

**Fighting together:  
Assessing the heterogeneity  
of social movement organizations' constituencies**

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The sociology of collective action and social movements has long been a disembodied sociology, in which individual actors only appear as metonymies, explicit in the case of movements based on shared socio-biological characteristics (such as those of students, retired people, poor people or the working-class, etc.) or implicit in the case of more transverse movements, as for example in the so-called New social movements theory.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, until the end of the 1980s, the irreducible heterogeneity of protest movements was mainly considered in organizational terms through distinguishing, vertically, between leaders and the *mass* of mobilized individuals (e.g. Oberschall 1973; Piven and Cloward 1977; Morris 1984), and, horizontally, between “conscience constituents” and the *mass* of members/beneficiaries (e.g. Lipsky 1968; Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977). However, since the beginning of the 1990s, many writers in the cultural turn tradition shifted their attention to non-organizational factors of internal cleavages such as ideologies, identities and consciousness, among others (Miller 1983; Fantasia 1988; Gamson 1995, 1997, 2000; Benford 1997; Steinberg 1999; Cohen 1999, 2000; Waite 2001; Goldstein 2002; Polletta 2002; Armstrong 2002; Wilde 2004; Robinson 2005).<sup>2</sup>

From this point of view, feminist theory has operated a Copernician revolution in the sociology of social movements. By placing at the heart of the analysis of activist groups gender relationships and their articulation to other dominance relationships (e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ingelhart (1990) on the “new middle class” and Cotgrove and Duff (1980) on “middle class radicalism”.

<sup>2</sup> See Ghaziani 2008, chapter I, for a recent review of this literature.

Stockdill 2001, 2003), these research pose as prolegomena to any analysis the irreducible heterogeneity of protest groups. That heterogeneity effectively demonstrates that protest movements experience the same principles of classification as the societies from which they come, even if they are seeking to transform them. As a consequence, these research have constituted an effective Trojan horse against an epistemology of the individual subject fed by rational choice theories and based on the model of “white middle-class men in Western capitalist systems.” (Marx Ferree 1992<sup>3</sup>)

The fractures generated in a protest group by the succession of political generations or their coexistence have also been centrally addressed by literature dedicated to the *herstory* of the women’s movement (Mannheim [1928] 1952). A generational approach has been used to demonstrate how the experience of a generation of women in student movements shaped feminist activism and to stress how intergenerational relations played a crucial role in long-term feminist mobilization (Evans 1979; Freeman 1973, 1975) and organizational change along its three waves (Rupp and Taylor 1987). Finally and most importantly, Nancy Whittier (1995, 1997) empirically verifies the effects of activist generations on change within the feminist movement in Columbus, Ohio.

However, there is still scant research on the way in which activist collectives transform over time when different political generations interact. Gusfield’s (1957) study of the Women Christian Temperance Union was a pioneer on the matter. One finds a similar interest in historical analyses of the Students for a Democratic Society (Ross 1983; Gitlin 1987; Miller 1987). Ginsburg (1989) drew attention to the generational roots of pro-choice and anti-abortion movements. Johnston and Aarelait-tart (2000) show how the Estonian national movement between 1940 and 1991 is marked by the intergenerational relations, and Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005) examine the effects that a new, younger generation with fewer social resources has on radical leftist organizations<sup>4</sup>.

The aforementioned results indicate the need for careful examination, at the micro-sociological level, of the fractures generated by diverse structural characteristics. Identifying the connections they help to establish, the distances they create and the tensions they build will help us to predict the fates of protest groups. For the most part, this consubstantial heterogeneity has been studied from a static and unidimensional perspective; as such, we can only partially view the whole range of phenomena of concern to the study of protest groups, which includes internal conflicts, crises and splits;

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<sup>3</sup> See also Taylor and Whittier 1995:5.

<sup>4</sup> See also Zwerman, Steinhoff, and Della Porta 2000.

the likelihoods of success and failure; organizational upheavals; the transformations of institutional cultures; collective identities; and changes in strategies and repertoires of action.

In this article, we begin with the generally-accepted notion that mobilized individuals have a variety of structural attributes—particularly with regard to class, gender, race, and age—that determine their different roles and statuses within the movements and also their objective interests, collective identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Stryker, Owens, and White 2000) and ideologies (Wilson 1973: 91-93). Nonetheless, the literature on this question is sparse. In this article, we offer a theoretical model and method that take into account the broad array of structural attributes and their effects on the fate of an organization.

In order to demonstrate the fruitfulness of such an approach, we draw on a case study of Aides, the oldest and largest French social movement organization (SMO) mobilized against AIDS epidemic that was founded at the end of 1984 by Michel Foucault's partner. Our dynamic model of individual activism is based on a set of theoretical premises, which we outline below. We describe the internal heterogeneity of protest groups as having structural properties that are *multidimensional*, *multisituated* and *processual*. We then introduce a methodological approach that allows us to systematically analyze these attributes. We empirically demonstrate, using sequence analysis, the fruitfulness of using such an approach to study political activism in the context of social movement theory.

### **A dynamic model of individual activism**

We define activism as a long-lasting social activity that involves joining, committing, and defecting, in phases. Recent developments in the research on activism from an interactionist perspective—to which one commonly refers as “the sociology of activist careers” (Fillieule 2001, 2005, 2010) or the renewed “interactionist paradigm” (Siméant and Sawicki 2009)—are particularly well suited to proposing a theoretical account of activist commitments that diachronically resituates them in the whole picture of individual life histories as well as helps to contextualize the coexistence of various activist profiles in SMOs.

The expression of 'career activist', refers directly to the Chicago School's interactionist tradition<sup>5</sup> and more precisely to the basic theoretical assumptions of 'symbolic interactionism'<sup>6</sup>. The concept of career offers the means of paying attention to the process and the permanent dialectic between individual history, social institutions and, more generally, the context. Therefore, this is less a case of predicting a state, here, for example, activism or disengagement, than of rebuilding "*a sequence of steps, of changes in the individual's behavior and perspectives, in order to understand the phenomenon. Each step requires explanation, and what may operate as a cause at one step in the sequence may be of negligible importance at another step (...)* In a sense, each explanation constitutes a necessary cause of the behavior (...) The explanation of each step is thus part of the explanation of the resulting behavior."(Becker 1966: 23)<sup>7</sup>

Applied to political commitment, the notion of career allows us to understand how, at each stage of a biography, attitudes and behaviors are determined by past attitudes and behaviors, and in turn condition future possibilities, thus resituating the periods of commitment in the entire life cycle. The concept of career questions one's predispositions to activism, the shift to action, differentiated and variable forms of involvement over time, the multiplicity of involvements throughout the life cycle (defection(s) and shift(s) from one collective to another, and from one type of activism to another), and the retraction or extension of commitments (Fillieule 2010).

The conceptual framework that we espouse carries theoretical implications, namely our understanding of individual's structural characteristics<sup>8</sup>. These characteristics can be assessed along three lines: *multidimensional, multisituated* and *processual*.

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<sup>5</sup> See Becker 1960, 1963; Gerth and Mills 1954; Hughes 1958; Strauss 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937, "symbolic interactionism" is closely linked to the social behaviourism of George Herbert Mead (McPhail & Rexroat 1979). Its subsequent usage belongs less to a school of thought than to a wide array of research sharing two standpoints: a common conception of the individuals and their relation to society, deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism; and a way of doing research inherited from the Chicago School of sociology. More precisely, symbolic interactionism can be defined as a micro sociological and processual approach which systematically links the individual and the study of situations to broader contextual factors and social order rules and norms. In this perspective, not only are individuals and society interdependent but they also mutually construct each other.

<sup>7</sup> It is this process that Becker uses in his celebrated analysis of the deviant career of marijuana smokers. His procedure was also borrowed recently to analyze phenomena as diverse as the process of uncoupling (Vaughan 1986), male femaling (Ekins 1997), and anorexia (Darmon 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Very classically, by structural characteristics, we mean the individual properties that, in a given social structure, generate divisions and classification of people and, as a consequence, hierarchization. A structural characteristic is defined then always in relation to a structural location of the individual, to a given structure of power relations, and is always translated into differentiated forms of acquisition of dispositions, objective positions and role expectations. Generally speaking, all the characteristics that determine differences in material and symbolic resources, are structural. Thus, the fact of being a man or a

### *Multidimensional structural attributes*

Individuals' structural characteristics must be viewed from a multidimensional perspective. Distances and proximity combine in reality to produce complex and overlapping groups defined by multiple intersecting affinities. Therefore, we must consider the distribution of power within groups, distinguishing different types of functions and roles and different modalities of articulation for beneficiaries and conscience constituents; activists and ordinary members; activists and external supporters; and experienced activists, enjoying the legitimacy that comes with their seniority, and recently recruited activists. In addition, related to the latter point, we must consider the coexistence and succession of different micro-cohorts (Whittier 1997), indeed of generations, which we have seen may have quite distinct characteristics and identities.

If, due to advances in feminist research, we may now readily agree on the multidimensional condition of structural characteristics, it is still necessary to operationalize these observations and describe their modalities of functioning *in concreto*. As proof, we can suggest that while today, after years of feminist research, we have reached agreement on the theoretical meaning of the coexistensivity of gender relationships to other dominance relationships, we are still far from possessing adequate tools to study intersectionality empirically (Crenshaw 1989; Kergoat 2001; Fillieule and Roux 2009).

### *Multisituated structural attributes*

Differences in structural characteristics are observable in activists' different tasks and functions, and in other life-spheres. Anselm Strauss's (1959: 41-43) notion of *plurality*, following the work of George H. Mead, emphasizes actors' memberships in a number of other social worlds and subworlds as part of contemporary social life.

In each of these spaces, individuals are led to adopt specific roles in which they are more or less "stuck." These define various contexts of socialization. This may be especially observed if we note the importance of gendered social relationships, which contribute to determining assigned role expectations, as well as shaping the perceptions of reality and the relationship to politics.

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woman constitutes a structural characteristic in an androcentric world, while differences in short and long hair—in most of the social world—generate neither division nor hierarchy.

