

Academic Paper

# Mentoring and gender: a systematic review

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## Abstract

The incorporation of a gender perspective in scientific research and social intervention practices is essential, including in mentoring. While there are publications that address this issue, existing systematic reviews tend to focus on specific contexts and groups, rather than taking a general approach to introducing a gender perspective. This study aims to address the gap in research by analysing 405 articles that examine the gender variable in mentoring. The analysis is conducted from three perspectives: types of mentoring (formal/informal), mentor-mentee matching and a chronological perspective. The analysis is conducted through two main axes: equality-inequality and identity-diversity. The study suggests the importance of further research on gender and mentoring, specifically in the areas of matching and identifying gender barriers. Additionally, it highlights the need to incorporate a gender and intersectional perspective into mentoring research.

## Keywords

mentoring, gender, gender perspective, literature review, systemic review

## Article history

Accepted for publication: 10 July 2024

Published online: 01 August 2024



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Published by Oxford Brookes University

## Introduction

Mentoring research has a long history of producing literature reviews (Merriam, 1983; Scandura, 1998; Jacobi, 1991) and has dealt with various issues (Eby et al., 2007). For example, the definitions of mentoring and the different types that exist – such as formal, informal and group – (Mullen & Klimaitis 2021) or the debates on targeted and non-specific mentoring (Christensen et al., 2020). It has also focused on identifying the benefits that mentoring offers to mentees (Eby et al., 2008), depending on the context in which it is carried out. One of the most explored contexts is that of mentoring with teenagers, understood as support in situations of vulnerability (DuBois et al. 2002; DuBois et al. 2011) or accompaniment in the academic field (Raposa et al. 2010). Such mentoring support has also been researched in other contexts, such as school-based mentoring (Schwartz et al., 2011; Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012); natural mentoring (Van Dam et al., 2018); cross-age mentoring (Burton et al., 2022); e-mentoring (López-Gómez, 2016) and group mentoring (Huizing, 2012), among others.

Regarding the benefits, mentoring is linked to a variety of positive outcomes in terms of behaviour, attitudes, health, relationships, motivation and career support (Eby et al., 2008; Ghosh, 2014). It is also linked to workplace benefits, such as increased salaries and job promotions, as well as subjective terms like satisfaction and motivation for the mentees (Allen et al., 2004; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Ghosh & Reio Jr., 2013) or the acquisition of new skills (Eby et al., 2013). Mentoring has been applied in various contexts and has also been used as a methodology for specific groups of people who belong to the same collective. For instance, mentoring has been used with undergraduate students (Gershenfeld, 2014), college students (Crisp & Cruz, 2010), head teachers (Hobson & Sharp, 2005), nursing students in their workplace (Jokelainen et al., 2011) and in the field of medicine (Sambunjak et al., 2006; Sambunjak et al., 2009). Thus, research on mentoring has mainly focused on analysing the benefits, contexts and types of support offered to mentees.

To a lesser extent, research has also analysed the impact of mentoring according to the profile of the participants. In this regard, there are several investigations that have delved into the implications of race in the mentoring relationship, especially among adolescents that belong to minority cultural groups and live in a region where the cultural majority is different, such as the USA for example low-income or ethnic minority students (Monjaras-Gaytán & Sánchez, 2023); young black men (Sánchez et al., 2018); or Latino children and adolescents (De los Reyes et al., 2022).

Gender studies have repeatedly shown the need to incorporate gender into the analysis of social phenomena. Various studies have highlighted the importance of considering women as a minority group (Faraldo Rivas, 2007; Saltzman, 2006; Marchbank & Letherby, 2014; Richardson & Robinson, 2020; Tomassini, 2021). Although the gender perspective has been increasingly incorporated into mentoring research, it is important to continue expanding it to address social inequalities experienced by women, sexual diversity and the LGTBQ+ community. This is similar to the consideration given to race or social class variables. Therefore, the intersectional perspective is crucial in both mentoring programmes and research on this methodology.

From the study of men and women's cultural characteristics and the subordination of the feminine (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004) to the analysis of social status, structures and relations of power and dominance, gender studies have stressed the need to take it into account as a variable of differential experiences, opportunities and challenges (Saltzman, 2006; Marchbank & Letherby, 2014). Intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1994, revealed how gender oppression is gradually being extended to other groups differentiated by characteristics such as race, social class, sexual orientation and abilities (Taylor et al., 2010; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2019). These groups have gradually become aware of their position, and this enables them to recognise systemic sexual inequalities. This has helped uncover the mechanisms producing such inequality and it has generated movements of struggle and resistance (Osborne & Molina Petit, 2008).

