

How does your weekend stack up?

A cluster analysis of how Americans' spend their weekends

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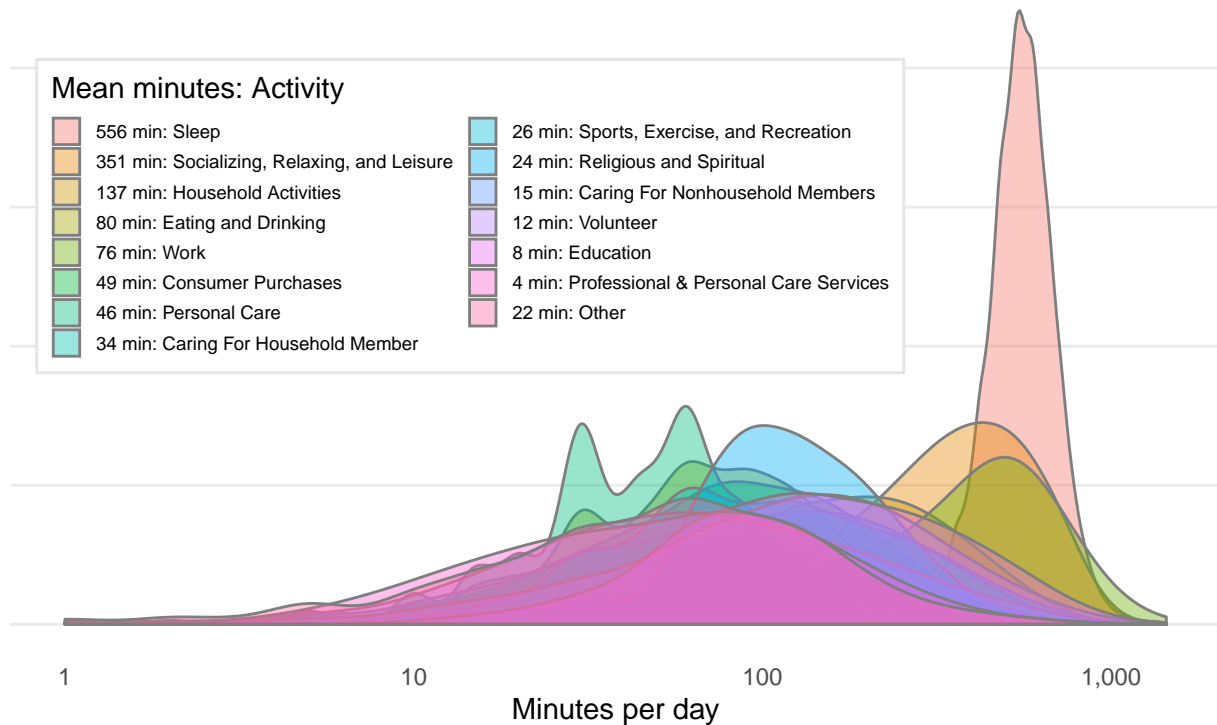
Introduction and research question

What are your plans for the weekend? While it is easy to imagine that American's spend their weekends differently, this is a challenging question to empirically validate.

What are your plans for the weekend? Describing the average American's weekend plans in an easy exercise in descriptive statistics. On average, the typical American sleeps 10 hours sleeping, 6 hours socializing and relaxing, 2 hours on household activities and 1 hour eating and drinking. This picture of how the average weekend is spent is shown in the plot below.

Weekend time use activities

Non-zero values only



While this plot speaks to the population average, it provides little relevant information about how actual individuals spend their time. Moreover, averages and traditional supervised methods are not designed to identify patterns of how different groupings of Americans fill their weekends.

The idea that different people spend their weekends in different ways is unsurprising but it is hard to quantify. Unsupervised machine learning, also referred to as cluster analysis, or clustering, offers a solution to these types of unstructured problems. The method applies distance metrics and linear algebra to recognize patterns and can quantify if different groups of Americans spend their weekends in different ways.

