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Published in final edited form as:

Sch Soc Work J. 2022 ; 47(1): 37–71.

Informal and Formal Mentoring of Sexual and Gender Minority Youth: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Research demonstrates that mentoring relationships can promote positive outcomes for youth across numerous domains, a topic of importance to school social workers. Whereas most mentoring research to date has been conducted with heterosexual cisgender youth, there is a growing body of literature that examines mentoring experiences among sexual and gender minority youth (SGMY). The purpose of this article is to conduct a systematic literature review of informal and formal mentoring experiences among SGMY. Results from twelve studies that met inclusion criteria suggested that (1) the majority of SGMY report having a mentor/role model; (2) demographics are generally unrelated to having a mentor; (3) SGMY seek out mentors with certain characteristics; (4) mentors promote positive outcomes across psychosocial, behavioral, and academic domains; and (5) mentors report varying levels of self-efficacy in mentoring SGMY and disparate motivations for becoming a mentor. Several limitations of the extant literature were identified, underscoring the need for methodologically rigorous and more inclusive research. Nevertheless, preliminary research suggests that SGMY benefit from having a mentor and that efforts are needed to safely connect SGMY to high-quality informal or formal mentors.

Keywords

cisgender; sexual and gender minority youth; mentoring

Promoting positive youth development (PYD) is critical to school social workers. Over the past few decades, there has been a burgeoning body of literature focusing on the impact of mentoring relationships on youth (Raposa et al., 2019; Van Dam et al., 2018). More recently, this body of literature has expanded to focus on the impact of informal and formal mentoring on sexual and gender minority youth (SGMY). These youth experience concerning rates of mental health problems; self-harm; alcohol and drug use; sexual risk taking; and violence victimization and perpetration, such as teen dating violence (Becerra-Culqui et al., 2018; Dank et al., 2013; Day et al., 2017; Greaves et al., 2014; Hafeez et al., 2017; Hughto et al., 2015; Johns et al., 2019; Lucassen et al., 2017; Martin-Storey, 2015; Scheer et al., 2019;

Scheer et al., 2020; Shorey et al., 2018; Valentine & Shipherd, 2018; Van Schuylenbergh et al., 2018).

Minority stress theory (Brooks, 1981; Meyer, 2003; Testa et al., 2015) suggests that peer and family rejection as well as internalized homophobia and/or transphobia predict deleterious health outcomes in SGMY (Kualanka et al., 2017; Munroe, 2018; Pariseau et al., 2019; Robinson, 2018), underscoring the urgent need to identify effective programs that promote resilience among SGMY. Grounded in theories of PYD (Benson et al., 2006; Bowers et al., 2010), informal and formal mentoring relationships may help to buffer against the deleterious impacts of minority stress and promote resilience in SGMY. To date, there is no systematic review of the extent and context of both informal and formal mentoring and their impact on SGMY. A comprehensive review of informal and formal mentoring among SGMY can identify important gaps in the research and provide practice-based implications for supporting SGMY in the face of proximal and distal minority stressors. Although a review was recently published on informal mentoring among SGMY (Burningham & Weiler, 2021), this review did not include articles that focused on formal mentoring, including Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) advisors' perspectives. Further, it did not include studies that asked SGMY about their experiences with role models (both accessible and inaccessible) or their interest in having friendships with older SGM individuals.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of what we know to date about both informal and formal mentoring relationships among SGMY. We sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do SGMY access informal and/or formal mentors?
2. What factors are associated with accessing an informal and/or formal mentor?
3. What outcomes are associated with accessing an informal and/or formal mentor?

We anticipated that studies would emerge from the perspectives of both SGMY and their mentors. Finally, we paid close attention to potential differences in results as a function of the mentor's status (i.e., informal vs. formal).

Prior to presenting results from the extant literature, we provide an overview of the impact of mentoring relationships on youth along with definitions of various types of mentoring. Next, we provide an overview of theories relevant to informal and formal mentoring relationships among SGMY. Following the presentation of results from the extant literature, we will delineate an agenda for future research as well as implications for practice and policy.

Mentoring Relationships

Youth mentoring involves relationships between youth and supportive non-parental adults who provide guidance and support over time (Rhodes, 2002). Mentoring relationships can be either formal or informal. *Formal* mentoring relationships are ones in which mentees are matched with a mentor through programming (e.g., Big Brothers or Big Sisters) that delineates the expectations and parameters of the relationship. Conversely, *informal* mentoring relationships, or natural mentoring relationships, are supportive relationships

that develop organically between youth and older individuals in their networks such as teachers, coaches, or extended family (Van Dam et al., 2018). According to census data, approximately 2.5 million adults volunteer as youth mentors each year (Raposa et al., 2017). Additionally, estimates indicate that 75 percent of youth report having a natural mentoring relationship (McDonald et al., 2007).

High-quality formal and informal mentoring relationships are associated with improved youth outcomes. For instance, a 2019 meta-analysis of formal mentoring program evaluations revealed moderate effect sizes of such programs according to empirical guidelines for youth prevention programs (Raposa et al., 2019; Tanner-Smith et al., 2018). Such programs show significant effects on youths' school engagement, psychological symptoms, physical health, cognition, social functioning, risk for delinquency, and career outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011; Raposa et al., 2019; Tolan et al., 2008). Further, a 2018 meta-analysis of informal mentoring relationship studies found modest but significant associations between such relationships and positive youth outcomes (Van Dam et al., 2018). Better quality natural mentoring relationships are associated with improvements in youths' social-emotional, academic/vocational, and psychosocial well-being. Although meta-analyses of formal and informal mentoring relationships do not find that youth risk status (e.g., low socioeconomic status, single-parent household) moderates the relationship between mentoring relationships and youth outcomes, scholars propose that such relationships can offset the individual and contextual risks youth experience and promote youths' capacity to thrive in the face of adversity (DuBois et al., 2002, 2011; Greeson & Bowen, 2008).

