Evaluation and Teachers’ Perceptions of Gender in Sixth-Grade Student Writing

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The desire for accountability has led designers of large-scale writing assessment to embrace a formal semantics theory of writing evaluation that disregards cultural influences on the writing and marking processes in its emphasis on consistency and unbiased scoring of student writing. However, an examination of the scores assigned to the narrative writing of elementary and middle-grade students on large-scale examinations in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States reveals the need to consider sociocultural influences because scores on girls’ writing are consistently higher than scores on boys’ writing. This study investigates the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of gender-related differences in grade six students’ narrative writing and teachers’ scoring of five narrative papers written by sixth-grade boys and girls. Participating teachers scored the narrative papers using a Canadian provincial scoring guide. Teachers who did not know the gender of the writers were asked to identify the gender of the writer (if possible) and to describe the characteristics of the narrative that helped them to determine the writer’s gender. All teachers were asked to compare and contrast girls’ and boys’ classroom narrative writing. Significant differences in the scores appeared for only one paper, written by a girl, that exemplified both male and female narrative writing characteristics. Teachers who felt that a girl wrote this paper scored the paper significantly higher than teachers who identified the writer as a boy. Teachers who disagreed in their identification of the writer’s gender drew upon similar elements from the writing to support their views yet evaluated those elements in contrasting ways that revealed a stance privileging girls’ narrative writing. In addition, teachers characterized girls’ classroom writing as being more sophisticated than boys’ writing on all five dimensions of Moffett’s (1968) continuum of discursive growth.

Accountability in large-scale evaluation of writing competence has proven problematic because of the difficulty in finding a reliable method for discriminating levels of quality in written compositions. The desire for accountability has led designers of large-scale writing evaluation to embrace a formal semantics...
theory of writing evaluation (Gere, 1980) that positions written compositions as autonomous, self-contained demonstrations of individuals' intellectual and communicative abilities, and that neutralizes the effects of the individual readers' and writers' cultural and social contexts on their construction of texts.

An examination of scores assigned to the narrative writing of elementary and middle-grade students on large-scale examinations in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States suggests the need to use a communication intention theoretical framework (Gere, 1980) that looks at sociocultural influences on the scoring of large-scale assessments, however, because there are consistent patterns in the distribution of scores assigned by students' gender (Afflerbach, 1985; Alberta Education, 1995a, 1992; Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986; Engelhard, 1991; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1995; Stobart, Elwood, & Quinlan, 1992). Repeatedly, greater percentages of scores at the high and medium levels for the grade are assigned to girls' narrative writing and greater percentages of scores at levels that show the writers' inability to meet grade-level expectations are assigned to boys' narrative writing. The predominance of this trend over time and across political borders prompted a study exploring the relationships between teachers' responses to student writing that adheres to and departs from their expectations of topical and linguistic features of sixth-grade boys' and girls' narrative writing.

Theoretical Frameworks for Evaluation

Formal Semantics Approach to Writing Evaluation

Two assumptions are reflected in the tools and procedures used in large scale evaluation of student writing: a belief in the need for reader consensus in response to texts and a perception of the written text as representative of individual writing competencies that are free of cultural influences. These assumptions underpin evaluation methods used in large-scale and classroom assessment of student writing and in research that purports to study unbiased, consistent scoring of writing.

The measures taken by a Canadian Provincial Department of Education to ensure reliability in the scoring of approximately 20,000 sixth-grade narrative papers, for example, reflect a formal semantics theoretical perspective. An attempt is made to foreground individual writers' cognitive and communicative abilities by removing demographic information from the examination papers. Without explicit information identifying the writer, the examiners assume that the student's sociocultural background is hidden to teacher-markers and that unbiased evaluation of the student's writing competence will follow.

Assessors attempt to standardize the teacher-markers' evaluation processes by instituting hiring and training procedures designed to create a group of markers with shared experiences and perspectives. All of the teacher-markers must have taught sixth-grade language arts in the province for at least two
years. In addition, teacher-markers participate in a half-day training session on the use of the analytic scoring guide that has been developed to represent provincial standards of the ideal text. In this way “the locus of evaluation [is placed] outside the individual reader, situating it instead either in the text itself or in a supposedly community-wide set of standards” (Schwegler, 1991, p. 205). Reliability reviews are conducted twice daily in which teacher-markers evaluate and discuss their scoring of common papers in small groups. The emphasis of the discussions is on reader consensus in response to student writing. Through these processes teacher-markers position themselves as part of a group of authoritative readers who represent provincial standards, rather than as individuals whose responses to student writing are grounded in personal, social, and cultural ideology and experience.

The evaluation protocol used by markers of the provincial writing examination also reflects a formal semiotics perspective. Raters are provided with an analytic scale similar to the one developed by Diederich (1974) to provide a set of qualities against which to judge a composition. The relationship among the writer, the audience, and the subject is subsumed by attention to topical and linguistic features that are assumed to be individually constructed and devoid of social meanings and intentions (Gere, 1980).

The desire for unbiased, consistent scoring of student writing is reflected in classroom writing evaluation methods as well. Though the interpersonal relationships developed between teachers and their students are considered integral to effective classroom writing instruction (Calkins, 1991), they appear to be at cross purposes with teachers’ goals for the unbiased evaluation of students’ classroom writing. Current classroom evaluation practices such as portfolio assessment are informed by a formal semantics theoretical approach that focuses on the cognitive development of individual students. Portfolio assessment, considered an “ecological evaluation” method that “recontextualizes literacy assessment” (Lucas, 1992, p. 9), emphasizes individual writing development and students’ active participation and autonomy over their learning. Proponents of portfolio assessment caution that “there is not necessarily any one scoring guide or rubric to guide the reader seeking to compare the differing pieces of a single class, . . . as comparing students one to the next has not been a primary objective” (Yancey, 1992, p. 18). However, in teachers’ reading of student writing, the focus on the individual writer’s cognitive development discourages attention toward the interaction among teachers’ and students’ cultural backgrounds, values, and interpersonal relationships (Howard, 1990; Krest, 1990; Lucas, 1992; Rief, 1990; Yancey, 1992).

The formal semantics theory of evaluation informs assessment practices in many research contexts as well. Numerous studies have assessed the reliability and validity of holistic and analytic scoring procedures by examining the criteria used by raters to make decisions about writing quality. Features
that accounted for significant variances in scores assigned to student writing include the quality and development of ideas (Vacc, 1989), ideas, form, flavor, mechanics, and wording (Diederich, French, & Carlton, 1961), the nature and purpose of the writing task (Freedman, 1979; Harris, 1977; Lehman, 1991), usage and mechanical correctness (Greenberg, 1981; Stewart & Grobe, 1979), and superficial features such as handwriting and neatness (Markham, 1976; McColly, 1970). Like the research findings, researchers' recommendations for practice and further research focused on analytic features of the texts, rather than on sociocultural features of the raters, to further the goal of uniformity in the scoring of student writing. Vacc's (1989) recommendations illustrate researchers' formal semantics theoretical focus: “Further empirical study is clearly needed to identify the constructs of teachers' holistic scores and to address the question of why raters differ in the cognitive processing of writing evaluation” (p. 93).

