

# Why me? Connections between socioeconomic status, religiosity, perceived personal control, and views of suffering



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## Abstract

When tragedy strikes, how do individuals make sense of suffering? If God is good, why do bad things happen to good people? Do people differ in how they understand suffering based on socioeconomic status and on religiosity and the way in which they view God? Research indicates that individuals of lower socioeconomic status tend to be more religious than those higher in economic status (Wimberley, 2016). However low SES individuals also tend to perceive themselves as having less control over their lives and God as having more control (Schieman, 2010). High SES individuals report feeling that they have more control over their lives than God (Schieman, 2010). How do individuals of differing SES view suffering? The present study examines the relationship between SES, religiosity, and views of suffering using the Views of Suffering Scale (Hale-Smith, Park, & Edmondson, 2012)

## Hypotheses

### Hypothesis 1:

- Low SES is expected to be related to greater perception of divine control.

### Hypothesis 2:

- Low SES is expected to be related to higher religiosity

### Hypothesis 3:

- Individuals who report low SES will be more likely to indicate more benevolent views of suffering because of their perception of divine interaction mediating life's hardships.

### Hypothesis 4:

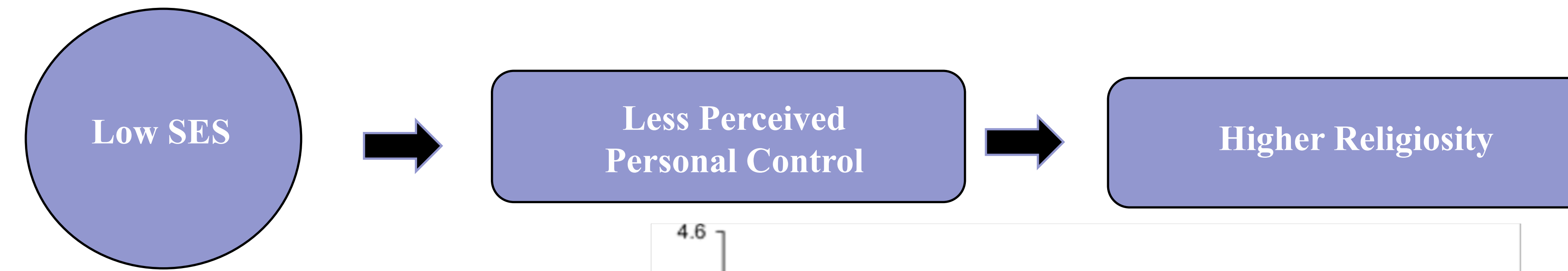
- We predict that those of higher SES will have a more negative view of suffering because of their greater perception of being in control of their life.

## Socioeconomic Status (SES)

The measure of one's combined economic and social status and tends to be positively associated with better health (Baker, 2014).

