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# DoYou Feel Financially Secured? The Investigation of Economic Indicators and Consequences of Financial Well-Being

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***Abstract*** – The economy has been in downward movement in the past few years in the United States as well as different parts of the world. Consumers' financial situations have been found to influence their purchase behaviors. While some personal finance experts blame consumers' (lack of) spending plans for their financial situations, others suggest that consumers' perception of their financial standing influences their purchase plans. Using two nationwide large scale survey studies, we investigated how the consumer's financial well-being affects planned and unplanned purchasing decisions from two competing perspectives. Supporting our notion of financial well-being as a status, the results revealed consumers with high financial well-being are more likely to make planned purchases and less likely to make unplanned purchases. We also examined the value of applying economic indicators as proxy measure of financial well-being. Instead of income or debts, wealth was found to be the most important economic indicator of financial well-being.

***Keywords*** – Financial well-being, Financial Security, Economic indicators, Planned purchase, Unplanned purchase

***Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners*** – We searched for the best economic indicators as well as the potential consequences of financial well-being. Although further work is needed in this area before definitive conclusions can be drawn, the potential implications are broad. Our findings can serve as the guideline for marketing educators, researchers and practitioners to understand how the consumer respond to their financial situations and what

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factors could potentially influence their perceived financial security and shopping behavior. We believe this research is significantly relevant to all of them, especially given the fact that most of us are affected by the economic downturn.

# Introduction

Throughout the current economic recession, we have witnessed the overwhelming pressures that accompany a worldwide credit crisis. Previous studies have shown that many individuals strive for financial success (Kasser and Ryan 1993), which makes the current financial crisis a critical time to further understand how financial situations, and our perceptions of those situations, influence consumer decisions and well-being. One way that financial situations have been proposed to influence consumer decisions is through financial well-being, which is conceptualized as an individual's subjective assessment of the adequacy (Vera-Toscano, Ateca-Amestoy, and Serrano-Del-Rosal 2006) and stability (Poduska 1992) of his or her financial situation. Past work has demonstrated the importance of financial well-being. Increased financial well-being is associated with: (a) lower stress (Norvilitis et al. 2003); (b) higher self-esteem and sense of personal control (Krause, Jay, and Liang, 1991); and (c) lower depression (Rocha and Strand 2004). Fox et al. (2002) found that lower financial well-being predicted an increase in partner violence.

# Economic Indicators of Financial Well-Being

Using measurement items like the InCharge Financial Distress scale to capture individual consumers' financial well-being is not always feasible, therefore, it is important and often unavoidable for marketers to use various economic indicators which have been proposed to capture financial well-being such as income (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Hayo and Seifert 2003; Walson and Fitzsimmons 1993), wealth (Hayo and Seifert 2003), debt (Walson and Fitzsimmons 1993), and expenses (Walson and Fitzsimmons 1993). Nonetheless, to our best knowledge, there is no empirical study that examines a variety of economic indicators simultaneously. So, our paper will fill this gap and compare these economic indicators.

One way to understand the importance of financial well-being to consumer decision making, and the underlying mechanism through which economic indicators may be critical for consumers' financial well-being, is via Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) originally proposed that human motivation can be classified within a hierarchy of needs where lower needs must be, at least partially, satiated before higher needs become salient. Physiological needs, the lowest needs in the hierarchy, focus individuals on the satisfaction of behaviors concerned with survival, such as food and hydration. Safety needs

encompass desires for well-being and stability, both actual and perceived. It is likely that a consumer's financial circumstances can affect both physiological and safety needs. Physiological needs can be satisfied by using one's income and earnings to provide basic survival provisions (Poduska 1992) and associated basic needs (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002). Likewise, safety needs may be satisfied through the accumulation of savings and wealth (Maslow 1943; Xiao and Noring 1994) assuring the ability to provide food and shelter, while also allowing for the allocation of income that allow higher-order needs to emerge (e.g., belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization; see Maslow 1943; Poduska 1992). Maslow stated that the desire for financial stability, such as depositing money into a savings account, is one possible manifestation of safety needs. At the other extreme, the accumulation of debt could be an attempt to bypass lower needs in favor of higher needs, such as esteem needs over safety needs (Poduska 1992;). Given that financial well-being is not only a subjective assessment of the adequacy of one's financial situation (Vera-Toscano et al. 2006), but also an evaluation of the stability of one's financial situation to maintain his or her standard of living in the future (Poduska 1992), economic indicators that influence stability, and therefore safety needs, likely impact financial well-being.

