

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN UNDERGRADUATE
ENGINEERING PROGRAMS IN JAPAN
AS RESOURCES TO THE DECISIONS TO PURSUE MASTER'S DEGREES

Masako Hosaka

Dr. Jeni Hart, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe how women engineering students in Japan experience engineering study and how their decisions to pursue a master's degree are informed by their experiences. The study is framed by identity (control) theory (Burke, 1991; Styker, 1968, 1980). This research draws upon interviews with 32 final-year undergraduate women students in two different national engineering schools in Japan. The findings indicated that these women engineering students perceived their study and engineering identity were constrained by poor teaching and little guidance from the faculty since early stages in their program. They also experienced challenges in participating in group work because of token status. As a result, they were inclined to have low evaluations of themselves as future engineers. Sense of social isolation, powerlessness, constraint, and inadequacy prevailed. Despite these experiences, those who planned to pursue master's degrees tended to engage in engineering-related activities relatively actively and interpret their experiences more positively. Implications for future research and institutional and departmental practices are provided.