

# Gender-Driven Legislative Policymaking: The Case of Truancy

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Rachel Szala

The Ohio State University

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Project Adviser: Dr. Pamela Paxton, Departments of Sociology and Political Science

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### **Abstract**

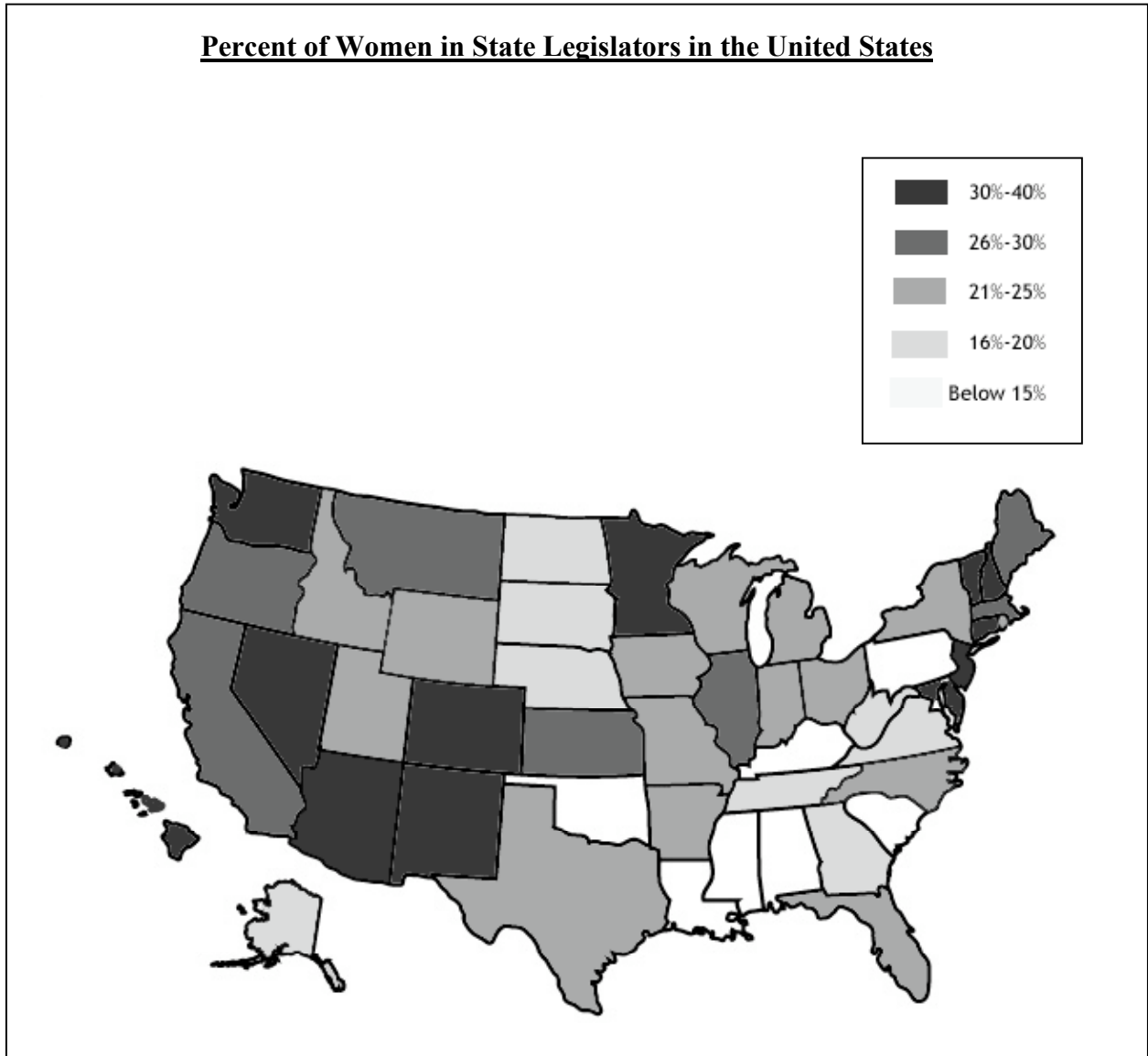
Do women legislate differently than men do? Much research has examined the influence of women on public policy, with some research specifically focused on state legislatures. This research tends to focus on the question of whether women legislate more often towards women's issues and feminist ideologies. Following Kathlene (1995), this research seeks to identify whether women formulate public policy and legislate differently when it involves an area of public policy that is not a typically defined women's issue, but rather in a gender-neutral area. I presented a newspaper article discussing the problems and issues of truancy in schools to nine Ohio General Assembly legislators. I then interviewed each legislator about truancy and analyzed the interviews. The female and male legislators proposed different reasons for the causes of truancy, and therefore different policy solutions as well. Analysis of 16 education bills proposed by male and female legislators in the Ohio General Assembly provides some additional support for the view that men and women do legislate differently, even on gender-neutral topics.

## **Introduction**

State legislatures across the United States make decisions, create policy, and pass legislation that changes the lives of those living within a state. The state legislature is the site for debate on health, education, economic and local issues that often have immediate and direct effects on the state's inhabitants. State legislators are elected into office to represent the views and advocate the positions of those people who elect them (NCSL.net).

The U.S. state legislatures were created as a representative democracy; meaning that the legislatures make the effort to fully represent their constituents. However, females are far from parity in these legislatures. Women account for 51% of the general population, but they account for far less in many state legislatures. In 2009, only 24.3% of state legislators in the United States are women. Specifically, women hold 22.1% of the state senate seats and 25% of the state house seats (Center for the American Woman and Politics 2009). This means that even though women account for half of the American population, women only account for a quarter of the population of state legislators. In Figure 1, the percentages of women in state legislatures are displayed by state. In states like Arizona and Colorado, women represent closer to 50% of the state legislature. However, in states like Pennsylvania and North Dakota, women barely represent a tenth of the number of seats in the state legislature. Ohio, with 20.5% of the state legislature seats occupied by women is close to the national average. Thus there is a broad range among all 50 states in terms of percentage of women in the state legislatures.

**Figure 1**



Center for the American Woman and Politics. 2009. New Brunswick: Rutgers University.