The economic indicator that is studied most frequently in relation to consumer purchases is income. For the most part, small to moderate, though significant, correlations between income and well-being are reported (Diener et al. 1993). Unfortunately, the current methods of measuring income may not be sufficient (Dolan, Peasgood and White 2006). Participants tend to underreport income by focusing on a salary paid by an employer while disregarding other sources (Moore, Stinson, and Welniak 2000). Literature suggested that the weak correlations found between income and consumer well-being may be due in part to poor measures of income—thus more encompassing better measures may lead to stronger relations between economic standing and well-being (Diener and Biswas-Deiner 2002). The role of expenses (e.g. non-durable expenditures) is often ignored in relation to well-being; Dolan et al. (2006) suggested that measuring expenses as well as income will provide more accurate information regarding someone's financial situation. Aside from income and expenses, wealth (e.g. savings and investments) is another economic indicator investigated in relation to financial well-being. Headey, Muffels, and Wooden (2008) demonstrated wealth affects life satisfaction more than income. They suggested that "wealth confers economic well-being; it enables one to tide over bad times at least for awhile" (66). Similar to Headey et al.'s (2008) hypothesis, Johnson and Krueger (2006) suggested that some negative events might be minor inconveniences to individuals with higher economic recourses.

Previous studies involving wealth and well-being often investigated net worth defined as total assets minus total debts (Headey et al. 2008; Johnson and Krueger 2006; Smith et al. 2005). However, there is limited research involving the

relationship between debt and well-being (Lange and Byrd 1998), particularly when it pertains to individual debt (Brown et al. 2005).

The importance of debt should not be overlooked. An average U.S. college student is found to owe 24% of his or her annual income to debt and this debt has psychological consequences. Those college students who reported higher amounts of debt also experienced greater stress and lower perceived financial health (Norvilitis et al. 2006). Additionally, heads of British households with higher amounts of outstanding debt are found to have significantly higher levels of psychological distress than individuals with lower amounts of debt (Brown, Taylor, and Price 2005). On the other hand, in addition to reported debt, relative debt is also found to be another possible predictor of financial well-being (McBride 2001). People who perceive their incomes as lower in relation to some standards will report lower subjective well-being. To date, a review of the literature reveals that the issue of relative debt has not been addressed. The main study will explore the economic indicators of financial well-being like relative debt, among others.

# Study 1

The current study will expand the literature on consumers' financial well-being by examining potential economic indicators related to financial well-being such as income, wealth, reported debt, relative debt, and expenses. Simultaneously examining multiple attributes that comprise consumers' assessments of financial well-being should reveal a stronger relationship with financial well-being than any single attribute.

## Participants and Procedures

A total of 653 participants from a national consumer panel (76.8% female) completed an online questionnaire in this study. Participants reported on self-reported financial well-being, various economic indicators, and demographic information such as employment status, age, gender, and relationship status.

## Measures

*Financial well-being.* Financial well-being was measured with the InCharge Financial Distress/Financial Well-Being Scale (IFDFW Scale, Prawitz et al. 2006), using a 7-item measure rated on 10-point scales ($\alpha = .90$).

*Economic indicators.* A series of questions were included to assess economic background such as income, wealth, reported debt, relative debt, and expenses. Given that measuring gross income alone may provide an insufficient assessment of actual disposable income (Dolan et al. 2006), *income* was assessed via items on individual and household annual net income, scholarships, and family financial

assistance. *Wealth* was assessed via questions regarding the value of savings and investments and other commonly used indicators of wealth such as the number of savings accounts. The number of credit cards possessed and credit card usage predict overall debt (Norvilitis et al. 2006); therefore these items were included to assess *reported debt* along with the total amount of credit card debt and student loan debt. The use of peers and parents as reference groups for social comparisons have been used in studies involving relative income (McBride 2001) and therefore were included in the current study to assess *relative debt*. *Expenses* included items on monthly costs of rent/mortgage, groceries, and car payments, which are consistent with existing literature (e.g., Headey et al. 2008). Economic indicators for analyses were generated by taking the mean of z-scores for each grouping of questions to create five composite variables measuring income, wealth, reported debt, relative debt, and expenses.