From this, the idea arises that activist organizations are also comprised of individuals belonging to a multiplicity of social worlds and subworlds. As a consequence, they struggle with a need to abide by different, sometimes contradictory, norms, rules, and logic. The individual submits to heterogeneous, and sometimes conflicting, internalized principles of socialization.

This suggests that analysis of the logic of activist commitment must proceed through identification of the “individual’s succession[s] of phases, changes in behavior and perspectives.” (Becker 1966) These critical moments change the expected reward in each sphere, which covaries with other areas. After retiring or leaving work, for example, an individual may feel the need to invest in a social or political association that allows him or her to rediscover a “social purpose” and new forms of responsibility.

So, it is vital that we find the means to identify, in each life sphere, these “critical moments” as points in time, measure the length of the “phases,” and finally to articulate the various spheres of life, since they permanently interact. From this perspective, while the consideration of such indicators as “biographical availability” (McAdam 1988) as measured by professional status and parenthood is an interesting way to account for overlapping roles, it remains too rough an indicator.

### *The processual nature of structural attributes*

Identifying the diachronic formation and reformation of structural attributes presents the greatest difficulties. We recognize, however, that individuals’ structural characteristics evolve over time and must be envisaged as diachronic.<sup>9</sup> Biographical time, in combination with historical time, determines an objective structure of social opportunities for each structural characteristic at each stage. Scholars must therefore go

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<sup>9</sup> Which means that we consider that “*the intellectual convenience of the assumption that development ceases once adulthood is attained must be sacrificed in the face of the annoying complexity of reality*”(Ryder 1965:860) and we do not consider that adolescence or young adulthood are the sole formative periods in individuals' lives. Socialization is here conceived as a continuous process (Berger and Luckmann 1966: chapter 3; Strauss 1959), which means that commitments in protest organisations can be transformative at any age and that individual structural properties are always susceptible to transform. We fully agree on that point with Schneider (1988) and Whittier (1997) who argue that when it comes to women and their political socialization in women’s movements, age does not appear any more as the very basis for defining the climax of transformative experiences because participation to the women’s movement was, at any age, a strong vehicle for building a new way of seeing the world and one’s own lives. Gay and lesbian movements (Epstein 1999; Armstrong 2002, Ghaziani 2008), as well as AIDS volunteer groups (Barbot 2002; Broqua, Fillieule 2001; Eptsein 1996, 2008; Gould 2010; Stockdill 2001; Voegtli 2010), also play such a role and offer to committed people, no matter their position in the life-cycle, opportunities for ‘institutionalized changes’ and ‘biographical ruptures’ aiming at both acceptance of one’s own stigma and one’s visibility in the social world.

beyond static analyses of structural attributes and restore temporal order of individual experiences. Two main issues arise.

First, most structural characteristics are not bestowed upon individuals but rather are sequentially acquired, the order of which partially determines their meaning. How do we interpret people volunteering in the field of AIDS declaring themselves HIV-positive if we do not consider the date at which this occurs? It is clear that, whether this occurs before, during, or after the period of involvement radically affects the explanatory value of this fact. For the activist who is motivated to volunteer by a close proximity to the disease marked by knowing close friends or family living with AIDS and his or her own seropositivity, the elements have different meanings depending on when they were first known. Most questionnaires fail to take temporal order into account, falsely inferring a causal relationship from correlations.

Secondly, structural positions may be better viewed from a relational perspective. The value of a structural position is derived from its commonality, how it compares to the experiences of others, its synchronism (coexistence) and antecedence. The link between structural attributes and structural locations (i.e. the social settings in which individuals are circulating) significantly reduces the explanatory power of analyses that correlate activist commitment with social characteristics identified in questionnaires or structured interviews. Indeed, any social characteristic (gender, age, income level, professional status and so on) lacks explanatory capacity if we do not resituate it in the 'configuration' (in the sense articulated by Elias) in which it develops and contributes to the creation of certain dispositions. In other words, the social characteristics of individuals are ambivalent. Their values (and explanatory power) vary in conjunction with the system of competitive interrelations in which they are found. This system may be interpreted at three levels:

First, one's structural position may be interpreted at the level of the expanded political field, the widest possible competitive system. Depending on the social valuation, at a particular point in time and in a particular sector, certain social characteristics and aptitudes will be privileged or devalued. The social value of a cause, as well as the ways of contributing to it, may vary as a function of the context in which it is found. Mobilizing against AIDS at the start of the epidemic, for example, does not have the same social significance as mobilizing in the 1990s, the AIDS cause having acquired by the end of the 1980s a strong legitimacy increasingly detached from homophobic

stigmatization. In the initial phase of the struggle, only those directly affected, emotionally or physically, were mobilized (primarily gay men). In the institutionalization phase, there was significant mobilization of heterosexual women who became invested in the cause in a so-called logic of care. To understand why, it is necessary to pay attention to the history and development of SMOs.

Second, one's structural position may be interpreted at the micro-level of biography, since it is in the succession of encounters with social characteristics and in variable socialization contexts that dispositions are created. For example, gender is by itself not an explanatory variable with respect to politics and commitment, even if statistical correlations always stress the gap in the levels and modes of commitment between men and women. Understanding the effects of gendered belonging in various social subworlds at various biographical stages, however, allows us to pinpoint patterns of perception and habits as a result of gender (Fillieule 2009).

Third, one's structural position may be interpreted at the meso level of organizations. One must understand how organizations select and orient individual activities to grasp how they differentially relate to their members' social attributes<sup>10</sup>. If, like Gerth and Wright Mills, we believe that an institution is an organization with distinct hierarchical roles to which members must conform, it is reasonable to hold that the internalization of such roles occurs through learning mechanisms and secondary socialization. The strength of such socialization mechanisms—from conversion and alternation, in the sense used by Berger and Luckmann (1966), to strategic and limited adaptations—needs to be studied along with durability from the viewpoint of biographical consequences. This model places the Goffmanian notion of a 'moral career' at the centre of activism. This refers to the selection of people (to the incentives and barriers to joining, and the orientations of activities) and to organizational modelling, or the multiple socializing effects of activism, which are in part determined by the organizational rules and modes of operation as constraints on behavior.

Qualitative investigations of activists, in following particular trajectories through life stories, allow us to bring together the different dimensions of structural characteristics. It is not surprising that the most persuasive research on political activism is most often based on qualitative data or, less frequently, on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data (Whalen and Flacks 1988; McAdam 1988; Fillieule and Broqua

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<sup>10</sup> See for example McAdam (1992) on the gendered recruitment of activists to the Freedom summer.



2000 2005). Nonetheless, these methods come up against a formidable obstacle. It is difficult to create representative samples on the basis of in-depth interviews, which are the only way to reconstitute the density of biographical time without letting aside historical time, i.e. changing contexts, and thus to describe the heterogeneity of protest groups at each historical stage. As for studies using questionnaires, with the exception of a few rare, particularly sophisticated research with a limited focus on the question of biographical consequences for involvement (Whalen and Flacks, McAdam 1989), they usually limit themselves to understanding phenomena seen in a synchronic manner, describing a given state of idiosyncrasies' structures

In this article we propose a method of statistical analysis derived from a questionnaire according to the demands of a career-oriented approach. In the contemporary practice of analyzing careers, we too readily forget the extent to which methods knowledge has evolved tremendously in fifty years. Fifty years ago statistical studies were an anathema to interactionists; this should no longer be the case, however. In reality, statistical analysis can be done using observations tracked over time and multivariate analysis can account for changing conditions. A sequential model of analysis reconstructs itineraries that follow socially prescribed sequences and satisfies the career-oriented approach that we promote.

## **Data**

Our paper relies on a secondary analysis of data collected in the framework of a research project conducted from 1998-2002 by Olivier Fillieule and Christophe Broqua (2000). Whereas the initial research design compared the two biggest voluntary groups mobilized against AIDS (Aides and Act Up) using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods (life history interviews and ethnographic observation), the present analysis is based exclusively on a retrospective longitudinal self-administered mail survey of members of Aides. Thanks to the access to the member directory granted to us by the organization, we sent our questionnaire to all the 1,969 members of Aides Ile-de-France (central region around Paris) in 1998<sup>11</sup>. The response rate was decent (25%, N = 502). Not only were current volunteers contacted (886 questionnaires 289 returned, 33%), we also surveyed former volunteers (1,083 questionnaires 213 returned 20%). Their

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<sup>11</sup> At its inception, Aides started as a small Paris-based association. Along its development, chapters were created in the provinces. In order to study a consistent group of volunteers throughout the period, we limited our investigation to the volunteers of the Paris region.

inclusion gives us a view which includes terminated, fully informed commitments, as well as unfinished, statistically “censored” trajectories.

We had the opportunity to test the reliability of our sample by means of other data from Aides’ archives that are basic, but crucial to our study: sex, birth year, date of entry and date of exit.<sup>12</sup> All representativity tests on these four variables give satisfying results: monovariate distributions are highly tied between survey sample and population<sup>13</sup> and the hierarchy of bivariate correlations are similar enough in the sample and in the population.<sup>14</sup> Archive data are not rich enough to prove that our sample is fully representative regarding other variables like sexual orientation, socioeconomic status (SES), HIV status or positions in Aides. As a matter of fact, our questionnaire was designed precisely to supply these information from the respondents. Our knowledge of the organization leads us to suspect survey response biases, particularly among more educated activists and in executive professions. Nonetheless, our sample can be considered reliable as it regards our focus on the heterogeneity of constituencies.

Our typological approach (see below) is not conditional on strong representativity as much as are linear models approaches. Surveying more members might change the typical longitudinal profiles we sketch out by providing new profiles. It would more likely impact the size of the clusters of members that we associate with these profiles, in two ways: by adding new cases which resemble the ones already surveyed; and by adding cases slightly different that would move the boundaries of clusters, but not their core. We assume that 502 respondents drove us close enough to sampling saturation.

### **Sequence analysis in the social sciences**

Sequence analysis (SA) groups several methods devoted to describe (statistically and graphically), analyze and classify sequences of events or states in the life course of individual or collective entities. A sequence is defined as a list of states, that is, elements

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<sup>12</sup> The quality of data about members from Aides’ directory is substantial. Missing values are only 5% (birth year), 3% (year of entry and exit) and 0% (sex).

