

Masani McGee: “We Create Our Own Demons”: Trauma in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

Trauma and its sometimes debilitating aftereffects have typically been reserved for male characters within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Yet with the release of Netflix series *Jessica Jones*, the dynamic surrounding this issue has changed. Unlike the majority of male-focused films within the franchise—where post-traumatic stress is either downplayed (the *Captain America* series) or even portrayed humorously (*Iron Man 3*)—the online series has displayed an ability to explicitly and honestly acknowledge how trauma impacts a person’s everyday life.

These new developments make it necessary to examine whether or not multiple perspectives on this concept can coexist within Marvel’s shared universe. To that end, I will discuss the implications of presenting trauma through a gendered lens, the impact of different mediums, and how the MCU can be used as a framework to discuss real-world instances of post-traumatic stress. Cathy Caruth’s definitive work on trauma theory will provide a starting framework to examine how this concept functions within the MCU, while the work of Anne Cubilié and Victor Seidler will allow me to consider trauma through gender, in addition to its function in the aftermath of 9/11 respectively. As arguably the dominant film genre of the new millennium, superhero films and the Marvel Cinematic Universe in particular have a unique opportunity to depict trauma in a varied and respectful manner. However it is also clear that this opportunity will be heavily shaped by the economic goals of Marvel as a corporation, and especially the cultural narratives in America regarding mental illness.