Theoretical Frameworks

Minority Stress

Minority stress theory can explain SGMY's increased risk for psychosocial and behavioral health problems (Brooks, 1981; Meyer, 2003; Testa et al., 2015). According to minority stress theory (Delozier et al., 2020; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Meyer, 2003), SGMY experience distal stressors (experiences such as discrimination, rejection, non-affirmation, and bias-based victimization) and proximal stressors (internally based processes such as internalized transphobia, internalized homophobia, identity concealment, and expected rejection). Sexual and gender minority youth who report higher levels of internalized stigma (e.g., transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia) are more likely to meet criteria for depression and anxiety disorders (Chodzen et al., 2019). Research also suggests that SGMY who experience bias-based victimization are at increased risk for substance use (Huebner et al., 2015; Reisner et al., 2015; Scheer et al., 2020), which increases sexual risk behavior (Delozier et al., 2020; Johns et al., 2019; Scheer & Antebi-Gruszka, 2019). Further, research suggests that youth who use substances and engage in risky sexual behaviors are more likely to experience teen dating violence (Alleyne et al., 2011; Temple et al., 2013), which likely explains the higher rates of teen dating violence victimization and perpetration for SGMY compared to non-SGMY.

Intersectionality

Subgroups of SGMY seem to show differential risk for minority stressors as well as stigma-coping strategies such as community involvement (Fox et al., 2020). As noted recently by Watson and colleagues (2020), sexual and gender identity development, particularly among youth, is influenced by cultural factors that may differ across racial/ethnic groups and other sociodemographic characteristics. Indeed, SGMY who experience multiple forms of inequality, particularly SGMY of color, face mental health risks due to their disproportionate experiences of stigma and oppression and resulting distress (Fox et al., 2020). A theoretical framework rooted in the work of Black feminism, intersectionality posits that SGMY's identities are situated within cultural and historical contexts of multiple systems of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012; Crenshaw, 1990). Indeed, there are well-documented differences in minority stressors and resulting health consequences among SGMY based on sociodemographic characteristics (Eisenberg et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2018; Velez et al., 2017). However, there exists no summary of the literature to date on how informal and/or formal mentoring is experienced among SGMY who are exposed to multiple forms of oppression (e.g., racism, cissexism, and biphobia).

Resilience

Minority stress theory also underscores the importance of resilience in protecting against minority stressors. Protective factors include self-acceptance and self-identification (i.e., pride), adaptive coping (i.e., self-affirmation), and hope for the future (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Shelton et al., 2018). Additionally, SGMY with supportive family environments have lower rates of mental health problems and other adversities (Delozier et al., 2020; Westwater et al., 2019). Unfortunately, however, more than 82 percent of transgender and other gender minority youth (TGMY) report family rejection, a rate higher than that reported by their cisgender sexual minority peers (Kovalanka et al., 2017; Munroe, 2018; Pariseau et al., 2019; Robinson, 2018). Further, between 71 and 77 percent of sexual minority youth report family rejection (D'Augelli, 2006; Scheer et al., 2020), with ethnic minority youth reporting greater parental rejection than ethnic majority youth (Richter et al., 2017). The presence of informal and/or formal mentors may help to mitigate the deleterious impact of family rejection and other forms of minority stress on SGMY.

Positive Youth Development

Theories of PYD focus on building core developmental competencies that are protective against multiple negative behaviors and health outcomes as opposed to narrowly focusing on reducing risk (Shek et al., 2019). The PYD approach posits that the etiology of most risk behaviors is grounded in youth lacking these core developmental competencies, which may be exacerbated by social and economic inequities (Catalano et al., 2004, 2019; Payne et al., 2017). The five C's of PYD include competence (social, academic, cognitive, and vocational), confidence (self-worth and self-efficacy), character (sense of right and wrong consistent with societal and cultural expectations), connection (positive bonds with others), and caring (empathy for others). More recently, a sixth C has been added to reflect contribution, or giving back to one's community (Lerner et al., 2005, 2009). These competencies develop over time and are learned from parents, non-parental adults (e.g.,

mentors), and peers (Nasheeda et al., 2018). Relationships with caring mentors are believed to promote developmental competencies in youth that may lower engagement in risky behaviors (Lerner et al., 2014; Theokas & Lerner, 2006).

Method

Study Inclusion Criteria

To be included in the systematic review, a study must (1) be written in English, (2) be published in a peer-reviewed journal, (3) present empirical data, (4) present findings specific to SGMY (i.e., studies that collapsed categories across SGMY and did not include heterosexual and cisgender youth), and (5) meet reporting standards for qualitative research (Levitt et al., 2018). Of note, studies that focused solely on educational outcomes among undergraduate and graduate students were excluded given our focus on PYD outcomes among youth during the formative period of adolescence. Finally, to be included, a study must include a search term for the following (or related) words: (1) mentoring, (2) SGM, and (3) youth (see Figure 1).

Search Strategy

Research studies were found by searching international electronic databases, including Academic Search Premier, Anthropological Literature, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, Business Source Complete, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Educational Administration Abstracts, Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Gender Studies Database, Historical Abstracts, Humanities International Index, International Political Science Abstracts, Legal Information Reference Center, LGBTQ+Source, Primary Search, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and PubMed. The search was conducted in November 2020, and all relevant studies published to date were included.