## Results

*Inter-Correlations of Economic Indicators and Financial Well-Being*. We first examined the relationships among economic indicators. Although all the economic indicators measured are theoretically related, they showed marginally weak correlations ($\gamma = .44$ for wealth, $\gamma = .25$ for income, $\gamma = -.25$ for reported debt, and $\gamma = -.40$ for relative debt) suggesting that they captured different economic constructs. Financial well-being was significantly correlated to income, wealth, reported debt, and relative debt ($p$s < .001). Expenses were not significantly correlated with financial well-being ($p > .72$).

**TABLE 1: Correlations of Economic Indicators and Consumer Well-Being**

| | Financial Well-being | Income | Wealth | Reported Debt | Relative Debt | Expenses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Financial Well-being | -- | | | | | |
| Income | .25*** | -- | | | | |
| Wealth | .44*** | .18*** | -- | | | |
| Reported Debt | -.25*** | .10* | -.05 $^{ns}$ | -- | | |
| Relative Debt | -.40*** | -.03 | -.19*** | .45*** | -- | |
| Expenses | -.19 | .15** | .12** | .21*** | .12** | -- |

*Note.*
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; N = 653

*Predicting Financial Well-Being from Economic Indicators*. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the unique variance explained in financial well-being by each economic indicator. Wealth was the strongest predictor of financial well-being (explaining 11% of the variance). The second strongest predictor was relative debt (explaining 5.7% of the variance). Income (explaining 4% of the variance) and reported debt (explaining 1% of the variance) were also significant predictors of financial well-being. In other words, wealth explains more variance of financial well-being than income, relative debt, reported debt, and expenses combined. In addition, none of the demographic variables (age, gender, and relationship status) were significant (*ps* > .44), suggesting that these demographic variables are not direct indicators for financial well-being.

**TABLE 2: Predicting Financial Well-being from Economic Indicators and Consumer Demographic Background**

| Explanatory Variables | Without Consumer Demographic Background | | With Consumer Demographic Background | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | ß | *B* | ß |
| Income | .86*** | .21*** | .88*** | .20*** |
| Wealth | .97*** | .35*** | .95*** | .34*** |
| Reported Debt | -.39** | -.11** | -.31* | -.10** |
| Relative Debt | -.60*** | -.27*** | -.61*** | -.27*** |
| Expenses | -.07 *ns* | -.02 *ns* | -.11 *ns* | -.04 *ns* |
| Age | | | .01 *ns* | .03 *ns* |
| Gender | | | -.26 *ns* | -.06 *ns* |
| Employment status | | | -.21 *ns* | -.05 *ns* |
| Relationship status | | | .06 *ns* | .02 *ns* |
| Ethnicity | | | No | No |
| $R^2$ | .34 | | .35 | |

*Note.*
N = 653
Gender is coded as 0 for male and 1 for female.
Employment status is coded as 0 for "not employed" and 1 for "employed".
Relationship status is coded as 0 for single and 1 for married.
Ethnicity is coded by using 7 dummy variables (0,1) for African American, Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian American, Native American, South Asian/Indian, and multi-racial.
*B* = unstandardized coefficient; ß = standardized coefficient.
** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Because of the direct implication of employment status in financial well-being (Krueger and Mueller 2012), we used multiple regression analysis to examine the unique variance explained in financial well-being by each economic indicator

across employment status (full-time employed vs. part-time employed vs. not employed). Many of the patterns held across all employment groups: (a) wealth explained the most variance in financial well-being (8.6%, 10.5%, and 13.6% for full-time, part-time, and not employed, respectively) and relative debt was the second best predictor (6.7%, 4.6%, and 7.1% for full-time, part-time, and not employed, respectively); (b) income explained a significant amount of variance in financial well-being – though quite a bit less for part-time workers (5.1%, 2.4%, and 5.3% for full-time, part-time, and not employed, respectively); and (c) expenses did not provide significant variance explained (variances explained < 0.1%). However, reported debt was a significant predictor of financial well-being for those participants without a job ($p < .001$), but for those with a job (full- or part-time), reported debt was not a significant predictor ($p$s > .05).