As previously stated, research on mentoring has gradually taken into account the gender variable. However, comprehensive systematic reviews that include gender and mentoring are rare, as will be demonstrated below. Literature reviews typically concentrate on particular groups or aspects of a construct. For example, Edwards et al. (2022) and Burningham and Weiler (2021) focused on young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities, Liang et al. (2014) on adolescent mentees of immigrant origin and Foradada and Sala Roca (2020) on mentoring projects exclusively aimed at young women. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the field of medicine has been a topic of consideration (Farkas et al., 2019). A report by House et al. (2021) demonstrates the effectiveness of mentoring in eradicating gender inequalities in medicine, resulting in more positive work experiences, increased overall satisfaction, improved clinical leadership skills and an enhanced national and international clinical scientific profile. The underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions is also evident in academic mentoring (Meschitti & Lawton Smith, 2017). O'Brien et al. (2010) note that male and female mentees receive different types of support, with female mentees receiving more psychosocial and emotional support than their male counterparts.

This research aims to address the lack of systematic reviews on gender and mentoring and to specify a future research agenda that has yet to be explored. The text includes diverse contributions from different angles, presented chronologically, covering the types of matching used in mentoring projects and the types of mentoring programmes according to their level of formality. This section provides an overview of research on gender in mentoring and the associated issues. It is important to note the lack of research on gender and mentoring, particularly in systematic reviews. Therefore, it is necessary to fill this knowledge gap in organisations related to equality and diversity. The study is based on the analysis of a database of published documents using a two-dimensional model that considers the equality-inequality axis and the identity-diversity axis.

## **Present study**

Defining the concept of gender has grown in sophistication as scholars have sought both a deeper understanding at the social level and to connect this with individual psychological aspects of each person. That is, the paradigm of analysis in terms of gender has incorporated the impact of normative beliefs and structural inequalities on people's individuality, their bodies and their sexualities and identities (Osborne & Molina Petit, 2008). In this study, care has been taken to incorporate this theoretical approach into the field of research on gender applied to mentoring. Thus, with the literature review we have analysed both the social dimension, linked to social structural inequalities, and the impact of gender and its consequences on people's individuality.

Mentoring is a tool that aims to promote personal growth through guidance, intensity, reflection and regulated learning (Mullen & Klimaitits, 2021). However, it is important to be aware that it can generate inequalities due to power dynamics or authority established during the practice, or other dynamics of exclusion (Mullen & Klimaitits, 2021). The purpose of this article is to examine whether research on mentoring has considered gender barriers, including those faced by traditionally excluded groups such as LGTBIQ+ individuals and women. Women typically report having fewer available mentors than their male counterparts (Torney Welsh & Diehn, 2018). This suggests that, in addition to facing social hierarchy challenges, women also experience disadvantages in the realm of mentoring.

This study aims to identify gender barriers analysed in scientific literature on mentoring, particularly in systematic reviews. The concept of mentoring by Mullen and Klimaitits (2021) has been used as a reference, which includes various typologies and definitions such as formal mentoring, informal mentoring, group mentoring or peer mentoring. The article's context is not limited to a particular type of mentoring but aims to explore the role of gender in various mentoring areas, as identified in the findings section. This approach provides an overview of the research within the study's territorial and language limitations. Thus, this study is therefore innovative as it provides an overview of the research on mentoring carried out to 2022, both in applied projects and theoretical research.

The contribution of this study is to highlight the main issues discussed in terms of gender in mentoring, which are often closely related to traditionally established gender roles, and to show that more research on matching is needed considering race and gender. It also highlights the need to introduce the gender and intersectional perspective in formal mentoring, since in natural mentoring it has been taken more into account, as will be demonstrated throughout this article. In addition, these issues are grouped in a systematic review, which is an unusual format with regards to mentoring and gender.

To carry this out, the study is organized into different sections, following the chronological perspective, the matching in terms of race and gender and the level of formality of the mentoring, reviewing the contributions of the analysed articles. Finally, the gaps in knowledge that need to be filled with more research and with the incorporation of new research perspectives are identified.

## Methodology

The research process was based on procedures established for carrying out a literature review (Paul and Rialp Criado, 2020; Snyder, 2019) and on the proposed sections in Newman and Gough (2020).

### Search strategy

The search for documents was carried out through recognised electronic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest and Web of Science. The main search words were: mentoring; mentoring for girls; mentoring for females, mentoring for boys; mentoring for males; gender; gender perspective; gender implications; gender consequences and LGBTBIQ+. Various combinations of these were also made.

In parallel, the bibliographies of the selected articles were thoroughly reviewed in order to identify other studies related to the topic and to detect the most cited references.