Search Outcome

The initial search yielded fifty-one peer-reviewed articles. Abstracts and titles of all studies identified by the search strategy were reviewed by the first two authors (experts in SGMY and violence prevention with previous experience in publishing systematic reviews) and were either included or excluded based on the inclusion criteria. Of the fifty-one articles, forty were excluded because they did not meet inclusion criteria for any of the following reasons:

1. The study was not empirical ($n = 7$).
2. The study focused on college and/or graduate students ($n = 33$).
3. The study focused on professional training issues ($n = 6$).
4. The study was topically unrelated ($n = 2$).
5. The study was a duplicate ($n = 3$).

The authors each reviewed approximately four articles and noted all findings specific to the research questions as well as information specific to mentoring that was not included in the original research questions. They recorded both significant and nonsignificant findings, and

they took notes on methodological strengths and weaknesses. The first author checked all article summaries for accuracy. Next, the authors reviewed the reference lists of the eleven studies that met inclusion criteria and identified one additional article that was summarized using the steps above. Thus, twelve studies were included in the current review. The protocol for this review was registered with the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO).

Results

The twelve articles included in this systematic review are summarized in Table 1. All studies were cross-sectional, seven were qualitative, and the sample sizes ranged from 8 to 4,882. Six studies focused on both formal and informal mentors, four studies focused on informal mentors, and two studies focused on formal mentors. Content areas of the articles included mentoring rates, demographic correlates of mentoring, mentoring contexts, mentoring outcomes, and mentors' perceptions of mentoring SGMY.

Mentoring Rates

Of the SGMY who participated in these studies, 52 to 96 percent reported having an informal mentor/role model (Bird et al., 2012; Drevon et al., 2016; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015; Reed et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2012). One study found that about half of lesbian girls were ambivalent or not interested in having an adult lesbian mentor (Stanley, 2002). Notably, there is variability across studies in the ways in which mentors were assessed. For example, in the study by Bird and colleagues (2012), youth were asked about role models, including those who are inaccessible (e.g., celebrities). In this study, of the 60 percent of youth who had a role model, only 20 percent had an accessible role model (e.g., family member or teacher). However, in the studies using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health), 81 percent of the sexual minority youth who were asked about the presence of an informal mentor answered affirmatively (Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015). In this same study, sexual minority youth were more likely than heterosexual youth to report having an informal mentor although sexual minority youth were more likely to have met their mentors later than heterosexual youth (Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015). In a study of young Black men who have sex with men, 96 percent reported having a mentor, most commonly an informal mentor (Reed et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research suggests that sexual minority youth are less likely than heterosexual youth to have family members as mentors and more likely to have adults at school as mentors (Gastic & Johnson, 2009). Indeed, Gastic and Johnson found that teachers were the most common type of informal mentors for sexual minority youth. Similarly, Torres and colleagues (2012) found that school adults as well as counselors and neighbors were more likely to be mentors to sexual minority youth than family members and peers. However, another study of young Black men who have sex with men found that youth frequently mentioned family members as mentors (Reed et al., 2019). Another study with sexual minority youth found that teachers as well as family members and friends were

less commonly mentioned as role models compared to inaccessible role models, such as celebrities (Gastic & Johnson, 2009).

Demographic Correlates of Mentoring

One study found that younger SGMY were more likely than older SGMY to report having a role model (Bird et al., 2012). Other demographic variables such as gender identity and race/ethnicity do not appear to be consistently related to having an informal mentor among SGMY (Bird et al., 2012; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015). However, in one study sexual minority girls of color were least likely to have a teacher as a mentor (Gastic & Johnson, 2009).

Youth also reported having natural mentors across various demographics. In other words, a number of sexual minority youth reported having mentors who do not identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning plus; Torres et al., 2012). Indeed, Reed and colleagues (2019) found that only a small proportion of young Black adult men who have sex with men felt it was important that their mentors have a similar sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, one study found that ratings of the closeness of the relationship with mentors varied by ethnicity, with Black/African American sexual minority male youth reporting the highest levels of closeness (Sterrett et al., 2015). Additionally, the same study found that, for these youth, relationship closeness with sexual minority and male informal mentors was rated lower than relationship closeness with straight/heterosexual and female informal mentors, even when controlling for the status of the mentor as a family member.

Mentoring Contexts

Research suggests that sexual minority youth establish mentoring relationships later (age fourteen versus age thirteen) than heterosexual youth (Johnson & Gastic, 2015) and that teacher mentors in particular become important around the age of sixteen or seventeen for sexual minority youth (Gastic & Johnson, 2009). Research suggests that SGMY are often cautious in identifying a mentor due to concerns about not being accepted and/or beliefs that forming a mentoring relationship is a slow process (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Similarly, one study found that some sexual minority girls/women did not desire friendships with older lesbian women due to concerns about the generation gap (and the possible impact of the age difference on the helpfulness of a mentor) as well as the myth that older lesbians seek to seduce younger lesbians (Stanley, 2002). Those SGMY who are interested in forming a mentoring relationship look for mentors who have certain qualities such as being a good listener or having similar interests, expressing a genuine interest in the relationship, accepting diversity and demonstrating resilience in the face of structural inequalities, and demonstrating a commitment to ending SGM-based bullying (Mulcahy et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2019). Also, SGMY noted that they could often talk to mentors about things they could not discuss with other adults, such as family (Mulcahy et al., 2016), and that they liked to engage in activities with mentors, such as playing games (Torres et al., 2012).

