have changed to favor equality for these individuals. At the same time, there are still issues that the movement is focusing on in order to attain further progress in this community. According to an article from The Daily Beast, LGBT individuals are seeking “support for bisexual community issues like domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault, poor health, poverty, and suicidality” (The Daily Beast, 2015). The website noted that “the legalization of same-sex marriage today might seem monumental—and it is—but it’s only the start of the social and legal reforms LGBT leaders hope to enact in the coming decades.” (The Daily Beast, 2015).

**Men’s Movements**

Men’s movements initially emerged in the early 1960s in Western Countries, and have progressed and evolved into modern society. A Men’s movement is a network of men self-consciously involved in activities related to men and men’s gender (Flood 2007). Both nationally and internationally, Men’s movements have been largely understudied in political science because men are in almost all cases the majority or dominant group (Murray). The issues at hand vary for each different type of Men’s group, and are diverse in goals and tactics. Murray theorizes that because men have high descriptive representation, and are often the majority or dominant group, their issues are often discredited and pushed
to the side. This feeling of oppression and reverse discrimination has motivated the need for this movement.

The Men’s Movement in India only began to gain traction in the late 1980s in Delhi, India. One of the first movements at that time was the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Husbands, who mobilized on the issue of wives making false claims of dowry harassment against their husbands. As discussed in the historical analysis of women in India, dowry was the practice of the bride’s family having to give large amounts of cash, durable goods or property to the groom’s family. Post criminalization of dowry practices in 1961; many women were falsely accusing men of harassing them for dowry payments resulting in the creation of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Husbands. This movement led to the founding of the Save Indian Family Foundation in 2005 and since then they have worked to defend the rights of men and husbands. In line with Indian men’s family rights the Child’s Rights and Welfare group was formed in 2009 to improve the legislation for men in regards to father’s rights such as child custody. The backlash against laws put in place to protect women from violence and abuse prompted another core issue of the men’s movement. The Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence Act allowed for husbands to be thrown out of their own house or restrained from their own house in the case of accusations of abuse against them. Men’s family and father rights were just one of a number of issues that prompted mobilization of groups and organizations for Indian men. Another recognized group in the Men’s movement is the Men’s Rights Association. In 2011, the Men’s Rights Association was created and stands today, sponsoring weekly meetings in dozens of Indian cities. The goals of this group and many others alike were to fight male-hatred, spread awareness about men’s rights, discuss medical problems related to men, and to lobby for the formation of men’s welfare ministry in central government.

Status of Men and Women
The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is a good analytical tool to compare how men and women are viewed in India. The United Nations, in its charter, states that one of its main goals is to promote human rights around the world, and end any forms of discrimination, focusing on ending sex based discrimination. There were many attempts by the United Nations to aid in the equality between men and women, but despite their effort, there was still an unsatisfactory amount of discrimination against women. The UN created the Commission on the Status of Women which has worked towards numerous declarations and conventions that “protect and promote the human rights of women” (UN WomenWatch). Through small steps towards gender equality, the Commission proposed the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 7, 1967. “Although the Declaration amounted to only a statement of moral and political intent, without the contractual force of the treaty, its drafting was none the less a difficult process” (UN WomenWatch). The Declaration had the right motivations and intentions to end worldwide discrimination against women; however, it lacked the ability to enforce policies that would end the discrimination. A few years later, the Commission on the Status of Women began to envision creating a treaty that would reinforce the purpose of the Declaration, and allow the UN to take action towards women’s rights across the world. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was born from this, and was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. The result of the vote was overwhelming with 130 votes for, 0 votes against, and only 10 abstentions.

India is a signatory to the Convention, and the initial report was discussed during the 22nd session in 2000 (CEDAW India 2007). India signed the treaty with 2 Declaratory Statements
and 1 reservation. India decided to abide by the provisions of the Convention, but will not interfere with the personal affairs of the community without its initiative and consent. They also agree to compulsory registration of marriages, but the failure to register the marriage will not invalidate the marriage in India due to its variety of customs, religions, and levels of literacy. India also stated that it will not be bound by paragraph 1 of Article 29, which establishes compulsory arbitration or adjudication by the International Court of Justice of disputes concerning interpretation.