Data on time use was obtained from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), which measures how Americans spend their time doing various activities such as work, household activities, volunteering, leisure, and socializing. The ATUS is the most comprehensive measure of time use and obtains a representative sample of how Americans spend their day.

Key findings

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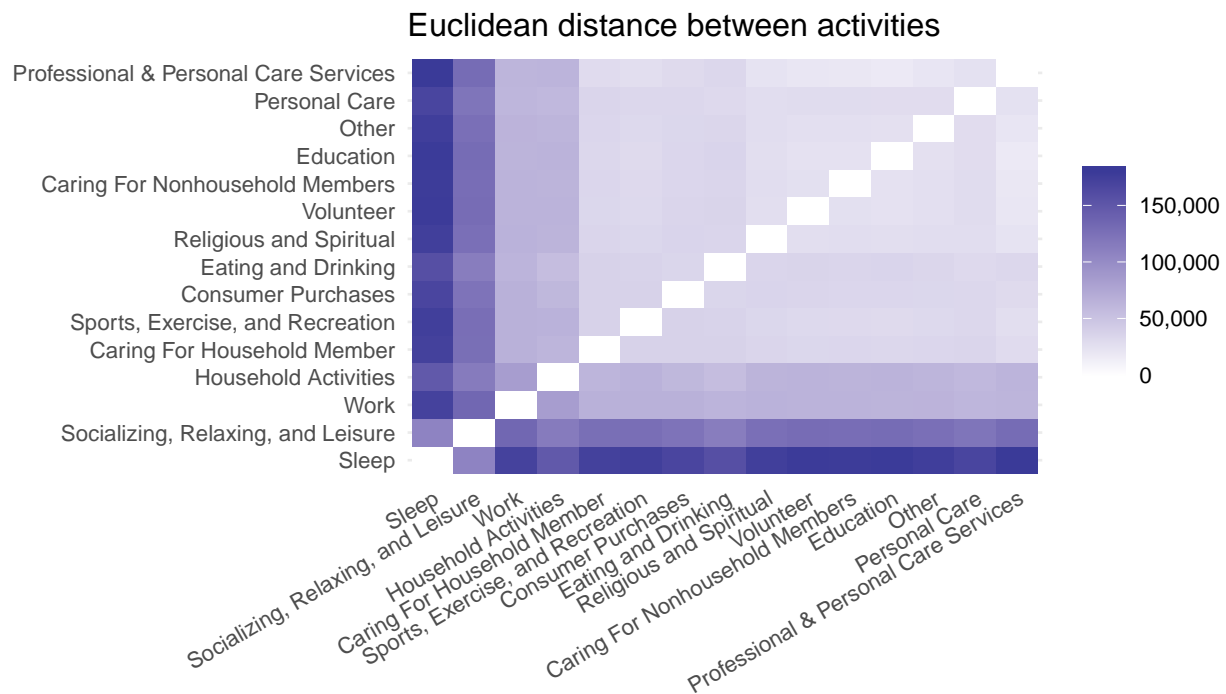
key points on data not yet mentioned - weekend only - going to examine a weighted sample of 25k

Analysis

Distance

Clustering algorithms rely on calculating measures of distance between data points and variables. There are several established metrics such as the euclidean, manhattan, Jacquard and many others. As a starting point, it is useful to examine the distances between variables to understand if an underlying relationship exists.

The distance matrix confirms some simple assumptions. For example, those who work more on the weekend spend less time sleeping. Similarly, those who work more on weekends have less social and leisure time. While these simple comparisons confirm the assumption that patterns exist they do not reveal any underlying complex structure.