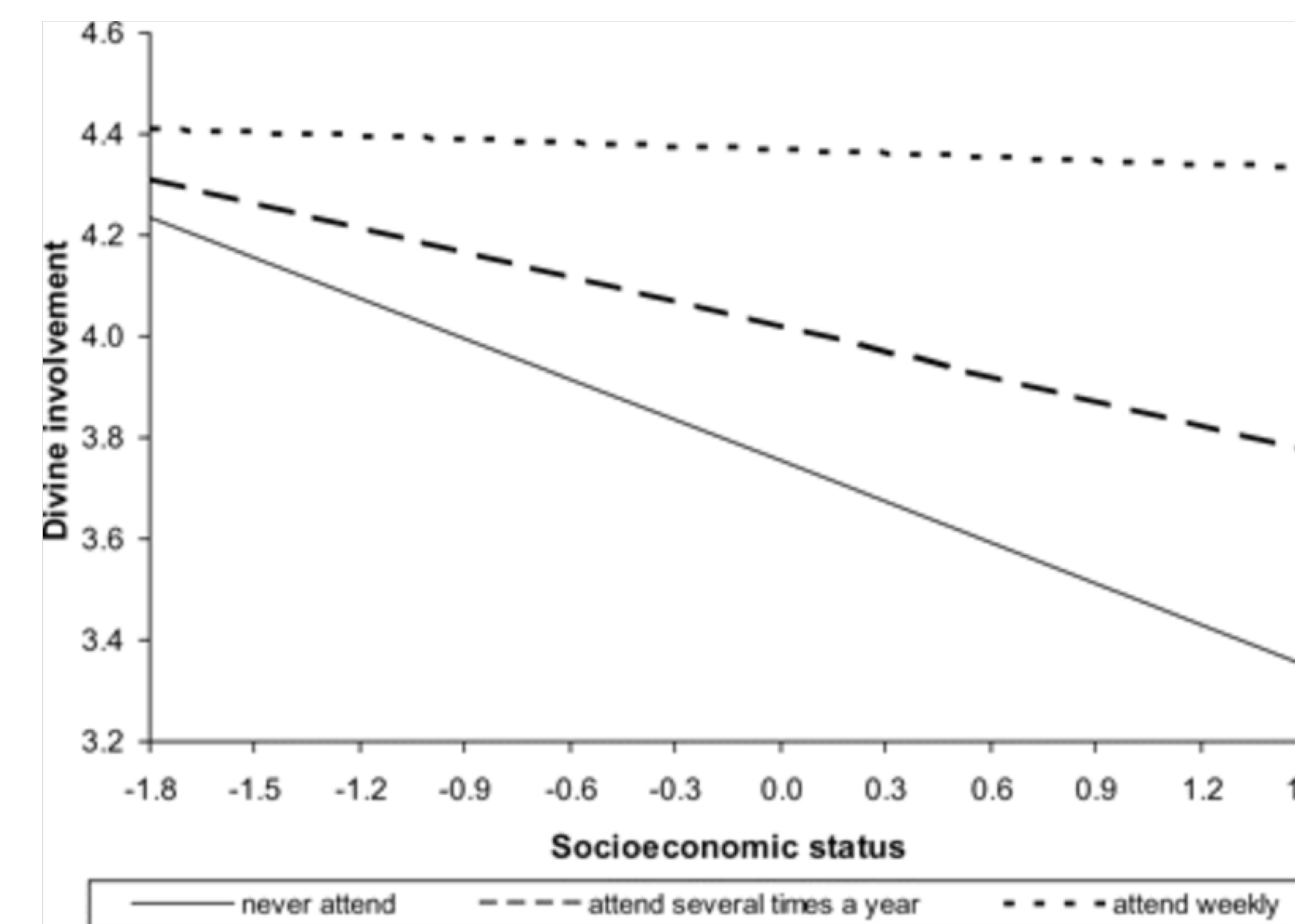
## Background

### Hypothesis 1 & 2:



Low income, and the economic hardships that are often associated with it, add increased stressors to day-to-day challenges and decisions in life. Thus, people from lower SES communities tend to rely upon a powerful other relinquishing their sense of generalized mastery or perceived personal control (Schieman Nguyen & Elliot, 2003).

Dale Wimberley's research is consistent with the idea that socioeconomic deprivation leads individuals to be more religious in certain ways. The related perspectives of exchange theory and cognitive behaviorism imply that such deprivation also leads people to place more importance on religion.



Glock 1964, introduced the **deprivation-compensation** thesis which maintains that disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions motivate people to develop profound intrinsic religiosity and a relationship with God to compensate for their plight and acquire otherwise-unattainable rewards (Schieman, Pudrovskaya, Pearlin & Ellison, 2006).

### Hypothesis 3 & 4



Divine struggle was more common among people who believe that God plays a benevolent part in suffering, as well as for people who believe that suffering exists in part due to a God who is not completely benevolent (Exline, Grubbs & Homolka, 2015). Socioeconomic status could play a role in how people understand suffering. It could be that people of low socioeconomic status already have low expectations and chronic experience of suffering. Such experiences may contribute to a sense that life and what happens to them is not in their control. Research indicates that individuals of low SES report low levels of belief in personal control (Schieman, 2010). In contrast, individuals of high SES tend to feel that they are in control of their lives. When something happens beyond their control, it could be that people of high SES have a more difficult time understanding the suffering and reconciling it with their personal control beliefs? Similarly, there are SES differences in belief in divine control with people of low SES more likely to believe that God is in control of their lives and those high SES believing that God exerts less control over their lives (Schieman, 2010). We expect that these SES differences in beliefs in personal and divine control will impact views of suffering with those of lower SES responding with more benevolent views of suffering than those of higher SES.

### Low SES (Education, income etc.)

- Disadvantaged
- Socially excluded
- Higher dependency on religion
- Less self-personal control (mastery)
- Leads to more health concerns

### High SES (Education, income etc.)

- Advantaged
- Socially accepted
- Lower dependency on religion
- More personal control (mastery)
- Less health concerns

In our review of previous research, low and high SES individuals displayed a number of contrasting characteristics.

## Proposed Research

We plan to recruit participants from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds to see whether SES is related to religiosity. Participants will complete a questionnaire that includes measures of SES (objective and subjective), perceived personal control, perceived divine control, religiosity, and views of suffering.

We will also conduct analyses to determine whether those who classified themselves as highly, moderately, or lowly religious vary in terms of their perception of suffering. If our results follow previous research, people from lower SES will have higher religiosity, and will justify experiences of tragedy and suffering with a benevolent divine host.

One way we plan to measure perceived suffering is through Views of Suffering Scale or VOSS (Hale-Smith, Park, Edmondson, 2012) The VOSS includes six scales (divine responsibility, encounter, suffering God, soul-building, providence, and overcoming), that assess the degree to which people subscribe to—beliefs that reconcile suffering with a loving God.

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