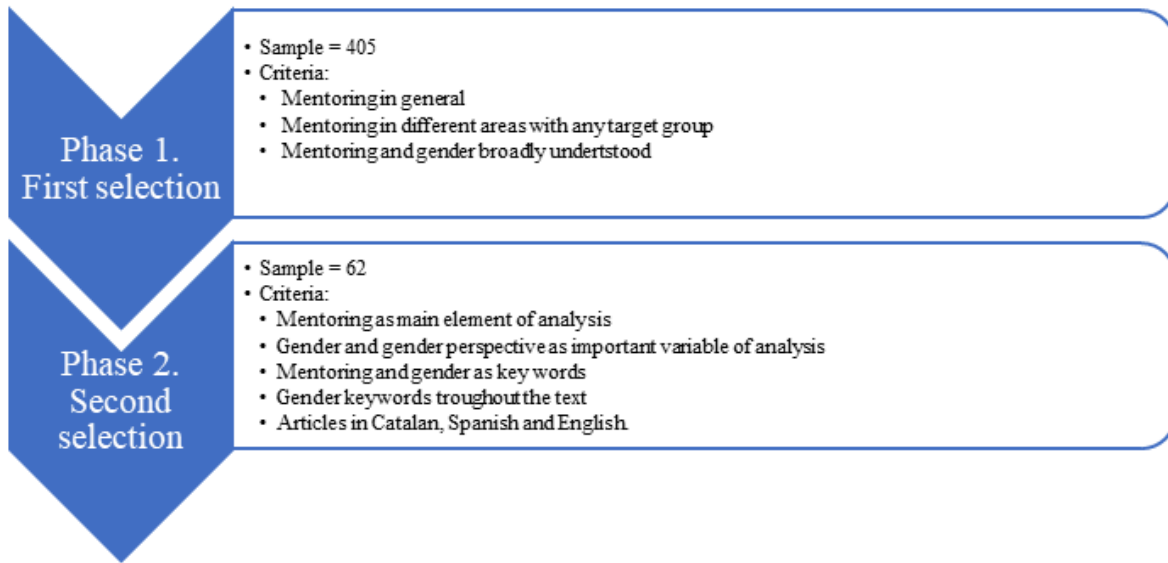
### Sample and selection criteria

The work process was divided into two phases. The first phase consisted of collecting all the articles that, dealing with any aspect related to mentoring, included the variable gender as an analytical construct in general terms and at any point of the research process. It was thus an extensive search and a sample of 405 articles was collected. The second phase entailed the selection of 62 articles that provided results specifically focused on the role of gender in mentoring relationships.

The inclusion criteria used in phase one to select the articles were not restrictive enough to guarantee the creation of a document base. We included articles that: (a) dealt with mentoring from any point of view; (b) analysed mentoring projects in different areas and with any target group; (c) studied mentoring taking into account gender broadly understood and from any perspective. To be part of the database, all abstracts were reviewed and read.

In phase two, the selection criteria was stricter. We included articles in which: (1) mentoring was the main element of analysis; (2) the gender of the mentors and mentees or the gender perspective had considerable weight for the research; (3) gender and mentoring were key words in the article; and (4) the keywords related to gender appeared throughout the text. The main exclusion criterion was language, so all articles that were not written in Catalan, Spanish or English were discarded from the study sample.

**Figure 1: Phases of the section process of the reviewed articles and criteria**



Source: authors

## Document analysis

Phase one consisted of reviewing the abstracts and bibliographies of the articles and including them in the collection. In the first analysis, the topics related to gender and mentoring addressed in the publications were detected, and the categories of analysis that make up the codebook were drawn up (Figure 2). The creation of categories was carried out through triangulation, as the authors did it independently, and subsequently the results obtained by each author were compared. The fact that multiple researchers with varied expertise analysed the same object of study (Noble & Heale, 2019) made it possible to give more validity to the categories of analysis initially proposed and to enrich and complement the knowledge obtained and the research process (Santos et al., 2020).

In phase two, the coding of the publications was carried out with the categories created. For the document analysis we used a model based on two axes that is consistent with trends in gender studies mentioned above: the equality-inequality axis and the identity-diversity axis. This model was developed inductively, based on the results of phase one. The equality-inequality axis includes aspects related to the social situation of the genders in a patriarchal context and the consequent social inequalities, from a structural and systemic perspective. The identity-diversity axis covers aspects related to sexual identity and gender, as well as identities, from a more individual and subjective perspective.

**Figure 2: Codebook that forms the study's two axes of analysis**

Codebook	Equality-inequality axis	Identity-diversity axis
	Gender-related barriers	Gender identity
	Gender and sexual violence	Gender expression
	Gender-linked stigma	Sexuality
	Work within the home	Sexual orientation
	Intersectionality	Gender identification
	Glass ceiling	Lack of acceptance by family and peers
		New masculinities
		Hegemonic masculinities