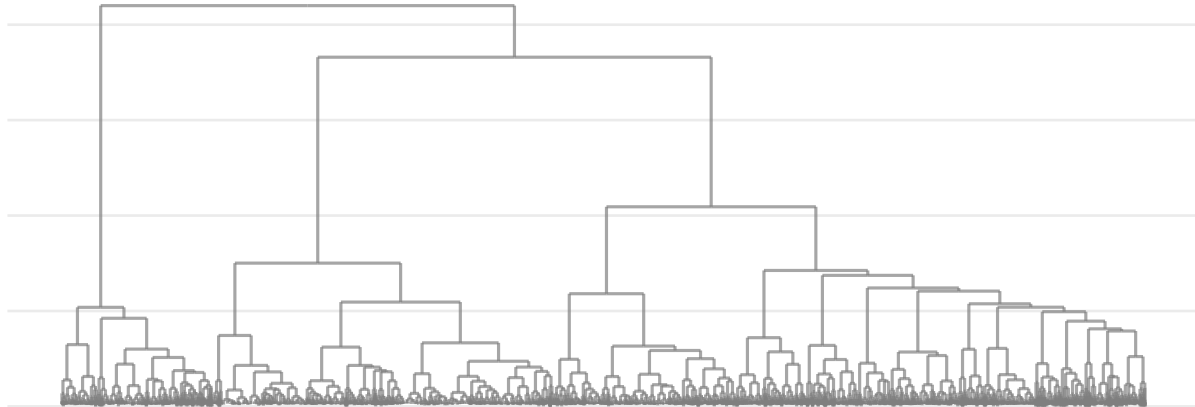


Clustering

Hierarchical clustering extends the use of distance metrics to understand the similarities and differences between data points (i.e. the people), rather than the distance between variables. A powerful way to visualize this distance is by plotting a dendrogram of the clusters. Hierarchical clustering groups observations by iteratively reducing the number of clusters by combining data points. Dendrograms are a way of visualizing these relationships and identifying existing groupings. In this context, branches that are closer to one another represent people with more similar weekends.

Hierarchical clustering

Ward (D2) linkage



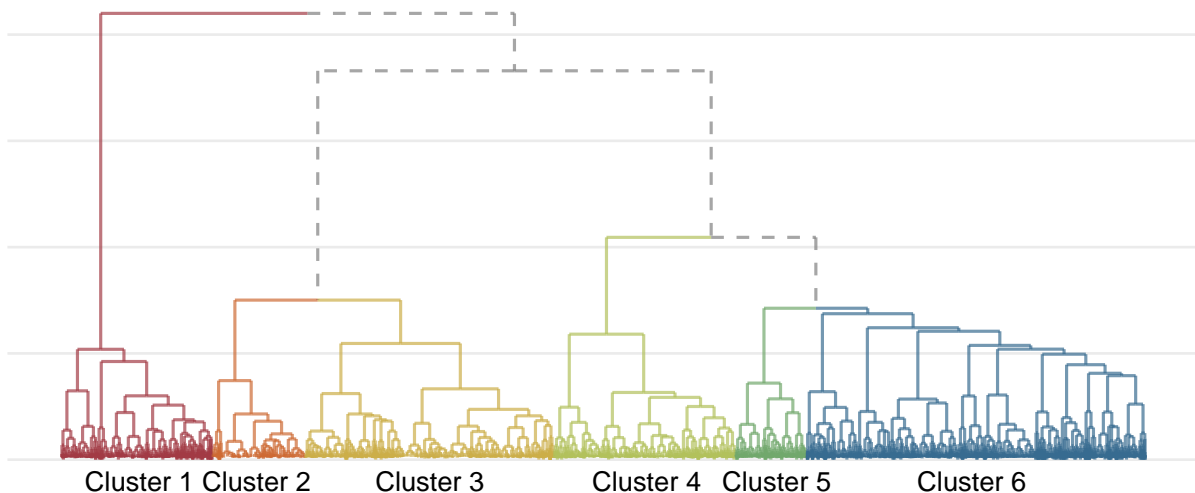
Choosing number of clusters

Identifying the final number of clusters is a nuanced and subjective exercise. That being said, mathematical and quantitative guidelines exist to aid this decision. To determine the number of groups the Calinski-Harabasz index, Silhouette width and Gap-statistic were consulted.