Ohio has fluctuated in terms of the percentage of women in the state legislature. As shown in Table 1, the highest percentage was 24.2% from 1994-1996. This occurred during the Clinton Administration and immediately following the much touted “year of the woman” in 1992. Ohio has also fluctuated in terms of where it ranks in comparison to other states. Starting at 35<sup>th</sup> out of all 50 states, Ohio began to progress in the ranks from 1989-1996 peaking at 15<sup>th</sup>. Ohio abruptly dropped to 25<sup>th</sup> in 1997, and continued to hover around 30<sup>th</sup> until a few years ago. In 2007, Ohio dropped to 43<sup>rd</sup>, meaning only seven states had lower percentages of women in their state legislatures.

**Table 1**

<b>Women State Legislators in the Ohio General Assembly (1989-2009)</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>State Rank</b>	<b>Total Women in Legislature Out of 132 Seats</b>	<b>% Total Women</b>
2009	34	27	20.5
2008	38	24	18.2
2007	43	21	15.9
2006	32	25	18.9
2005	30	26	19.7
2004	28	28	21.2
2003	33	25	18.9
2002	28	29	22
2001	28	29	22
2000	30	27	20.5
1999	28	28	21.2
1998	25	29	22
1997	25	29	22
1996	15	32	24.2
1995	15	32	24.2
1994	18	32	24.2
1993	22	28	21.2
1992	29	20	15.2
1991	29	20	15.2
1990	35	17	12.9
1989	35	17	12.9

Center for the American Woman and Politics, 2009. New Brunswick: Rutgers University.

What is necessary for women to gain equal political opportunity when they are proportionally underrepresented? Feminists argue for descriptive representation, which states that if women make up 50% of the population, they should make up 50% of the state legislature as well, (Phillips 1995). If women are numerically underrepresented in the state legislatures, this poses a potential problem for public policy in today's world. Research has shown that female state legislators view, change, prioritize, and create different public policy solutions compared to male state legislators (Carroll 2002; Dolan & Ford 1995; Kathlene 1995; Saint-Germain 1989; Shapiro & Mahajan 1986; Thomas 1991). Substantive representation, where women's issues and views need to be advocated, becomes critical when we discuss women in elected office (Pitkin 1972). Research also shows that women often propose legislation that is aimed towards issues considered being more feminine issues, such as healthcare and family policy (Carroll 2001; Saint-Germain 1989). Females have different lifestyles, careers, responsibilities, and anatomy that give women different perspectives and priorities in public policy compared to men. Moreover, women and men differ in their perspectives when it comes to examining supposedly gender-neutral problems in the world. When referring to gender-neutral issues, this will mean issues not dealing specifically with women's issues. Men often view policy problems on an individual-based issue, while women most often formulate policy based on the whole society and its interlocking relationships (Gilligan 1982; Kathlene 1995).

A significant research project done by Lyn Kathlene shows how male and female legislators view and attempt to create policy dealing with crime differently (Kathlene 1995). In her research, Kathlene interviewed male and female state legislators from Colorado. She presented them with a newspaper article discussing crime issues, followed by a numeric and qualitative analysis of the language used in their responses to the interview questions. She then linked their responses to bill proposals made in the state legislature that were crime-related. This research project will use Lyn Kathlene's study as a framework, but look at the differences in male and female state legislators' viewpoints on educational policy, specifically the problem of truancy. By analyzing interviews completed with Ohio state legislators, and proposed truancy-related bills, I ask whether male and female legislators perceive the problem of truancy differently and whether they propose different bills related to truancy.

After discussing theories and research related to women in state legislatures and women's substantive representation, I propose several hypotheses and explain the framework of my study. Next, I analyze the language and overall focus of nine interviews conducted with male and female Ohio state legislators. I compare the main themes arising from the interviews and attitudes of these legislators with various bills regarding education, and specifically truancy, in order to see if each gender's verbal viewpoints correspond with the bills they introduce in the Ohio General Assembly.

## **Literature Review**

Do women legislate differently than men? Researchers have investigated many ways in which women may influence public policy. For example, a set of researchers conclude that women legislators place different priorities than men on certain types of legislation; and most specifically, place their priorities with women's issues-based legislation (Dolan & Ford 1995; Kathlene 1994 & 1995; Saint-Germain 1989; Shapiro & Mahajan 1986; Thomas 1991).

A place to start is by asking whether women and men in the general population have different policy priorities. Shapiro & Mahajan (1986) compared responses of men and women in national surveys about policy-related questions in an effort to find gender differences among policy preferences. They ultimately found that women were much more supportive of what they define as "compassion issues". Compassion issues were those that aimed to equalize wealth, guarantee jobs, provide healthcare, and provide student loans. In contrast, men emphasized issues of infrastructure and "big government". Differences in men and women's policy preferences in the general public is suggestive that male and female legislators may also display different preferences.

Indeed, a study performed by Sue Thomas (1991) showed that women bring different priorities to the state legislature than men do. She gathered data from surveyed members of the lower house in twelve different state legislatures. Two areas of gender differences were examined in these surveys: The first was gender differences in the actual types and categories of bills among legislators' priorities; and the second was gender differences among the levels of success in passing traditionally women's issues-based bills. She defined women's issues-based bills as related to the rights of women, the



family, and children. She found that women indeed gave top priority to issues that dealt with the family, children, and women. Moreover, she found that in areas not traditionally women's issues-based, such as crime, education, or the environment, women placed no higher priority on these issues than men did. Additionally, Thomas (1991) found that women are more likely than men to introduce and successfully pass legislation that dealt with traditional women's issues, including the family and children. A study done by Thomas & Welch (1991) also showed that as females have become more predominant and more integrated into the state legislative process, they have brought distinctive policy concerns related to women's issues to the legislative table. Specifically in the area of welfare related to women and children.

Dolan & Ford (1995) offer additional evidence on the reasons and causes of gender differences among policy-makers. Dolan & Ford (1995) focus solely on women instead of comparing females to males. The research looks to see if the factor of being a feminist legislator plays a role in prioritizing women's issues, instead of solely being just a female. Dolan & Ford completed a survey of the 1,373 female state legislators serving throughout the U.S. in 1992 in effort to find a correlation among gender, a feminist identity, legislative committee assignments, and policy priorities. They found that being a feminist played no role in committee assignments. Women were appointed to women's issues committees whether they were considered feminists or not. However they did find that feminist female state legislators listed more women's issues, or those concerning women, children, and family, among their top legislative priorities than female state legislators without a feminist identity.

When translating women's issues-based priorities into actual bill sponsorship, Saint-Germain (1989) offers an insightful study. In her research, Saint-Germain (1989) performed a study of bills proposed in Arizona between 1969 and 1986. Looking at bill's that dealt with women's issues, she found that women initiated more feminist and women's issues bills than men did.