Mentoring Outcomes

One study by Bird and colleagues (2012) found higher rates of psychological distress among SGMY with role models. This study also found that having a role model was unrelated to binge drinking and drug use. However, the vast majority of research to date suggests that there are benefits associated with SGMY having a mentor (Bopp et al., 2004; Drevon et al., 2016; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015; Mulcahy et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2019; Stanley, 2002; Torres et al., 2012). Across these studies, benefits to having a mentor include greater self-esteem, academic success, career aspirations, and sexual self-efficacy, as well as less victimization, suicidality, and drug and alcohol use. Mentors also helped to encourage identity development, enhance cognitive skills, and promote social and emotional growth. The mechanisms through which mentors promote positive outcomes among SGMY include various types of support (e.g., emotional and informational), acceptance, catharsis, sense of community, reduced isolation and loneliness, encouragement, and advice about issues unique to sexual and gender minority identities.

Mentors' Perceptions of Mentoring SGMY

Two studies examined adults' perceptions of mentoring SGMY. Motivation for becoming a GSA advisor was related to having a protective attitude toward SGMY and a personal connection with SGM individuals (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Barriers to becoming a GSA advisor included lack of credibility, fear of losing their job, and fear about being accused of recruitment into the "gay lifestyle" (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Research examining self-efficacy among GSA advisors suggests that mentors have less self-efficacy in their ability to mentor SGMY of color than trans youth (Poteat & Scheer, 2016). Furthermore, SGM advisors often felt more confident than heterosexual advisors in their ability to mentor trans youth. However, SGM and heterosexual advisors did not vary in their self-efficacy with regard to mentoring SGMY of color. Finally, although younger advisors report more self-efficacy in mentoring SGMY compared to older advisors, length of time as a GSA advisor was unrelated to self-efficacy.

Discussion

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of what we know to date about both informal and formal mentoring relationships among SGMY including the perspectives of mentors of SGMY. Specifically, we sought to better understand the extent to which SGMY access informal and/or formal mentors, identify factors that are associated with accessing a mentor, and determine outcomes that are associated with accessing a mentor. Finally, we paid close attention to potential differences in results as a function of the mentor's status (i.e., informal vs. formal). Our findings demonstrated that SGMY seek mentors with certain characteristics (e.g., supportiveness), most SGMY report having a mentor, and that having a mentor is generally unrelated to demographics. Further, mentors promote positive outcomes across multiple domains and report varying levels of self-efficacy and motivations for mentoring SGMY. These findings underscore the need to facilitate SGMY's connection to high-quality informal or formal mentors, especially for SGMY youth who may have inaccessible mentors, such as celebrity role models, as documented by Bird and colleagues (2012).

Based on the literature reviewed here, it seems that the majority of SGMY seek out mentors although many do not seek formal mental and behavioral health services (Lytle et al., 2018). Although more empirical research is needed, these informal mentoring relationships may promote positive identity development and the acquisition of skills that help SGMY cope in healthy ways with minority stressors and reduce engagement in risk behaviors (Kuper et al., 2014; Reisner et al., 2015).

Findings also suggest that there is some variation across SGMY subgroups in terms of likelihood of accessing mentors. Although it is dated and has methodological weaknesses like many of the studies reported here, one study (Stanley, 2002) found that about half of lesbian girls were ambivalent or not interested in having an adult lesbian mentor. In other research, younger SGMY were more likely than older SGMY to report having a role model (Bird et al., 2012), and gender identity and race/ethnicity do not appear to be related to SGMY having a mentor (Bird et al., 2012; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015). Clearly more research is needed to better understand if subgroups of SGMY have more difficulties in accessing informal and formal mentors and/or the extent to which interest in having a mentor may vary across subgroups of SGMY.

This review also demonstrates that SGMY may seek mentoring relationships later than heterosexual youth (Johnson & Gastic, 2015) and that SGMY are often cautious in identifying a mentor due to concerns about not being accepted or feeling a lack of belonging (Mulcahy et al., 2016). These findings suggest that efforts are needed to create safe and affirming spaces, which can include mentoring opportunities, to support SGMY.

Overall, studies found that, relative to SGMY without a mentor, SGMY with a mentor reported better mental and behavioral health outcomes, including increased self-esteem, academic success, career aspirations, and sexual self-efficacy, as well as lowered victimization, suicidality, and drug and alcohol use (Bopp et al., 2004; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Gastic, 2015; Mulcahy et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2019; Stanley, 2002; Torres et al., 2012). Despite methodological limitations of the literature, these findings underscore the potential role of mentors in providing SGMY with the opportunity to develop stress-buffering skills to reduce their risk of adversity and improve their overall health (Torres et al., 2012). However, given the small number of studies that examined outcomes associated with having a mentor and the cross-sectional nature of the studies, these findings should be interpreted with caution. It is also possible that SGMY who had negative mentoring experiences were less likely to participate in research on mentoring, especially qualitative research, which characterizes the majority of these studies.

Many factors seem to facilitate mentors' engagement with SGMY, including having a protective attitude toward SGMY and a personal connection with SGM individuals (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Nevertheless, there are several barriers to becoming a mentor to SGMY, including lacking credibility, feeling a lack of self-efficacy, or fearing losing one's job (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). Indeed, formalized mentoring efforts might consider providing training to adults on the provision of validation and support of SGMY mentees (Torres et al., 2012). Moreover, given that mentoring relationships should not necessarily supplant parental or caregiving relationships, it is important for mentors to work within SGMY's immediate

context (e.g., school, neighborhood, and community) to support their optimal development in the face of chronic and acute forms of adversity (Torres et al., 2012).