The predominance of the formal semantics theory of evaluation in research is also evidenced in a comparative study of achievement in written composition (Purves, 1991) where raters used six rating criteria to score student writing in six different genres, including a rotated narrative, to determine scoring patterns in 14 countries. Though girls outperformed boys consistently in all 14 countries and raters claimed they could discern the writers' gender through their handwriting styles, Purves did not address the possible interaction between the presumed gender of the writer and the rater's gender when reporting the achievement results.

Communication Intention Approach to Writing Evaluation

A communication intention approach is reflected in evaluation protocols and processes that focus on the social purposes and meanings of text, recognizing ideational and textual features of writing as tools used by readers and writers to communicate and transmit social meanings (Gere, 1980). Examples of evaluation procedures and an evaluation protocol that embrace a communication intention approach are provided in the following descriptions of studies examining teachers' and researchers' identification of gender markers in student writing and of Moffett's (1968) continuum of discursive growth.

Researchers' and Teachers' Perceptions of Male/Female Writing Differences in Secondary and Post-secondary Persuasive Writing

The existence of gender-related differences has been repeatedly observed in analyses of elementary students' narrative writing and storytelling (Fleming, 1995; Gray-Schlegel & Gray-Schlegel, 1995-96; Kamler, 1993; Mcauliffe, 1994; Rometowski & Trepanier-Street, 1987; Sutton-Smith, 1981; Trepanier-Street & Rometowski, 1991; Tuck, Bayliss, & Bell, 1985). These studies reveal a consistent pattern of gender-related characteristics in children's narrative writing. Boys' writing can be
characterized by a limited offering of roles for female characters and a positioning of male characters in powerful, risk-filled roles that require independent problem solving to overcome obstacles. Violence and crime are typically found in boys' writing. Girls' writing is defined less rigidly, with the positioning of female characters in both powerful and powerless roles and the presence of some male characters. Violence may be an element in girls' stories. Characters are more likely to resolve conflicts through the creation of alliances with others, however, than through independent, aggressive action.

Although extensive research has been conducted in the identification of gender-related characteristics of elementary children's writing, it is at the college and high school level where researchers have examined teachers' perceptions of male and female students' writing and their influence on teachers' marking of the writing (Barnes, 1990; Haswell & Haswell, 1995; Haswell & Tedesco, 1991; Rose, 1991; Roulis, 1995).

Roulis's (1995) study of secondary and post-secondary teachers' ratings of students' essays revealed a preference by both male and female teachers for a male style of writing, defined by Deming and Gowen (1990) as "linear, hierarchical, evaluative, distanced and controlled" (p. 15). Ratings were significantly higher for essays written by males in the categories of dynamism quality (strong, aggressive, active, loud) and socio-intellectual status (literate, high social status, white collar). Higher ratings were assigned to essays written by females in the category of aesthetic quality (nice, pleasant, beautiful, sweet), however. In their qualitative responses to male students' writing, teachers made suggestions for revisions at the text level and made positively-worded comments about the quality of the writing. In contrast, suggestions directed to female writers were at the word and sentence level. Teachers' evaluative comments for girls' writing were worded negatively.

In Barnes's (1990) study of gender bias in teachers' written comments regarding students' persuasive writing, male teachers showed an intolerance for emotional writing, especially when the writer was female. As observed in Roulis' (1995) study, female teachers' comments identified concerns about the form and mechanics of the writing. Drawing on Labov's (1973) work, Barnes (1990) proposed that women "attend to form more as a way of displaying competence and credibility in composition teaching in our male-dominated departments and institutions" (p. 152). Teachers directed differential praise and criticism for male and female students' written work. These differences showed a view of male students as having greater intellectual abilities and of female students as being more willing to comply with the conventions of writing.

When 32 graduate teaching assistants and professors of composition were asked to identify the gender of the writers of two persuasive papers (Haswell & Haswell, 1995; Haswell & Tedesco, 1991), identifications were incorrect twice as often as they were accurate. In explanations of their deci-
sions, some teachers attributed masculine traits, such as “he is rebellious, self-confident and emotionless” to the writing, while others attributed feminine traits, such as “she is caring, honest and sincere” (Haswell & Haswell, 1995, pp. 240-241) to the same paper.

In a similar study (Rose, 1991), three female graduate teaching assistants expressed their uncertainty about the gender of 13 selected papers written by college writers. However, the graduate teaching assistants were very specific when describing characteristics of writing submitted by males and females in their college composition classes. Consistent with assessments of secondary and post secondary teachers in other studies (Barnes, 1990; Haswell & Haswell, 1995; Haswell & Tedesco, 1991; Roulis, 1995), the comments of these three graduate teaching assistants privileged the linear, impersonal style traditionally attributed to male writers over the sensual, contextual, and committed style traditionally attributed to female writers in students’ academic writing. These gender-related preferences matched teachers’ differential scoring of male and female students’ persuasive writing.

The Present Study
Although numerous studies (Barnes, 1990; Haswell & Haswell, 1995; Haswell & Tedesco, 1991; Rose, 1991; Roulis, 1995) have contributed to an understanding of gender-related differences in the scoring of adult persuasive writing, these studies do not address the consistent disparity in scores assigned to boys’ and girls’ narrative writing on provincial, state, and national writing competency tests. The present study attempts to address this question by exploring sixth-grade teachers’ perceptions of gender-related differences in grade six students’ narrative writing and the influence of these perceptions on their scoring of the writing.

Three research questions guided the data collection and analysis:

1. How do sixth-grade language arts teachers who marked a 1995 provincial narrative writing examination characterize grade six boys’ and girls’ classroom writing?
2. What topical and linguistic markers within the narrative writing of three grade six girls and two grade six boys do teachers use to identify the writer’s gender?
3. What is the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of the writers’ gender and their scoring of five narrative papers written by grade six girls and boys?

Method
Participants and Procedure
Of the 174 grade six teachers who were contracted to mark approximately 20,000 narrative papers from a 1995 provincial narrative writing examination in a Canadian province, 55 teachers volunteered to participate in the study. All of the participating teachers had participated in a half-day training session and had employed the provincial scoring guide used in this study to mark the 20,000 narrative writing examination papers over a five day period in July, 1995.
Participating teachers worked in both public and private schools representing a balance of rural, suburban, and urban school districts throughout the province. These teachers had considerable experience in marking grade six writing as 65% of the 55 teachers had taught grade six language arts for ten or more years and 58% of the teachers had been contracted to mark a previously-administered provincial narrative writing examination. Though half of the 174 contracted teachers were male, an attempt to have a balanced sample for this study in terms of gender was unsuccessful, with 67% of the teachers who agreed to participate being female. I did not redress the gender imbalance because of my priority on maintaining a sample of teachers who had extensive experience in marking student writing in accordance with the provincial scoring guides.

To determine possible differences between teachers’ evaluative responses to writing that conformed or did not conform to teachers’ gender-related expectations, one group of teachers—14 female and 3 male teachers—knew the gender of the writers of the five papers they were asked to score. The group of teachers who did not know the writers’ gender was larger—21 female and 17 male teachers—in order to generate information regarding teachers’ gender-related expectations for sixth-grade narrative writing.