Similarly, through a study done in the 102<sup>nd</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, Swers (2002) found that on the national level Congresswomen also prioritize and legislate more towards women's issues, and feminist identity issues, not strictly in regards to a party line. Additionally, research done by Gerrity (et. al 2007) also found that Congresswomen, when replacing men in the same congressional districts, on average sponsored more legislation dealing with women's issues, and commented more often on women's issues on the floor than the men they replaced.

While much research has been done to show that women prioritize and sponsor legislation on women's issues more often than men, less research has been done on females' influence in public policy areas other than those deemed traditionally female. Lyn Kathlene's (1995) study on crime policy yielded a new and innovative spotlight on gender differences in public policy. By interviewing Colorado state legislators, Kathlene found that men and women approached crime policy, a traditionally gender-neutral policy area, in much different ways. She found that men tend to be more individual and instrumental in their behavioral attitudes. According to Kathlene, men view people in society as "autonomous individuals in a hierarchal, competitive world", while women view the world as an "interconnected web of relationships". This resulted in men

legislating to protect and guarantee individual rights and freedoms, while women legislate less on individual rights and more so on finding solutions to problems that “impede on society” as a whole (p. 698). Kathlene (1995) therefore concluded that men have a higher tendency to concern themselves with people interfering with each other’s rights, and have an overall “justice orientation” to public policy. Women spoke more about “people” rather than criminals, and were more likely to incorporate “society” when talking about crime. These differences in language led to different policy recommendations for dealing with crime across the two genders, and ultimately to the sponsorship of different types of bills.

The efforts of my research are to expand and build on that of Lyn Kathlene’s (1995) study that used crime policy; but to also integrate and examine a new area of public policy: education. Education may sometimes be considered a more female topic, but there is no reason to believe that the issue of truancy is a female issue. Therefore, this study will research whether male and female state legislators approach a gender-neutral education policy problem, like truancy rates in Ohio public schools, differently.

### **Hypotheses**

Two hypotheses are derived from the previous research on gender differences in public policy formulation for the interview and bill analysis to be conducted in this research:

1. Men and women view and formulate public policy in different ways, and therefore will bring different legislative solutions to the table.

2. Because women are underrepresented in the state legislature and their views and solutions for policy problems are different than men, they may be less successful in enacting their proposed legislation.

This research aims to test the above two hypotheses using interviews and analyses of proposed bills.

## **Research Framework**

### **The Framework**

Ohio was chosen as the state to perform this study in due to geographic location of The Ohio State University, the research facility used. Also, Ohio was chosen due to the percentage of women in its legislature closely depicting the national average. The Ohio General Assembly contains a total of 132 state legislators between its House and Senate. Of these 132, nine were randomly selected<sup>1</sup> and agreed to participate in an in-person interview. All nine interviews were taped on audiocassette, and transcribed verbatim in order to be able to conduct a full language analysis of all interview questions. All participants were given numbers or letters in order to protect the confidentiality of their viewpoints<sup>2</sup>. Table 2 shows the descriptions and characteristics of those legislators who chose to participate.

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<sup>1</sup> Ten legislators were initially contacted representing five females and five males, and also representing five Democrats and five Republicans. However, six of those ten never responded to phone calls or e-mails. Thus additional randomly chosen legislators were contacted until the goal of ten legislators was close to being met.

<sup>2</sup> All research activities involving the use of human beings as research subjects must be reviewed and approved by an Ohio State University (OSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB), unless the Office of Responsible Research Practices

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(ORRP) determines that the research falls into one or more of the categories of exemption established by federal regulation (<http://orpp.osu.edu/irb/exempt/index.cfm>). This research project was considered exempt under Category 2 of research activities considered exempt by the OSU IRB.

**Table 2**

<b><u>Females</u></b> <b>Legislator Descriptions</b>	
Senator 1	Democrat, senate member since 2007, full-time legislator
Senator 2	Democrat, senate member since 2003, former House Representative, part-time legislator
Senator 3	Democrat, senate member since 2007, part-time legislator
Representative A	Republican, 2 <sup>nd</sup> term (first full term), part-time legislator

<b><u>Males</u></b> <b>Legislator Descriptions</b>	
Senator 4	Republican, senate member since 2005, former House Representative, full-time legislator
Representative B	Democrat, 2 <sup>nd</sup> term, part-time legislator
Senator 5	Republican, senate member since 2009, former House Representative, part-time legislator
Senator 6	Republican, senate member since 2007, former House Representative, part-time legislator
Representative C	Republican, 2 <sup>nd</sup> term, former House Representative and State Senator, part-time legislator

Prior to the interview, each legislator was e-mailed a newspaper article to read regarding the issue of truancy. The article was shortened from its original length in order to make it easier to read and comprehend. This article was chosen based on its legislative and state law approach to the problem of truancy relevant to Ohio state truancy law. Moreover, it proposed various solutions and discussions surrounding the root cause of truancy. The purpose of the article was to give each legislator a basic background on the problems of truancy and provide a foundation and introduction into the content of the interview questions to be asked.

### **Why Truancy?**

For reasons unknown, there are profound numbers of children who are not going to school everyday. Specifically, in the 2003-2004 school year, Ohio only had a 94.5% attendance rate (NCES.gov). To some, this may appear to be a high attendance rate. However, that 5.5% of children who are not attending school equals thousands of children in the state of Ohio. Moreover, cities like Akron and Cleveland have much lower attendance rates that are easily overlooked because of a relatively high average state attendance rate. For example, in Summit County and the Akron area, there were 10,000 truant students in the year 2002. The county only has 100,000 students, thus 10% were truant (Teodosio 2003). Furthermore, because of Ohio's unconstitutional way of funding public schools, various state legislators have speculated that schools may be fudging their attendance records in order to receive adequate funding (personal communication). In an effort to combat the problem, Ohio Senate Bill 181 passed in the year 2000: "The law stipulates that not only is the student responsible for attending school, so, too, is the parent or guardian. If a child has seven consecutive unexcused absences, 10 days in a month or 15 days in a school year, that child is considered chronically truant and subject to Juvenile Court intervention. Sanctions against parents or guardians who fail to send their children to school may include mandatory mediation and parenting classes, up to 70 hours of community service and/or a fine up to \$500. In some cases, jail time is a possibility" (Summit County). The bill predominantly places the responsible and resulting punishments on the parents of the truant student. This

proposed solution will be carried over into the research and interview process of this project.

