We Love Discourse Groups 3000:
Exploring the Literacies and Discourse Group of the Marvel Fandom

Allison Mool

In this article, Mool explores how people interact with the Marvel genre of movies, and how this creates an important discourse group. WARNING: SPOILERS AHEAD!

Welcome to the Fandom!

Imagine your friend walks up to you and says, "I thought it was so interesting when we found out that Nick Fury was actually a Skrull in *Far from Home*, but I have so many questions. What is he doing in space? Is he interacting with Captain Marvel? Was he there during the blip? Did he just ignore *Endgame* happening? Will he be in *The Eternals*?" Would you understand what they are saying? If you do understand these questions, chances are you were one of the paying moviegoers that, according to *boxofficemojo.com*, contributed to the $2,797,800,564 brought in by *Avengers: Endgame*, the highest grossing movie of all time ("Top Lifetime Grosses"). If you don't understand this, then you may not be a part of this fandom, and you probably have more time on your hands than the rest of us who are watching the movies.

A fandom is the people that *really* like movies, shows, or books. They are dedicated fans. Usually they form communities online and talk about their common interest with each other. Now if you are familiar with some of the terms that the writing program works with, you probably think this sounds a little bit like a **discourse group**! And you're right. A discourse group is a

group of people who share certain **literacies** or understand terms, topics, and conversations that others might not understand. So if, for example, I am talking to someone inside my discourse group who has also seen each movie three times, I will speak differently than if I am trying to speak to someone who has only seen one movie. The discourse groups we are involved in effect the ways we communicate and act in situations. They are very influential in our lives. In this article we will take a look at how the Marvel discourse group interacts with itself and the rest of the world.

The Fan Experience

The discourse group of Marvel is an interesting occurrence. This isn't just a common language; it is something that people are very passionate about. These movies teach people lessons and give them hope. They can unite people. In my experience, watching a Marvel movie premiere at a theatre is something very special. There's an electricity in the air because every person in the theatre is excited. They all bought their tickets months ago and were counting down the days until they could be there. You can feel a community with these complete strangers who are as invested in these characters as you are. If you don't believe me, let me give you a few examples.

Whenever I have been in a theatre with Marvel fans, we never sat in silence for the movie. It is more . . . interactive. For example, whenever the Stan Lee cameo that is in every movie arrives on screen, the audience will cheer. Now, to someone not in the discourse group, this would not make sense. Yes, it may be a fun one-liner, but that person doesn't understand the significance of that man. They don't know that he devoted his life to bringing others joy and telling stories. They don't know how ridiculous those moments always are, and how it's always a surprise where he will pop up.

Watching *Infinity War* on opening night was also a very memorable experience. Everyone was captivated by the story and invested in the characters. When people started dusting, I could hear people around the theatre crying. Then, when the movie ended with Thanos succeeding and walking through the garden, we were all confused. Aren't the heroes supposed to win? As the credits started playing, someone on the opposite side of the room exclaimed, "WHAT?" We all started laughing through the tears because he was saying exactly what we were thinking. Also, during *Avengers: Endgame* when the portal appeared, there was a gasp in the theatre. Then when Black Panther walked out and the other portals started to open, the theatre broke out into applause. It was an epic moment on the screen, and the fans shared in that together.

As a part of the discourse group, you can see who is also a part of the discourse group by their actions. At the end of each movie there are postcredit scenes. There is one after the actor credits and usually one after the long credits. People that get up and leave after the movie or even after the first one, don't know that there is one at the end. Well, they either don't care or don't know about this convention of the movies. Members of the discourse group find this information important. It is exciting to get a little sneak peek at what is coming next.

Bringing People Together

The build-up to *Endgame* was very exciting for many fans, myself included. But what was even more interesting than the movie itself, was what it did to complete strangers. In my classes it became socially acceptable to overhear a name and turn around to ask if they were talking about *Endgame*. Then they would include you in talking about theories, opinions of previous movies, and favorite characters. Immediately you found a common interest with these strangers and through the conversation, you could get more excited about the movie and the characters you love. These movies can actually create discourse because we could have been scrolling through Instagram while waiting for class to start, instead we met new people and had a stimulating conversation.