<sup>13</sup> Monovariate distributions of sex S, age A, entry date E and leaving date L show Pearson correlation coefficients between the sample and population of respectively 1.00, 0.88, 0.98 and 0.94. As a consequence, none of the categories of these four variables is omitted in our survey sample. See appendix for a graphical comparison of members flows in and out of Aides between sample and survey.

<sup>14</sup> The similarity of structures of correlations between the sample and population strengthens the monovariate correlation tests (see note 9). In our case: correlations S\*E and S\*L are not significant in both sample and population; S\*A, E\*L and A\*E are significant and strong in both. Only A\*L is non significant in sample and significant and strong in population. Therefore, as a whole, with only one exception out of 6 tests, the internal structure of ties between characteristics available in both the sample and population are very close.

that are generally time-ordered (although non temporal sequences have been studied the same way, like series of written or spoken symbols). These methods include sequence mining, sequence plotting, sequence comparison algorithms (like optimal matching) and several statistics about sequence and groups of sequences (like turbulence) (Gabadinho and oth. 2009). In a sociological perspective, SA can produce typologies of time-related phenomena and extract the determinants of belonging to each type. We concentrate here on two methods that are crucial to our project about multisituated activism in organizational and historical contexts: first, plots of year-by-year individual sequences by historical time; second, the most consistent and successful method to compare sequences, optimal matching analysis (OMA), that was imported from genetics and computer science in the 1980s.

We rely on Abbott and his colleagues' groundbreaking works about optimal matching analysis applied to social sciences, especially to the sociology of work and professional careers (Abbott 1983 1995a; Abbott, Hrycak 1990; Abbott and Barman 1997). The method was applied to a larger range of topics: the sociology of work (Rosenfeld 1992; Halpin, Chan 1998); joint work and family sociology (Anyadike-Danes and Mcvicar 2003, Lesnard 2006 2008a 2008b; Lesnard and de Saint Pol 2006, Widmer and oth. 2003); demography (Billari 2001); sociological survey methodology (Pollien and Joye 2009); and geography (Pribyl 2003). As a new approach, diverting the methodological interest of social scientists from the general linear model (regression models, event history analysis, time series analysis) to narratives, events, and turning points (Abbott 2001), SA generated some discussions and some critics. Some theoretical assessments of the method have been given by Halpin and Chan (1998), Levine (2000), Elzinga and Liefbroer (2007), Aisenbrey and Fasang (2007), and Mayer (2008). Alternative methods or variants have also been proposed by Dijkstra and Taris (1995), Elzinga (2003), Elzinga and Liefbroer (2007), Saporta (1996), and Grelet (2002). Abbott responded to some of the critics (1995b 2000); the debate, which today is still open, generated increasing demand for a more accurate description and explanation of sequential phenomena. Nonetheless, concomitant to these theoretical discussions and empirical applications, statistical and software operationalizations have been proposed—first by Abbott<sup>15</sup>, then by Rohwer and Poetter<sup>16</sup>, Gauthier, Bucher, Widmer and Notredame<sup>17</sup>, and Gabadinho, Ritschard, Studer and Müller<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> *Optimize* software, 1997.

The general principle of sequence analysis applied to multisituated individual, that is, to biographies made of several simultaneous careers, can be summarized accordingly: each step of an individual trajectory in each of the  $c$  careers is coded according to  $c$  standardized alphabets of states. To each career, with an alphabet of  $s$  states, is associated a matrix of  $s*s$  costs of comparison of pairs of states, set either at a constant value, or computed from the data (eg, transition rates between states), or in relation to the objective difference between states. The matrices are used to compare, one by one, all the successive states composing each pair of individual trajectories. The distance (or dissimilarity index) between individuals  $a$  and  $b$  is the minimum sum of costs of all the elementary operations needed to convert  $a$  into  $b$ , elementary operations being deletions, insertions, and substitution of states. This produces a  $N*N$  similarity matrix of distances, to which any relevant clustering (usually, hierarchical, ascending model with square euclidean distances and Ward aggregation algorithm), multidimensional scaling, and factor analysis methods can be applied. Clusters are finally described and/or explained through cross-tabulation and logistic regression models, using variables endogeneous, and mostly heterogeneous, to longitudinal data: social and economic resources, ideological attitudes, socioeconomic status, and so on.

The specific relevance of SA, and especially OMA, compared to other longitudinal statistical methods, are now more and more recognized in the realm of sociology and demography. Abbott (1995: 95) initially insisted on the following four assets: repeatedness (states can repeat or not), internal dependence (successive states can be dependent or not, even in the form of a Markov process, with a scalar probability of any given  $n+1^{\text{th}}$  state after any given  $n^{\text{th}}$  state), external dependence (there can be various degrees of dependence between various whole sequences) and causality (sequences can be studied for themselves, or as an independent or dependent variable). Ten years and several empirical studies later, we may point at three more assets of SA: a flexible handling of missing values and ill-categorized states, which are common in all longitudinal questionnaire studies, either through panel or retrospective surveys; robustness to censorship and varying length of sequences, which are also common phenomena due to age variations and to unfinished careers at survey time; and the possibility to adjust the time period according to available data and to the research

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<sup>16</sup> Optimal matching package in *Transition data analysis* software, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> *Saltt* package (2009) in *T-Coffee*; see also: Notredame and Higgins 2000.

<sup>18</sup> *TraMineR* package (2008, 2009) in *R*.

question<sup>19</sup>. These features make SA and its variants a good fit for *descriptive data analysis* (Le Roux, Rouanet 2004). In this way, SA both differentiates from and supplements time series analysis, which aims at fitting a continuous sequence with a simple generator, Markov models, which estimate transition probabilities step-by-step between categorical sequences, and event history analysis, which determines the likely time before transition between one step and the next.

In OMA, each sequence is considered as a whole—that is, including all the internal biographical dynamics, and without assuming constraining hypotheses on the succession of states. As explained by Abbott (2001: 16):

*What is at issue is the nature of the regularities to be found. The cases should be seen as fish in a lake (i. e., as moving dots in an n-dimensional state space). If they swim in a regular pattern, linear models (and their temporally stochastic derivatives) can capture those models. But if they are constrained by weeds always to swim around certain parts of the lake in certain ways, then only sequence methods can discover the patterns. If the exact shape of past history has binding effects on the future, too, there will be ‘long’ patterns in the sequences, visible only to whole-sequence-based methods.*

### **Adapting sequence analysis to activist careers**

Although SA is a simple, powerful and open method, our dynamic model of individual activism (see above) and the complexity of our individual trajectories require that we push forward and adapt current uses of SA in the social sciences<sup>20</sup>. The internal complexity of activist trajectories confuses the determination of costs. Relative (and less well known) heterogeneity of careers, contrary to previous studies, increases the randomness of effects of parameters. Several parameters have to be adjusted, weighting more this or that aspect of time (biographical, historical or organizational time), this or

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<sup>19</sup> Our study period goes from 1957 to 1999, the date of the questionnaire survey. 1957 is the earliest significant start. Before that, few respondents indicate any biographical turning points. Moreover, the reliability of answers to some questions is low at early times, like “When did your parents/colleagues/friends learn about your homosexuality? – They have known *forever/since the beginning/since I was a teen.*” Pushing back further the start would also increase the cumulated use of “Not born/minor” state, giving it excessive weight in the OMA and introducing noise in the final clusters.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed account of our approach to multiple sequence analysis, see: Blanchard, Fillieule (to be published).

that aspect of sequences (their total length, the order of states and the duration in each state) and this or that aspect of the structure of the population of sequences (the extreme sequences or the central profiles of the distribution, regarding length, order and duration in each state).

Does SA fit to describe the multidimensionality of structural attributes? How can a method that reduces all the differences between two, sometimes long and complex, series of events or states to one unique number produce a typology that eventually accounts for their diversity? Two steps of the method are decisive so that each distance between two individuals reflects the reality of their difference. Firstly, alphabets of states have to reflect each career's variations, be they hierarchical (the degree of involvement in Aides, the degree of disclosure and acceptance of homosexuality and illness) or not (minority, sexual orientation, HIV status). The best trade-off has to be found between accurateness/richness and simplicity/robustness of alphabets.

Secondly, the choice of costs has to fit, both the structure internal to alphabets and between them, and the theoretical questions at stake. An appropriate balance has to be set between insertion, deletion and substitution costs. If insertion and deletion ("indel") costs are low, the algorithm uses them instead of substitution costs, hence differences in career length weight less: indels distort duration but keep order (Lesnard, Saint Paul 2009). If indel costs are high, they get less "attractive", until being used only to adjust between short and long careers. Conversely, substitutions distort order but keep duration. We set deletion and insertion costs equal, low enough to play more than adjustment and high enough to let substitution costs play a part in most elementary operations.

As for substitution costs, they must seize precisely the relationship between states. We chose field-based objective costs, with pragmatic minor adjustments to help maximise clusters coherence, for three reasons: we already had a good knowledge of the data, having previously studied at length the organization (Broqua, Fillieule 2001); studies of other complex datasets produced good results by relying on objective costs (e. g.: Halpin, Chan 1998; Pollock 2007). And, comparing results from all competing methods, this one appeared more efficient and adapted to our data.

How does SA deal with the different life spheres activists belong to and our multi-situated perspective? Current uses of OMA and sequence mining, mainly in demography and sociology of life course, focus on only one life sphere: family, work or place of living. Exceptionally, two domains with obviously paired dynamics would be studied

jointly (Pollock 2007; Gauthier 2007). Multisequence analysis remains a virgin territory, partly because of methodological obstacles (Blanchard 2005). Our perspective on activist careers implies three careers in three simultaneous life domains: political organization, sociosexual identity, AIDS. Depending on the respondent's profile, one or two of these domains might provide more relevant explanation of the moment of his/her commitment, his/her change of status or his/her exit. This could be studied through combinations of OMA-based monochannel typical trajectories, but at the cost of losing the yearly interactions between careers. A general understanding of interindividual differences of involvement over the whole life course requires that we systematically articulate these three layers of experience throughout time.