The topic of truancy was chosen as a case study because of its relative gender-neutral approachability. As noted by Thomas (1991), education is traditionally an area in politics that both males and females take a desired interest in. Specifically, truancy does not specifically affect only women, but both genders universally. Thomas & Welch (1991:451) note that ever since the 1970's there has been no evident favoring of males or females being appointed to education committees. Currently in Ohio, the education committees in the Senate and House are both chaired by a males, also showing a gender-neutral approach.

After reading the newspaper article about truancy, each legislator was then asked three questions during the interview based on similar questions asked by Kathlene (1995):

### **Truancy News Paper Article**

“Judges Say Schools Must Deal With Truancy, Graduation Rate Problems”

posted August 12, 2008

Several local judges said Tuesday that the county schools need to step up efforts to deal with truancy and graduation rate problems. General Sessions Court Judge Bob Moon said, "It is time that Dr. Scales and the Hamilton County School Board step up, speak out and implement effective polices in these two areas of concern. It is not that we are trying to tell the school board what to do. We are simply telling them that we are putting too many high school dropouts in jail. Educators cannot continue to operate without effective truancy policies and expect different results. We are not prejudging any parent or guardian. However, the law is not being followed when kids who are compelled to attend school pursuant to state law are repeatedly truant. It is my understanding that teachers are required to inform parents in writing when a student is truant. If these absences are unexcused and are repeated, the law has been broken if parents or guardians are inexcusably to blame. Social workers, truant officers, teachers and principals have a



legal and mandatory obligation to report parents and guardians who inexcusably fail to get their children to school regularly. As parents, grandparents, citizens and judges, we are going to continue to speak out publicly about the concerns that we have involving truancy and the unacceptable graduation rates of young people in our public schools." According to recent figures by the Department of Education, only about half of the students in the United States are graduating from high school, the judges said.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is your initial reaction to the newspaper article?
2. Why do you think there is such a high truancy and school dropout rate?
3. What do you think needs to be done?

A majority of the research and analogy will be based on language, as was Kathlene's research (1995). Kathlene analyzed language in a three-step process, which I have used to set up my model of research. First, a "micro level examination of the nouns used by" 9 legislators to describe the issue of truancy. Second, "a textual analysis reveals the reasoning behind the legislators' recommendations for developing" truancy policy. Third, "the gender differences found in the linguistic analyses provide the basis for judging the content and purpose of all" truancy-related bills introduced in the previous three General Assemblies (1995:701).

### **Interview Analyses**

Primarily, the analysis for this research is done by an extensive look into the language, word usage, and overall focus of the legislators' answers to the above three questions. The language analysis framework is similar to the framework used by Lyn

Kathlene in her study on crime (1995). Primarily, I conducted a quantitative examination of the nouns used by the nine legislators during the interview. This thorough examination includes looking at the words that were used to describe the different avenues of truancy and education policy. Also, quotations are extracted from each interview, and specifically from each answer of the three questions, to complete a qualitative analysis of legislators' viewpoints.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Words chosen to examine gender language differences were those dealing with education and the problem of truancy. A total of 37 nouns that dealt with the actors, problems, solutions, and characteristics of truancy were chosen, and their frequency was calculated. Table 3 shows that there were indeed major differences in frequency between noun usages from females to males.

**Table 3**  
Frequency and Rate  
Nouns Referenced Relevant to Truancy Problems and Solutions Categorized by Gender

<b>References Made by Women</b> (based on 4 interviews)	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Rate<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>References Made by Men</b> (based on 5 interviews)	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Rate</b>
School(s)	43	10.8	School(s)	45	9
Student(s)	<b>15</b>	<b>3.8</b>	Kid(s)	<b>37</b>	<b>7.4</b>
Kid(s)	<b>11</b>	<b>2.8</b>	Parent(s)	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>
Parent(s)	<b>11</b>	<b>2.8</b>	Family(s)	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>
Children	9	2.3	Responsible(ity)	<b>17</b>	<b>3.4</b>
People	7	1.8	Community	14	2.8
Family(s)	<b>6</b>	<b>1.5</b>	People	13	2.6
Community	6	1.5	Children	12	2.4
Jail	6	1.5	Educators/Teachers	10	2
Social Workers	<b>5</b>	<b>1.3</b>	Society/Societal/cultural	9	1.8
Law Enforcement	4	1	Household(s)/Home	<b>8</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Juvenile	4	1	Mother	<b>8</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Rural	4	1	Court	<b>7</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Educators/Teachers	3	0.8	Student(s)	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
Judges	3	0.8	Father	5	1
Accountable	3	0.8	Law	5	1
Society/Societal/cultural	3	0.8	Law Enforcement	4	0.8
Government	2	0.5	Judges	4	0.8
Environment	2	0.5	Accountable	4	0.8
Drug/Alcohol	2	0.5	Truants	4	0.8
Crime	2	0.5	Drug/Alcohol	3	0.6
Urban	2	0.5	Legislature(or/ tion)	3	0.6
Responsible(ity)	<b>2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	Black	3	0.6
Personal (responsibility)	2	0.5	Environment	2	0.4
Intervention	2	0.5	Urban	2	0.4
Household(s)/Home	<b>1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	Personal (responsibility)	2	0.4
Mother	<b>1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	Social Workers	<b>1</b>	<b>0.2</b>
Father	1	0.3	Juvenile	1	0.2
Legislature(or/ tion)	1	0.3	Crime	1	0.2
Consequence	1	0.3	Intervention	1	0.2
Church	1	0.3	Consequence	1	0.2
Counselor	1	0.3	Church	1	0.2
Court	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	Counselor	1	0.2
Shootings	0	0	Shootings	1	0.2
Truants	0	0	Jail	0	0
Law	0	0	Rural	0	0
Black	0	0	Government	0	0

<sup>3</sup> Rate calculation = Frequency of word divided by the number interviewed (by sex). Provides a comparative standardized measure (Kathlene 1995).

First, females used nouns that dealt with the education system more often than males did. For example, females used the noun “student” almost four times more frequently than the males did. In addition, when females described young people that may be affected by truancy, the word “student” was used more times than the word “child” or “kid”. For example, compare the following statement from a male legislator:

Male, Senator 4: “Truancy starts when the parents aren’t make sure the kids are getting to school.”

To one from a female legislator:

Female, Senator 3: “Students may do well at a joint vocational school or more of a vo-tech type of education and I think they get disinterested (at a public school), and that disinterest starts at truancy.”