Other measures that can be used to identify the Status of Men and Women in India are Men’s and Women’s life expectancy, level of education, literacy rate, maternal mortality ratio, and labor force participation rate. The CEDAW reported Life Expectancy statistics in its 2007 report. They reported that in India, men are expected to live until age 65, and women are expected to live until age 68. This is an overall improvement from previous years. World Bank reported in 1991 that men’s and women’s life expectancies were 57.1 and 58.1 respectively. They again reported in 2001 life expectancies of 62.3 and 65.3 respectively. This data shows an overall trend of upward growth of the life expectancies of men and women through the years. Another significant point that can be made from this data is that there seems to be a gap growing between the life expectancies of men and women. In India, women are starting to outlive men by a few years, which was not happening back in 1991, and before (Worldbank 2015).
United Nations Development Programme produces Human Development Reports which can be useful for determining the status of other factors of the lives of men in women in India. The population with at least some secondary education is 27% for women, and 56.6% for men. Men are obviously outperforming women in this category, by almost double. This can most likely be explained by women being removed from school to keep them safe from sexual violence, as discussed before. The literacy rate among men and women follows a similar trend. Men’s literacy rate is 75.26% while for women it is 53.67%. It is evident here that there is a significant gap between men and women, with more men being literate than women. This also can be explained by the dowry tradition. The maternal mortality ratio 190 deaths per 100,000 live births, which is quite high in comparison to other countries. Lastly, 27% of women are in the workforce while 79.9% of men are in the workforce. Once again we see the men outperforming the women in this category. In general, it can be concluded that men are more well off in India than women are.

**Status of LGBT Individuals**

Despite the incline in LGBT movements and the increasing international push to bring equality to the LGBT community, the LGBT individuals in India still face a severe gap. In the permanent mission of India to the UN, India claims to stand with a position that reinforces the importance of the inter-relationship between development, human rights, democracy, and international cooperation (UN
General Assembly 1948). Within the United Nations India has been an active participant in human rights movement. India was one of many countries that took part in drafting the Universal Declaration on human rights within the United Nations and they are also involved in the six core human rights covenants and conventions (Wilkes 2010). These covenants advocate for economic, social and cultural rights, the elimination of racial discrimination, elimination of discrimination against Women, rights of the child, and rights for those with disabilities. These conventions, established in the UN push for the protection of civil and political rights, progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights (UN General Assembly 1948). India’s involvement in these conventions requires that the Indian Constitution reflect these values and protect the fundamental and legal rights of individuals. Though India has made several important strides in the assurance of human rights across a scope of diverse groups, their platform within the United Nations vastly excludes the human rights and protections of LGBT individuals.

In 2010, a report made by the United Nations Human Commissioner for Refugees addressed that the Secretary and high commissioner of the UN were teaming up with a few countries, including India, “to call for an end to human rights violations directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people” (UNHCR 2010). Unfortunately, we do not see a true reflection of this in day-to-day. Today in India, there are an estimated 2.5 million lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in India. As discussed in the historical analysis of the LGBT movement, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalizes the act of a person to having carnal intercourse against the order of nature, making same sex acts or same sex marriage illegal throughout India (Yuvraj 2015). In 2009, the Delhi High court retracted section 377, decriminalizing all consensual sex between adults, so long as these acts or relationships were carried out in private. Yet just a few years later in 2013 the Supreme Court ruled Section 377 of Indian Penal back into parliament, yet again stripping the LGBT community of their rights. This discriminatory law not only prohibits LGBTs from their fundamental right to marriage, but also the economic and medical benefits that accompany marriage rights.
Historically transgendered individuals in India have been denied even more rights than the LGB community, and faced equal if not significantly more discrimination. Transgender individuals in India were unable to vote, own property, marry, adopt, or claim a formal identity. This inability to claim a formal identity blocked their access to government services such as food subsidies, education, employment, and health benefits. In a historical Indian Supreme Court ruling in April of 2014, \textit{NALSA vs. India} ruled that transgender individuals should be recognized as a third gender, and enjoy all fundamental rights and benefits. The Indian Supreme Court declared this third gender as “Hijras.” This ruling not only provided transgenders with the fundamental legal rights they deserved, but also allowed them the to choose their own identification as man, woman, or Hijras. Additionally, the ruling stated that this third gender should be identified on all official and legal documents regarding education, healthcare, housing etc.