Limitations of Extant Research

To date, a handful of studies have examined mentoring of SGMY. These studies have several methodological limitations. First, a number of studies are qualitative, and those that are quantitative have methodological flaws (e.g., lack of inferential analyses and cross-sectional designs). Therefore, synthesizing conceptual and empirical findings from this body of literature is futile and without validity (Rolfe, 2006). Second, except for the studies that used the ADD Health data, existing research relies on convenience samples of SGMY predominantly recruited from LGBTQ+ organizations. This type of sampling approach likely overinflates the number of SGMY who have mentors given that SGMY who are not out are likely not participating in such organizations and thus will not be included in study samples (Heck et al., 2013). Future research should consider examining whether involvement in SGM-focused organizations, such as GSAs, has varying levels of utility based on SGMY's comfort level with their SGM status and their level of outness (Kosciw et al., 2013). Similarly, studies that rely on convenience samples are likely impacted by selection bias such that SGMY with more positive mentoring experiences may be more likely to participate in research than SGMY with less positive mentoring experiences. Future research with larger representative samples should examine whether these findings hold true across perceptions of mentoring experiences to further elucidate the potential benefits associated with SGMY mentoring.

Also, all the research to date on mentoring among SGMY is cross-sectional; thus causality cannot be inferred. For example, it is possible that SGMY with fewer psychosocial and behavioral challenges may be more likely to seek out mentors than SGMY with more psychosocial and behavioral challenges, especially those who are not out. Moreover, studies not only used inconsistent terminology to describe mentors (e.g., mentor, role model, advisor) but they also lacked standardized measurement of SGMY mentoring outcomes. Along these lines, most studies focused on informal mentors, and no studies assessed the presence of both informal and formal mentors including potential differences in experiences with informal versus formal mentoring among SGMY. As a result, integrating, comparing, and generalizing results across studies is a challenge.

Furthermore, several studies lacked diversity in terms of gender identity and/or race/ethnicity. Similarly, most studies did not examine how mentorship experiences may differ for sexual minority cisgender youth compared to TGMY. In general, findings demonstrate that TGMY are less likely than sexual minority cisgender youth to seek affirming support from family, peers, and community members (Scheer & Baams, 2019; Weisz et al., 2007). Thus, it is critical for mentoring programs to increase their catchment of TGMY in their service delivery and to become more aware of the unique experiences of TGMY given the likelihood of serving this population (Scheer & Baams, 2019). We also know little about mentorship experiences among SGMY of color. Given that rates of psychosocial and behavioral health issues are especially elevated among SGMY of color (Kuper et al., 2014; Toomey et al., 2017), this represents a critical avenue for future research. Additionally, there

is no research to date on how mentor-mentee demographic matching relates to SGMY's outcomes.

Finally, studies included in the current review did not differentiate between targeted mentoring (e.g., programs that include specific interventions such as skill building to match mentees' needs) and nonspecific mentoring (e.g., programs solely focused on relationship building between mentors and mentees). Furthermore, studies did not describe differences in outcomes based on mentor skills or training. This is particularly important given findings (not specific to SGMY) that targeted problem-focused programs are twice as effective as nonspecific programming at improving youth outcomes (Christensen et al., 2020).

Future Research Implications

Based on the aforementioned limitations, future research that uses diverse and representative samples of SGMY is needed, especially SGMY who may not be out to school personnel, family members, or parents, which represents between 35 and 53 percent of the SGMY population (Kosciw et al., 2015; Scheer et al., 2020). It is likely that youth living in high-stigma areas of the United States (e.g., rural locales) have less access to in-person mentors; thus, the acceptability, feasibility, and effectiveness of connecting SGMY to mentors in other ways (e.g., online) is an important area for future research. Also, although qualitative research is important for theory development and higher level abstraction (Leung, 2015), additional studies using rigorous quantitative designs with large SGMY samples are needed to demonstrate ecological validity and generalizability, replicability of study process and design, and causal associations between study variables. For example, longitudinal and prospective designs are needed to examine temporal associations among quality, type, and context of mentor-mentee relationships and outcomes among SGMY. Further, research is needed to better understand mentoring relationships among youth who are not out and ways in which to safely connect these youth to mentors. Additional research is needed to examine mentoring relationships as a buffer of minority stress and stress-sensitive mental and behavioral health issues among SGMY. Finally, research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring programs for SGMY and to examine how informal mentoring relationships evolve over time and impact SGMY.

Practice-Based Implications

Findings from this literature review have several practice-based implications for mentors of SGMY. First, although studies demonstrate inconsistent findings regarding mentoring rates among SGMY, some research suggests that the majority of SGMY report having an informal mentor, such as a school professional. As such, informal adult role models might consider increasing their catchment of SGMY in their mentoring programs and tailoring their mentoring approach to address specific needs of SGMY (e.g., family rejection, identity development, and high rates of victimization). Second, efforts may be needed to engage older SGMY in mentoring relationships given some research suggesting that this subpopulation reported lower rates of mentoring compared to younger SGMY. Engagement in risk behavior increases from early to late adolescence, and late adolescence and emerging adulthood represent periods of unique identity development including dating and increasing

autonomy (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2020; Zimmerman et al., 2013). Thus, late adolescence and emerging adulthood may be developmental moments during which it could be especially important for SGMY to have access to affirming and supportive mentoring relationships.