These metrics, combined with the visualization provided by the dendrogram suggest that American's weekend activities can be divided into 6 distinct clusters. Of the 6 final clusters, 5 represent distinct groupings while the 6th appears to be more general.

Hierarchical clustering

Ward (D2) linkage: 6 cluster solution



Hierarchical clustering is only one of many clustering methods. We considered the popular K-means algorithm as well as model based clustering. A hierarchical approach offered the best fit to this particular data set. Within the time use survey, many respondents indicate 0 minutes spent on several activities. The K-means algorithm assumes all variables have an equal variance and does not handle zero inflated variables well. These assumptions do not fit the specifics of time use. Simmialty, model based clustering has more rigid assumptions that variables come from a multivariate normal data generating process. Hierarchical clustering avoids these assumptions and is why it is a good fit for this particular clustering problem.

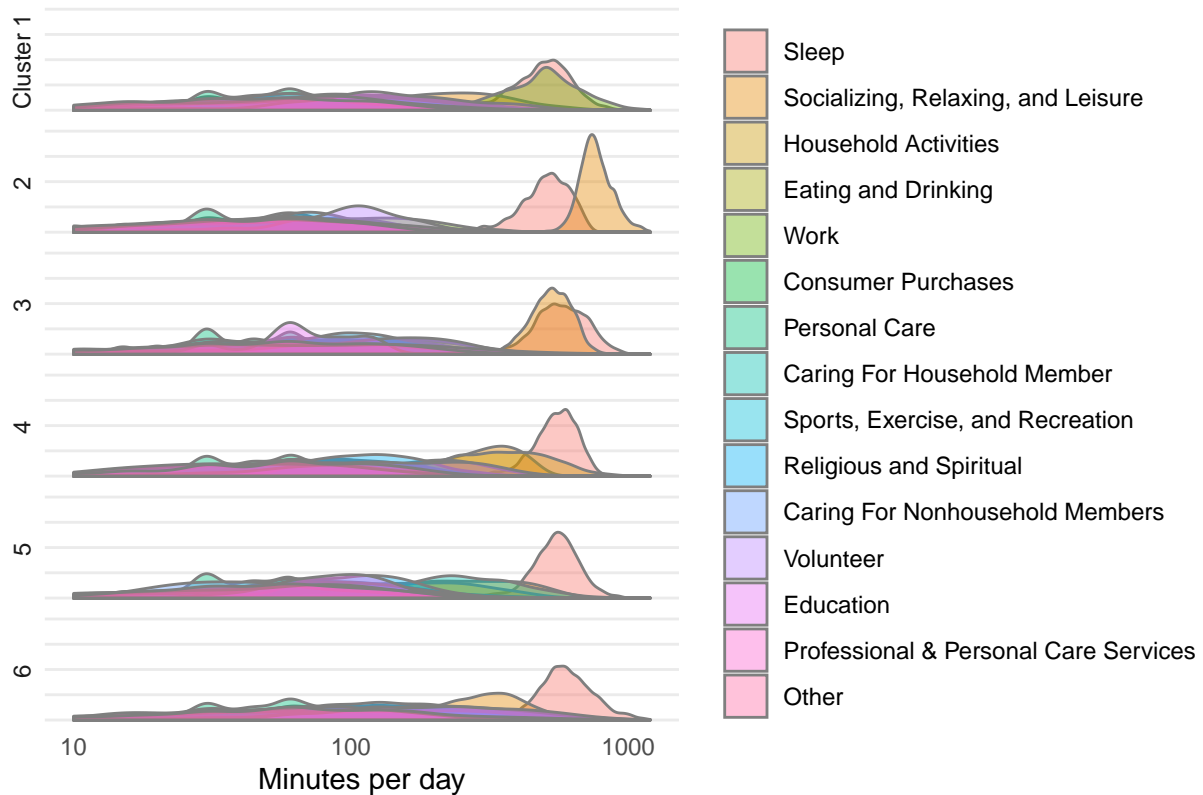
Frequently, variables are scaled prior to cluster analysis. In this particular context, variables are already recorded on the same scale so no transformations were included and variables were left in their original non-transformed format.