Multiple-sequence analysis (Pollock 2007), also called multichannel analysis (Gauthier 2007), considers that each step of the process, resulting of a combination of several statuses and roles in several life spheres, conditions the next steps. This creates typical multisituated sequences. We choose to keep indel costs at a half of the mean of all substitution costs (Pollock 2007) and to combine linearly the substitution costs from all three matrices at each step<sup>21</sup>. Appropriately weighted, all three careers significantly contribute to the final result. On all three dimensions, the clusters of biographies both distinguish clearly and have reasonable internal coherence, relying each on specific typical multisituated sequences.

Last but not least, how does SA account for the processual aspect of structural characteristics? The diachronic complexity of activist careers is obvious. Up to now, sociologists and demographers have usually considered irreversible states or events. Being born, leaving the educational system, marrying, having one's first child, divorcing, retiring, dying generally occur once, reducing the diachronic complexity of sequences. Some of our careers do include irreversible events (becoming HIV-positive, disclosing one's homosexuality to relatives, ending one's studies) but others are reversible and/or recurrent, like getting involved in a SMO, moving from one professional category to another or losing one's job. The combinatory complexity of sequences is all the more increased.

Another shortcoming of current uses of SA is that time is strictly conceived of as the succession of standard steps in one's life. Persons of different ages are compared in a non-historical, loosely contextualized perspective. By contrast, each of our activist's

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<sup>21</sup>This method has been developed by Pollock (2007, implemented in *TraMineR*, Studer and oth. 2010) and Gauthier (2007, implemented in *Saltt*, Gauthier and oth. 2009).

biographical time, formally identical to the time of other activists, is doubly embedded: in the organization's time, with its own specific moments (birth, growing steps, changes in the leadership and recruiting strategies...) and, in a more general historical context, composed of waves of mobilization, evolution of the reception of AIDS epidemic, steps in the scientific and pharmaceutical research on AIDS, etc. These two enveloping times result in generational structures. Fortunately, SA addresses each of these time layers: biographical and organizational times are directly processed by OMA algorithm; biological time is induced by the cost of the minority, initial period, and by indel costs; significant historical events, in and/or outside of Aides, materialize on sequence plots. Moreover, generational time emerges from clusters as a composition of age (biological time) and length of involvement (on graphs and in OMA algorithm).

### **Normalization of AIDS. Between organizational growth and demographic changes**

In France, like elsewhere in Europe and in the US, AIDS epidemic first affected a population of young male homosexuals and, through “affective proximity”, those close to them. This generation of the fight against AIDS, therefore, defines itself through “cognitive proximity,” which is both part of the chain of experience and an element of identification: the common experience of homosexuality and/or of the epidemic (Pollak and Rosman 1989; Pollack 1991a 1991b; Adam 1997; Mendès-Leite and Proth 1997; Duyvendak and Fillieule 1999; Fillieule and Broqua 2000).

However, as the fight against aids takes shape and the associative field grows, the composition of the association evolves towards a greater heterogeneity, reinforcing existing cleavages that were latent during the initial phase of the mobilization and generating new lines of division.

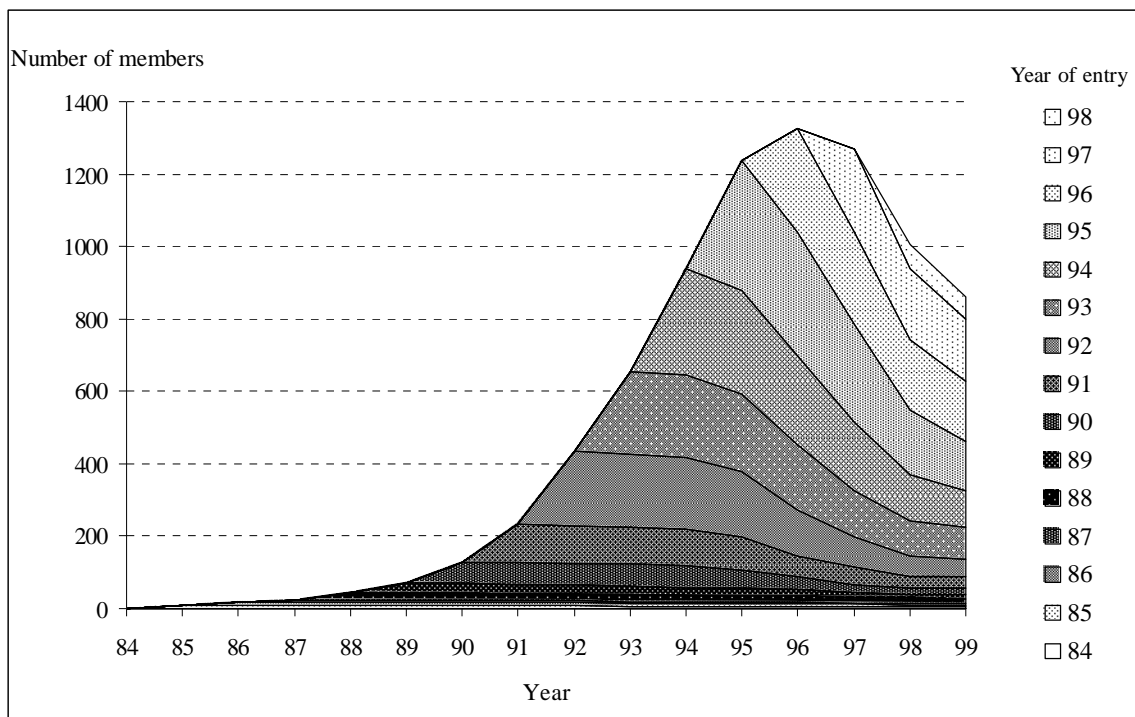
These multiple centrifugal forces are all the more important in the case of Aides that the number of volunteers in the group dramatically increase along the period studied, with the effect of a strong turn over (the average length of active commitment in the association is 2.4 years). Graph 1, which is based on the total number of people having volunteered in Aides, clearly illustrates this situation. As new cohorts join and older activists disengage, the initial core group, marked by a strong cognitive proximity to the disease, reduces as a trickle, giving way to a higher heterogeneous constituency.



Since between the beginning of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s the associative field has experienced a series of dramatic transformations, one can suggest the hypothesis of a progressive but deep change of the structural characteristics of these successive cohorts of volunteers.

As a matter of fact, three major groups of factors have generally been invoked in the literature, which more or less correspond to: the epidemic's evolution (in terms of its prevalence and scientific advancement but also in terms of public framing of the disease); the pace of state intervention (and its consequences in terms of public funding, political representativeness within public agencies, development of employed work and professionalization) and the creation of a multi-organizational field, in the sense of Curtis and Zurcher (1973).<sup>22</sup>

**Graph 1**  
**A cohortal perspective on the evolution of Aides**  
 Data from Aides' list of members (N = 1,908)



In the specific case of France one should add the rebirth of an activist homosexual movement from within the field of anti AIDS associations, due to the creation of Act Up Paris in 1989, on the model of Act Up-New York (Pinell and oth. 2002; Broqua 2005).

<sup>22</sup> See Rosenbrock (2000, 2002), Voegtli (2010) on Switzerland; Epstein (1996) and Gould (2010) on the US.

As a result, new cohorts of activists, more committed to the fight against homophobia and mobilized on the defense of their civil rights (e.g. gay marriage) join the associations.

In the first phase of the fight, that of the pioneers, if the mobilization is solely run by homosexuals, it is built outside existing homosexual associations and, a fortiori, without any reference to the issue of “homosexual identity.” During the first two years of its existence, recruitment is through cooptation and mutual acquaintances, assuring a very strong social and ideological identity (Pinell and oth. 2002). Gradually, due to the progressive identification of the modes of transmitting the virus and the invention of AIDS tests (1985-1986), the extent of the epidemic appears in full light, leading to the development of recruitment procedures and training in helping those who are ill. Nonetheless, the growth in numbers and the increasing heterogeneity of points of view produce a split in March 1987 and the subsequent departure of some of the founding members (Pinell and oth. 2002). 1987 is also the year of the first visible involvement of public authorities in the fight against the epidemic, triggering the creation of many associations with a similar attitude to that of AIDES, in refusing to homosexualize AIDS. It is only from 1989 on, with the appearance of a new generation of associations, that the movement open up a new dynamism in homosexual activism (Pollak 1990 1991; De Busscher, Pinell 1996; Fillieule and Duyvendak 1999; Pinell and oth. 2002).

A second phase, so-called of “consolidation and performance of exceptionalism,”(Rosenbrock 2002) begin in 1988/1989 and extend to the beginning of the 1990s. It is reflected in increasing involvement of public authorities in the struggle against an epidemic, the public image of which has largely changed due to the first data emanating from AIDS tests (even though homosexuals and drug users are still the majority of those affected). The state’s involvement is formalized in 1989, with the creation of three specialized agencies. This phase is also marked by the establishment of new associations, with a clear focus on the experience of seropositivity, who denounce the inaction of public authorities. The appearance of Act Up-Paris, in the vanguard of a “new generation” of associations, results from this conjuncture of two emerging phenomena: the new expression of a public word for those affected by AIDS and the inclusion of a demand for recognition of the homosexual identity in the fight against AIDS. Simultaneously, the AIDS cause diversifies and generalizes, which translates into the arrival of heterosexual women, participating in a spirit of solidarity, motivated by

their professional involvement in the (traditionally female) field of health and social services.

In the third phase, which runs up to the middle of the 1990s, AIDS is turning into a chronic affair, which leads to the first erosion of its special status as a consequence. The management of AIDS is consolidated and professionalized, with a progressive institutionalization of the most prominent voluntary groups, among which Aides occupies a leadership position. As a result, Aides undergoes a phase of vigorous growth at the start of the 1990s (see graph 1), provoking tensions around two issues. On one hand, the massive hiring of new employees, coming partly from the volunteer population, raises questions about the division of labor between professionals and volunteers. On the other hand, an increasingly bitter tension between volunteers and users is emerging.