Five narrative papers, three written by girls and two written by boys, served as stimuli for this study. They were randomly selected from 30 stories submitted by grade six students to a 1995 provincial (Canadian) writing competition recognizing excellence in narrative writing that was sponsored by the provincial council of the National Council of Teachers of English. Three of the stories, one written by a girl and two written by boys, conformed closely to the characterizations of stories written by children of their gender, while the other two narratives written by girls exhibited characteristics of both boys’ and girls’ writing, as observed in studies of gender and writing (Fleming, 1995; Gray-Schlegel & Gray-Schlegel, 1995–96; Kamler, 1993; McAuliffe, 1994; Romatowski & Trepanier-Street, 1987; Sutton-Smith, 1981; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1991; Tuck, Bayliss, & Bell, 1985). Written on self-selected topics, the narrative papers had been edited and type-written by their grade six writers. These papers were presented to participating teachers in the form in which they had been submitted to the writing contest. Type-written, edited stories were used to control for the influence of neatness and clarity of presentation on teachers’ evaluation of the writing.

All participating teachers scored all five papers using the provincial scoring guide on which their common experience as evaluators of students’ narrative writing was based. Using a five-point scale ranging from barely below the acceptable standard for grade six to meets the standard of excellence for grade six, this scoring guide divided the marking of narrative writing into five scoring categories: content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary, and conventions.

The 38 teachers who did not
know the gender of the writers were asked to identify the gender of the writer (if possible) and to describe the characteristics of the narrative that helped them to determine the writer’s gender. Because raising the issue of interactions between gender perceptions and evaluation may have heightened teachers’ awareness of possible biases and resulted in a conscious suppression of the biases while marking the papers, I asked this larger group of teachers to mark the papers before identifying the writers’ gender. The smaller group of teachers carried out a process that paralleled more closely their marking process during the provincial achievement test marking, with their only instruction being to mark the narratives. Through these procedures I attempted to minimize the influence of their awareness of the study’s purpose and the writer’s gender on their evaluation of the writing.

The 17 teachers who knew the five writers’ gender, together with the 38 teachers who were not provided this information, were asked to describe characteristics of boys’ and girls’ classroom writing. Teachers recorded their assigned scores and responses to questions on a questionnaire that was sent to their homes in January, 1996.

An Evaluation Framework Used for Data Analysis

I used Moffett’s (1968) continuum of discursive growth to analyze the teachers’ characterizations of boys’ and girls’ writing. This continuum is identified by Gere (1980) as an evaluation framework that reflects a communication intention approach to writing evaluation. Drawing on Piaget’s (1959) developmental theory and Bernstein’s (1971) sociolinguistic theory, Moffett’s framework explores the relationship between the structure of thought and the structure of discourse, thereby considering both individual cognitive and social influences on the construction of texts by writers and readers.

Defining discourse as a form of communication that achieves its purpose, Moffett (1968) argues that the primary dimensions of growth are the assimilation and accommodation of the individual self to the world and in the process, the creation of the individual self from the multiple discourses available within the individual’s world. These dimensions of growth, he says, are evident in “increasing rhetorical distance between speaker and listener, and increasing abstractive altitude between the raw matter of some subject and the speaker’s symbolization of it” found in student writing (p. 11).

Moffett’s notion of growth in abstract thinking draws on Piaget’s (1959) work on developmental stages, which has been criticized for its middle-class, Eurocentric, and scientific/analytic focus. On its own, Piaget’s developmental model, with its typically masculine way of developing, seems out of place in a study of teachers’ perceptions of gender differences in narrative writing. Moffett’s continuum of discursive growth encompasses the relationships among writers, their audience, and their subjects, as well as individuals’ cognitive growth, however. In this way it highlights interactions between sociocul-
tural contexts and writers' cognitive
growth, making teachers' perceived
gender differences in students' discursive
growth more apparent.

In addition, Moffett's (1968) evi-
dence of discursive growth is reflected
in the findings of previous studies
(Barnes, 1990; Haswell & Haswell, 1995;
Haswell & Tedesco, 1991; Rose, 1991;
Roulis, 1995) of secondary and post-
secondary teachers' gendered percep-
tions of student writing. In these studies
teachers valued female students' writing
for its compliance with linguistic con-
ventions as an indicator of their aware-
ness of audience needs and valued male
students' writing for its movement away
from the writer's primary world toward
more generalized, abstract ideas.

With the caveat that writing develop-
ment is idiosyncratic, Moffett (1968)
identifies the following qualities of the
maturing writer's experience, thought,
and knowledge:

1. From the implicit embodied idea to the
   explicitly formulated idea.
2. From addressing the small, known audi-
   ence like oneself to addressing a distant,
   unknown, and different audience.
3. From talking about present objects and
   actions to talking about things past and
   potential.
4. From projecting emotion into the there-
   then to focusing it in the here-now.
5. From stereotyping to originality, from
   groupism to individuality. (p. 57)

This continuum is appropriate for
the evaluation of many forms of dis-
course, including narratives (Moffett,
1968). In the following discussion, char-
acteristics of sixth-grade writing that
meets the standard of excellence in a
Canadian province are used as examples
to demonstrate the applicability of
Moffett's continuum to an analysis of
teacher's evaluative comments about
sixth-grade narrative writing. Although
there are cultural differences in perspec-
tives on what counts as effective narra-
tives (Cazden, 1988), this discussion
shows how the perspective taken by
designers of the Alberta Education
scoring guide for sixth-grade narrative
writing closely parallels that which is
evident in Moffett's continuum of dis-
cursive growth.

The first dimension of discursive
growth is grounded in Piaget's notion
(1959) that individuals move from an
initial egocentricity, assuming that
others see the world from the same
perspective and draw on the same ex-
periences and available information
from the environment, to a recognition
that others view the world differently.
Growth in writing on the first dimen-
sion is reflected in an awareness that the
disembedded nature of written lan-
guage (Donaldson, 1978) requires writ-
ers to provide explicit information for
readers. Writers who show sophistica-
tion on this dimension use higher lev-
els of syntactic organization and lexical
selection to clarify their intent to read-
ers whose experiences and perspectives
differ from those of the writer. Sixth-
grade students demonstrate compet-
tence within this dimension by using
"supporting details [that] are specific
and consistently effective," by "using
specific words and expressions to cre-
ate vivid images and/or to enrich de-
tails," and by showing "effective and
consistent control" over sentence struc-
ture (Alberta Education, 1995b, n.p.).
The meanings expressed in explicit writing are universalistic (Bernstein, 1971) in that they are accessible to a wide audience. Meanings expressed in implicit writing are particularistic, as they require that writers and readers have shared experiences and shared assumptions about the content of the writing.

The universalistic nature of more sophisticated writing is also reflected in the second dimension of discursive growth. Writers come to recognize that clarity of communication is contingent upon adhering to public knowledge of the organization of ideas in different discourse modes, of grammatical forms, of punctuation, of spelling, and of symbol formation. Writers' attention to writing conventions, reflected in one of the five scoring categories of the provincial narrative scoring guide, and their attention to rhetorical forms provide evidence of development along this continuum.