Third, because a number of SGMY report having mentors who do not identify as an SGM (Torres et al., 2012), it is important for adults in service-oriented professions (e.g., teachers and advisors) to receive psychoeducation about SGMY's unique needs and resiliencies (Chaudoir et al., 2017), especially for those who occupy multiple marginalized identities (e.g., SGMY of color). Fourth, structural-level initiatives are needed to develop and implement training practices, such as cultural competency training, that aim to increase adults' sustained comfort, self-efficacy, and motivation to serve as mentors of diverse SGMY (Poteat & Scheer, 2016; Valenti & Campbell, 2009).

Study Limitations

Mentoring of SGMY is an evolving field; therefore, it is possible that emergent terms and terminology may not have produced all relevant studies on SGMY. However, our study included all the studies included in the Burningham and Weilder (2021) review as well as four additional studies. The conclusions provided here are also limited given the lack of rigor of studies in the extant literature. Nevertheless, the current review sheds light on what we know to date about formal and informal mentoring of SGMY.

Conclusion

Results from the limited body of existing research on mentoring SGMY document that the majority of SGMY report having a mentor/role model and that there are a number of positive outcomes (e.g., psychological and academic) associated with having a mentor. However, findings must be interpreted with caution given the small number of studies as well as notable methodological limitations of the literature. Future methodologically rigorous research is needed to better understand the rates, contexts, and outcomes associated with informal and formal mentoring of SGMY. Despite limitations of existing research, preliminary results suggest that SGMY may benefit from having a mentor; thus, continued efforts to connect SGMY with high-quality mentors are essential and potentially lifesaving.

Acknowledgments

Support was provided by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health under grant K01AA028239 to Jillian R. Scheer. Research presented here does not represent the views of the funders, including the National Institutes of Health.

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Mentoring (in alphabetical order)

important non-parental adult OR informal mentor OR mentor OR mentoring OR mentoring adolescent OR mentorship OR mentors OR informally acquired mentoring relationship OR informal mentor OR non-parental adult OR role model OR role models OR very important person OR youth initiated mentoring OR youth mentor

AND**SGM (in alphabetical order)**

agender OR aromantic OR asexual OR bigender OR bisexual OR demiboy OR demienby OR demigender OR demigirl OR demisexual OR female-to-male OR FtM OR FTM OR gay OR gender diverse OR gender expansive OR genderfluid OR gender identity OR gender minority OR gender non-conforming OR genderqueer OR gender questioning OR gender variant OR GLB OR GLBT OR gray romantic OR homosexual OR intersex OR lesbian OR LGB OR LGBT OR LGBTQ OR LGBTQ+ OR LGBTQIA OR LGBTQIA+ OR male-to-female OR MSM OR MTF OR MFT OR multi-gender OR non-binary OR panromantic OR pansexual OR queer OR questioning OR sexual identity OR sexual minority OR sexual minority youth OR sexual orientation OR SGM OR TGD OR TGN OR TGNC OR third gender OR trans OR transfeminine OR transgender OR transgender and gender-diverse OR transgender and gender non-conforming OR transgender female OR transgender male OR trans masculine OR trigender OR Two-Spirit

AND**Youth (in alphabetical order)**

adolescence OR adolescent OR adolescents OR child OR childhood OR children OR student OR students OR young people OR young OR youth

Figure 1.
Boolean search terms

Table 1.Summary of studies on mentoring among SGMY ($N=12$)

Author(s)	Study sample	Findings
Bird et al. (2012)	Racially/ethnically diverse LGBT youth ($N=496$) aged 16 to 24 were recruited from a community-based organization in Chicago.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixty percent of participants reported having a role model, with younger participants significantly more likely to report having a role model than older participants. Younger participants were more likely to have an inaccessible role model than older participants. Having a role model did not correlate with gender identity or race/ethnicity. • Role models included parents (8%), other family members (9%), friends (8%), political/community leaders (6%), other known adults (6%; e.g., teacher), singer/musicians (21%), and actor/entertainers (21%). • Of youth who reported having a role model, 60 percent had an inaccessible role model (e.g., singer/musician) and 33 percent had an accessible role model (e.g., parent). Across the entire sample, 20 percent had an accessible role model. • There was higher gender congruence of participants and their role models for girls (90%) than for boys (58%). • Youth with and without role models did not differ on binge drinking or drug use. • Youth with role models had higher levels of psychological distress than youth without role models. However, youth with inaccessible role models had higher levels of psychological distress than youth with accessible role models and no role models.
Bopp et al. (2004)	Surveys were completed by eight transgender or questioning youth, half of whom participated in Chrysalis, a weekly afterschool drop-in group, with a trans mentor. Chrysalis youth and five stakeholders (e.g., school counselors and mental health professionals) participated in short interviews. Youth were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, and all were Pacific Islander and/or Asian.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chrysalis members scored better than the youth in the control group on measures of school participation, educational and career goals, self-esteem, positive relationships with friends and family, sexual self-efficacy, and confidence in preventing victimization (e.g., bullying, assault). Chrysalis youth were also less likely to report suicidality and use drugs and alcohol than non-Chrysalis youth. • Youth and stakeholder interview data echoed the survey findings and specifically stated that the transgender role model helped to facilitate positive change in Chrysalis youth. • Negative feedback about the program was “minimal” and included things like the desire to have more guest speakers and participate in more field trips.
Drevon et al. (2016)	Data were from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health) and Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement study datasets. The sample included 447 individuals who identified as LGB in wave III of ADD Health ($n=409$ for wave III high school exit status outcome variable). Females comprised 60 to 62 percent of the sample, and the mean age was 21.7 years. The majority of respondents were White (80–83%).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than half of the sample (52%–53%) reported having an informal mentoring relationship during adolescence. • Having an informal mentoring relationship was significantly associated with high school exit status in LGB individuals. This relationship remained significant when controlling for gender, age, race, and parental support. LGB individuals with informal mentors during adolescence were 3.13 times as likely to graduate from high school as their non-mentored counterparts. • Having an informal mentoring relationship was not significantly associated with years of education, self-esteem, depression, young adulthood utility (composite measure of current or past participation in college, active-duty military, and current employment), suicidal ideation, illegal drug use, and problems caused by alcohol/drugs at school or work.
Gastic & Johnson (2009)	Data were from wave III of the public-use dataset of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health). Sexual minority youth accounted for 9 percent of the ADD Health sample ($N=4,882$). Thirty percent of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual minority youth (81%) were more likely than heterosexual youth (76%) to have informal mentors. There were no significant differences among sexual minority youth between females and males or youth of color and White youth on having a mentor.

