# Chapter 59 Religion, Stress, and Superheroes

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# Abstract

Religion can be a cause of stress or a cure for stress. Religion's ability to relieve the stress that it induces partly accounts for its tenacious hold on its truest or newest believers. Religious sentiment and sectarianism rises during times of increased personal or societal stress. Since change and uncertainty are potent causes of stress, on a psychological, sociological, and physiological level, it stands to reason that some of history's most unusual religious movements occurred at times of rapid social change and uncertainty. Individuals undergoing personal stress and lifestyle shifts are statistically more likely to get involved with unusual or innovative religious movements. Thus, adolescents who recently left home, those who are newly divorced, bereaved or relocated, and inmates who “relocate” to prison are especially susceptible to the appeal of “radical religions.” “Garden-variety” religions and also cults grow in response to the stresses of poverty, old age, war, illness, isolation, or impending death.