Piaget's theory (1959) of assimilation and accommodation is reflected in the third dimension of discursive growth. The writer's ability to select, reorganize, and integrate information with previously abstracted information to create hierarchies of classes and subclasses ( Moffett, 1968) is demonstrated in narratives focusing on themes that show writers' abilities to generalize and theorize about their world. Sixth-grade writing that "consistently maintains connections and/or relationships between events, actions, details, and characters" and "brings closure to the writing" (Alberta Education, 1995b, n.p.) demonstrates competence within this dimension. Plot-driven reports of events characterize narratives found at the lower end of this dimension, as they show writers' inability to extend referential relationships in space and time.

Narratives that characterize the lower end of the fourth dimension use grandiose, superficial, super-human characters such as those found in folk and fairy tales, myths, legends, and fables, and focus on themes that portray the world in stereotypical ways. The use of more realistic characters who are well developed and encourage readers' empathy and of themes that explore the subtleties of participation in one's culture characterize more sophisticated narratives. Writing development in this dimension requires the ability to assimilate and accommodate information in order to see the nuances of everyday life. One of the criteria on the sixth-grade narrative writing scoring guide indirectly addresses this dimension: the use of "events and/or actions [that] are consistently appropriate for the established context" (Alberta Education, 1995b, n.p.).

Bernstein's theory (1971) of restricted and elaborated codes is reflected in the fifth dimension of discursive growth. Growth is reflected in a movement away from the reproduction of popular culture topics and plots toward creative topics and plots that show individual elaboration on dominant discourses. Growth is also demonstrated in a movement away from the use of colloquial language and limited syntactic choices toward the careful selection of language and syntax from a vast array of choices. Competence within the fifth...
Evaluation and Teachers' Perceptions of Gender

dimension is reflected in sixth-grade narrative writing that "captivates and holds the reader's interest and is creative and/or original," that uses "words and expressions accurately and effectively" and that uses sentences of a "type and length [that] are consistently effective and varied" (Alberta Education, 1995b, n.p.). Writers who reproduce the topics, themes, and plots of popular culture using limited lexical and syntactic choice are restricted in their abilities to express their individual experience as personal meanings are refracted through the stereotypical, taken-for-granted meanings of popular culture.

In summary, Moffett's (1968) writing assessment framework reflects a communication intention perspective (Gere, 1980) that broadens the scope of the provincial scoring guide used by participating teachers to mark sixth-grade students' writing. Moffett's framework views students' writing as a demonstration of students' use of textual and rhetorical features to expand their perspective outward from the self and at the same time, to express their individuality within the culture.

Analysis

Frequencies showing male and female teachers' accuracy in identifying the writer's gender were obtained from questionnaires completed by the 38 teachers who did not know the writer's gender. Analyses of the 38 teachers' identification of gendered elements within each story, together with the 55 teachers' observations of boys' and girls' classroom writing, provided the basis for inferring teachers' characterizations of grade six boys' and girls' writing.

Teachers' written responses to the questions about boys' and girls' classroom writing, 170 discrete comments about boys' writing and 157 discrete comments about girls' writing, were categorized by two raters in terms of the five dimensions on Moffett's (1968) framework of discursive growth. The raters then assessed whether the comment showed a high level or a low level of sophistication on the continuum within each dimension of discursive growth. The two raters' categorizations of teachers' comments showed 96% agreement.

Because this study sought to reproduce the context of large-scale evaluations in order to tease out possible interactions of gender perceptions and scoring on a process for which the influence of social factors was believed to be highly controlled, I needed an analytic tool that mirrored the provincial scoring guide used to evaluate provincial achievement tests and also foregrounded the influence of gender on the scoring of the writing. I used Moffett's (1968) continuum of discursive growth because it provided an analytic framework into which I could place scoring guide categories and, because at the same time, it highlighted readers' and writers' social intentions and meanings.

I inferred the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the writer's gender and their evaluation of the five narrative papers by comparing the means of the scores that teachers assigned to the papers. I used two-tailed T-tests to compare (1) the means of
averaged scores assigned to the five papers by teachers who knew the writers' gender with averaged scores assigned by those who did not know the writers' gender, and (2) the means of averaged scores assigned by male and female teachers. I then conducted a two-way analysis of variance to determine the correlation between the averaged scores of the teachers' gender and the perceived gender of the writers.

Teachers' identification of the writer's gender had a significant interaction effect with the averaged score for one of the papers written by a girl. Subsequent two-way analyses of variance were then employed to test the effects of the teachers' gender and of the writer's perceived gender on scores assigned within each of the five scoring categories to this paper.

Results
Teachers' Characterizations of Boys' and Girls' Writing
Teachers' descriptions of the elements within each of the five narrative papers that provided clues about the writer's gender were based on a uniform perception of characteristics of girls' and boys' writing. Descriptions of teachers' perceptions are organized according to the degree to which teachers agreed upon the writer's gender. Table 1 provides a summary of the teachers' assignment of gender.

Teachers Unanimously Agreed That the Writer Was a Girl
The gender of the writer of the paper, "The Horrors of Getting Your Haircut," was correctly identified by most participating teachers. This story was about a girl who was given a "mushroom bowl" haircut and was teased at school until another student was given a worse-looking haircut.

Teachers identified the gender of the protagonist and her friends as a significant clue to the writer's gender, explaining, in the words of one rater, that sixth-grade girls generally wrote stories about girls whose best friends were girls and that boys "would never write a story pretending to be a girl." The writer's knowledge of the "ins and outs of a beauty salon" demonstrated through her detailed description of the shampoos, conditioners, and perfumes, was cited by 17 teachers as knowledge that girls were likely to possess. The conflict that arose because of the protagonist's concern about a humiliating haircut and the description of the protagonist's emotional response to this problem was viewed by 31 teachers as an indicator of a female writer of the story. One teacher explained that "physical appearance would probably be more important to a girl than a boy at this age" and another felt that "guys take appearance disasters more matter-of-factly." Another teacher observed that "others' opinions are more important to girls than to boys." One teacher also noted that relationships with the protagonist's mother, as well as with her friends, were central to the conflict. The protagonist's response to the problem, hiding from her peers, was one that participating teachers had observed more frequently in girls. Girls were
### Table 1
Teachers' Assignment of Gender to the Writers of Five Narrative Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER OF WRITER AND TITLE OF STORY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF MALE TEACHERS GUESSED WRITER WAS A BOY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE TEACHERS GUESSED WRITER WAS A BOY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF MALE TEACHERS GUESSED WRITER WAS A GIRL</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE TEACHERS GUESSED WRITER WAS A GIRL</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF MALE TEACHERS UNCERTAIN OF WRITER'S GENDER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE TEACHERS UNCERTAIN OF WRITER'S GENDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girl “Horrors of Getting Your Hair Cut”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy “Penny Please”</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy “Sky Screamer”</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl “My Super Flying Machine”</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl “Million Dollar Discovery”</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More likely to “run away from teasing and not start a fight,” and to write stories that “do not rely upon action to make the story move,” according to one teacher.