Breaking down the clusters

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- Cluster 1:
- Cluster 2
- Cluster 3
- Cluster 4
- Cluster 5
- Cluster 6: Catch all 'Other'

Weekend activities split by cluster

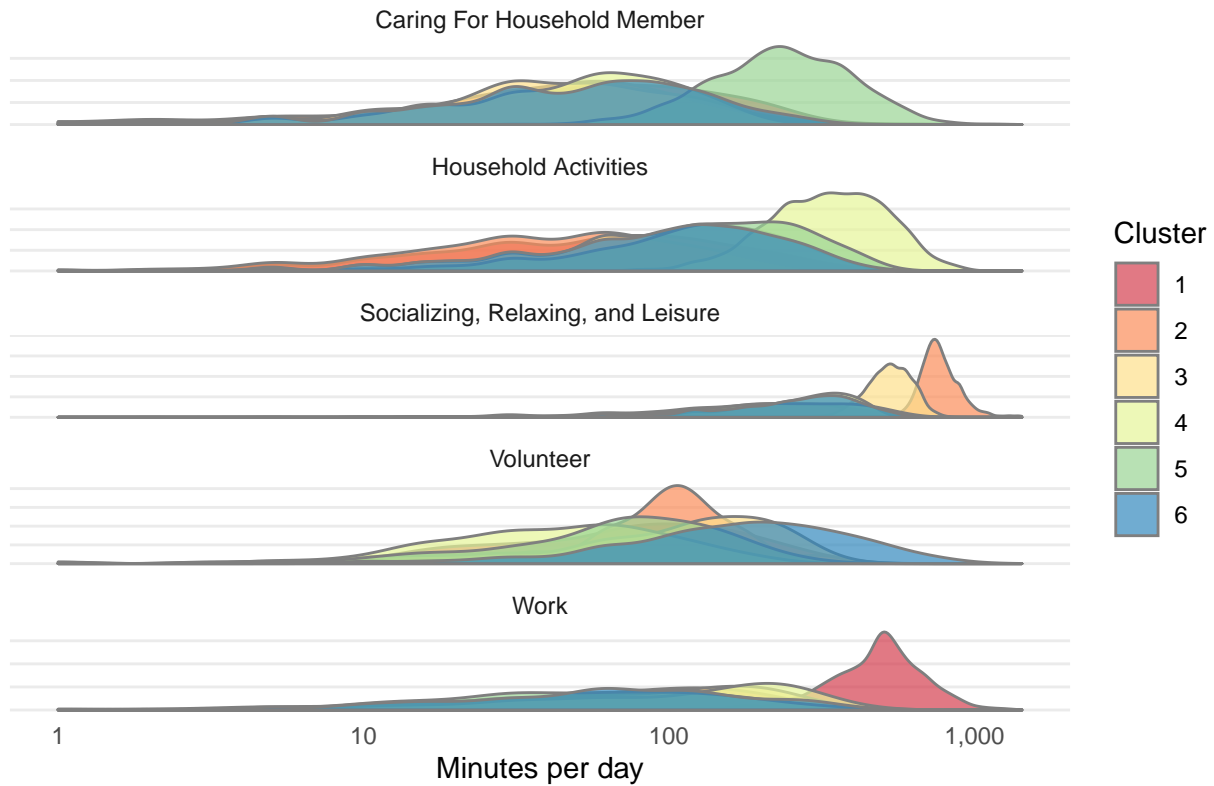


Zoom in on specific activities

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Discuss how this cluster split this activities the most