The goal of the 2014 Supreme Court ruling was to create awareness regarding gender diversity across many categories such as family, educational institutions, health care, workplaces, and law enforcement authorities. Because the ruling is so recent, and Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is still in effect, the rights of LGBT individuals are not protected. Unfortunately, changing the law does not correct the attitudes of an entire society over night and LGBTs still face countless acts of discrimination, extortion, verbal, physical, and emotional abuse. In addition, law enforcement officials are not only neglecting these incidents of violence and discrimination toward LGBTs, but also participating in it. The Supreme Court Ruling was a significant step in the right direction for India, receiving a large amount of praise from the UN, but India still has ways to go in achieving equality for LGBT individuals.

\textbf{Women’s Political Equality}

Throughout the past 25 years, women’s descriptive representation in India’s National Parliaments has been slowly increasing. Data from World Bank’s World Development
Indicators shows that in 1990, 5% of members of parliament were women. There was a significant jump the next time data was collected: in 2000 women composed 9% of the parliament. There was a slight decrease in the year 2006, but shortly after the number returned to 9% in 2007. Then there was another jump to 10% in 2009. Since that year, there has been very slow progress with women’s descriptive representation. Currently in 2015, 12% of members of parliament in India are women (World Bank, 2015). Analyzing this data, we clearly see that there was good progress between 1990 and 2000, but that progress seems to have remained stagnant from 2010 to 2013. Since 2013 through the present day, the proportion of seats held by women in India’s national parliament has started to slowly increase again. In comparison to the United States, India is slightly behind with the percentage of women in parliament. Currently, around 19% of members of congress are women, which is roughly 7 percentage points more than India. The overall growth trend between the two countries is very similar, but the United States has been and continues to be slightly ahead with women in government. One interesting thing to note is that the United States has never had a female president, but India has had a female president and a female prime minister, which will be discussed in the following sections.

India does not have any quotas in place at the national level. However, they have a reserved seats quota for women in local government institutions and municipalities. This quota was put into place through a constitutional amendment in 1993, therefore women’s position in local governmental institutions is a constitutional right (Beaman et al. 2012). India has twenty-nine individual states, and in those states the reserved seats quotas vary from 33 to 50%. The people of India have mixed opinions about these quotas. Those who oppose the quota
believe that it favors women in upper castes, while it disadvantages women of the lower castes and those who are Muslim (Polgreen 2010). However, the research indicates that the local quotas are helping make positive steps towards gender equality. For example, more and more people in India are becoming confident about women’s ability to make good leader and political figures. The quotas are also making people more willing to vote for women (Beaman et al. 2012). Despite the positive results from the implementation of these local quotas, the research has one negative finding. The finding is that the Indian population has not changed their views on the traditional gender role for women, which is creating a barrier and hurting the progress towards gender equality.

As mentioned, there are no quotas in place in the national parliament to ensure women’s descriptive representation at a national level. There was a bill passed by the upper house of parliament that would reserve 33% of the seats in national parliament for women (Polgreen 2010). Unfortunately, as of 2014, this bill has not been voted on by the lower house of India’s parliament. If it did pass the lower house, the bill would need to be ratified by half of India’s state legislatures, and also be signed by the president. This is definitely a step in the right direction for women in India, and their representation at the national level.

India has 2 formal leaders in their government, the President and the Prime Minister. The president serves as the head of state, which is a more ceremonial role. The prime minister serves as the head of government, and plays a more active role in the executive branch of India’s government. Since the most recent government which was established in 1950, there has been one female president, and one female prime minister in India. Indira Gandhi, from the Indian National Congress party, was elected in 1980 as the first female prime minister, and the fourth
prime minister since the establishment of the government (Das 2014). She played a very active role during her tenure, and unfortunately was assassinated by two of her body guards. Her role as the first female prime minister was significant; she served during a time where there were virtually no women in India’s government. It was also significant because she was the first woman in India to hold such a high office in the government. One of the factors that played into her becoming prime minister was the ties her family had to the government. Her father, Jawaharlal Nehru served as the Prime Minister of the Union, and also the Republic of India, and was an important figure in Indian politics (Das 2014). In India, there is usually a consensus among the political parties on who they want the president to be, and the candidate runs unopposed. This has not always been the case. In 2007 presidential election, the parties could not reach an agreement on who the president should be, therefore Pratibha Patil was suggested as a compromise candidate (Biswas 2007). Being the first female president of India, which as mentioned before is a largely ceremonial role, Pratibha Patil can be seen as an important symbol for women in India. She is a perfect example of how women in India, despite how they are viewed, can be political actors and leaders of their country. Even though as the president she was not heavily involved in policy, her role still sets a precedent for other women in India.