Source: authors

# Findings

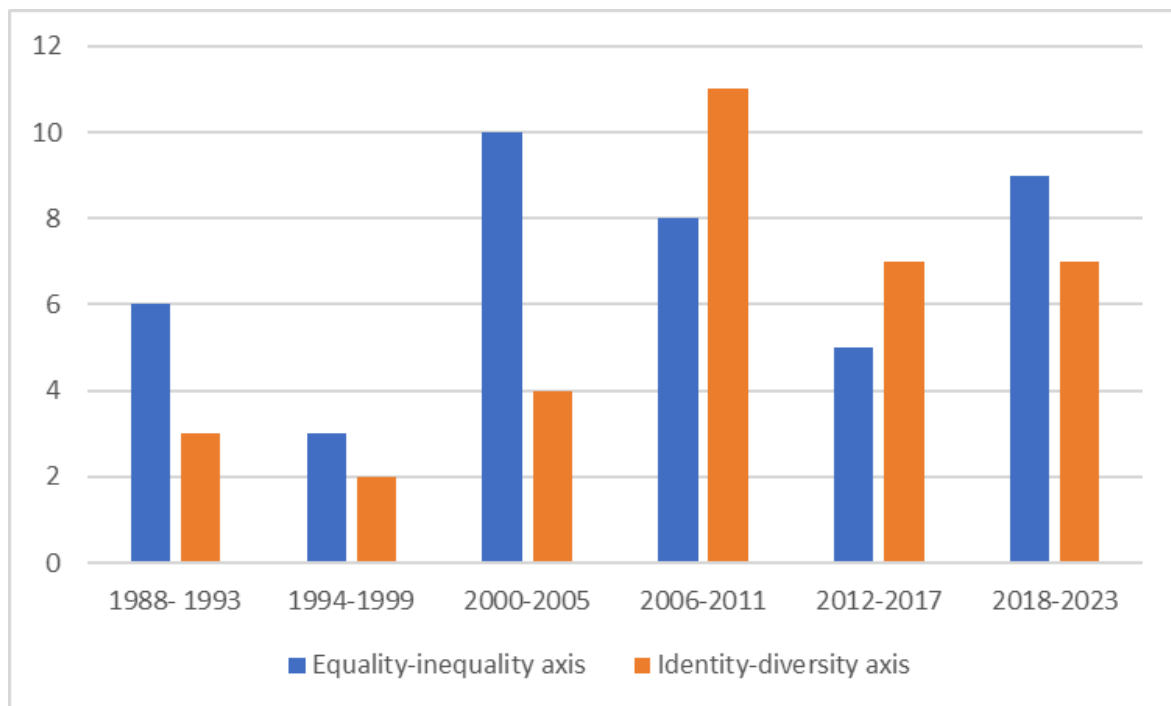
The systematic analysis of the publications on mentoring have allowed us to adopt two perspectives. First, a chronological perspective in order to understand the evolution of the topics on mentoring and gender of the analysed articles, as well as the treatment given to them in each period. Second, the relationships of each of the two types of mentoring (formal and natural) with the gender dimensions systematised by the research: equality-inequality and identity-diversity.

## 1. How gender analysis evolves in the research on mentoring

The chronological reading reveals that the concern for the relationship between mentoring and gender-related aspects seems to have begun to be considered recently, because the 62 selected articles are between 1991 and 2022, except for one 1988 article.

Figure 3 shows the presence of the gender dimensions according to the equality-inequality and identity-diversity axes in the analysed documents organised into five-year periods. As can be seen, the topic of gender is uncommon in publications on mentoring as the maximum number of times it appears is 11. In general terms, it seems that the equality-inequality axis is the most frequent since it appears more than the identity-diversity axis in almost every five-year period.

**Figure 3: Presence of gender dimensions by axes in the articles over five-year periods**



**Source: authors**

Figure 3 shows that, despite the presence of both axes in almost every year, from 1988 to 2005 there was a predominance of researched topics referring to the equality-inequality axis. The period with most presence of this axis was between 2000 and 2005. In contrast, after 2006 a move towards an increase in the presence of the identity-diversity axis can be seen, except between 2018 and 2023 when the equality-inequality axis was once again more present. The five-year period with the greatest presence of the identity-diversity axis was 2006-2011. This increase could be due to social and political transformations involving a greater visibility of the LGTBQ+ collective.

The figure shows that from 2018 there seems to have been an increase in research on gender and mentoring because both axes are very present.

