

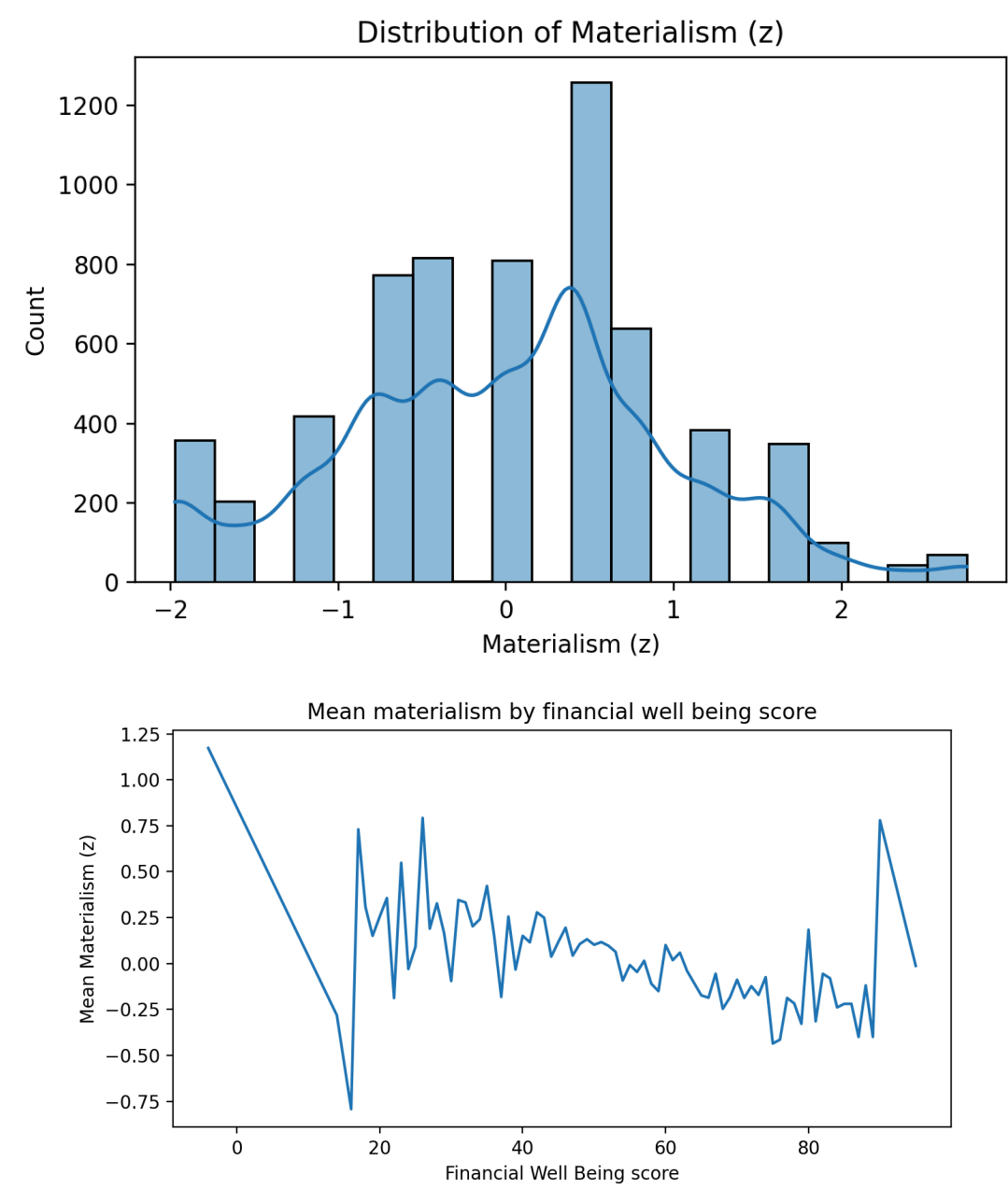
Financial Well Being, Stress, and Materialism in a National U.S. Sample

Author: Lucas Svirsky, Applied Data Analysis (QAC 201), Wesleyan University

Introduction

- Materialism is the importance people place on owning and acquiring possessions.
- Higher materialism has been linked to more debt and poorer financial and subjective well being.
- Perceived financial well being (FWB) and psychological stress are key psychological factors that may shape how strongly people endorse materialistic values, above and beyond income.
- This project uses the CFPB Financial Well Being survey to examine how FWB and stress relate to materialistic values in a nationally representative U.S. adult sample.

Results



Research Questions

1. Is higher perceived financial well being associated with lower materialistic values?
2. Is higher psychological stress associated with higher materialistic values?
3. Exploratory: Does the FWB–materialism relationship differ across levels of stress?