**LGBT Political Equality**

In India, the LGBT community has undergone a rollercoaster of legislation that has temporarily enabled and disabled political equality for the LGBT community. We have continuously mentioned Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code because *Naz Foundation v Union of India* (2009) has a great effect on the political equality can obtain. In 2009, the
non-governmental organization, Naz Foundation filed a court order to the Delhi High Court in hopes that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code would be ruled unconstitutional as we have mentioned throughout our research. The Naz Foundation filed this writ because the discriminatory sentiments towards the LGBT community had been hindering the HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. At first the court order was dismissed by the Delhi Court. Later the Supreme Court ruled the writ worthy of consideration and as a result the Delhi Court decriminalized homosexuality in India. Furthermore, the ruling in 2009 did not end discrimination and marginalization of the LGBT community. In 2012, the Home Ministry replied to the Supreme Court stating that the ruling was “highly immoral and against social order” (Aparna, Banerji 2012). A year later the highly conservative ideology in India led to the re-criminalization of homosexuality. By analyzing the legislations that affects the LGBT community we discover that policies that target the LGBT community in India affect LGBT descriptive and substantive representation, and political equality, nevertheless.

Currently there are no LGBT members in the Indian Parliament; as a result, it is difficult for the LGBT community to obtain representation or even litigation over LGBT issues (Reynolds 2013). Section 377 of the Indian Penal code leaves it up to parliament and not the judiciary to rule over LGBT rights. Since then, NGOs and the central government have made efforts to repeal the legislation, but they have been dismissed (Aparna, and Banerji 2012). According to Andrew Reynolds’s in, Out in Office: LGBT Legislators and LGBT Rights around the World, the more LGBT members in parliament the more likely it is that LGBT issues will be protected and pushed. In “Out in Office” we see how India has not had any open LGBT members of Parliament. That in fact is a close reflection of the LGBT political equality in India.
As the biggest democracy it is shocking that India does not have as much LGBT representation within its government. Andrew Reynolds also finds that strong democracies are built from equal representation (2007;2013). Although India has not had any LGBT member is parliament; there have been LGBTs who’ve held other seats in government.

As previously mentioned, hijras are recognized in Indian society. Hijras identify as India’s third sex. Their recognition has given them the opportunity hold seats within the state. Nevertheless, their political involvement is limited to local and bureaucratic positions. After the 2009 ruling of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, there were many attempts to incorporated LGBTs in Indian society through equal employment and civic engagement incentives (Aparna Banerji 2012). However, despite the efforts and legislation, LGBTs continued to be invisible and marginalized in Indian society.

Unsurprisingly, holding seats is not easy for the LGBT community. Those LGBTs who’ve held seat in India have been victims of hate crimes and unseated (Kalra, and Shah 2014). Kamla Bai, identified was a woman held a seat reserved for a woman, but because her gender identification was “questionable” she was unseated. Suman Ahirwar took over the seat; however, Kamla Bai did file a civil revision petition against the district’s order to unseat her, which too she later withdrew for personal reasons (TNN 2012).

Furthermore, there are non-governmental organizations (NGO) and Political Action Committees (PAC), who work to advocated for the LGBT community by empowering them and helping them find resources within their community. The Naz Foundation (India) Trust, specifically focuses on paving the way for equal rights to social inclusion, sexual health education, and career opportunities for the LGBT community. In addition, the Naz Foundation
filed the writ that decriminalized Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 2009. Furthermore, Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan created the “People’s Manifesto Campaign” which seeks justice for those who are misrepresented in India.

Finally, in examining the descriptive representation for the LGBT community in India we’ve examine how cultural, societal, and institutional barriers have marginalized the community and prevented them from political participation. It is surprising that India, the biggest democracy, has a regressive LGBT movement in comparison to the United States. In so that, “by 2008, the total number of LGBT officeholders in the U.S. had tripled to 602, including 79 state legislators and 28 mayors” (Andrew 2013). Similar to the United States, India is under a majoritarian electoral system. Throughout the semester we have examined how a majoritarian electoral systems can result in underrepresentation at national and local levels because it disadvantages third parties from getting seats. Not only does misrepresentation hinder the LGBT movement and those underrepresented in the U.S and in India; it also prevents litigation over LGBT issues by not having someone to push them onto the agenda. In fact, proportional electoral systems are known to produce proportional outcomes (Reynolds 2007;2013). In addition, in India, national elections are strictly covered by a National Electoral Management body where in the U.S elections are covered by the media, religious institutes, local government, etc. (Reynolds 2007;2013). The secluded coverage of elections and election information in India prevents other voices from advocating for a different ideology.

