

## “I Don't Trust Anyone Without a Darkside”: Analysis of Captain America’s Mental Illness Through the Comics

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Superheroes have been and still are popular sources of entertainment, making many of the heroes well-known in the public eye. One of the most popular of these heroes comes from the Marvel universe: Captain America. With the current focus on mental health due to the pandemic, the public is becoming increasingly aware of mental illnesses, including anxiety disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Captain America – specifically Steve Rogers –has a unique connection to PTSD due to several losses (such as the death of Bucky Barnes). This combination of popularity and his mental illness makes a perfect case study through the lens of trauma theory. Trauma theory is the highly controversial idea that trauma cannot be expressed through writing; however, scholar Joshua Pederson combines the two opposing sides of trauma theory presented by theorist Cathy Caruth and opponent Richard McNally. Pederson suggests that trauma is indirectly expressed through writing, and it is how I can identify symptoms of PTSD and how Rogers copes with them. My findings are that throughout the comics, Steve Rogers exhibits strong and clear symptoms, including irritability with those that don’t follow orders, social isolation, mistrust, and flashbacks. The trend follows the early comics (the 1960s) and the later comics (the 21st century). Although the text does very little to hide such stigmatized symptoms from the public eye, society still views him as one of the greatest superheroes. I argue that it is because of this openness of mental illness is why people respond well to him as a hero; those who have a mental illness find some comfort in knowing that someone as strong as a hero can have a mental illness.