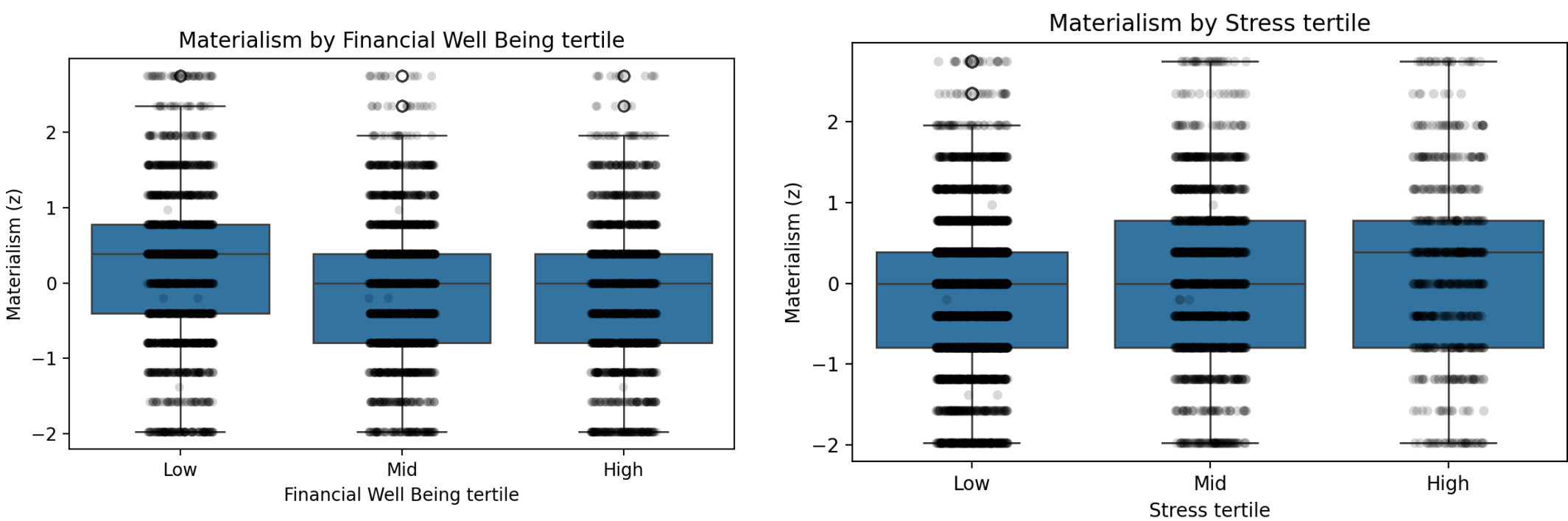
Methods

Sample

- Data: CFPB Financial Well Being survey (national U.S. adults).
- Analyses use the survey weight finalwt to approximate the U.S. adult population.
- Final analytic sample for the main regression: N = 6,237 with complete data on key variables.

Measures

- Materialism
 - Three items (MATERIALISM_1, _2, _3) averaged to create a 3 item index.
 - Standardized to a z score mat_z, so higher values reflect higher materialism.
- Financial Well Being (FWB)
 - CFPB FWB score (0–100), cleaned for survey missing codes.
 - Standardized to FWB_z.
 - Grouped into tertiles: Low, Mid, High (FWB_tertile).
- Stress
 - Psychological distress scale (DISTRESS), cleaned for missing codes.
 - Standardized to STRESS_z.
 - Grouped into tertiles: Low, Mid, High (STRESS_tertile).



The bivariate analyses show that materialism is modestly related to both financial well being and stress. For financial well being, the weighted Pearson correlation between materialism (z) and FWB (z) was $r = -0.12$, $R^2 \approx 0.015$, 95% CI [-0.15, -0.09], $p < .001$, with an effective N of about 4,655. Consistent with this, the boxplot in Figure 2 shows that median materialism is highest in the Low FWB tertile and slightly lower in the Mid and High tertiles. For stress, the weighted correlation between materialism (z) and stress (z) was $r = 0.13$, $R^2 \approx 0.018$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.16], $p < .001$, effective N $\approx 4,641$, and Figure 3 shows median materialism increasing from Low to Mid to High stress tertiles. A three variable plot of materialism versus financial well being, colored by stress tertile, indicates that all stress groups share a negative slope between FWB and materialism, and that the High stress group tends to sit above the Low stress group at any given FWB level, suggesting that more stressed individuals report higher materialism. The weighted linear regression of materialism (z) on FWB (z) produced a slope of $b = -0.13$ (SE = 0.01, $t = -9.77$, $p \approx 2.3 \times 10^{-22}$, $R^2 = 0.015$, N = 6,237). This means that a one standard deviation increase in financial well being is associated with about a 0.13 standard deviation decrease in materialism. The regression results closely match the bivariate correlation, confirming a small but reliable negative association between financial well being and materialistic values.

Discussion

- The three variable pattern suggests that the protective link between FWB and materialism is clearest for respondents with low or moderate stress and weaker among those with high stress.
- Effect sizes are small: FWB explains about 1.5% of the variance in materialism, and stress explains about 1.8%, so many other factors also shape materialistic values.
- Limitations include the cross sectional design (cannot infer causality), self report measures, and the brief 3 item materialism index.
- Nevertheless, the findings align with prior literature that connects materialism to financial strain and lower well being and highlight perceived financial well being and stress as potential levers for interventions that aim to reduce harmful, debt driven consumption.

References

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