Most distinct activities after accounting for cluster membership



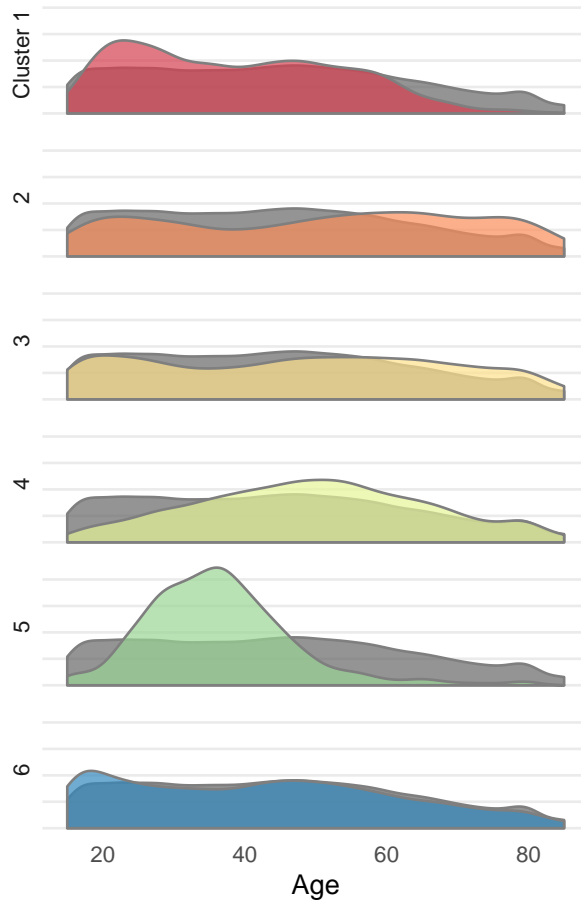
Discuss demographics

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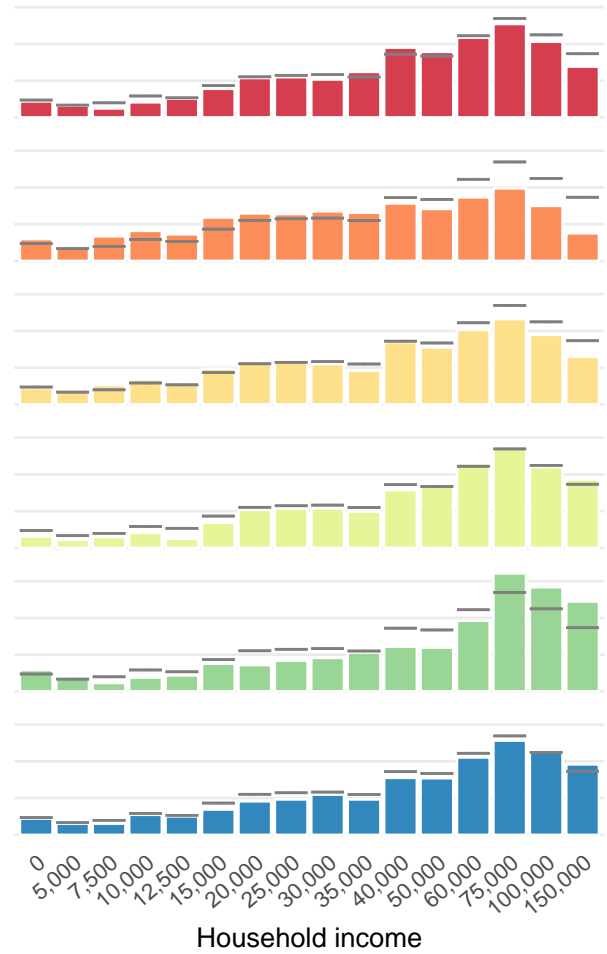
discuss how some of the cluster difference are associated with different demographics