Thus, according to the females, young people who were truant were actors and participants as students in the system of education. On the other hand, males’ noun choice for the description of young people was “kid”. Males used the word “kid” almost three times more frequently than females. Thus, males appeared to view and describe young people who were truant as being individual actors in a family or in their community.

Moreover, the females’ thoughts and word usage was much more limited to words describing education or society such as “teacher”, “social worker” and “school”. Females used these words to convey the thought that truancy was a problem occurring in our educational system, mostly a result of societal factors. The males tended to use nouns that described the family and individuals on a much more regular basis. For example,

males used the word “parent” twice as frequently, and the word “family” almost four times more frequently than females. Males used these words to convey the thought that truancy is a problem in our community, most likely the result of the parents, family or child’s irresponsibility. The most overwhelming word usage difference was the word “responsibility”. The word was most commonly used with phrases such as “personal responsibility” or “individual responsibility”. The males referred to responsibility-related terms seven times more frequently than the females did. In fact, only two of the female legislators used the word responsibility, and only mentioned it one time each. On the contrary, every male legislator interviewed mentioned the word responsibility at least one time.

These findings correspond with the findings in Kathlene’s (1995) interviews regarding how Kathlene’s interviewees defined crime and criminals. Kathlene found that women’s language defined criminals as people in society, while men specifically focused on the individual criminal. This is precisely how women and men in these interviews discussed truant children. In both studies, women recognized interrelationships between people in society. For example, in Kathlene’s study women recognized society’s influence on criminals. Women used words like “community” and “country” to discuss the possible effects of crime and possible barriers to solutions (p.707). In this study, women discussed various factors within society such as the education system that may be failing our students and causing them to become truant. Also, Kathlene found that men were more likely to see the criminal as having individual deficiencies such as making bad choices or character flaws (p. 707). Corresponding with this study, men

focused on the family and child, their character flaws within the dysfunctional family, and the child and parents not being responsible.

Thus men most often viewed the problem of truancy stemming from the lack of responsibility of an individual of some sort, whether that individual is a mother, father, child, or teacher. For example, “But we need to strengthen the family and make them accountable and going after the responsibility.”

While in accordance to the word usage of women, the problem of truancy was not necessarily caused by an individual’s irresponsibility, but on factors and influences implemented from a more societal level, specifically the education system. For example, “I honestly believe that there is a lot of interest that students have, and I don’t think the schools are focusing on some of the interests.”

The infrequent use by females of nouns describing the family is intriguing. Females are often thought of as mothers, and the nurturers of the family. Thus one could assume that females might frame and relate to problems as they would in terms of a family. However, this did seem to be the case when presenting the problem of high truancy rates. While men were eager to find faults within the parents and family unit, women were not. For example, a male stated: “People need to realize parents have to be involved. And they can’t just walk away.”

Are female legislators not mentioning the possible faults of the parents because they are able to find faults in other institutions as well? Are females more likely to link

the cause of truancy based on a variety of factors, and not just a single factor such as the family? If so, it is possible that because women believe the fault lies not only within the family, females then look into other causes and solutions to the problem, such as solutions within the schools or communities. Looking at only the noun usage analysis, it can be speculated that various solutions that females discuss range more in variety in comparison to men. Female legislators being mothers, teachers, counselors, or other occupations that come into contact with children daily, women may be better to see a variety of factors that influence a child to become truant.

Corresponding with Kathlene's research, females tended to respond in relation to personal experiences. In Kathlene's research using crime policy, women's responses discussed personal experiences with crime, whether it was touring a state prison or conversing about crime with other local officials in their communities (Kathlene 1995:706). In relation to education policy, females tended to answer questions in personal experience as well, either as a mother or a teacher.

Female, Senator 3: "My kids are two children in high school, one's a senior and one's a freshman and I've had one that's graduated, so I know some of the issues that they have to face and some of the instructors and teachers do."

Furthermore, Kathlene found that women viewed the family unit as a piece within a larger social framework (1995: 709). Moreover, Kathlene notes that when the alternative is believed, or that the family unit is envisioned separate of society, prevention strategies are often introduced, such as in the case of this study to "strengthen the family unit". This is precisely how many of the men in this study approached solutions. Men

saw the family unit as separate, and unique to the problem of truancy, and often spoke of strengthening the dysfunctional family.

Male, Senator 5: “There’s too many irresponsible, and it’s a breakdown of the family. And its really a concern. But we need to strengthen the family and make them accountable and going after the responsibility. If kids are truant, parents should be held responsible.”

If the problem does lie within the family unit or parent responsibility, females are not addressing it in the statehouse. Looking at only noun usage, men bring to the table the idea that the parents need to be held accountable. However, unlike the females, men appeared to be less aware of the more complex social structural causes and more focused on specific players in society such as the family, the parents, or the misbehaved child.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative analysis takes an in-depth look at extractions of specific quotes from all nine legislators. Extractions will be taken from each of the three questions in order to compare and contrast each gender’s commentary on his or her initial reaction to the article, viewpoint of the problem, and possible solutions to the problem of truancy.

#### ***What is your initial reaction to the article?***

When asked this question, the popular response was for legislators to state whether they agreed with the article or not. While the article focused its solution to truancy on punishing the parents, fewer females than males agreed with this solution.



Males predominantly agreed with the article, and placed the responsibility and root of the problem on the parents.

Male, Senator 4: “Truancy starts when the parents aren’t making sure the kids are getting to school...they are then relying on teachers having to get involved. It sounds to me like the core problem here is that you have a break down of a family.”

Male, Senator 5: “I found it interesting that the court or the judge here, I guess its several local judges, talked about truancy and regard to parents being responsible, and I totally agree.”

Females predominantly mentioned the failure of our education system to monitor and help truant students:

Female, Senator 2: “I think the school districts have really weakened their programs and maybe eliminated them altogether. The state board of education and the Ohio Department of Education have not done a good job of tracking dropouts.”

Female, Senator 3: “As far as people being responsible, that is absolutely at a local level. They need to monitor very closely, I know our school board is doing an excellent job with truancy rates specifically and moving towards those issues I talked about.”

Only one out of the four women agreed that truancy is predominantly the parents’ responsibility when discussing her initial reaction. Only one out of five males did *not* agree with the newspaper article about parent’s being the main element responsible for truant children. It is apparent that men and women have different initial opinions on the article, and the responsibility of parents for truancy.