# Discussion

Our findings suggest that wealth and relative debt are the best predictors of financial well-being, with wealth contributing to financial well-being and relative debt negatively influencing financial well-being. Further analyses revealed that various demographic variables contribute significantly to financial well-being. Also, although three of the five economic indicators only weakly correlated with life satisfaction, a stronger positive relationship emerged between financial well-being and life satisfaction; this finding is consistent with previous research (Hayo and Seifert 2003; Norvilitis et al. 2003).

The current study also found that wealth was the best predictor of financial well-being. It is possible that wealth is more important to financial well-being than other economic indicators because it confers additional feelings of well-being by serving as a buffer to cushion people's level of well-being from negative life events, such as the onset of disability (Smith et al. 2005) or financial hardship (Headey et al. 2008; Johnson and Krueger 2006). Individuals with greater wealth would be in a better position to handle certain negative life events than individuals who lacked wealth (Johnson and Krueger 2006) and were living paycheck to paycheck (Headey et al. 2008). That is, individuals with higher wealth are in a more stable financial situation than individuals who are solely dependent on current income. Given that financial well-being is a subjective assessment regarding the adequacy and stability of an individual's financial situation (Vera-Toscano et al. 2006), individuals with greater perceived financial stability due to higher wealth are likely to experience greater financial well-being.

Likewise, aspects that reduce the stability of someone's financial situation are likely to negatively affect financial well-being. Based on the theoretical framework of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, people who accumulate excessive debt via loans, mortgages, or credit cards may be attempting to bypass survival and safety needs in order to satisfy esteem needs through gaining approval of their peers, which may actually endanger stability and have a detrimental effect on financial well-being (Poduska 1992). However, in the

**TABLE 3: Economic Indicators as Predictors of Financial Well-being across Employment Status**

| Economic Indicators | Not-Employed (n = 164) | | | Part-time Employment (n = 358) | | | Full-time Employment (n =131) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | ß | $sr^2$ | *B* | ß | $sr^2$ | *B* | ß | $sr^2$ |
| Income | .91*** | .23*** | 5.3% | .72*** | .16*** | 2.4% | 1.10*** | .27*** | 5.1% |
| Wealth | 1.06*** | .37*** | 13.6% | 1.02*** | .34*** | 10.5% | .77*** | .34*** | 8.6% |
| Reported Debt | -.74*** | -.24*** | 4.1% | -.30 $^{ns}$ | -.09 | .5% | -.16 $^{ns}$ | -.05 | 0 .1% |
| Relative Debt | -.67*** | -.28*** | 7.1% | -.59*** | -.26*** | 4.6% | -.62*** | -.30*** | 6.7% |
| Expenses | -.08$^{ns}$ | -.03$^{ns}$ | 0.07% | -.06$^{ns}$ | -.02$^{ns}$ | 0.03% | -.10$^{ns}$ | -.05$^{ns}$ | 0.1% |
| $R^2$ | .40 | | | .29 | | | .42 | | |

*Note.*

*B* = unstandardized coefficient; ß = standardized coefficient; $sr^2$ = effect size (semi-partial correlation squared).

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

current study only relative debt was a significant predictor of financial well-being while reported debt was a rather meaningless predictor (i.e., explaining less than 1% of the variance) for those with some form of employment. A previous study found that relative income effects influenced consumers' financial situations to a greater extent than reported income (McBride 2001). Given that excessive debt may be prompted by attempts to gain a positive social evaluation from one's peers, relative debt is likely to be particularly detrimental to financial well-being, which is supported in the present study.