Nine teachers commented that the writer’s use of sensory details and specific adjectives, particularly the colors maroon and white, were representative of a sixth-grade girl’s style of writing.

**Teachers Generally Agreed That the Writer Is a Boy**

On the whole teachers were accurate in their agreement on the gender of the paper, “Penny Please,” written by a boy. While there were no female teachers who identified the writer as a girl, 29% of female teachers were uncertain of the writer’s gender. The percentages of male teachers who were uncertain of the
writer's gender or who thought a girl had written the paper were evenly divided, 8% in each case.

In this story a boy did odd jobs to earn $499.99 of the $500.00 needed to "buy a model space shuttle autographed by the first kiwi (sic) in space." Finding a shiny penny, the boy bought the model space shuttle but discovered that the wing was broken. Accidentally using paint stripper instead of glue when mending the model space shuttle, the boy removed the autograph. He vowed never to buy things he did not need... until he saw an autographed baseball in a store window.

In the story "Sky Screamer" the protagonist, Ben, and his friend, Mike, were locked in the Water Park at West Edmonton Mall. After a chase in which the janitor fell down the Sky Screamer slide, lost his glasses and the keys to the exit, and then ended up in the pool, the boys stole the exit keys and escaped from the Water Park to meet their parents. When questioned about the wet state of their clothes, they explained that they had been drenched at the dolphin show in the mall.

The importance of the model space shuttle and of the autographed baseball to the story "Penny Please," as well as the nature of the odd jobs in which the protagonist was engaged, were cited as evidence of a male writer of the story. Teachers agreed that boys tended to write about space and sports and about occupations that have traditionally been held by men. Teachers did not comment on the conflict or on the protagonist's response to the conflict in "Penny Please," but nine teachers observed that the aggressive nature of the two boys' attempts to exit the water park in "Sky Screamer" was typical of conflict resolutions in stories written by sixth-grade students in their classrooms. One teacher noted that boys in her class were "adventurers" who wrote about "taking risks and winning, of course." Four teachers also observed that "the use of tricks to achieve goals" and the protagonists' deceit when explaining their lateness to their parents were also representative of boys' behavior.

In both stories the writer's use of humor proved to be an indicator of his gender. Three teachers commented on the humor in "Sky Screamer" and eight teachers commented on the humor in "Penny Please." In one such teacher's view the "flippant, slapstick, almost bathroom humor" was expected to a greater extent by sixth-grade boys than by sixth-grade girls.

The writer's use of language drew the greatest number of comments from teachers who identified the writer of "Penny Please" as a boy. Words and expressions such as "go stuff himself," "elephant dung," and "taxidermy" indicated to 18 teachers that a boy had written the story. The writer's language was described by one teacher as "not as descriptive or flowery as girls would write" and by another teacher as "picturesque though not chosen with care." When teachers described "Penny
Please,” they used terms such as “less sophisticated,” “poorer quality,” and “to the point.” Similarly, when describing “Sky Screamer,” they noted “very little description of what the boys look like” and “more attention to action than to details.”

In contrast, the five teachers who thought that a girl had written “Sky Screamer” described the writing as showing “clarity and precision” and as “a great story.” They also felt that the writer used “strong vocabulary and sentence structure” and paid “attention to details and mechanics.” Four teachers identified the descriptions of the characters’ hair and eyes as indicators that a girl had written the story.

In these teachers’ view the location of the story “Sky Screamer” in a shopping mall reflected girls’ perceived penchant for shopping. In contrast teachers who felt a boy had written the story observed that it was set on the most daring water slide in the shopping mall’s water park.

The characters’ responses to conflict in both stories indicated the writer’s gender to the teacher who felt a girl had written “Penny Please” and to those teachers who felt a girl had written “Sky Screamer.” Referring to “Sky Screamer,” one teacher observed that “girls often use trickery to outsmart an adversary, while boys are more likely to tackle and confront an adversary.” Another teacher felt this story was a “safe adventure.” Similarly, the teacher who identified the writer of “Penny Please” as a girl stated that “girls create characters who don’t necessarily triumph in the end. Sumba’s final folly was caused by the same characteristic that led to the premise of the story.”

**Teachers Were Uncertain of the Writer’s Gender**

The story “My Super Flying Machine,” written by a grade six girl, caused considerable uncertainty among the teachers in identifying the writer’s gender. The story tells of the gathering together of materials and the construction of a flying machine, an element that led 62% of male teachers and 54% of female teachers to believe the writer was a boy. Only female teachers (29%) correctly identified the writer’s gender, while 38% of male teachers and 17% of female teachers were uncertain of the writer’s gender.

Teachers’ identification of clues identifying the writer’s gender reflects differential application of a common set of expectations for boys’ and girls’ writing. The topic of “My Super Flying Machine” was deemed by 14 teachers to be a typically male topic because, as one teacher said, “Boys are more interested in mechanical things.” In addition, two teachers felt that the names given to the flying machine were typically male names. Five teachers noted, however, that the writer seemed more concerned about the name and appearance of the craft than about the flying of it. One teacher observed that girls were more likely than boys to refer to older sisters in their writing, while five teachers felt that the trick the protagonist played on his older sister identified the writer as a boy. Four teachers who thought the writer was a girl explained...
that a male writer would have known "how materials were placed together to form a plane," while six teachers who thought the writer was a boy felt that the writer showed a knowledge of the parts and tools needed to construct a flying machine. The colors, red and black, and the names used in the story were characterized as "male oriented" by some teachers, while others felt that the introduction, "One beautiful summer day," was a typically female expression. Six teachers considered the story to be short and simplistic, characteristics that they attributed to boys' writing.

Large numbers of teachers were uncertain of the writer's gender and many incorrectly identified the writer's gender of "Million Dollar Discovery," the story that included both male and female protagonists. More than half of male teachers (54%) and 46% of female teachers were uncertain of the writer's gender of this story. Correct identification of the writer's gender was made by 29% of female teachers and 15% of male teachers. The existence of both male and female characters appears to have masked the gender of the writer of this story, which began with a farmer's discovery of a tyrannosaurus behind his barn. A call to the police yielded no response, so his granddaughter called the police to report a robbery. The fire service and the army were subsequently called in and the dinosaur died after being hit with 50 bombs. The dinosaur's carcass was sold for one million dollars to "the first ever dinosaur museum in Tokyo."

Teachers' views of the topic choice and the protagonists' responses to conflict were contingent upon their identification of the writer's gender. In 12 teachers' views the events in the story "Million Dollar Discovery" reflected, as one teacher said, "grade six boys' preoccupation with military might." Six teachers felt that the story demonstrated boys' tendencies for violent conflict resolution in their writing. One male teacher wrote, "Why kill the dinosaur?—sigh—it's got to be a guy thing." In contrast the violence in "Million Dollar Discovery" was described by one teacher who identified the writer's gender as female as "understated and on the sterile side." Another teacher pointed out that "a boy would have tried to fight the dinosaur."