## **2. Matching as a factor introducing gender and race into mentoring**

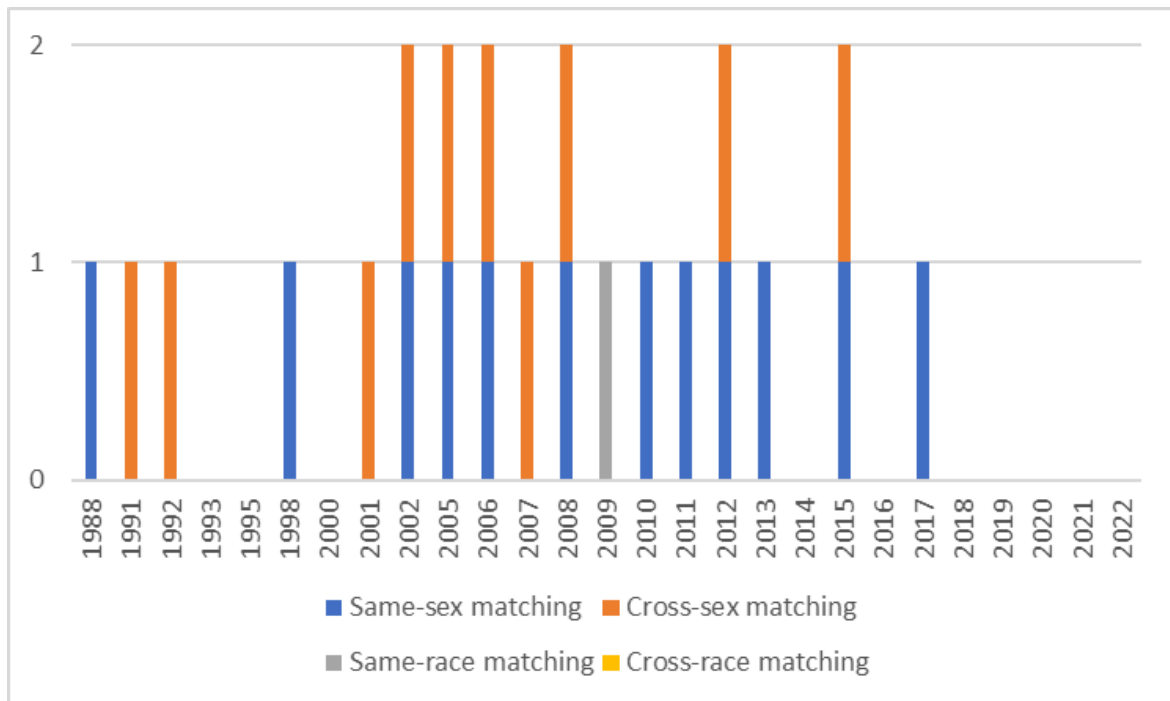
Matching between mentor and mentee is important in research on mentoring. The documents were analysed in terms of matching, taking into account the variables of sex and race since it is common to differentiate between four types of matching: same-sex, cross-sex, same-race and cross-race (Lockwood, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2002; Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Burke et al., 1990).

Figure 4 shows the presence or absence of the matching analysis, in terms of sex and race, in the selected articles, according to the year of publication. Although there are some years in which matching is not shown as an analysis variable in the articles, it does appear in most years, so it is a fairly recurring theme. Despite this, it can be observed that from 2018, the issue of matching is no longer a priority. During some years, the tendency is to deal with both types of matching related to sex, and it is generally studied in the first half of the years analysed, as can be seen in Figure 4. In general, same-sex matching is more frequent in the scientific literature analysed on mentoring.

Some articles, generally focusing on mentoring in the workplace, report that same-sex matching favours role modelling (Burke et al., 2006), because it is likely to generate rumours related to sexuality because it is assumed that both members are heterosexual (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007) and that the more similarities there are between the mentor and the mentee, especially in terms of nationality and gender, the higher the levels of support (Young et al., 2006). It was also observed that same-sex matching is often justified with gender stereotypes of interests linked to gender-specific activities (Kimmel & Traver, 2005) and with the consideration that people generally feel more comfortable with others of the same sex (Hughes, 2015).

Cross-sex matching is associated, in the analysed research, with gender barriers between men and women in sexual attitudes; with the lack of women who can be mentors in the workplace, or with the instrumental style of mentoring associated with male mentors and the psychosocial style with female mentors (O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007). In mentoring in the workplace, cross-sex matching is linked to power roles between men and women (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Young et al., 2006).

**Figure 4: Presence of same-sex matching, cross-sex matching, same-race matching and cross-race matching in the articles according to year**



**Source: authors**

Regarding matching by race, Figure 4 shows that it was a variable that was not studied much in the articles selected for this research: same-race matching only appears in the 2009 articles, and no article that dealt with cross-race matching was found. It is thus made clear that, in the articles of the period analysed, the intersectional perspective is not considered, neither in terms of published research nor mentoring projects.