**Why do you think there is such a high truancy and school dropout rate?**

Answers to this question were different between males and females as well. Specifically, men saw the problem of high truancy rates being caused by two main factors, one being a dysfunction within the family unit. Males believed that parents who are low-income, divorced, moving from home to home often, or are uneducated create a dysfunction within the family that eventually leads to a child becoming truant. Moreover, the uneducated parents may not see the importance of education, and not instill that importance among their children:

Male, Representative C: “Well some of it is the dysfunctional families, no home support, no encouragement, no discipline at home.”

Male, Senator 4: “If they have such a dysfunctional family background, school may not seem important, its not important to the parents either.”

Male, Representative B: “There is a lack of emphasis on the importance of education passed on from family member to member.”

Male, Senator 5: “I think it’s the demographics of family and the breakdown of family unit. If you look at districts that have a high drop out rate you look at the broken family structure...And conversely with families that don’t value education that much, it goes with the generation.”

The second factor discussed by males was the possibility that influences such as the media, communities, and pop culture were making children think school and education was not important. Males believed these factors might be sending children the wrong message about education; a message portraying that education is “uncool” and only for the “nerdy” kids:

Male, Senator 4: “Societal factors may make these kids see this as something that is normal.”

Male, Senator 6: “So an appreciable part of the high truancy rate in Ohio is due to cultural and community influences that have failed to appropriately value education.”

On the other hand, only one female mentioned the role of these influences or family dysfunction. Females tended to see the root problem of high rates of truant children coming from within the schools and the school curriculum. The most popular answer among females was that Ohio’s children are not being challenged enough or given intriguing opportunities and options. Females stated that children are then becoming bored, disinterested, and deciding that school is a waste of time. Females concluded that children are finding out that they can get away with being absent, because the schools are not being responsible and holding them accountable:

Female, Senator 1: “I think that there are levels of frustration among our student population and that maybe there’s a feeling and sentiment amongst certain students that being in school is a waste of time.”

Female, Senator 3: “I honestly believe that there is a lot of interest that students have, and I don’t think the schools are focusing on some of the interests. I support going to college and being a college graduate, but that’s not for everyone. And I know that there are students, who really like to work with their hands, they’re not interested. I think they just get disinterested, and that disinterest starts as truancy.”

Female, Senator 2: “I think because children are not being held accountable, and they can get away with it.”

While all but one of the females focused their answers on children being bored with school, only one male legislator expressed opinions about schools not challenging

students enough. It is evident that males and females have very different opinions on the root of the truancy problem in Ohio. This leads to the final question dealing with resolving the problem of truancy.

**What do you think needs to be done?**

This part of the question yielded a wide variety of answers. Almost every legislator, whether male or female, had different ideas, policies, and solutions to bring to the table. Ranging from eliminating teacher unions to having leaders like Bill Cosby come in and speak to communities, not one legislator answered with just one straightforward answer. Both genders appeared to see the need for a collective approach to the solution of truancy from families, schools, communities and the government. Both genders agreed that one small change is not enough to lower truancy rates, but a combination of ideas and approaches is needed:

Male, Senator 6: “But I think its going to take a stronger effort collectively and community wised to inculcate the value of education to a population to many of whom don’t see the value now.”

Female, Senator 2: “We need to take a collaborative approach, and also many stakeholders in the community addressing this issue and not just leave it up to school board members, maybe we need to have a task force for truancy.”

Sometimes legislators gave starkly different solutions. Interestingly, the following two legislators gave completely opposite solutions regarding the length of schooldays:

Female, Senator 1: “I think we are doing as far as extending the number of days in school. So if there is a longer school day or if there are added days, the more you are engaged in school the less you are obviously going to be potential at-risk and put in troublesome situations.”

Male, Senator 6: “I think one idea that I’ve had for a long time that won’t work everywhere...is to consider four-day school weeks. Perhaps if people were secure in the knowledge that they would have a three-day weekend they might be more willing to tough it out for a four-day school week.”

While both genders appeared to agree on the profound need for collaboration, both genders had very opposite views on this particular solution. However, there is no evidence that these opposite solutions stem from gender differences, but it is an interesting and intriguing observation to account for.

Moreover, while both genders stated that there is a huge need for the community and community leaders to step up and tackle this issue collectively, there were still apparent differences in each gender’s idea of specific solutions. The main difference between gender opinions dealt with the court systems, and innovative or social service programs. Three of the five men discussed the need for the courts to intervene and be proactive in helping truant students and their parents. They focused on the need for schools and the community to work with the law enforcement and court systems to help children understand the negative impacts of being truant. Also they discussed the need for the court systems to hold the parents accountable. On the contrary, no females discussed the court systems being an actor in solving the problem. Three of the four females focused their solutions on having the schools provide innovative classes or other options such as vocational schools. Also, these same females discussed the need for social services to have a truancy prevention program within the school districts to help

monitor and work with at-risk or current truant students. No males mentioned the possibility of social service workers within the school system.

### **Discussion and Summary**

These findings that show females focus on the school and the education system when looking for policy solutions with truancy, and this corresponds with the previous noun-analysis findings that they see the school as the major institution at fault. Females are seeing the education system failing our society's students, and therefore see the need to propose solutions to fix that. Moreover, these findings show that show males focus on the court systems when looking for policy solutions with truancy, which correlates with the previous findings that they see the dysfunctional family as the major unit as fault. Males find that the parents of dysfunctional families are causing their children to be truant, and by making the court systems hold these families accountable, truancy rates will be lowered.

Just as women used nouns like "student" and "teacher" more often than men in the quantitative section of this research, qualitative analysis shows that women discussed the causes of truancy and possible solutions through the lens of the education system. Similiar to Kathlene's results, women saw an institution, specifically the educational institution failing children (p.708). Also similar to Kathlene's results, women began to focus their solutions through intervention and rehabilitation programs, in this case throughout the education system. Similarly, in the study done by Shapiro & Mahajan (1986), results showed that women tended to focus policy solutions towards equalizing

the general population, thus providing services and tax breaks for those in need. Women in this study were proposing solutions within the schools, such as various truancy prevention and intervention programs in order to give every child an equal chance in education. A student going to school 25% less than the child beside him or her will not receive an equal education.