Evidence of the "more sophisticated style of writing" that teachers expected of girls was found by one teacher, who felt that this story "flowed well" and by another teacher who felt that the writing was detailed and showed "correct use of synonyms (e.g., surprised, astonished)." Four teachers who identified the writer as a boy felt, however, that, in the words of one, "Million Dollar Discovery" contained "just the facts. It was written dryly and matter-of-factly." Two teachers commented that the writing was "choppy" because there was little elaboration of events and ideas.

Overall, the certainty and accuracy of male and female teachers' identification of grade six writers' gender increased when the narrative writing conformed to characteristics defined by researchers (Fleming, 1995; Gray-Schlegel & Gray-Schlegel, 1995–96;
Kamler, 1993; McAuliffe, 1994; Romatowski & Trepanier-Street, 1987; Sutton-Smith, 1981; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1991; Tuck, Bayliss, & Bell, 1985) as representative of girls’ or boys’ writing. Male and female teachers showed relatively greater certainty and greater accuracy in identifying the gender of writers of their own gender than that of writers of the opposite gender. When reading the narrative papers, teachers used the presence of female characters, sophisticated sentence structure and sensory details, and the use of non-violent conflict resolution to identify female writers. In their identification of male writers, teachers used characters’ violent actions, the terseness of the paper, the presence of colloquial expressions and slapstick humor, and the absence of female characters, descriptive language, and sophisticated sentence structure as identifying clues. Teachers who disagreed in their identification of the writers’ gender often drew upon similar elements from the writing to support their perspective. Teachers’ interpersonal responses to these elements varied, however, depending upon their perceptions of the writers’ gender.

An Evaluative Comparison of Girls’ and Boys’ Writing

Teachers participating in this study characterized girls’ writing as being more sophisticated on all five dimensions of Moffett’s (1968) continuum of discursive growth. With the exception of detailed descriptions of violent events in boys’ writing, teachers felt that girls’ writing was more explicit. According to participating teachers, girls included more details that helped readers to make sense of the story, organized events in ways that allowed readers to follow the flow of events, and developed well-rounded characters in their writing. The term “reader friendly,” used by teachers to describe girls’ writing, implied a view of sixth-grade girls as having moved outward from a focus on themselves to an awareness of the needs of readers. In contrast, teachers felt that the lack of detail in boys’ writing made it difficult to follow the flow of ideas and described it as being “more choppy” than girls’ writing. In this respect, teachers characterized sixth-grade boys’ writing as lacking in an awareness of others’ varied perspectives.

A comparison of teachers’ comments regarding sixth-grade boys’ and girls’ writing on the second dimension of discursive growth—moving from addressing a known audience to addressing an unknown audience—also reflected a view of boys’ greater egocentricity. Boys’ writing was viewed as showing less care and accuracy in the use of vocabulary and writing conventions than did girls’ writing. The presentation of girls’ writing was more favorably evaluated by teachers, who also noted girls’ greater willingness to revise and edit writing in order to clarify the meaning for readers.

Teachers also felt that girls’ writing demonstrated a greater sophistication in terms of moving beyond the concrete, present reality to forming generalizations by assimilating and accommodating information from past experiences. They described girls’ writing as being
better planned and demonstrating greater use of logic in resolving conflict. Teachers felt that girls demonstrated evidence of having made generalizations about the world, in the form of lessons learned by protagonists through their writing. Teachers felt that girls were more likely than boys to write from the other gender’s perspective and to draw on literature they had read, demonstrating higher levels of abstract thought in their ability to move beyond their lived experience.

Sixth-grade girls were viewed by teachers as showing a greater awareness of the subtleties of everyday life through a propensity to write realistic fiction that emphasized feelings and relationships between characters over the events of the story. In contrast, teachers observed that sixth-grade boys’ writing often included superficial super-heroes who interacted using violence. Boys’ writing, with its focus on stereotypical super-heroes, shows a projection of emotion into the there-and-then. On the fourth dimension of Moffett’s continuum, this superficial writing is viewed less favorably than writing that demonstrates the subtleties of the here-and-now, a feature that teachers attribute to girls’ writing.

The ability to use language to express individuality—the fifth dimension of discursive growth—was also attributed to girls to a greater degree than it was to boys. Teachers observed that sixth-grade girls used humor to a greater degree and drew from a broader selection of topics, vocabulary, and syntax than did boys when writing narratives. Sixth-grade boys’ use of colloquial language and their propensity to retell story lines from popular culture restricted their expression of their individuality.

A summary of teachers’ evaluative comparisons of gender differences in sixth-grade writing is found in Table 2. Consistently, girls’ writing was described by teachers as showing greater movement from the self outward and of demonstrating higher levels of thinking, characteristics believed to be of greater maturity and sophistication in writing.

Ten of the 55 teachers did not identify patterns in terms of gender characteristics of their grade six students’ classroom writing. These teachers identified a close connection between students’ reading and writing. Strong readers, in their opinion, read and wrote within a wide range of genres. While these teachers felt that experiential background, both literary and lived, influenced students’ writing, they did not identify differences in these experiences along gender lines. Instead, they felt that this experiential background contributed to varied literary abilities, rather than to generalizable gender characteristics.

The Influence of Teachers’ Perceptions of Gender on Their Scoring of Five Narrative Papers Written by Grade Six Students

Though there was a range of scores for each of the five papers within each of the five scoring categories, there were no statistically significant differences between averaged scores assigned by male and female teachers, nor between averaged scores assigned by teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls' Narrative Writing</th>
<th>Boys' Narrative Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IMPLICIT</strong></td>
<td>• more information about characters’ motivations</td>
<td>• less detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more fully developed</td>
<td>• more choppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• better organized</td>
<td>• short sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXPLICIT</strong></td>
<td>• more attention to details</td>
<td>• explicit in describing bloody events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more fluid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more reader-friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KNOWN AUDIENCE</strong></td>
<td>• greater legibility</td>
<td>• less precise use of grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• correct use of conventions</td>
<td>• paragraphs often not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• neater</td>
<td>• presentation is not a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more willing to revise and edit writing</td>
<td>• reluctant to edit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC AUDIENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• usually use girls’ viewpoint</td>
<td>• always from boys’ viewpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• may have heroes of either gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stronger connections between reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• solve problems in a more plausible way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• protagonists often learn lessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• plan more carefully</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THERE-THEN</strong></td>
<td>• more personal</td>
<td>• violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• fantasy has a real-world over tone</td>
<td>• characters are super-heroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• closer to everyday life</td>
<td>• less expression of emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more boy/girl relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• more psychological conflicts happening to themselves and to friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• characters take precedence over plot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on next page
who knew or did not know the writer's gender. The means and standard deviations of the average scores of the five papers are presented in Table 3.

Significant differences appeared only in the marking of the paper “Million Dollar Discovery,” depending on whether the teacher thought the writer was a girl or a boy. There was a significant difference for the perceived gender variable \( F(1,19) = 9.30, p < .01 \). Teachers who thought the writer was a girl scored the paper significantly higher than teachers who thought the writer was a boy (\( M_{\text{guessed girl}} = 4.07 \) vs. \( M_{\text{guessed boy}} = 3.55 \)).