A fourth phase, generally called of “normalization, normality,”<sup>23</sup> begins, more or less, with the discovery and then the marketing of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapies (HAART) in 1996-1997, with numerous political and social consequences. First and foremost, new antiretroviral therapies extend potential lifetime dramatically, offering new perspectives to People Living With AIDS (PLWA), based both on hope for a better and longer living and also the return of material constraints (mainly in terms of work and bread and butter issues). On the other hand, HAART considerably modify the public image of the epidemic. This gradually shifts from that of a fatal illness to that of a chronic disease, resulting in a certain social and political demobilization. In terms of involvement, this fourth phase is characterized by a tendency of long-term activists to burn-out, often exhausted by the intense demands of their total investment in the cause (Maslanka 1996; Claxton, Catalan, and Burgess 1998; Fillieule and Broqua 2005), which they then replace with more sporadic involvement of diminished intensity. While the appearance of HAART also provokes a reduction in activism from 1996 on, we observe an ideological shift as of 1995, characterized by the increasingly visible participation of Aides in “parallel causes” (foreigners, prisons, insurance, etc.) and in the question of gay and lesbian civil rights. We might tentatively suggest that this particular tempo is linked to the conjuncture of a decline in the mortality rate and in the number of new AIDS cases, along with the competition between groups, Act Up positioning itself in the forefront of a renewed homosexual movement (Broqua 2005) and to the explosion of a very vast social movement in the winter of 1995.

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<sup>23</sup> On that phase, see also Bayer 1991; Herzlich & Adam 1997; Schaeffer et oth. 1992; Setbon 2000; van den Boom 1998.

These remarks indicate clearly the importance of paying attention to the diachronic evolution of volunteers' socio-biological characteristics and their proximity to the epidemics if one wants to describe and characterize more precisely the coexistence and possible replacement of heterogeneous units among the association's constituency. Michael Pollak's study of the dossiers of candidates admitted for training, from 1985-1987 shows that "at least during an initial period, volunteer recruitment quite faithfully reflected the categories of the population with H.I.V." (Pollak 1990, p. 812).<sup>24</sup> However, since 1986-87, this has evolved significantly. The population of volunteers is clearly more feminine (9% of candidates are women in 1985 compared to 35% in 1987). Our own data confirm these tendencies.

First and foremost, from 1989 to 1997, the proportion of female volunteers rose from 26% to 43%. This feminization echoes our remarks on the stages of the fight against AIDS that translate into a progressive "normalization" of the cause. Logically, an increase in the number of women is reflected in the declining proportion of homosexuals, dropping from 74% in 1989 to 57% in 1997. Indeed, gender differences here largely correspond to sexual orientation, homosexual men representing 89% of men responding to the survey and heterosexual women 87% of women, which raises questions about their working together within the association, since both sexual orientation and gender separate them. Data on the proximity to the epidemic provides a partial response. Amongst all the respondents, male homosexuals are the most directly affected. 24% of them claim to be seropositive, versus only 16% of heterosexual men and 5% of heterosexual women. (No gay or bisexual woman claims to have HIV) However, this gap reduces when it comes to other indicators of proximity, i.e. the death or seropositivity of people close to one prior to an activist commitment. Therefore, if the study of affective proximity before involvement seems, above all, strongly correlated to homosexuality, the affective proximity of heterosexual women also proves rather high. Overall, while the differences between gay and heterosexual women in terms of affective experience of the illness effectively delineate separate groups, affective proximity constitutes a powerful common characteristic that provides the beginnings of a response to the question of the conditions of their "cohabitation" within the association.

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<sup>24</sup> Here we use Pollak's (1995) data since the number of responses to our survey in these years is too small to enable a statistically reliable analysis.

## From variables to sequences, from trends to profiles

How do changes in the epidemic's development, the medical solutions and the organization's attractiveness translate into the profiles of the members? Using sequence analysis, we identify and distinguish between one's career in Aides, his or her sociosexual career and his or her career in AIDS. The picture that emerges provides a clearer view of the divides between members and the potential conflicts that may result.

As we explained above, the distance matrix output by OMA is converted into a typology by means of ascending, hierarchical cluster analysis<sup>25</sup>. Each of the ten clusters gathers members that are similar with regard to the statuses they occupied and their experiences in these three careers, but also with regard to the time they spent in them, the order in which they went through them, and the combination of these experiences between the three careers.<sup>26</sup> Table 1 sketches out the features by which we discriminate among classes. Some of the features are extracted from the three careers we used to create our typology, like the length and intensity of involvement in Aides, one's sexual orientation, and the degree and pace of one's disclosure of his or her sexual orientation to others. Some factors, like sex, age at first involvement, one's reasons for becoming involved in the organization, and his or her professional career, are exogenous to the three careers. The contrast of external variables between clusters verifies that the biographical-organizational types that we extracted by means of SA match social structures.

To more precisely test our hypothesis about the cross-determination of biographical trajectories and organizational evolution, we detail five clusters which more or less cover the temporal domain of the study (1984-1999), as indicated by the clusters' median year of involvement. Throughout the typology, we describe prototypical activists (*in italics*).

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<sup>25</sup> See appendix: hierarchical dendogram and choice of ten clusters. The number of ten is a statistically relevant cut in the hierarchical clustering tree. It also provides a detailed enough insight in the diversity of profiles, still without producing any marginally small cluster. Choosing more or fewer classes would also have made sense, but would not provide much more useful information to the question of the coherence and stability of the organization to which all groups belong.

<sup>26</sup> See graphs in appendix: example of three-career profiles and biographies of cluster 9.

**Table 1**  
**Ten profiles composed by multiple optimal matching analysis and cluster analysis**  
 Description of clusters from surveyed sample (N = 502)

Cl.	n	Longitudinal profile of career in Aides	Multiple-career dynamics and subsequences	Other specific features**
1*	18	Early and protracted (1984-1992) engagement, but with few managing positions. As of 1999 (when being surveyed), all have left, for personal reasons.	Mostly homosexual men with HIV+ status disclosed to relatives***.	Higher education***, 61% are managers in professional activity***.
2	26	Entries spread across 1984-1998. High level of commitment.	All homosexuals, of which half HIV+. HIV status not fully revealed. But lots of missing values in the sociosexual career (uncertainty about coming out) and AIDS-related career.	Mix of male and female activists. 54% >45yo (mean: 19%) and 96% intermediate SES/employees (m: 35).
3	40	Early (1987+), long term involvements, either professional (permanent positions, like administrative workers), or intense volunteering.	Only heterosexuals involved professionally, volunteers and management positions go to both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Some were HIV+ before getting involved, but many refuse to reveal their HIV status.	Only class that mixes all sociosexual statuses (50% het. women, 28% hom. men, 15% het. men, 2% hom. women) and ages (40% > 45 yo, m: 19).
4	45	Volunteers all entered from 1989 and left after 2 to 8 years in Aides, mostly keeping contacts inside the organization.	Long-term stable heterosexual and HIV+ activists.	82% women (m: 40). 29% married (m: 11) and 13% divorced (m: 7). 55% >55 yo when engaging (m: 38) High affective proximity to AIDS.
5	84	Volunteers have often been managers in Aides and then returned to volunteering.	Homosexuals with largely uncertain coming out, either really uncertain themselves or refusing to admit in the questionnaire. Some are HIV+ activists, all of whom were + before committing in Aides, sometimes long ago.	Highest proportion of missing values: least robust of all 10 classes. High SES, high political implication and high status in Aides: MV due to disinterest or refusal of questionnaire.
6	53	Strong commitment and rapidly evolving statuses in Aides, with management (45%), and/or full-time paid (21%) positions.	Engagement following the progressive, sometimes slow, revelation of their orientation and HIV-status. Members successively hold volunteer, full-time and managing positions. They sometimes leave but maintain contact.	30% HIV+. High educational level. Many intermediate SES. 72% <35 yo (m: 46).
7	18	Late (1992+), active involvement, mostly as managers, still in Aides as of 1999.	All homosexual men simultaneously leading coming out process, revealing their HIV+ status and engaging in Aides.	Intermediate age (25-35 yo). High proximity to AIDS. 39% interm. SES (m: 24).
8	98	Homogeneous 1993-1997 engagements cohort. Half of members directly held permanent-managers positions and left shortly after.	Long term stable heterosexual and HIV+ activists.	Mix of male and female. 26% married (m: 11). 32% >55 yo (m: 19) 42% employees (m: 32).
9	42	Late (1994+) volunteering with low-level engagement.	Long stable heterosexual and HIV-period before engagement in Aides.	Young heterosexual women. Unusual SES and educational profiles (more self-employed and workers; more graduate education). Low effective and affective proximity to AIDS.
10	78	Late (1994+) untermiated (still in Aides in 1999) volunteering with low-level engagement.	Engagement embedded in slow and unachieved homosexual coming out, with stable HIV+ status.	83% < 35 yo (m: 46). 80% hold only a volunteer position.

\* Clusters are ordered according to their median year of entry in Aides (see graph 2).

\*\* Specific features have to be significantly higher or lower than the mean (m) of the sample of 502 activists.

\*\*\* Evolving features (SES, age, education, proximity to Aides), when mentioned, are measured at the moment of involvement in Aides.