Our findings also suggested that all economic indicators, except expenses, significantly explained the consumer's financial well-being. More importantly, variances explained by these economic indicators, including income, wealth, and relative debt, for consumers who were not employed at the time were higher than those for full-time or part-time employed consumers. It demonstrated that people's feelings of being financial secured were more based on what they have and what they owe financially when they don't have jobs. When people have jobs, they feel more comfortable about their current financial situations and are more optimistic about their futures (Krueger and Mueller 2012). Therefore, their current income, debt, or wealth levels are not as important as those for unemployed people.

## Consequences of Financial Well-Being: Shopping Behavior

Because financial well-being is conceptualized as a subjective assessment, financial well-being can potentially be seen as an attitude that affects an individual's purchasing decisions. There are two common views in attitude research: 1) attitude as a resource that consumers can draw upon, and 2) attitude as a status that shows consumers the status quo for decisions (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Those two different points of view about attitudes offer two possible underlying mechanisms that can explain the relationship financial well-being and consumers' purchasing decisions. Drawing from research findings of these two research streams, we set up two sets of competing hypotheses for the effects of financial well-being on purchase decisions, specifically, planned and unplanned purchases.

## Financial Well-being as a Resource

Similar to financial well-being, attitude provides information as it is defined as "an evaluative state that intervenes between certain classes of stimuli and certain classes of responses" (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, 3). This view of feelings-as-information suggests that consumers use their feelings and attitudes as sources

of information. Pleasant moods are regard as evidence of well-being (Pham 2004; Cote 2005) and influence judgment (Pham 1998). In parallel to this line of rationale, financial well-being, as an evaluative state, can provide consumers the information that they need to make their purchasing decisions. In addition, the feelings-as-information theory also suggests that when consumers are in pleasant moods, they believe they are safer and tend to think and behave more flexibly and naively (Cote 2005; Greifeneder, Bless, and Pham 2011). Consumers with highly financial well-being feel more confident about their financial situations. This type of evaluative states has been found to be more influential and accessible than other informative inputs (Avnet, Pham, and Stephen 2012). So, when consumers feel financially secured, they tend to spend less time on planning their purchases. They would feel that they are financially capable of buying things they need and are less worried about running out of money. Thus, we hypothesize that there is a negative relationship between financial well-being and planned purchases.

$H_{1a}$: Intentions to make *planned purchases decrease*, when financial well-being increases.

On the other hand, if people with high financial well-being consider themselves resourceful and are not afraid of spending money, they will be more willing to spend on unplanned purchases. They may think that there are resources that they can use. Therefore, they do not need to think too much when they find something attractive to purchase, because they can afford it. Thus, we hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between financial well-being and unplanned purchases. In sum, the hypotheses derived from financial well-being as a resource are:

$H_{1b}$: Intentions to make *unplanned purchases increase*, when financial well-being increases

## Financial Well-being as a Status

From a different view point, attitude can also be regarded as tendencies, which means that “attitude is an internal state that lasts for at least a short time” (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, 2). The internal state here usually refers to an acquired behavioral disposition which consumers draw upon to respond to decision-making situations. This view can also provide an explanation for the effect of financial well-being on consumer decision making in planned and unplanned purchases. Financial well-being is a feeling of being well-off right now. This secured feeling is very important for consumers’ daily life and can significantly affect their purchase decisions (Salter et al. 2011). Also, according to this research stream, consumers are motivated to maintain their current financial status if they are financially secured. That means, they are less likely to make unplanned purchases because most unplanned purchases are unnecessary and financially secured

consumers are motivated to avoid changing their status of financial well-being. Consequently, they tend to plan their lives and make purchases accordingly. Just like people with a weak attitude, consumers with low financial well-being do not have motivation to maintain their financial well-being level. In this case, people with low financial well-being are more likely to make unplanned purchases, which are also consistent with the "what-the-hell" effect (Cochran and Tesser 1996), which states that when consumers find it difficult or impossible to accomplish their goals, they may be more likely to disengage from the initial plans, and behave like they have nothing to lose or even undermine the plans completely. Since they do not have much to uphold, it is very unlikely for them to make plans. Therefore, we hypothesize:

$H_{2a}$: Intentions to make *planned purchases increase,* when financial well-being increases.