Author(s)	Study sample	Findings
	sample was non-White, and respondents ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-eight years old ($M = 22$).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher mentors were the most common type of informal mentor for sexual minority youth after relatives. Teacher mentors became important around the ages of sixteen and seventeen. • Having a mentor, particularly a teacher mentor, was related to higher levels of postsecondary participation. For sexual minority males having a mentor is associated with an 85-percent increase in postsecondary participation (compared to a 46-percent increase for sexual minority females). • For sexual minority girls of color, 59 percent who were mentored engaged in postsecondary education compared to 35 percent of those who were unmentored. • Sexual minority girls experience a greater advantage of having teacher mentors versus other kinds of informal mentors; however sexual minority girls of color are least likely to be mentored by a teacher.
Johnson & Gastic (2015)	Data were from wave III of the public-use dataset of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health). See Gastic and Johnson (2009) above for methodological details. However, unlike Gastic and Johnson, data analyses included qualitative analysis of open-ended questions about how mentors helped mentees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual minority youth (81%) were more likely than heterosexual youth (76%) to have mentors. Male sexual minority youth were equally as likely as female sexual minority youth to report the presence of a mentor. • Sexual minority youth (26%) were less likely than heterosexual youth (36%) to have family members as mentors. However, sexual minority youth (32%) were more likely than heterosexual youth (23%) to have school adults as mentors. • Sexual minority youth met their mentors almost a year later than heterosexual youth (13 vs. 14 years old). • Male sexual minority youth were found to be more likely to have female informal mentors than heterosexual male youth. • Qualitative analyses showed that sexual minority youth believed that their mentors helped them in various domains of life (e.g., school, social life, careers, and religion) and provided stability and support. They often considered their mentors as family.
Mulcahy et al. (2016)	Ten LGBT students between sixteen and twenty-two years old.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT students were cautious in identifying a potential school personnel mentor because they were concerned about mentor acceptance and felt that developing a relationship with a mentor was sometimes a slow process. • Participants looked for mentors to have qualities such as good listening skills, independent thinking, liberal political views, curiosity about the student's life and their interests, acceptance of all types of diversity, helping with student career development, and a commitment to bullying prevention. • Participants reported many benefits to having a mentor including self-awareness, catharsis, reduced isolation and loneliness, and encouragement to become involved in school organizations and postsecondary education. • Participants reported that they could often talk to their mentors about things that they could not discuss with other adults, including their parents.
Poteat & Scheer (2016)	Forty-seven GSA advisors from thirty-three high schools (39 cisgender females and 8 cisgender males; none were transgender). Ages ranged from twenty-three to sixty-two years. Advisors' duration of service as a GSA advisor ranged from two months to twenty years. Most advisors identified as heterosexual ($n = 30$), twelve as lesbian or gay, four as bisexual, and one as other. Nearly all advisors identified as White non-Hispanic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The degree to which advisors' levels of self-efficacy differed in addressing issues among LGBT youth of color and trans youth was comparable for advisors, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, in general, advisors felt less self-efficacy in addressing issues related to LGBT youth of color than in addressing issues related to trans youth. • LGBT advisors reported greater self-efficacy in addressing issues related to transgender youth than did heterosexual advisors. LGBT and heterosexual advisors did not differ in