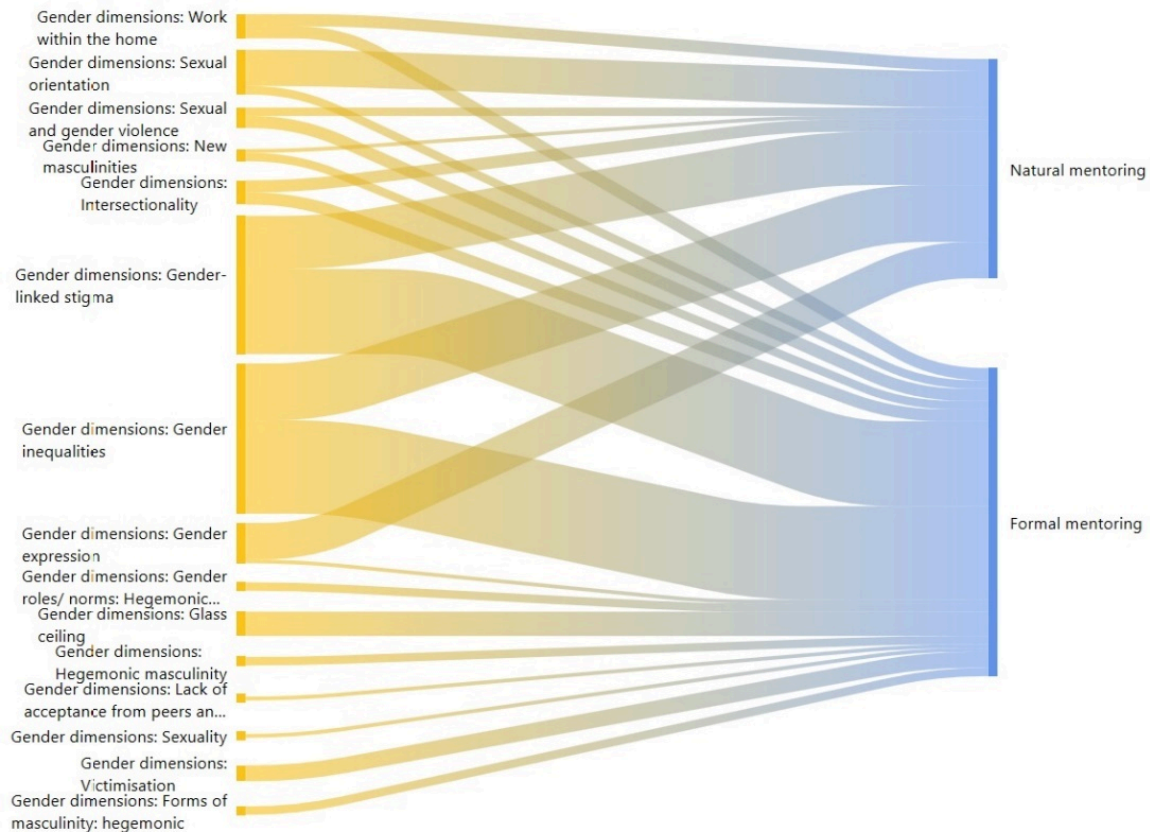
Kaplan, et al., (2009) analysed a project that paired Hispanic female college students, as mentors, with Hispanic girls as mentees, using a same-race and same-sex matching strategy. The study highlights that the strength of this programme is the lack of cultural barriers between the members of each pair and the shared educational experiences.

### 3. Gender in formal and natural mentoring

Mentoring can be classified into two types according to the degree of organisation of the relationship between the mentor and mentee: formal mentoring and natural mentoring. Formal mentoring involves a programme that manages the conditions necessary to create a bond of closeness and trust between the mentor and mentee (Radlick & Mevatne, 2023), while natural mentoring arises spontaneously between two or more people that share some space (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

The articles analysed in this study have been divided into formal and natural mentoring according to how the articles themselves define it. The type of mentoring was analysed based on the established gender dimensions, and the results obtained are shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Sankey diagram of gender dimensions by type of mentoring**



**Source: authors**

This analysis makes it possible to identify the gender dimensions that are directly related to the degree of formality of the mentoring projects. The most noteworthy are: gender-linked stigma, gender inequalities, gender expression, sexual orientation and glass ceiling. As can be seen in Figure 5, natural mentoring is associated with a greater diversity of gender dimensions addressed, which include gender stigma, inequalities, gender expression and sexual orientation. In contrast, formal mentoring focuses on two specific dimensions – gender inequalities and gender stigma – and, to a lesser extent, glass ceiling. In both cases, most of these dimensions are part of the equality-inequality axis. Despite this predominance of the equality-inequality axis, it was also possible to observe the presence of two dimensions that belong to the identity-diversity axis: gender expression and sexual orientation, only in the case of natural mentoring.

Gender-related stigma is an important issue in studies of both formal and natural mentoring. Regarding the former, the most notable concern involves the association between the most researched relational mentoring tendencies, psychosocial and instrumental, and the gender of the mentees. That is, it consists in determining whether psychosocial tendency is more appropriate for mentored girl mentees and whether, in contrast, mentored boys need a more instrumental style. We can see some correspondence with the typically masculine stereotypes that conceive men as dominant and risk-takers and with the feminine stereotypes that consider women to be compassionate and always acting carefully towards others (O'Neill & Black-Beard, 2002). Spencer & Liang (2009) show that both the emphasis on psychosocial and instrumental support can be important for both girls and boys. Another fundamental issue discussed in formal mentoring and gender is the possibility of sexual and intimate involvement between members of the cross-gender dyad (O'Neill & Black-Beard, 2002; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007). It can be considered gender stigma as it implies the impossibility of having a relationship without sexual-affective interests between a man and a woman, and only contemplates the existence of heterosexual relationships.

With regards to research on natural mentoring, gender stigma is important because it has focused on the consequences of gender roles in mentoring relationships. Women often encounter gender-related obstacles, both interpersonally and institutionally. These hinder their personal and professional progress, but it has been emphasised that natural mentoring in the work context can act as a cushion against this discrimination and promote their development (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). The support that natural mentoring can provide women has also been studied because it is often based on gender stereotypes that create unrealistic expectations in them. The support that male mentors give usually focuses more on the content than the relationship; it is based on very direct communication and avoiding talking about certain topics, such as work-life balance. How gender-related stereotypes and stigma affect female mentees, who expect more relational support from a female mentor than from a male mentor, has also been studied (Levine et al., 2013).