As shown in Table 4, a two-way analysis of variance of scores assigned within each of the five scoring categories to the paper “Million Dollar Discovery” revealed a significant difference for the perceived gender variable in the categories of organization \( F(1,19) = 6.85, p < .05 \), vocabulary \( F(1,19) = 6.05, p < .05 \), and conventions \( F(1,19) = 4.45, p < .05 \). Teachers who thought the writer was a girl scored the paper significantly higher than teachers who thought the writer was a boy in organization (\( M_{\text{guessed girl}} = 3.89 \) vs. \( M_{\text{guessed boy}} = 3.27 \)), vocabulary (\( M_{\text{guessed girl}} = 4.11 \) vs. \( M_{\text{guessed boy}} = 3.55 \)), and conventions (\( M_{\text{guessed girl}} = 4.44 \) vs. \( M_{\text{guessed boy}} = 3.90 \)).

“My Super Flying Machine” and “Million Dollar Discovery,” both written by girls and eliciting the greatest number of uncertain responses when teachers were asked to identify the writer’s gender, were assigned the greatest number of low scores. These papers, showing characteristics of female and male writing, were scored lower by teachers who knew the writer’s gender than by teachers who did not know the writer’s gender. The third paper, written by a girl and clearly showing female

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Table 2, Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THERE-THEN</th>
<th>HERE-NOW</th>
<th>THERE-THEN</th>
<th>HERE-NOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• more dialogue than action</td>
<td>• little tendency toward violence</td>
<td>• feelings explored in greater detail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• more creative with vocabulary</td>
<td>• greater risk of structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• more humor</td>
<td>• greater variation in sentence</td>
<td>• more retelling of popular culture</td>
<td>• more surprise endings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• more frilly topics</td>
<td>• take greater risk with vocabulary</td>
<td>• borderline profanity may be their answer to using rich vocabulary</td>
<td>• greater use of slang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• more frilly topics</td>
<td>• more creative</td>
<td>• less careful use of language</td>
<td>• excess repetition, especially of violent scenes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“My Super Flying Machine” and “Million Dollar Discovery,” both written by girls and eliciting the greatest number of uncertain responses when teachers were asked to identify the writer’s gender, were assigned the greatest number of low scores. These papers, showing characteristics of female and male writing, were scored lower by teachers who knew the writer’s gender than by teachers who did not know the writer’s gender. The third paper, written by a girl and clearly showing female
writing characteristics, was scored higher by teachers who knew the writer's gender. It appears that when the readers knew the gender of a female writer, they read papers whose writers had not closely conformed to gendered expectations for their sex more critically than those that did conform to gendered expectations. It is not possible to make a similar comparison of writing penned by boys because there were no writing samples in the study that were cross-gendered and there was no pattern in the scoring of teachers who knew and did not know the writer's gender. The findings of Haswell and Haswell's (1996) study of post secondary teachers and students' perceptions of gender in student writing, however, also indicated a negative bias against writers' display of cross-gendered characteristics in papers they were asked to evaluate.

Though there were no significant differences in the marking of the paper "My Super Flying Machine," a paper that elicited the greatest percentage of incorrect gender guesses, a trend ap-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer's gender and story titles</th>
<th>Writer's gender identified as boy</th>
<th>Writer's gender identified as girl</th>
<th>Writer's gender uncertain</th>
<th>Writer's gender known</th>
<th>Writer's gender unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy &quot;Penny Please&quot;</td>
<td>3.94 .54</td>
<td>3.70 .14</td>
<td>4.45 .48</td>
<td>4.06 .58</td>
<td>4.07 .73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy &quot;Sky Screamer&quot;</td>
<td>4.18 .53</td>
<td>4.36 .36</td>
<td>4.23 .63</td>
<td>4.25 .52</td>
<td>4.24 .62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl &quot;Million Dollar Discovery&quot;</td>
<td>3.55 .32</td>
<td>4.07 .62</td>
<td>3.70 .70</td>
<td>3.61 .54</td>
<td>3.66 .71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl &quot;My Super Flying Machine&quot;</td>
<td>3.06 .30</td>
<td>2.83 .23</td>
<td>3.20 .58</td>
<td>2.99 .30</td>
<td>3.07 .53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl &quot;Horrors of Getting Your Hair Cut&quot;</td>
<td>__ __</td>
<td>4.50 .51</td>
<td>4.70 .42</td>
<td>4.54 .47</td>
<td>4.52 .58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3
Means of Averaged Scores by Teachers' Identification of Writer's Gender
peared that contrasts with teachers’ marking of “Million Dollar Discovery,” a paper that elicited the greatest uncertainty in gender identification of the writer. Teachers who thought that the writer of “My Super Flying Machine” was a girl scored the paper lower than did those who thought the writer was a boy. Because there were no male teachers who thought the writer was a girl, it was only female teachers who assigned the lower scores when they perceived the writer as a girl, indicating the possibility of “same-sex depreciation” (Haswell & Haswell, 1996, p. 59), a harsher judgment of same-sex writing than of opposite-sex writing, in the marking of student writing. This phenomenon was also observed in a previous study exploring post-secondary teachers’ evaluation of student writing (Etaugh, Houtler, & Ptasiński, 1988).

Scores assigned to the two papers penned by boys did not show a gender-based trend in scoring. Teachers who identified the writer of “Sky Screamer” as a girl assigned higher scores than did teachers who identified the writer as a boy. Assigned scores were higher, however, when teachers thought that a boy wrote the story “Penny Please,” than when teachers thought a girl had written the story. A comparison of the gender markers identified by teachers may help to explain the absence of a pattern of scores assigned by determination of the writer’s gender. The higher scores assigned by teachers who felt that a girl had written “Sky Screamer” were accompanied by topical gender markers and by positive reference to linguistic markers such as “strong vocabulary and sentence structure” and “attention to mechanics.” In contrast only topical gender markers, such as “girls create characters who don’t necessarily triumph in the end,” were used to identify the gender of the writer of “Penny Please” as a girl. For both stories, both topical and linguistic gender markers were used by teachers who identified the writer’s gender as male, with the

### Table 4
Means of Scores by Perceived Gender of Writer for “Million Dollar Discovery” (Written by a Girl)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Categories</th>
<th>Writer identified as boy</th>
<th>Writer identified as girl</th>
<th>Writer’s gender uncertain</th>
<th>Writer’s gender known</th>
<th>Writer’s gender unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>MEAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence structure</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
linguistic markers showing a view of male writers as showing less maturity and lacking in audience awareness. In this respect the scoring of the two papers matched teachers' gendered expectations for only one of the two papers written by boys.

Teachers who were uncertain of the writer's gender assigned higher scores to three papers. Two of these papers ("Penny Please" and "The Horrors of Getting Your Hair Cut") conformed to their gendered expectations and one ("My Super Flying Machine") did not. In the scoring of "Million Dollar Discovery," teachers who were uncertain of the writer's gender scored the paper lower in all categories than did teachers who identified the writer's gender correctly as a girl. The scores assigned by teachers uncertain of the writers' gender were higher in all categories except conventions, however, when compared with scores assigned by teachers who identified the writer incorrectly as a boy. No pervasive pattern was found demonstrating the influence of readers' inability to construct a gendered image of the writer of student narratives on their evaluation. Previous studies (Haswell & Haswell, 1996; Paludi & Strayer, 1985; Rajecki, de Graaf-Kaser, & Rasmussen, 1992), in contrast, found a pattern of lower ratings assigned to papers identified by readers as gender neutral than to papers for whom readers found clues identifying the writer's gender.

