RUNNING HEAD: TEACHERS MATTER TOO

Teachers Matter Too! A qualitative perspective in the experiences and expectations of females within STEM and non-STEM careers.

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Abstract

We explored the factors associated with women’s choices to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers. Participants in this study came from two 20-year longitudinal studies conducted in the United States who were initially surveyed about their career aspirations in high school. Interviews were then conducted when participants were in their mid-thirties and forties to understand their decisions to: (1) go into STEM careers if they had initial non-STEM career aspirations, or (2) leave or not pursue a STEM career if they had initial STEM career aspirations. Findings from unstructured interviews uncovered three themes that emerged in participants’ career decisions: (1) the importance of teachers and classroom experiences, (2) interest and value in STEM subjects, and (3) the importance of family and work/life balance in career choice. We discuss the implications of these findings in relation to initiatives to encourage more women to pursue and stay in STEM careers.