With respect to social inequalities in natural mentoring, the focus has been placed on how gender differences and stereotypes perpetuate existing stereotypes in today's society and affect mentoring practices. When women are the natural mentors, for example in the field of mentoring in academia, female faculty are associated with performing tasks related to the care and emotional support of students, while their male counterparts are freed from these roles and can devote themselves more to research and publishing scientific articles (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006). When women are the mentees, they have great difficulty naturally accessing a mentor. This is usually due to the lack of spaces where they can participate or because natural mentoring relationships usually occur in high positions within a business hierarchy, and they hold lower positions within the enterprise (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). The same difficulties in accessing natural mentoring relationships have also been detected with other minority groups, and this lack of significant opportunities represents a barrier to career advancement and to the satisfaction of the participants (Levine et al., 2013; Gastic & Johnson, 2009).

In research on formal mentoring, the main concern is cross-sex matching and the consequences that can arise from it. A male-female pair can generate gender inequalities due to the possible development of interactions with a sexual-affective charge or due to the adoption of stereotypical gender roles in mentoring (Chesler & Chesler, 2002). With regards to intimacy in a cross-gender relationship of formal mentoring, scientific research has been concerned with proposing preventive measures to avoid negative consequences that may arise (Blake-Beard, 2001). Regarding gender inequalities based on traditional roles, research has investigated whether participating in mentoring programmes reinforces stereotypes that associate women only with caring roles (O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002) and consequently with the lack of effectiveness of women leading organisations (Blake-Beard, 2001). It also shows that one of the tasks of female mentees when they have male mentors can be to show that these preconceived notions are wrong and fight to detect the presence of harmful stereotypes and replace them with unbiased information about women as equally competent (Blake-Beard, 2001). To foster the eradication of gender inequalities, formal mentoring can challenge hostile patriarchal structures and institutional power roles. This can occur as mentoring relationships encourage women to achieve positions of leadership, to be trained to understand what barriers are associated with male-dominated spaces and what strategies can be used to combat them. Female mentors can also become role models of motivation to explore the professional aspirations of the mentees (Beck et al., 2021). The lack of recognition and inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in mentoring programmes is also highlighted since they are only based on gender binarism (Beck et al., 2021).

Another question investigated in the research on mentoring and gender is the impact that the gender expression of the mentor and mentee can have. The type of support that mentoring can provide depends more on the gender expression of the mentees than whether they are male or female, so that mentees with a more androgenous gender expression receive more support than mentees with attributes considered typically masculine or feminine (Young et al., 2006; Scandura & Ragins, 1993). In this regard, research shows that masculine or androgenous attributes make it easier to establish a bond, especially at the beginning, thanks to aggression or being direct (Scandura & Ragins, 1993).

Sexual orientation was also an important topic in the research analysed. Belonging to sexual and ethnic minority groups has been linked to situations of vulnerability and difficulties in accessing natural mentoring. Due to institutional heterosexism and homophobia, translated into victimisation and harassment, these young people see their socio-educational development directly affected, and they lack opportunities to be mentored both in general and naturally by their teachers (Gastic & Johnson, 2009). Natural mentoring has also been conceptualised as a tool that, thanks to the bond with their mentor, allows the mentee to develop their sexual and gender identity and to have role models with their same sexual orientation to accompany them and introduce them to LGBTQ+ spaces. In the case of young black men who have sex with other men, natural mentors can provide positive images of black masculinity, role models of good providers for others, of respected leaders who create positive community change and of responsible and ethical workers (Reed, et al., 2019).

The glass ceiling is a recurring concern in the research on mentoring and gender since it is considered than any process that occurs within a non-gender-neutral institution, such as companies and therefore mentoring in the workplace, will be reproducing the stigma associated with gender (De Vries et al., 2006). This structure will also create an almost impenetrable glass ceiling for women who wish to take on positions of leadership within organisations. In the workplace, where mentors are usually those who hold high positions within the organisation, the low presence of women implies an insufficient participation of women as mentors (O'Neill & Black-Beard, 2002).

## Limitations

The identification of 405 articles related to mentoring and the gender perspective resulted in a longer coding stage than expected. Additionally, the volume of analysis was greater than initially planned. It is important to note that only articles written in Catalan, Spanish and English were included, and relevant publications written in other languages were not accessed. It is possible to extrapolate this fact to the territories studied, as most of the research analysed has been conducted or published in Europe and America. This may suggest that other existing research from other continents has been excluded due to distance from the databases used. The use of limited databases may have restricted access to emerging research publications or options for broadening the perspective on the subject. Additionally, the analysis focused solely on research publications on gender and mentoring. It is unclear whether gender is being taken into account in current mentoring projects, as there may be no research on the matter or no access to this information.

## Discussion and conclusions

This research was carried out to obtain an overview of research on gender and mentoring and to identify contributions in these areas from other research already published. As has become evident throughout this systematic review, research on gender and mentoring is more common than believed at the beginning of the research.