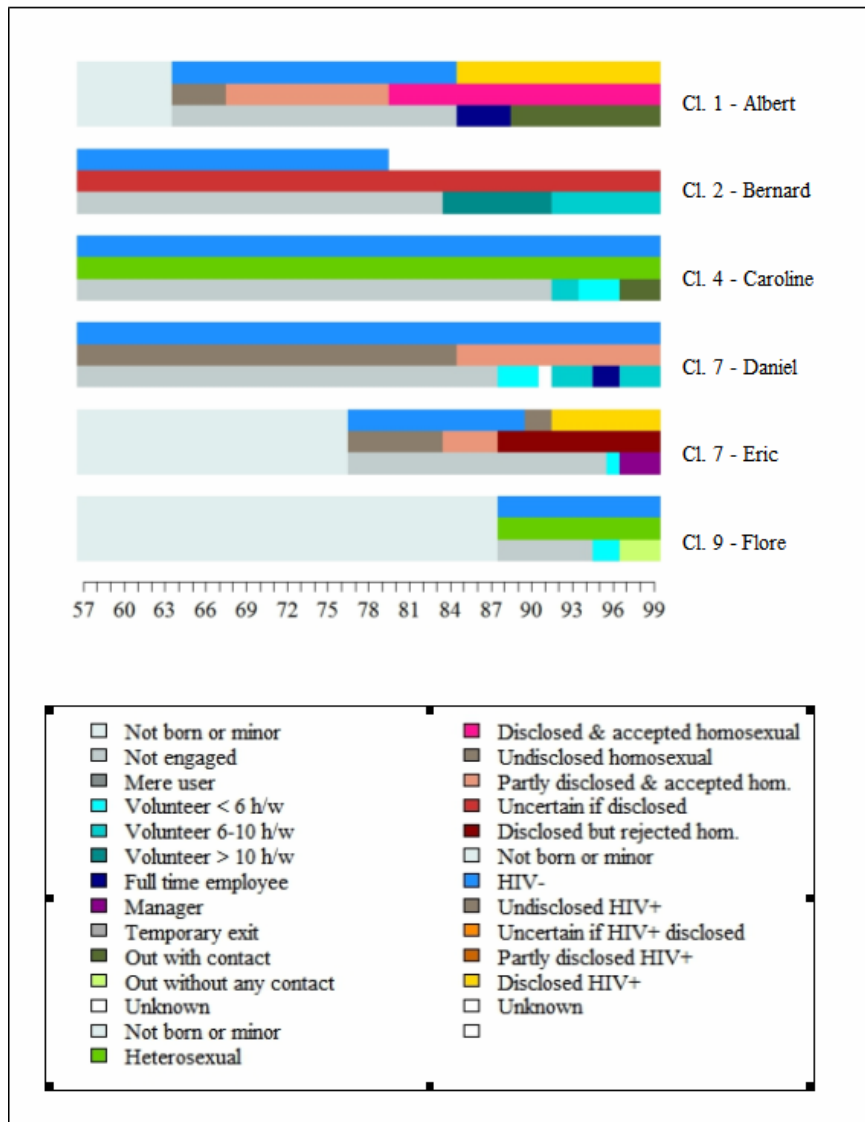
Cluster 1 is a small but significant cluster of activists who entered Aides before 1993. This includes mainly homosexual men and a few heterosexual women with higher education and managing positions at work, who played an active, historical role in the development of Aides. Some logged more than 10 hours of activity per week. Some took responsibilities inside the organization; the ones who left remained close to the organization through maintained contacts. All of them at least partially came-out before engaging, and nearly all of the PLWA revealed their seropositivity to relatives as soon as they found out, inciting their active involvement in a homosexual community which was still heavily ostracized in the 1980s. The high exit rate (sometimes after just one or two years of involvement) reveals two kinds of disengaging processes: either a dense, costly involvement lead them to burn out, or disagreements over the organization's policy caused them to exit to escape conflict. Burdensome careers in Aides and early exits must also be linked to one's personal experience with AIDS. Half of the members are PLWA, and were HIV-positive before joining the association.

*A prototypical activist for cluster 1 is Albert (#423 –see graph 2). He progressively revealed his sexual orientation to his relatives at the age of 20 and made it fully public by age 31. His involvement in Aides began at age 36, in 1985. His primary motive was “to appeal against an anti-AIDS policy that was ill-driven”. At the time, he held a University degree and has since held a managing position at work for 12 years. The same year that he began working at Aides, he learned of his HIV+ status. This turning point was crucial—he simultaneously became a manager in Aides and revealed his illness to all of his relatives. The stigma of being involved in Aides was doubled by his own seropositivity. Albert fully devoted himself to the organization and contributed to its development. He completely disengaged after five years, when he committed to another organization. Albert nonetheless kept contacts within Aides.*

**Graph 2**

**Prototypical activists of clusters 1 2, 4, 7 and 9**

Real activists chosen among clusters according to cluster-representative nature, length, and order of states in three-career biographies (see appendix for more details about graphs)



Cluster 2 also contains pioneers of AIDS activism. The members are active and highly involved volunteers, managers, and full-time employees. All are homosexual and half are HIV+ positive. They differ from people in cluster 1 on several important points: some got involved late, not until the mid-1990s, making it a trans-generational cluster; their sociosexual and AIDS careers are both marked by uncertainty, either because they are not concerned with whether their relatives know about their sexual orientations and illness, or because they refuse/neglect to answer such intimate questions in our questionnaire. As a result, this cluster (like cluster 5) is less robust than others. Sequence analysis is more efficient because it groups these partially incomplete respondents instead



of dropping them and missing a crucial point of our historical puzzle. Moreover, a much smaller number of the members in Cluster 2 had left the organization by the time of the survey than those from cluster 1, indicating that early members of cluster 2 had a long-lasting influence on Aides. The older mean age of this cluster denotes some activists who had more time to socialize before engaging and as a result tolerated demographic changes and policy reversals in the organization without quitting.

*Prototypical activist could be Bernard (#140). He got involved right at the birth of Aides in 1984, “because [his] lover had died from AIDS”. He gave more than 10 hours per week to the organization. He downgraded to less than 6 hours from 1994 on, but did not leave. As Albert, he was older than many other members (43 yo) at the time he got involved. He was also holding a higher education diploma and worked as a manager. Unfortunately, Bernard did not fill any question about HIV, so his career in AIDS is blank from the start of the epidemic. This selective refusal, and the fact that he did not provide any dates for his coming out (although admitting it is fully completed in 1999), can be explained by the generalist, universalist activism he professes. He does not feel the need to tell about himself when reporting about his activism. He left Aides because it was “not active publicly and would not communicate enough”.*

Cluster 4 neatly differs from the two previous ones in the sense that it only contains volunteers, who entered Aides from 1990 onward, and who are all long-term stable heterosexuals and all HIV-negative. This group fits to the above-mentioned pattern of less intense involvement, with higher affective than effective proximity to AIDS. In the same respect, it contains older persons, more often married or divorced than other clusters. This is a sign of the diversification and normalization of the cause. It might also cause a lack of biographical availability resulting in the fact that 90% of its members had already left in 1999.

*Caroline (#137) properly illustrates cluster 4. She became involved in 1992 at 52 years old, in a wish to “give [her] anger against the affair of infected blood [non sterilized blood transfused to ill persons in hospitals in the early 1980s] a positive output”. She took part as a volunteer for two years with intermediate intensity (6 to 10 h./w.), then 3 years at a lower level (<6 h./w.). Then she left, but kept contacts. She was a self-employed worker at the time of her entry and retired the same year she left Aides. This coincidence between political and professional turning points illustrates a*

*propensity, higher in this cluster than in others, to get involved in activism according to one's family and work availability or opportunities. In her case, she was in charge of emotionally and materially supporting PLWA. She resigned with a feeling of "shame of surviving in good health" and at the same time, chose to invest herself in a "less deseperating cause".*

Cluster 7 is composed of people who got involved lately (from 1992 on) but who, at least for one year, held managing (83%, m: 34) and/or full-time clerk positions (22%, m: 12). Cluster 7 can be compared to cluster 2 (see above), which is composed of homosexuals with intense commitment and intermediate SES. Nearly all members of cluster 7 are still became engaged in 1999, even if less intensely and a large part of Aides' leadership in the 1990s belongs to this cluster. Nonetheless, these leading organizational careers are often entangled with a slow, sometimes uncertain, disclosure of HIV-positive status, as well as a progressive disclosure of their homosexuality. By far, they show the highest proximity to AIDS before engaging, both effectively (67% HIV+, m: 14) and affectively (56% strong or intermediate, m: 26). Many activists, still discrete to some of their relatives before their commitment, might have used it as a resource to complete their coming out. We need 2 prototypical activists to illustrate this complex cluster.<sup>27</sup>

*Daniel (#29) got involved at 54 years old in 1988. He has "volunteered his all life long", he likes "helping, serving a cause". And, a friend he knew for 30 years died 2 years before. He started disclosing his homosexuality only 3 years earlier and had not completed yet in 1999. He starts with 3 years of limited involvement in Aides. Then, he takes one year off, retires professionally (lower education, intermediate SES). He comes back in 1992 with a more intense involvement, being at a manager position for 2 years, and 3 more as a mere volunteer again. The case of Daniel illustrates the ties between sociosexual identity, biographical availability and activism.*

*Eric (#475) was 32 yo when he got involved in 1995. His case clearly demonstrates the link between our three careers. At 25 yo, all his relatives would know*

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<sup>27</sup> The high proportion of activists still in Aides in 1999 (89%, mean: 56%) in cluster 7 once again shows the robustness of SA. By gathering right-censored (unfinished) trajectories in the same cluster SA limits the spread of distortion of interpretation to the whole sample. Cluster 7 (like clusters 5, 8 and 10) has to be read as less robust on this aspect at survey time. Conclusions about the final part of commitment in Aides and about the exit are still temptative. At the same time, dropping these respondents would literally mean censoring our sample and missing some relevant kinds of activist careers.

*about his homosexuality, but most of them would reject him for that. Two years later, he tests HIV+, and soon reveals it to his relatives. He gives not less than four reasons for joining, which might explain his intense commitment: his boyfriend died 3 years before, he was ill himself and wanted to help before it was too late, Aides had an office close to his place and, he regretted not to have used condoms to protect himself before. But, as a full time paid employee in Aides, we should not exclude financial aspects too.*

Cluster 9 radically opposes the former. Although identically got involved lately, its members seldom dedicate more than 6 hours per week to voluntary work. Some of them are still in Aides in 1999, but a majority have given up after 1 to 3 years. They belong to the last period described above, young heterosexual women with low effective and affective proximity to AIDS. Their unusual educational and SES profiles add to the contrast they make with the homosexual, male core of clusters 1 2 and 7, as well as their HIV-negative status.

*As a prototypical activist, Flore (#72) enters Aides at 22 years old. She has undertaken long studies at that time. She claims she wanted to be useful and express her solidarity with the victims of the epidemic. She leaves at 26, because of lack of time, without keeping any contacts inside the organization. Her biographical availability has gone down because of several competing involvements.*

Among the many results following this sequential approach to biographies, three have to be highlighted. First, homosexual men, although a coherent sociosexual group, bearing a high effective proximity to illness and mixing AIDS activism with identity issues, mingle with other sociosexual groups in some clusters and extend over the earlier, pioneering clusters. They mix within cluster 1 and 3 with some early committed heterosexual women, and within cluster 2, 5, 6 and 10 with some homosexual women (see table 1). By comparing activists according to their concrete, successive steps in three combined careers, sequence analysis unearthes some shared biographical features that overcome strong sociosexual cleavages.