**Attitudes towards Women, Gender Equality, and Homosexuality**

In its most recent survey wave, the World Values Survey asked various questions regarding respondents’ views on women, homosexuals, and gender equality in politics in
respondents’ respective countries. India’s results regarding all of these demographics are very
telling to the cultural and political climate of the world’s largest democracy. The most obvious
question in regards to female political equality asked if men are better political leaders than
women. Sixty-one percent of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that men are better at
governing than women. This opinion shows no signs of slowing down, either: 60 percent of
respondents up to 29 years old agreed with the question, which is on-par with the ratios for
respondents between 30 and 50 years old and 50 and older. However, the majority of
respondents (63 percent) said women’s political equality was an “essential part of democracy” to
some degree.

Homosexuality is never justifiable to the majority of Indian citizens. On a scale of one to
ten, with one being “never justifiable” and ten being “always justifiable,” 24 percent of
respondents gave justifiability a one. Approximately 67 percent of respondents gave the
justifiability of homosexuality a five or under. Approximately 42 percent of respondents
explicitly mentioned homosexuals in an open-ended question about people who they would not
like as neighbors.

All of these views are rapidly growing ideals among Indian civilians, especially in
regards to women in politics. The idea men are better political leaders than women has become
very strong in the last ten years. Fewer people are just simply “agreeing” with the question and
are instead saying they “strongly agree” about 13 percent more frequently than they did ten years
ago. Simply saying “agree” to the question is down by 4 percent in the last ten years.

The number of citizens agreeing to some degree with the idea that gender equality is an
essential characteristic of democracy is poorly measured. The first time this question was asked
in the 2005-2009 survey wave, four levels of agreeing with the question were asked. In the most recent wave, respondents are asked to rank how much they agree with the question on a scale of one to ten. Studying longitudinally, the results say “strongly agreeing” to the question, or giving the characteristic a 10 (strongest) has plummeted from 57 percent to 13 percent in less than ten years, while the other numbers between 5 and 10 correlating with agreeing have each grown to 16 percent or less.

Homosexuality is becoming more tolerated in India. The mean of the answers respondents gave on a scale of one to ten has increased in every survey wave. It is up to 4.1 from a 1.2 ranking since 1989. In the same year, 91 percent of respondents said they would not like homosexuals as neighbors. That figure took an egregious jump to 29 percent in 1999, and has hovered around 40 percent since.

These conservative views on gender roles in politics can be found in historical and legal analysis. In “Empowerment of Women in India,” political scientist Jugil Kishore Misra finds that these negative views of women are rooted in patriarchal beliefs that “female exclusiveness” is inherently wrong and inessential. Women are constantly devalorized in Indian literature, and are so often the victim. Misra’s solution is to use classic feminist means of gaining equality, such as empowerment and utilizing both genders in government.

Jasodhara Bagchi found in “Towards Equality” that women in India are forced to have dependent status, and women are also less legally protected than men in the Indian constitution.

Compared to the United States, India is much more conservative regarding political equality among the genders. Though electing women is an arduous process, 80 percent of American respondents disagreed with the question of men being better political leaders than
women. Much like the majority of each of the three age groups polled in India responded positively to the question, each age demographic overwhelmingly respondent with disagreement: people younger than 29, between the ages of 30 and 50, and those older than 50 were overwhelmingly opposed to the idea men were overall better political leaders than women, with percentages in the mid to high 70 range.

Eighty percent of respondents in the United States did not mention homosexuals on the open-ended question regarding who they would dislike as neighbors. However, only 40 percent of American respondents said homosexuality was justifiable to some degree.

**Gender and Political Involvement**

Although there are roles for each gender in Indian politics, men and women are, in general, equally politically involved at the constituent level. The World Values Survey asked respondents about their involvement in various political activities.

Regarding conventional behavior, which is considered typical electoral political involvement such as voting, following current events, and discussing news with others (Desposato, and Norrander 2009), Indian people are choosy with which activities they pursue. For example, only 17.9 percent of Indian citizens considered themselves active members of a political party. This is an equal participation level across both genders. A majority of Indian citizens, 51.6 percent, said they are not a member of any political party, which is also equal between genders.