While men used terms like “family” and “parent” far more than women in the quantitative analysis section of this research, they also discussed the causes of truancy and possible solutions through aspects of the family in the qualitative section. Similar to Kathlene’s study, men discussed the “breakdown of the family” and “lousy parents” (p.708). In both studies, men saw this as the main cause for the problem, whether it was becoming a criminal in Kathlene’s study, or becoming truant in this study. Men then turned to the court systems in order to penalize and hold families accountable for not making sure their children go to school each day.

The discussions and solutions between male and female legislators should be expected to carry over into related bills being proposed on the floor of the General Assembly. If true, we should expect women to propose policy solutions that aim to implement intervention or prevention programs within the schools. Moreover, females should be proposing bills that legislate towards the school systems and social service agencies. On the contrary, we should expect men to propose policy solutions that enhance the role of the court system in dealing with truant children and families. Families and parents should be the center focus of males’ bill proposals.

### **Truancy-Related Education Bills Proposed**

The following bill analysis demonstrates that female and male legislators indeed approach policy solutions, especially in the area of truancy, quite differently. The educational bills being analyzed deal with a number of education and truancy-related issues. There were no bills found that proposed solutions for the sole purpose of combating Truancy in Ohio. However, education bills were found that proposed solutions that were related or connected to the issues of truancy. The bills were found through a variety of different web-based search techniques. First, the Ohio General Assembly legislation search engine was used, and was expanded to Gongwer, one of Ohio's leading sources of legislative news and archives. Additionally, keywords such as truancy, truant, and absenteeism were first used in an attempt to find relative bills. However, these terms led to the conclusion that Ohio has not discussed many bills specifically related to truancy. Thus, the search was opened to words relevant to truancy related issues. These search terms included: student, "school and children", school day, school transportation, "school and student", "school and community", student dropout, and bullying. Ultimately, sixteen relevant bills were found in the search. These sixteen bills were proposed anytime between the current 128th General Assembly and the three General Assemblies prior. Men sponsored eleven of these bills, while women sponsored five of them. The bills range from placing certain requirements on school districts, to the state creating intervention programs. Table 4 lists the bills proposed by females, and Table 5 lists those proposed by males.



<b>Table 4</b>			
<b>Female Truancy-Related Bills Proposed in Ohio General Assembly</b>			
<b>Bill Number</b>	<b>Key Word</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
HB 519	Student	Require parents to perform volunteer service for the district, and to require schools to establish mentoring programs for students.	Failed
HB 4	School & Student	Establishes an interactive distance learning pilot project.	Pending
Hb 175	School & Day	Permit schools to make up calamity days by adding hours to remaining days in the school year	Failed
HB 597	School transportation	To require schools to transport pupils in grades kindergarten through eight who live within two miles of school but do not have access to a sidewalk	Failed
HB 605	School and Children	To require schools to mark the records of students identified as missing children	Failed

<b>Table 5</b>			
<b>Male Truancy-Related Bills Proposed in Ohio General Assembly</b>			
<b>Bill Number</b>	<b>Key Word</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
SB 187	Student	Require schools to provide transportation to the school of attendance for each resident student under sixteen years	Failed
SB 311	Truancy	to calculate the minimum school year based on hours, rather than days	Enacted
HB 276	Bullying	State develop a model policy to prohibit harassment, intimidation, or bullying	Enacted
HB 77	Student & Dropout	Eliminates certain spending requirements for Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid moneys paid to school districts	Failed
HB 95	Student & Dropout	Require schools to provide intervention services to any student whose test results indicate that the student is failing	Enacted
SB 2	Student & Dropout	Provides for intervention services to failing students	Enacted
SB 219	Student & Dropout	Requires schools to implement anti-harassment policies	Failed
HB 79	Student & Dropout	Provides a penalty for inaccurate school attendance data reporting	Enacted
HB 21	School & Community	Permits a school to surrender the transportation of its resident high school students attending community Schools to those community Schools.	Pending
Hb 41	School & Community	Requires that a portion of lottery profits be distributed annually on a per pupil basis to schools.	Pending
HB 66	School day	To establish a minimum school year for schools based on hours, rather than days	Failed

If what female legislators discussed in the interview translates into legislation, then we will find females proposing bills that target the education institution. Moreover, we should find bills that offer creative solutions to children that may be bored in school, or intervention and prevention services for truant or potentially truant children. On the contrary, if men are proposing legislation relevant to what they discussed, then we should expect to see proposed bills dealing with penalties for parents who are not ensuring that their children get to school. Furthermore, we should expect to see legislation that allows for the courts to step in and intervene if necessary.

Looking at Table 4, a female proposed House Bill 4, which establishes an interactive distance-learning project. This corresponds to the females' belief, established in my interviews, that children are not being challenged enough in schools, and new techniques of instruction should be implemented. No males proposed legislation similar to this. Moreover, three of the five bills proposed by women legislate for requirements of the schools to change one of their policies. For example, House Bill 519 requires schools to establish mentoring programs for students who are at risk. This legislation not only corresponds to the fact that females more predominantly discussed the schools role in tackling the problem of truancy, but it also corresponds with the female's belief that an intervention program, like mentoring, is a plausible solution.

However, the male legislation did not correspond as uniformly with their interview answers. During interviews, men placed the responsibility for guarding against truancy on the family, parents, and courts, and not as highly on the schools. Conversely,

all eleven of the bills proposed by males deal with legislation primarily involving the schools' roles and responsibilities. In fact, four of the bills specifically legislate for certain requirements of the schools. For example, Senate Bill 219 requires schools to implement anti-harassment policies. Males did not propose any legislation that aimed to target families or parents for not seeing that their children made it to school.

A male representative proposed House Bill 79, which actually imposes a penalty on school districts for inaccurately reporting their daily attendance records. No females proposed legislation that was penalizing in nature. Women appeared to completely disregard proposing penalty induced legislation; and instead women proposed legislation that was interventional or mandating of stricter policies.

Males also proposed legislation that dealt with the funding of schools and financing. Two of the bills proposed by male state legislators dealt with education and funding policies. In Ohio, schools receive funding based on an intricate and complex calculated logarithm (Ohio Department of Education). A majority of that calculation involves the variable of the "pupil in attendance" (Ohio Department of Education). Thus, schools are tempted to report an attendance rate that may or may not be accurate in order to receive a quality amount of funding from the state. Students that are habitually and chronically truant should not be factored in to the schools attendance rate, and should be logged as absent. However, it is possible that schools do not record this to increase their funding rates. This ultimately leads to these students not being documented as truant and in need of intervention, and thus not being treated for their truancy issues. It is possible that males addressed the issue of funding policies due to their penalty mentality. If men

are thinking in terms of penalties and punishments, then maybe they realize that schools may be fudging their attendance records in order to secure funding. Males then possibly aim to react to this through various funding bills.