Members of cluster 1 (see analysis above) share higher educational and professional resources, a somewhat stabilized sociosexual status (coming out completed or homosexuality kept secret) and an intense and sometimes burdensome involvement in the dynamic, newly created Aides. These common features enable configurational

proximity of two structurally opposed groups, with affective proximity to AIDS as a structural equivalent for heterosexuals to effective proximity of gays. Similarly, members of cluster 2 share intermediate and lower SES, an older age, a more problematic situation regarding the disclosure of homosexuality and HIV+ status. They might not only be committed against the epidemic and to defend the homosexual community stroke by it, but also use social resources gained inside Aides to solve the personal difficulties they meet in other life domains. This kind of involvement in Aides lasts longer and overcomes the organization's internal changes, building a bridge between contrasted generations.

Further examination of sequences shows that clusters 1 and 3 include some lesser disclosed gays who use Aides as a way to act with other gays on gay issues without professing this stigmatized activism. They would do so in the early 1990s, at a time when Act up-Paris was not yet competing with Aides and pushing it to claim its homosexual identity. Their less distinctively male and homosexual profiles allow some closeness with heterosexual, female activists. They can be contrasted with another category of gays, who enter Aides in the 1990s, in a newly competitive field of AIDS-activism. They deem the homosexual stigma a main hindrance to the struggle against AIDS and, consequently, combine this struggle with an offensive claim of their homosexual identity. These profiles will logically mingle with female homosexuals, like in cluster 2, 6 and 10.

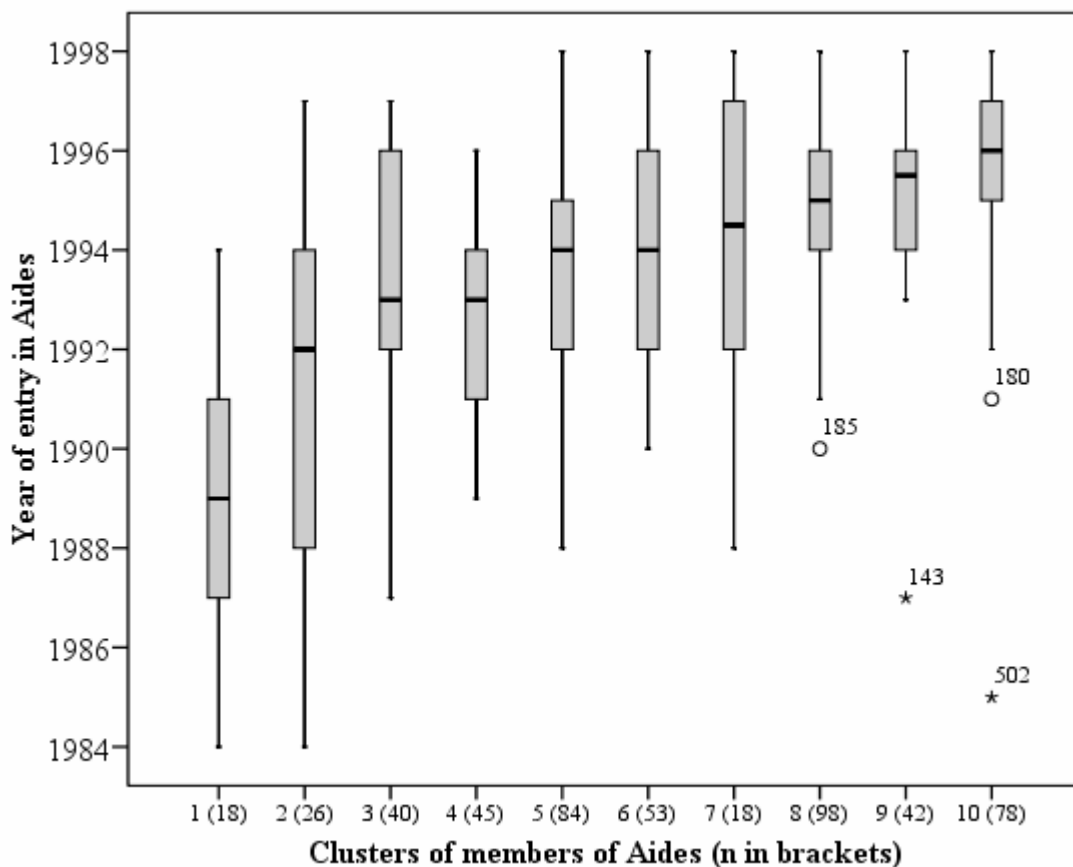
Secondly, sequence analysis unfolds a similar diversity of configurations regarding heterosexual female activists. Previous research usually state that they massively became involved in the 1990s, when AIDS activism became a more common, normalized cause, and that they do so in a logic of care. Indeed, this specific profile dominates clusters 8 and 9, with later, less intense commitments, carried by persons whose education and SES would neatly differ from the average in Aides. But we also pointed to some earlier heterosexual female commitments (cl. 3 and 4), based on a feeling of affective closeness to AIDS, and sometimes to the homosexual cause itself at the same time. Some women would also join Aides for professional reasons, more than for volunteering purposes, and get a steady work contract in the organization (cl. 3 and 8). In this case, like regarding gay activists, the diversity of ideological and material motives explains that clusters elaborated on the basis the structural and configurational biographical dynamics do not strictly reproduce previous analyses based on classical statistical methods. They reveal similar trajectories that would remain invisible otherwise.

Thirdly, the attention paid in this paper to the diachronic evolution of the association's constituency have led us to place the study of the complex interrelations between biographical, organizational and historical time at the center of our analysis. This very centrality of time invites us to return to the generational analyses evoked at the beginning of this paper to finally ask whether sequence analysis allows us to discern, within the generation of AIDS activists, and more particularly within Aides, *generation units* in Mannheim's sense ([1928] 1952). Graph 3 below presents a distribution of 10 clusters as a function of the members' year of joining the association.

**Graph 3**

**A generational perspective on biographical profiles**

Boxplot of distribution of year of arrival in Aides by clusters. Median is represented by bold dash, 50% of members are inside box 25% below and above box, circles and stars represent outliers (>1.5 sd) and extreme values (>3 sd).



On one hand, in fact, the general appearance of the distribution of boxes indicates a temporal order suggesting the existence of generation units. On the other hand, no clear

boundaries can be drawn between these generation units. They do not succeed each other in a mechanical fashion but more or less intersect. From this perspective, it is interesting to note that none of the groups, including the two whose numbers dramatically decreased upon the period (cluster 1 and 4), had “disappeared” by 1999.

Moreover, if one considers each cluster separately, we observe that they are highly concentrated in time. The varying dispersal of members around the median in each box allows us to better assess the relative weight of different clusters in the history of the association, and their importance in the formation and evolution of its collective identity. Indeed, certain clusters, such as those including the founders and longest-standing members (cl. 1,  $n = 18$ , cl. 2,  $n = 26$ ), spread out more than others. However, this is also true of cluster 5 ( $n = 84$ ) that comprises the heart of the core activists of the association at the time of the study, primarily homosexual men, very involved in responsible positions, whose greater reluctance to reveal their sexual orientations and their serological status in the questionnaire reflect the “generalist” ideology that has long prevailed within the association (Pinell and oth. 2002).

Finally, cluster 7 ( $n = 18$ ) is distinctive due to its members’ more recent involvement, their youth, their sexual orientation and their serological status, about which they are very open, but they are similar in their high proximity to the disease and their commitment to the organization. It is these groups that comprise the backbone of the association. Their cumulative presence is continuous and it is they who occupy the leading positions, in some ways playing the role of safeguarding the association’s ideological line and collective identity despite upheavals related to the turn over.

In total, therefore, it is clearly generation units in Mannheim’s sense that we find.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in Mannheim’s conception, political generations are, like social classes, *socially* and not temporally or biologically constructed, around a “*common location in the social and historical process*” (Mannheim 1952: 291). This is this very “*generational location*” which determines the belonging to a same “*generation unit*” (Mannheim 1952: 304). However, Mannheim remains unclear about how to empirically study these

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<sup>28</sup> On this point, we depart from Nancy Whittier’s (1997) definition of micro-cohorts as “clusters of participants who enter a social movement within a year or two of each other and are shaped by distinct transformative experiences that differ because of subtle shifts in the political context” (Whittier 1997:762, we underline. See also Johnston, Aarelaid-Tart 2000: 695).

generation units, since he does not specify the individual characteristics that should be taken into account in order to measure structural positions.<sup>29</sup>

In this paper we argue that sequence analysis gives an empirical foundation to Mannheim's theoretical intuition. In putting at the centre of the analysis an attention to individual structural attributes, we have shown that generation units form around intersectionally defined clusters, which determine the interactions in micro-mobilization contexts, the way individuals internalize a vision of the world, of the place of the group in this world and one's place in this group, the way they incorporate or resist organisational modelling (e.g. norms of self-presentation, status, proposed or reserved activities, role-taking, internal discourse in the movement. See Lichterman 1995; Whittier 1995; Fillieule 2010) etc. All that contributing to fix members' shared identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Stryker, Owens, and White 2000).

## **Conclusion**

In her 1997 seminal article, Whittier suggested that "more research is needed to determine whether cohort turnover is a mechanism for producing change in a broad array of movements. (...) The generational dynamics (or lack thereof) are important to consider". (Whittier 1997: 776). In this paper, by focussing on internal heterogeneity of movement constituencies, we have contributed to this debate on the role of internal processes to the transformation of social movements at three levels:

by taking into account the multidimensional, multisituated and processual characters of structural attributes, we propose a theoretical specification of what is heterogeneity within movements; by applying sequence analysis to a questionnaire sent to former and actual volunteers, we offer a new way of empirically identifying and analysing the effects of such an heterogeneity; by exemplifying the importance of generation units to change as well as to continuity in AIDES, we contribute to the vivid debate about the conditions for change and stability among SMOs.