$H_{2b}$: Intentions to make *unplanned purchases decrease,* when financial well-being increases.

# Study 2

## Participants and Procedures

Data were collected from a national consumer panel in the US. A total of 2,916 employed participants completed the questionnaire (57.1% female, mean age = 28.41). The participants were ethnically diverse: 43.3% Caucasian, 22.3% Asian American, 10.4% Hispanic, and 8.2% African American.

Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire that contained several self-report measures which assessed financial well-being, financial situation, and basic demographic information (i.e., employment status, relationship status, age, gender, year in college, and ethnicity).

## Measures

*Financial well-being.* The InCharge Financial Distress/Financial Well-Being Scale (IFDFW Scale, Prawitz et al. 2006) was a 7-item measure rated on 10-point scales. Participants were asked about their subjective feelings and reactions to their financial situations. A sample item was "how do you feel about your current financial situation?" The items are averaged to form an index (Cronbach's alpha = .90).

*Materialism.* Materialism was measured through 15 items using a seven-point strongly disagree/agree Likert scale. Participants were asked to respond the

degree they agreed or disagreed on eight different statements, such as "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes", "I like to own things that impress people" and "I like a lot of luxury in my life". The 15 items were averaged to form an index (Cronbach's alpha = .70).

*Planned Purchase Intention.* Planned purchase intention was measured through eight items using a 7-point strongly disagree/agree Likert scale. Participants were asked to respond the degree they agreed or disagreed on eight different statements, including "I usually think carefully before I buy something", "I usually only buy things that I intend to buy", "most of my purchases are planned in advance", "I only buy things that I really need", "it is not my style to just buy things", "I like to compare different brands before I buy one", "before I buy something I always carefully consider whether I need it" and "I am not the kind of person who 'falls in love at first sight' with things I see in shops". Reliability of these items was good (Cronbach's alpha = .85) and the items were averaged.

*Unplanned Purchase Intention.* Unplanned purchase intention was measured through eight items using a 7-point strongly disagree/agree Likert scale. Participants were asked to respond the degree they agreed or disagreed on twelve different statements, including "if I buy something, I usually do that spontaneously", "I am used to buying things 'on the spot'", "I often buy things without thinking", "it is a struggle to leave nice things I see in a shop", "I sometimes cannot suppress the feeling of wanting to buy something", "I sometimes feel guilty after having bought something", "I can become very excited if I see something I would like to buy", and "I always see something nice whenever I pass by shops". Reliability of these items was good (Cronbach's alpha = .85) and the eight items were averaged to form an index.

## Results

To test the competing hypotheses, two multiple regression models with financial well-being as independent variable, gender, age, and materialism as control variables, and intention of unplanned purchase and intention of planned purchase as two separate dependent variables respectively.

Results of the regression estimate generally support our second set of hypotheses which were derived from the *financial well-being as a status* view. We found a significant and positive relationship between financial well-being and intention of planned purchases ($\alpha 1 = .077$. $p < .01$), which supports $H_{2a}$. That is, when consumers' financial well-being is high, they are more likely to make planned purchases. There is also a significant negative relationship between financial well-being and unplanned purchase intention ($\beta = -.142$, $p < .01$), which supports $H_{2b}$. When consumers feel highly financially secured, they are less likely to make unplanned purchases. When consumers do not feel financially secured, they are more likely to make unplanned purchases.

**TABLE 4: Study 2 Regression Results**

| | Unplanned Purchase | Planned Purchase |
|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 1.104 | 3.826 |
| Financial Well-being | -.142** | .077** |
| Gender | -.227** | .162** |
| Age | -.009** | .004** |
| Materialism | .561** | -.258** |

*Note.*
***p* < .01.

Additionally, our results showed that the effects of three control variables, gender ($p < .01$), age ($p < .01$), and materialism ($p < .01$), on both planned and unplanned purchase intention are significant. The results are consistent with our expectations for age and materialism. We found that as consumers grow older, they are more likely to make planned purchases and less likely to make unplanned purchases. We also found that high-materialism consumers are more likely to make unplanned purchases. However, for gender, our results revealed a different story from what we have expected. It is shown that male consumers are more likely to make planned purchase and female ones are more likely to make unplanned purchases.