This low membership in political parties in India is close to that in the United States, where only 14.5 percent of World Values Survey respondents said they were an active member
of a political party, and 55.4 percent said they were not a member of any political party. Both results are even across gender lines for American citizens.

Another form of conventional political participation, according to Desposato and Norrander, is following news and discussing it with others. The World Values Survey asked various questions regarding how people receive information about politics. Not surprisingly, a popular way to gather news for Indian citizens, like Americans, is to talk with friends and colleagues. Forty-four percent of Indian respondents said they received news from other people every day. This is split evenly across gender lines. In the United States, 41.7 percent of respondents said they learned about current events from friends or colleagues each day, and is also split evenly across gender lines.

The gender divide in political involvement is more clear in India when it comes to unconventional political behavior. Desposato and Norrander define unconventional behavior as any protest-type activity. In these types of behaviors in India, both genders are equally likely to have done acts, such as signing petitions and joining strikes, but men are more likely than women to consider doing unconventional political acts.

For example, in the World Values Survey, 20.9 percent of Indian respondents said they had signed a petition before. If divided by gender, 21.1 percent of men and 20.6 percent of women said they had signed a petition – an equal split. However, 44.3 percent of respondents said they might sign a petition – i.e., it is something they could see themselves doing. Forty-nine percent of men said they might sign a petition, but only 39.3 percent of women said the same thing. Indian men, according to these numbers, are more likely than women to see themselves or consider signing a petition.
In the United States, this isn’t any type of noticeable divide. Sixty percent of American respondents had signed a petition, averaged between 58.2 percent men and 61.8 percent women. Thirty percent of both men and women in the United States said they might sign a petition in the future.

Joining strikes is another gender-divided activity in India, although not as stark as signing petitions. Nineteen percent of Indian respondents said they had done it, averaged between 19.6 men and 17.8 women. However, 42.8 percent would consider joining a strike, and again, men are more likely to consider striking (44.8 percent) than women (40.7 percent).

Striking is a more popular political action than petitioning in India, but the reverse is true in the United States. Only 7.4 percent of Americans have signed a petition, according to the World Values Survey, averaged between 9.2 percent men and 5.7 percent women. But 41.7 percent of Americans said they might join a strike, averaged between 41.4 percent men and 42 percent women. While both genders are more likely to consider striking, men are more likely to actually be involved, which is not only different from the interest in petitions, but also in which actions are more popular in the world’s largest democracy compared to the world’s most powerful.

**Conclusion**

Throughout our research we have compared India to the United States on multiple aspects. We start off by examining the causes behind violence against women. We discover that women are not as valuable as men in Indian society and are victims of dowry. In addition, we consider the status of women, men, and LGBTs by looking at the history of each group. First, the colonization of Britain paved the way for the idea that equality must exist within humanity and worked to instill the idea that women must be treated equally. The start of the women’s movement in India has evolved radically by enacting laws
that protect women, allow women to represent women, and allow them to pursue a dignified lifestyle. The women’s movement has undergone many obstacles and still continues to struggle with the ever changing socio economic state of affairs. Fortunately, there are laws in place that could further empower women, and in comparison to the U.S the women’s movement is more vigorous than the women’s movement in the U.S. The LGBT movement on the other still has a long road ahead considering Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which has been referenced multiple times throughout our research because it has a significant effect on issue that affect the LGBT community drastically on social, economic, and political issues. We are hopeful that based on the ruling of 2009, which decriminalize homosexuality, India will repeal Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Hopefully with the help from political parties, NGOs, and PACs. The LGBT community should remain hopeful and engaged in its democracy’s affairs in order to help change the negative attitudes that marginalize the LGBT community, hinder HIV/AIDS advocacy, and result in underrepresentation of LGBT issues. Men, in spite of having high descriptive representation receives backlash through the enacted laws that protect women from violence and abuse. Consequently, men have gathered to fight men hatred, father’s rights, and discuss medical issues concerning men.

Furthermore, in analyzing the relationship among nations we found out the ending sex-based discrimination is in the United Nation’s charter, and in addition the UN promotes international pushes for pursuing human rights. Optimistically, we analyzed ways in which women, men, and LGBTs can continue to push their issues in order to obtain equal representation in all societal aspects, but also examined societal, historical, and political trends that favor or hinder each movement.
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