# Multilevel models to study intersectionality

## Transcript MAIHDA - Intersectionality (video 1)

Part of the resource: <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/all/?id=20849>

So, we’re going to start by thinking about some of the concepts that theory that underlines a lot of uses of the MAIHDA method, and particularly focusing on ideas around intersectionality. And, broadly speaking, there are two kind of essential ingredients that we want to think about when taking an intersectional approach. The first relates to heterogeneity, that is the idea that we are produced, our identities are produced by more than just the sum of our characteristics and those characteristics produce particular inequalities, so we can imagine dividing up society, and in this case we’ve got three categories of gender, two categories of ethnicity, three categories of socioeconomic position. And these combine to categorise people in society into a number of different groups or strata. And the differences between these groups is potentially what we’re interested in, and those might be, in some cases, produced by simple inequalities. It might be that men are advantaged compared to women. It might be that white people are advantaged compared to minoritised ethnic groups. But it might also be that there are particular pockets of disadvantage, particular disadvantaged groups as a result of a combination of these identities. So, perhaps working class minoritised ethnic men are particularly disadvantaged, more so than the combination of their characteristics might imply.

The second dimension of intersectionality is social power, so this is the idea that some of what produces those inequalities is related to social processes and hierarchies. And these social processes combine in often complex ways, so it may be that there is ageism and there is racism that disadvantage minoritised groups, sexism that disadvantages women, but it might be that these combine in particular ways. For instance, it might be that black women in particular experience disadvantage as a result of particular combination of sexism and racism.

And taking that example, let’s have a think about why this really matters. So, let’s think about the graph on the right here, so we have a situation where black women are particularly disadvantaged in comparison to black men, white women and white men. So, the key disadvantage here is that black women are disadvantaged compared to the rest. Now, if we didn’t take an intersectional approach, we might look at this situation and think let’s see if there is an effect of being black, let’s see if black people are disadvantaged, and let’s see if women are disadvantaged. We might think about doing that separately and we would find that, yes, on average there is a disadvantage among black people and there is a disadvantage among women. But if we then combine those two back together, we would end up finding something like the graph on the left. We would find that white women, we were assuming that white women are disadvantaged by being white, we’d be assuming that black men are disadvantaged by… sorry, white women are disadvantaged by being women and black men are disadvantaged by being black, but in fact that’s not true. In fact, the process that produces this disadvantage is one such that black women have a particular disadvantage and that actually black men and white women are not disadvantaged in this situation.

So, failing to understand this can lead to incorrect inference, it can lead to us not fully understanding the nature of the inequalities that we are identifying, and so it can mean that potentially things like policy analyses that attempt to address these inequalities can be a bit flawed.

Now, intersectionality is often thought of as something in the kind of domain of qualitative research, but it actually originated in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, or the term originated then, in a kind of quantitative domain along the lines of these sorts of graphs. So, what we’re going to be looking at in this tutorial is thinking about how we might use different quantitative methods, in particular the MAIHDA model, to uncover intersectional differences in society.

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