In addition, men were found to have higher level of financial well-being than women ($p <.01$), which is consistent with the literature. In terms of ages, we found that older participants feel less financially secured ($p <.01$) than the younger ones, which is consistent with *the cycle of life theory* suggesting that older people tend to process information more carefully and slowly so that they are more aware of the risks and challenges they are facing.

## Conclusion and Limitations

We searched for the best economic indicators for financial well-being. Although further work is needed in this area before definitive conclusions can be drawn, the potential implications are broad. Diener and Oishi (2000) stated that after basic physiological needs are met, financial resources spent to pursue status or on material goods would not improve well-being. Despite such knowledge, western society is dominated by a capitalist perspective on the importance of financial success (Kasser and Ryan 1993) while government and domestic policies often

focus on income to determine the well-being of the populace (Dolan et al. 2006) based on the misguided assumption that a higher income automatically leads to improved well-being (Diener and Oishi 2000; Diener and Seligman 2004). There may be "substantive psychological cost associated with consumer credit culture" (Brown et al. 2005, 659). The current policy of many governments of focusing on income and consumption may improve the economy, but is hurting the financial well-being. Our finding supports that financial well-being is changed by wealth and relative debt, future government public policies could progress toward encouraging people to actively improve their financial well-being by limiting debt accumulation and encouraging saving behavior.

On the other hand, all economic indicators in the current study demonstrated weak to moderate inter-correlations, indicating that each economic indicator is measuring separate facets of one's financial circumstance. Michalos (1985) suggested that satisfaction within a domain of well-being is partly the result of discrepancies between what people have and what they want. Thus, one plausible explanation for the weak inter-correlations is that individuals accumulate different patterns of wealth and debt independently from income due to desire discrepancies. Previous studies found that (a) desire discrepancies predict income satisfaction (Solberg et al. 2002); and (b) people within the same income bracket can accumulate different amounts of wealth (Johnson and Krueger 2006) and different amounts of debt (Brown et al., 2005). The different patterns may be an individual difference where people with the financial means to meet their material desires are able to accumulate wealth (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002) and people with material desires beyond their financial means might accumulate debt. Therefore, whether an individual chooses to accumulate wealth or debt may be driven more by desire discrepancies than income. Therefore, we believe that future research including consumer well-being is a promising direction that could potentially make contributions to current research stream.

From the results of Study 2, we found that the notion of financial well-being-as-a-status was supported. Consumers have higher intention to maintain their status quos as their financial well-being increases. Consequently, they are more likely to make planned purchases. On the other hand, when their financial well-being is low, they feel like that have nothing to lose or maintain. Therefore, they are more likely to give in to their impulses and, in turn, to make unplanned purchases. In Study 2, we also found that gender, age, and materialism significantly influence the degrees of both planned and unplanned purchases. However, we surprisingly found that male consumers are more likely to make planned purchases, which is opposite to what the past research has suggested. Since no prior research has included the notion of financial well-being-as-a-status, we speculate that men have higher intention to maintain their financial statuses because they are more financially knowledgeable (Allen, and Hayhoe 2007).

There are other areas for future research. First, the results of the current paper are based on self-report measures; however, such a method may be

preferable to obtain subjective judgment responses and efforts to demonstrate that reports of economic indicators were not significantly influenced by socially desirable responding. Efforts were undertaken to assess the complete financial situation of participants by including additional financial questions geared toward students that covered family financial assistance, student loans, credit card debt related to school expenses, and scholarships. Next, our findings show that expenses were not a significant predictor of financial well-being in contrast to a previous study that employed more extensive questions of consumption patterns and found expenses were significant predictors of life satisfaction and satisfaction with standard of living (Headey et al. 2008), indicating a more thorough investigation of expenses may be required in the future. Last, but not least, based on our findings and previous research (e.g., Krueger and Mueller 2012), level of employment showed differential but non-linear effects in financial well-being. Prior research focused on the level of employment and indicated income generated from employment was the origin of employment level effect. Our study suggested employment status has more than income effect.

## Note

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