The chronological perspective made it possible to see that the selected research on gender and mentoring was generally published recently. This is explained by the growing importance of gender studies and their impact on other disciplines, which has highlighted the need to incorporate the gender perspective in scientific research. This process, which is being carried out progressively, culminated in the last five-year period (2018-2023) included in this research, which saw the most publications on gender and mentoring. This suggests that taking the gender perspective into account in social projects may be gaining momentum.

This chronological perspective also allowed us to identify a change in trend from 2006 to 2011: from the predominance of the equality-inequality axis to the subsequent greater presence of the identity-diversity axis. This change is important for understanding how the evolution of the concept

of gender has affected research on mentoring: from a more social perspective, in terms of the assumptions regarding the nature of being male and female, collected through the equality-inequality axis; and, in more individual terms, taking into account the effects of gender on the position of each person within the social structure, collected in the identity-diversity axis (Osborne & Molina Petit, 2008).

This perspective also made it possible to identify two important issues in terms of matching in mentoring. First, research has been based almost exclusively on the analysis of relationships between people of the same sex (Burke et al., 2006; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Young et al., 2006; Kimmel & Traver, 2005; Hughes, 2015). This shows that there is more interest in the results of the mentoring relationships between people of the same group. Moreover, if the research took cross-sex matching into account (O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002; McKeen & Bujaki, 2007; Young, Cady et al., 2006), it was generally based on the more patriarchal aspects present in society. First, one topic amply discussed was the different type of support that having a man or a woman mentor can provide the mentee since women are often associated with providing more psycho-social support and men with more instrumental support, perpetuating the gender stereotypes linked to men and women. Second, the possibility that pairing men and women encourages the creation of affective or sexual relationships beyond mentoring, assuming and perpetuating the hegemony of heterosexuality, has also been analysed.

The analysed research does not delve into the relationship between people of the same cultural group, nor do any of the selected articles address the relationship between people of different cultural groups. It is important to note that subjective evaluations have been excluded from this analysis. Regarding the gender variable, there has been a shift in research focus from cross-sex matching analysis to examining relationships between individuals of the same group. However, it appears that the matching variable is no longer considered in mentoring research, both in terms of gender and race, as it was not mentioned in the articles analysed after 2018. Research is needed on cross-race matching, as well as further research on same-race matching. Additionally, it is important to introduce an intersectional perspective between gender and race in mentoring, both in practice and in scientific research.

Our model of analysis has shown that the gender dimensions that are considered in the research depend on the degree of formality of the mentoring programmes. While we have seen that formal mentoring is related to aspects of both axes of analysis, we have observed a tendency in the studies on natural mentoring to address issues of the identity-diversity axis. The themes that emerge from the deeper analysis have to do with gender stereotypes between men and women and the support that is usually offered depending on whether the mentor is male or female. This shows that natural mentoring addresses more individual and subjective aspects of gender but is not a tool to produce structural changes.

It should also be noted that in certain cases the topics covered in the publications are very focused. In the professional field, whether at work (Ragins & Cotton, 1991) or academic (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006), research concerns are based on inequalities between the opportunities of men and women. For instance, these are women's difficulties to access formal mentoring due to lack of high positions in the work hierarchy because of the glass ceiling; gender roles of men and women in terms of work-life balance (Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Levine et al., 2013; O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002; De Vries et al., 2006), and the development of work according to gender expression (Young et al., 2006; Scandura & Ragins, 1993). Another case is that with mentoring with specific groups, such as LGTBQ+ people, where research focuses on natural mentoring. The main topics of research in this context are their lack of access to a mentor and the benefits that having the support of a mentor means for them to overcome social discrimination and to develop the sexual and gender identity (Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Reed, et al., 2019). Although it has not been strictly the focus of study of this research, the results point to significant differences between the topics covered in the different contexts where mentoring is carried out. This is why there is a need to deepen research bearing this issue in mind.

The research results are theoretical and aim to promote the incorporation of the gender perspective in mentoring research. Additionally, the research has social implications for mentoring programmes. The results indicate the importance of considering gender and sexual diversity, as well as the intersections of these identity factors with other factors such as race, in mentoring programmes. This applies not only to the pairing of mentors and mentees, but also to the design, implementation and evaluation of mentoring projects. Mentoring projects can be made more inclusive for oppressed groups, helping to overcome social and programmatic inequalities. This, in turn, can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

In short, and as we have seen, mentoring and research on it can be yet one more agent in the perpetuation of gender roles between men and women and social inequalities typical of the patriarchal system. At the same time, however, if the gender and intersectional perspective is taken into account, it can be a powerful tool to improve the situation of people in today's society. More research from a feminist and intersectional is thus essential to prevent mentoring from being an institution that reproduces these conditions, both in the practice of the programmes and in scientific research. This overview has made it possible to trace the path towards a future research agenda that includes the incorporation of intersectionality in research on mentoring, as well as a deepening of the gender dimensions created in this model, considering the formality of mentoring and also the contexts in which it is carried out.

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## Endnotes

[1] ↩

The presence of this variable in the documents is represented with a 1 and its absence with a 0.

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