**Discussion**

A shared perception of gender-related differences in sixth-grade narrative writing was evident in teachers' descriptions of gendered elements within five narrative papers and in their observations of sixth-grade classroom writing. Teachers observed gender-related narrative writing characteristics that were consistent with researchers' analyses of children's narrative writing (Fleming, 1995; Gray-Schlegel & Gray-Schlegel, 1995-96; Kamler, 1993; McAuliffe, 1994; Rajecki, de Graaf-Kaser, & Rasmussen, 1992; Sutton-Smith, 1981; Trepanier-Street & Rasmowski, 1991; Tuck, Bayliss, & Bell, 1985). Predominant among the identified differences were the match between the writer's gender and the protagonist's gender, the degree to which writers attended to character development, the power relationships among male and female characters in the stories, and the placement of the conflict resolution strategy along a continuum ranging from the building of community to the independent conquering of a challenger. These characteristics, exhibited in three of the five sixth-grade narrative papers used in this study, enabled at least 70% of the grade six teachers to identify the writers' gender accurately for each of these three papers. Furthermore, in spite of many teachers' inaccuracies and uncertainties in their identification of the gender of the writer of two stories written by girls, teachers' comments about these stories were clearly drawn from this homogeneous body of gendered characteristics for sixth-grade narrative writing.

Teachers' qualitative descriptions of boys' and girls' writing revealed a stance that privileged girls' narrative writing.
over boys' narrative writing on all five dimensions of Moffett's (1968) discursive growth framework. Consistently, girls' writing was described by teachers as showing movement away from an egocentric perspective and of demonstrating higher levels of thinking, while boys' writing was described as lacking in awareness of others' perspectives and showing concrete, stereotypical thinking.

Sixth-grade teachers' privileging of female students' narrative writing contrasts with secondary and post secondary teachers' privileging of male students' persuasive writing (Barnes, 1990; Deming & Gowen, 1990; Rose, 1991; Roulis, 1995) on Moffett's (1968) implicit to explicit dimension. The use of detail and description in narrative writing, a characteristic of sixth-grade girls' narrative writing, was valued by sixth-grade teachers as showing an awareness of audience. In contrast, teachers described sixth-grade boys' writing as "choppy," with poorly developed characters and plots that were not "reader friendly." Barnes (1990), however, found that the stereotypical female propensity to use detail and description when writing was viewed by college and high school writing teachers as "being wordy" (p. 149).

Another contrast in sixth-grade teachers' and college-level teachers' perspectives on male and female styles of writing is found in Moffett's (1968) there-then to the here-now dimension. While sixth-grade teachers viewed the emotion-oriented narratives penned by girls as demonstrating higher-level thinking than the impersonal, plot-oriented narratives written by boys, secondary and post secondary writing teachers have criticized the typically female personal orientation in students' persuasive arguments (Barnes, 1990; Roulis, 1995). Furthermore, college-level teachers dismissed emotion-laden persuasive arguments as "lacking in logic" (Barnes, 1990, p. 151). The contrasting perspectives of these two groups of writing teachers indicate an interactive effect of genre and gender characteristics in their evaluation of student writing.

In the present study and in previous studies exploring secondary and post secondary teachers' gender-related impressions of student writing, a different sense of value and a different vocabulary for describing the worth of the paper were evoked contingent upon the teacher's impression of the writer's gender. While the male and female teachers participating in this study responded in a fairly consistent and non-biased manner to sixth-grade narrative writing that conformed to gender-related expectations, a significant bias toward female writers was found in the scoring of one paper written by a girl whose gender was either incorrectly identified or unidentified by 77% of participating teachers. Teachers who identified the writer of "Million Dollar Discovery" as a boy assigned lower scores in each of the five scoring categories than did teachers who identified the writer as a girl. Significant differences in the scores were found in the categories of conventions, vocabulary, and organization. It appears that the privileging of girls' writing, evident in
teachers' qualitative comparisons of sixth-grade boys' and girls' narrative writing, did significantly influence teachers' scoring of narrative writing when a female writer crossed gender lines. Teachers assessed the writing in more favorable terms when they perceived the writer to be female. It appears that the great uncertainty in gender identification evoked by this paper produced a Pygmalion effect of self-fulfilling expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) on teachers' evaluation of the writing.

An exception to the Pygmalion effect is found in sixth-grade teachers' marking of "My Super Flying Machine," a story that was written by a girl in a style that was characterized by more than half of the teachers as a masculine style. Teachers' evaluative comments contrasted with the scores assigned to this paper, highlighting inconsistencies in teachers' evaluation of student writing that does not conform to gendered expectations. The only evaluative comment made in reference to this story, "short and simplistic," was made by teachers who felt that a boy had written the story. However, while the scores in four of the five scoring categories were not significantly higher when the writer was viewed by sixth-grade teachers as a boy, they were higher than scores assigned by teachers who thought the writer was a girl. While the Pygmalion effect did not apply to teachers' scoring of "My Super Flying Machine," teachers' evaluative responses to this paper and to "Million Dollar Discovery" demonstrate that the evaluation of papers whose writers have stepped outside the dominant gendered expectations for a particular genre was problematic for these teachers.

Though the sample of teachers and of narrative writing is too small to allow for broad generalizations, the results of this study suggest that patterns in the distribution of scores assigned to boys' and girls' narrative writing in large-scale narrative writing examinations may be explained, in part, by teachers' privileging of girls' writing, by the scoring guides used to mark the papers, and by the context of broad-based assessment itself. In the training procedures for marking the 1995 provincial writing examinations, no effort was made to bring teachers' implicit expectations for gender-related styles to a conscious level where their possible influences on marking could be examined. Consistent with a formal semantics theory of writing evaluation, teachers were instructed to work toward common interpretations of the scoring criteria and to suppress the influence of biases toward particular styles or topics on their marking.

The formal semantics approach to evaluation oversimplified the evaluation process, however, as it overlooked cultural influences on teachers' evaluative responses to gender-related characteristics of student writing. In this study of sixth-grade teachers and in previous studies of secondary and post secondary teachers (Barnes, 1990; H aswell & H aswell, 1995; H aswell & Tedesco, 1991; R ose, 1991; R oulis, 1995), markers responded fairly consistently to student writing in which writers had
positioned themselves in recognizable gendered roles as authors. The scoring of cross-gendered writing proved to be problematic for teachers when cultural influences on their scoring were masked or suppressed, however. In addition, teachers' evaluative comments regarding student writing were influenced by cultural expectations that privileged one gendered style over another. Consistency and equity in the scoring, the goals of large-scale evaluations of student writing, were compromised by an emphasis on objective, detached marking that did not attend to the influence of teachers' sociocultural experiences and perspectives.

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