Furthermore, an interesting fact to examine is the number of bills proposed to change either the length of the school day or length of the school year. Several solutions related to the interviews that resulted in a male proposing a shorter school week, but a longer school year, and a female legislator proposed longer school days or school years. Translating to actual proposed bills, both male and female legislators proposed bills that attempt to change the way school days and year requirements are created. For example, House Bill 175, proposed by a female, permits schools to make up calamity days by adding hours to remaining days in the school year. During an interview, a female legislator proposed longer school days. Thus, the females' belief that children need to be in school longer to continue to stay engaged carried over into a female's legislative bill proposal. Moreover, Senate Bill 311, proposed by a male senator, legislates to calculate the minimum school year based on hours, rather than days. Schools could thus implement four-day weeks if desired. Correspondingly, during an interview, a male legislator had proposed the idea to have four-day weeks instead of five. Thus this policy solution was also translated from a male interview into an actual male's bill proposal.

While women talked about the role of the school in affecting and offering solutions to children who are truant, women expanded on this through the types of bills they proposed. Bills ranging from establishing mentoring programs, interactive learning, and requiring schools to transport children to school, women placed a majority of their

focus on proposing bills that aimed to establish requirements of schools. However, while males discussed the family dysfunction and the lack of accountability being placed on the parents, the majority of men actually proposed solutions aimed at the education system as well. Men proposed bills that also required schools to provide transportation, implement a model policy to prohibit bullying, and provide intervention services to failing students.

Why are men legislating in ways counter to their stated policy preferences? It is possible that men are not legislating towards the family, parents and children because it is easier to place requirements on a specific institution, such as the educational institution. Once a bill is passed that places new requirements on a school, it most likely gets sent to the Ohio Department of Education to be implemented and overseen. It is possible that this type of legislation is easier to pass, and therefore becomes a more successful route to choose when sponsoring a bill to target truancy. Future research will need to ask legislators about specific strategies used in designing bills.

### **Success of Legislation**

Not one of the five truancy-related bills proposed by females was enacted. Four bills specifically failed; meaning there was a vote on the floor and the majority vote was “nay”. One bill is “pending”, or in other words, has been tabled or forgotten about. On the contrary, five of the eleven bills proposed by males were enacted into law. This is a 45% enactment rate, compared to 0% of the female bills being passed. Moreover, only four of the eleven bills proposed by men failed, and two are pending. Thus women appear to have a much higher actual failure rate than men. Kathlene found a very similar

results when looking at the success of crime bills proposed in the 1989 Colorado State Legislature. Only 37% of women's bills passed<sup>5</sup> compared to 83% of men's crime bills that passed (p. 719). Thus, in both instances, men were better able to successfully pass legislation. In Kathlene's study, women's bills focusing on intervention and prevention were post-poned indefinitely. Here, a women's bill to implement an interactive distance-learning project was postponed. While a distance-learning project may not be viewed as a intervention program, it can be viewed as a prevention program in order to keep children creatively engaged in school and avoid truancy.

On the contrary, two of the five bills enacted by males focused on implementing intervention practices within the schools. Even though males did not discuss intervention programs, and females were the ones to talk about this possibility, males were actually the ones to execute intervention legislation. This legislation proved successful with the passage of intervention bills totaling to 40% of those bills passed. Different from Kathlene's (1995) findings, that women's ideas and bill proposals were too unconventional to become laws, women's perceptions on truancy actually appear to translate into successful legislation and public policy solutions, but males are the ones writing these ideas into law.

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<sup>5</sup> It shall be noted that three of the four female legislators interviewed were members of the minority party. This may have had an effect on their inability to pass legislation. The majority party is usually more effective in passing legislation than the minority party.

## **Conclusion**

In this research, I found notable differences between the ways males and females view and implement public policy solutions in relation to truancy. In the interview analysis, women tended to view the problem of truancy as located within society, and specifically within schools. Thus, women discussed solutions such as prevention programs and creative school programming to be implemented within the schools. Men viewed the problem of truancy on a more individual responsibility basis. Men saw the lack of responsibility of parents and children, combined with a dysfunctional family, being the root cause of truancy. Thus, men discussed solutions that aimed to hold parents and children accountability, specifically through the use of the court system.

Through an analysis of bills proposed by male and female legislators, I found that women's ideas to legislate regulations towards the school systems, actually translated into the types of bills they proposed. On the contrary, the males' discussion of holding the parents and children accountable did not translate into actual bills proposed. Instead, males also legislated towards regulating the schools. Males were also far more successful in passing their legislation than females were. The majority of the successfully enacted bills dealt with intervention and penalty strategies.

This research extends that of Lyn Kathlene (1995) and finds that there are large gender differences in the ways women and men view and formulate public policy. While prior research focuses on women's ability to legislate successfully for women's issues (Dolan & Ford 1995; Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1991), this research shows that



women bring to the table a new ideology and outlook towards public policy not specifically dealing with women's issues. Women appear to view a gender-neutral problem in a completely different manner than men do. This advances existing literature showing that women contribute to the public policy arena in a different way than men (Carroll 2002; Dolan & Ford 1995; Kathlene 1995; Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1991). One can speculate that if more women were elected into state legislatures, policy outcomes would most likely be quite different than they are today with male-majority legislatures. Women might also be more successful in passing their legislation under those circumstances.

This research did have a few limitations. First, I was only able to interview a total of nine state legislators. More interviews may have yielded a better understanding of the way men and women state legislators in Ohio view and create public policy. Second, I was limited to online bill search databases in order to find relevant proposed legislation. It is possible that relevant bills were not uncovered through this type of digital search. Additionally, it can be speculated that legislator's policy decisions and viewpoints are influenced by other factors besides solely gender. With more information regarding the legislators' biographical story, such as information about their family, career, hometown, or other various factors, further influences could be found.

Further research should be conducted on whether women and men approach various policies in different ways. This research could be applied at all levels of government, not solely in the state legislature. We could examine city councils, county commissioners, the court systems, or Congress. Moreover, we could see if these

differences extend all over the world, and not just in the United States. There is much more to discover about the reasons and ways women and men view policy and legislate differently on generally gender-neutral topics. We cannot turn our heads to the fact that women legislate differently; and because of this, women and their unique and innovative policy ideas should be welcomed and appreciated in the political arena.

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