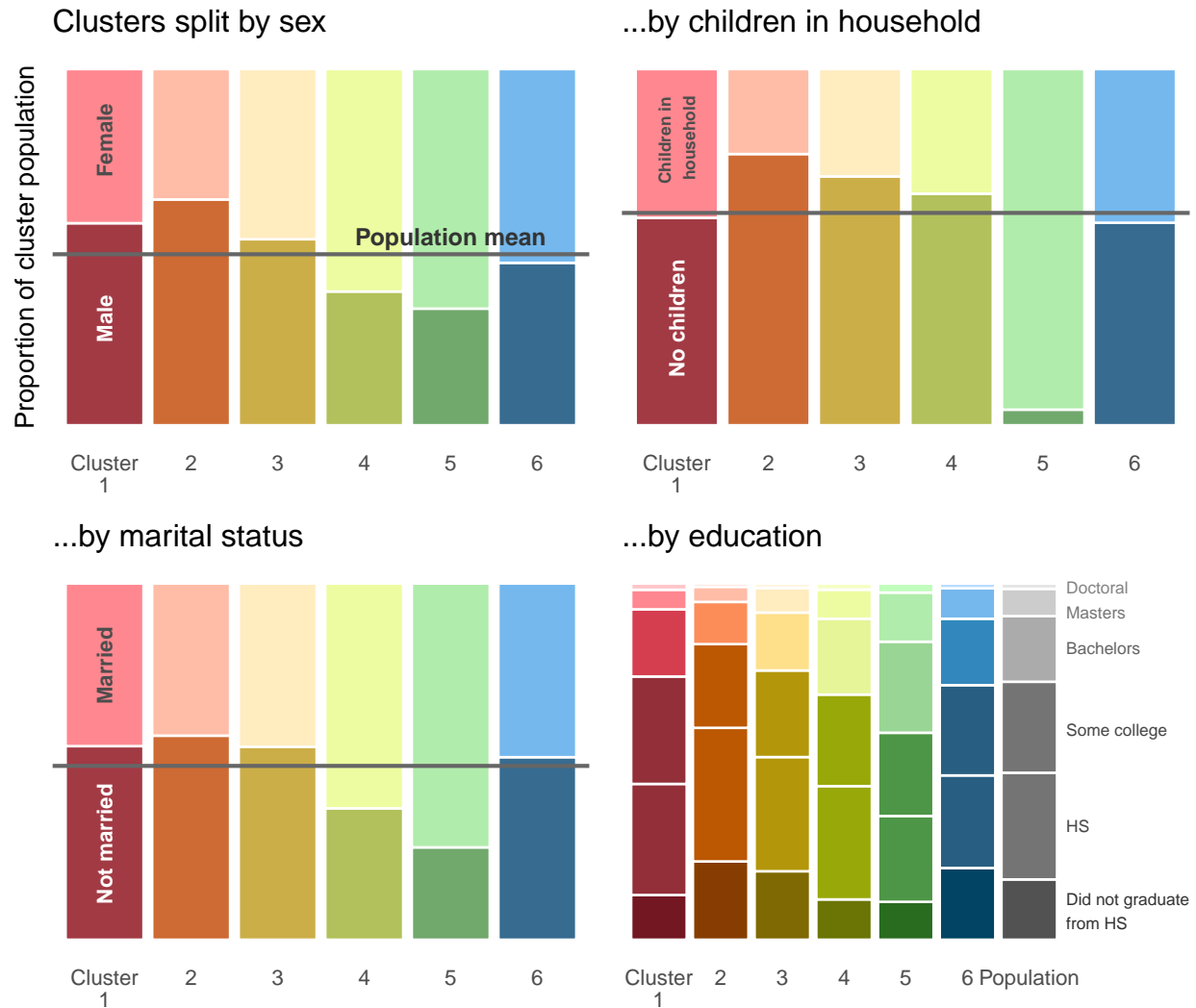
Age, income, married, child, educate, gender

Clusters by distribution of age
Grey distributions represent the population



...by household income
Horizontal lines represent the population





Conclusion

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