Author(s)	Study sample	Findings
Reed et al. (2019)	Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with 168 young Black men who have sex with men, most of whom identified as gay (77%) or bisexual (22%). Participants were between fourteen and twenty-four years old ($M = 20.5$, $SD = 2.3$).	<p>their reported self-efficacy in addressing issues related to LGBT youth of color.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a significant association between advisors' age and self-efficacy in addressing issues pertinent to LGBT youth of color, such that younger advisors reported higher efficacy. However, length of time as a GSA advisor was not associated with self-efficacy. • The majority of participants (96%) described at least one mentor from a broad range of ages, whereas only seven (4%) did not report having a mentor. • Participants frequently mentioned family members (e.g., mother, grandmother, father, gay family, sisters, aunt, brother) as mentors but infrequently mentioned community leaders (e.g., Black men working in HIV prevention, pastors, businesspersons). The majority of role models who were non-family members and directly accessible were males. Only 14 percent cited inaccessible people (e.g., political figures, motivational speakers, actors, or musicians). Of the accessible mentors, participants cited females as mentors more often than males. Slightly more than 25 percent specified that their mentor was gay or lesbian. • The qualities that participants indicated that they looked for in mentors included being similar to them (e.g., values, passions, hobbies, talents, life experiences, identities, or having faced similar obstacles in life). They also looked for mentors who were successful despite adversity (e.g., goal oriented, talented, driven, "have everything in their life together," are "doing stuff with their life," street smart, wise) and exemplify strength (e.g., "never let nothing stop them," very resilient, "know how to get around obstacles," survive despite structural barriers like racism and poverty, gay and transgender mentors who are willing to be true to themselves). Only a small proportion of participants suggested it was important to have mentors of a similar gender identity or sexuality. • Mentors helped promote identity development (influenced participants' conceptions of their future selves and helped participants identify traits they wished to cultivate), enhanced cognitive skills (advocated the importance of school; taught them new skills; and provided informational support on topics like school, sex and dating, coming out, mental health, and coping), and promoted social and emotional growth (provided relational stability, consistency, and unconditional love and acceptance). • Less than 25 percent of participants described how mentors influenced their sexual identity (e.g., male mentors who took them "under their wing" when first coming out or female mentors who helped participants accept their sexual identities). Fewer than 10 percent described how their mentors influenced their gender identity (e.g., providing them positive images of Black masculinity).
Stanley (2002)	Focus groups with sixteen young sexual minority women, ages fifteen to twenty-five. Of this sample, 63 percent ($N = 10$) were girls/women of color.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About half of the participants indicated an interest in having friendships with older lesbians and felt that such friendships would give them a sense of connection. The others expressed ambivalence about such relationships. They said that they wanted more "adult lesbian mentors and role models," especially those who are out, but they did not feel that type of relationship needed to transition into friendship. Ambivalent participants thought that such relationships might be ineffective because of the generation gap. Most participants perceived that older lesbians would not be interested in forming friendships with younger lesbians or were concerned about stereo-types that older lesbians are out to seduce and take advantage of youth. • Participants identified five potential benefits to cross-generational friendships with older lesbians: (1) they could

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Sterrett et al. (2015)	Sexual minority male youth ($N = 175$) aged seventeen to twenty-three ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 1.3$) who participated in a longitudinal study of HIV risk among sexual minority male youth living in Chicago. Of the participants, 54 percent were African American, 21 percent were Hispanic/Latino, and 14 percent were Caucasian. The majority (66%) identified as gay/homosexual, 22 percent identified as mostly gay, and 22 percent identified as bisexual.	<p>provide support and advice about issues unique to sexual minority identity (e.g., dating someone of the same sex), (2) they could provide acceptance and encouragement to “be who you are,” (3) they could provide a sense of community and shared history, (4) having older role models could be beneficial, and (5) friendships/mentoring would benefit both older and younger lesbians.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seventy-eight percent of participants (137) reported that at least one non-parental adult was in their social network. The mean number of non-parental adults in participants’ networks was 2.9 ($SD = 2.8$) with a range of 0 to 14. Non-parental adults ranged in age from twenty-five to eighty-four years old ($M = 39.9$, $SD = 12.9$). • The mean level of closeness across all non-parental relationships was 1.2, which corresponds to <i>some-what close</i>. • Of the youth-non-parental adult pairs, 67 percent were of the same race/ethnicity. Youth chose 50 percent female, 48 percent male, and 2 percent transgender non-parental adults as mentors. Most non-parental adults were hetero-sexual (58%), while 33 percent were gay/lesbian, 7 percent were bisexual, and 1 percent were queer. • Youth ethnicity was unrelated to the number of non-parental adults in their networks. However, the ratings of relationship strength varied based on youth ethnicity, with average closeness being highest among Black/African American youth, followed by Hispanic/Latino youth, and then White youth. • Being of the same or different race/ethnicity did not affect the relationship closeness between youth and non-parental adults. Relationships with female non-parental adults were rated as significantly stronger than relationships with male non-parental adults, even after controlling for status of the non-parental adult as a family member. Relationship closeness with sexual minority nonparental adults was rated lower than that with straight/heterosexual non-parental adults, even after controlling for status of the non-parental adult as a family member.
Torres et al. (2012)	Thirty-nine gay, bisexual, and questioning cisgender male youth (11 Black, 13 Latino, and 15 White; ages 15 to 22) participated in an interview on informal mentoring relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most youth identified having an informal mentoring relationship, most often with teachers, coaches, counselors, and neighbors (and less frequently with siblings, peers, and romantic partners). • The words that youth used to describe their informal mentors included mentor, role model, confidant, guardian angel, and parental figure. • Youth reported informal mentors across various demographics (e.g., a number of mentors were not LGBTQ+). • Youth discussed the ways in which mentors provided emotional, informational, unconditional, and self-appraisal support. • Youth also talked about activities that they would do with their mentors, such as playing games and attending Pride (or other annual events to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community) together.
Valenti & Campbell (2009)	Fourteen GSA advisors (six women and eight men, five of whom self-identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual) stated that they were currently in a same-sex relationship. Twelve of the participants were teachers and two were social workers. The time in GSA varied from two months to eight years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation for being a GSA advisor included a protective attitude toward LGBT youth and having a personal connection with sexual minority people/issues. • Each advisor seemed to weigh the pros and cons of the GSA decision before acting. Several worries or concerns were preeminent for advisors: possible lack of credibility, fear of losing their job, and fear about being accused of recruitment into the “gay lifestyle.” However, in some cases these concerns were buffered by a sense of security in their

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		job and personal life, such as being married or having tenure or other protections against being fired.

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