Finally, our results suggest that the coexistence and succession of generation units must not only be thought of in terms of internal conflict and dysfunction or, if one

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<sup>29</sup> Pilcher (1994: 483) tries to specify these characteristics along three dimensions. He argues that individuals of the same age-group are internally stratified along at least three dimensions: by their geographical and cultural location; by their actual participation in the "characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period" (Mannheim 1952: 304); and by their differing responses to a particular situation. Yet, one sees easily that the last dimension is all but precise and empirically usable.

prefers, generational rupture. The question may also be seen from the opposite perspective. To what degree does the heterogeneity resulting from the diversity of generation units contribute to foster organizational continuity? The maintenance and constant adaptation of a formal organization, as well as that of a collective identity, occurs in reality through continuous rearrangements, most effective if spread over time. Here we can only agree with the idea developed by Ghaziani (2008), that internal conflicts may, under certain conditions, contribute to the formation and maintenance of collective identities.



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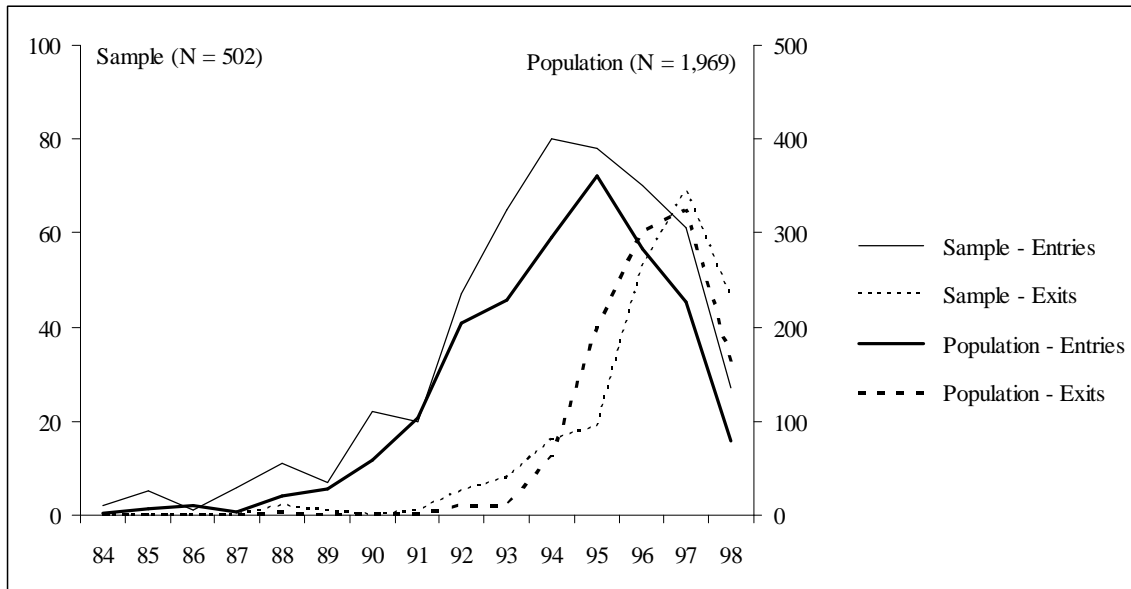
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## Appendix

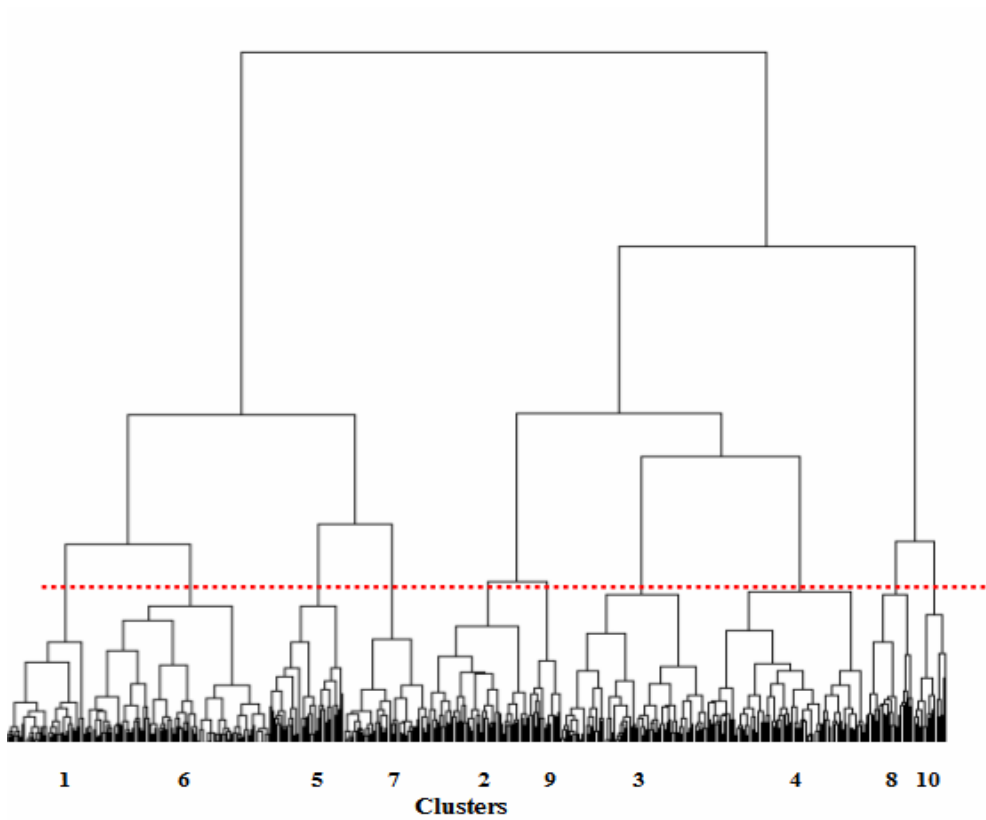
### 1. Representativity of flows of members from questionnaire sample

Comparison of survey sample and population from members' directory



## 2. Clustering dendrogram (N = 502)

Ascending hierarchical agglomerative clustering analysis applied to distance matrix resulting from optimal matching analysis of three-career biographies.

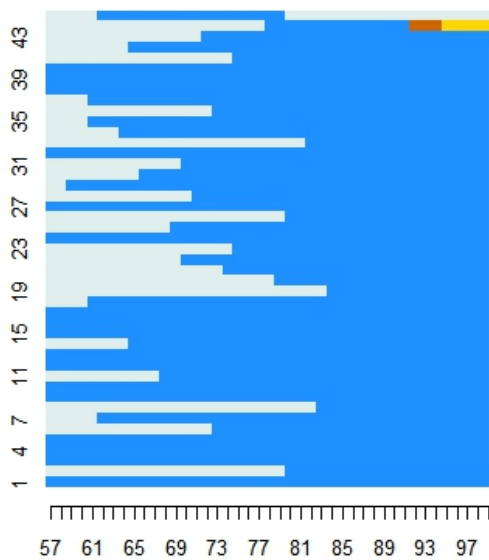
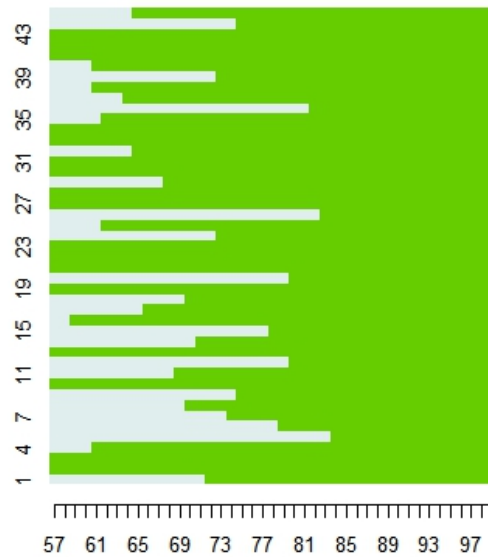
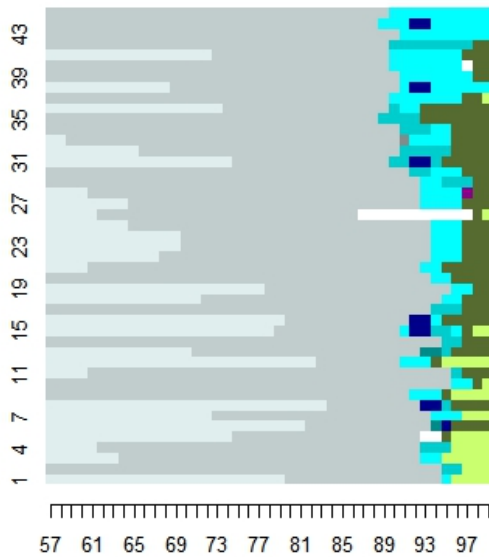




### 3. Example of graph of biographies - cluster 9 (n = 43)

Individual career in Aides, sociosexual career and career in AIDS

Dates from 1957 to 1999. Order differs between the 3 careers.



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Not born Minor</li> <li>□ Not engaged</li> <li>□ Mere user</li> <li>□ Volunteer &lt;6h/w</li> <li>□ Volunteer 6-10h/w</li> <li>□ Volunteer &gt;10h/w</li> <li>□ Full time employee</li> <li>□ Manager</li> <li>□ Temporary exit</li> <li>□ Out w/contact</li> <li>□ Out no contact</li> <li>□ Unknown</li> <li>□ Not born Minor</li> <li>□ Heterosexual</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Disclosed &amp; accepted homosexual</li> <li>□ Secret homosexual</li> <li>□ Partly disclosed &amp; accepted hom.</li> <li>□ Uncertain disclosure</li> <li>□ Disclosed but rejected hom.</li> <li>□ Not born Minor</li> <li>□ HIV-</li> <li>□ Secret HIV+</li> <li>□ HIV+ uncertain discl.</li> <li>□ Partly disclosed HIV+</li> <li>□ Disclosed HIV+</li> <li>□ Unknown</li> <li>□</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

#### 4. Biographies - cluster 9 (n = 43)

Combined individual careers in Aides, sociosexual career and career in AIDS