Those conversations were interesting, though. We weren't talking about the weather, politics, or our lives. We were talking about fictional characters as if they really mattered, because to us they do. It's not like they are real people, but they mean something to each of us. They take them with us on their journey. They brought us closer together to the ones we love when we share our love of Marvel with them. We can discuss things like whether or not Ant-Man would go into Thanos's butt was a valid theory. (I really wish I was making that up, but it was a very common discussion) To the outsider, these conversations don't make sense. In fact, they would probably find them really weird. But in a discourse group, these things are understood. It creates connection for so many people.

Coping with all the Feelings, aka the Internet

The online presence of Marvel is huge. From opinions to memes to edits to announcement to advertisements, Marvel takes many, many forms on social media.

One form that Marvel takes online is in YouTube videos. These can be very different too. There are videos about theories that use the past events and information from the comics to predict the future movies. There are trailer breakdowns, so people stop trailers and explain what is happening in more detail, which could be helpful if you are new to Marvel and want to understand it. There are movie reviews. There are compilations of funny moments from the movies. You can find almost anything that you want, honestly. This is all fan-produced content. They are people who want to participate in the conversation of Marvel. They do this to feel like they are a part of the movies. And sometimes what the fans do actually influences what Marvel does. When the first Avengers movie came out and the character Philip Coulson died, the fans started a Twitter campaign to bring him back. Eventually, *Agents of Shield* premiered revealing that Coulson was saved.

Another aspect of the fan presence is fan accounts. There are many people out there who run an account dedicated to Marvel in addition to their personal accounts. They may post clips, drawings, or memes. Through these posts, they often start conversations in the comments. They may take polls on which movies are best or favorite villains. It varies by account, but it would take time to keep up with these. These fans must be very dedicated.

A large portion of Marvel themed posts are memes. Memes are entertaining visuals and words that are spread on social media. In order to understand the world of Marvel memes, I decided to start by googling "Marvel Memes." I had millions of examples to look at. So, now we dive into an official meme review:

One of the first memes that I came across in my google search was this one (Babyninjawolf, Figure 1). I found it funny, not only because of the face that Captain America is making, but because I have experienced this before. I have gone with people who didn't care to see the postcredit scenes and I had to convince them to stay the extra five minutes. In the discourse group, people will understand similar things. They all know about the postcredit scenes, so therefore this meme would make sense to them.

Figure 1: Babyninjawolf meme of Captain America.

This meme stuck out to me because, firstly, I was scared of *Endgame* spoilers, and secondly, the content isn't just Marvel themed (Hauntedbreezy, Figure 2). This meme brings in knowledge of *Bird Box*, which was a very popular movie on Netflix. They weren't allowed to look at the entity that was terrorizing them, so they walked around in blindfolds, as you can see. It is interesting how the Marvel discourse can incorporate other ideas and parts of culture. The fandoms are intersecting. This is cool because two completely different ideas can exist together and make something great. (It could even teach us something about unity in our society.)
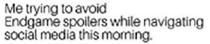

Figure 2: *Bird Box* meme about *Endgame* spoilers.

This meme takes the knowledge of what these characters personalities and experiences were and applied them to their lives (Clearwood, Figure 3). It's funny and relatable. This meme applies Marvel to the real world. It is also simpler. You don't need to know much about the characters when there are context clues in the picture. Steve Rogers looks confused while Tony Stark is handling scientific-looking technology. Will you enjoy it more if you do know the characters? Yes. But is it still made for everybody? Yes!

Figure 3: Marvel meme featuring Tony Stark and Steve Rogers.

Figure 4: Marvel meme that is also about nursing.

The interesting thing about this meme is that the content is nursing and Marvel (Strom, Figure 4). They took Marvels words and visuals and made them their own. Now, I am not a nurse. But I can still use context clues to figure it out. For example, if you look at the bottom right corner of this meme, you will see the word "Nursing." There are probably some nurses in the world that aren't Marvel fans but have enjoyed this meme. The two discourses are combined nicely to entertain two groups of people. This shows us that discourse groups aren't completely separate. We all have unique combinations of discourse groups in our toolbelt that make us who we are and inform how we communicate.

The Endgame

At this point you might be thinking, "cool, great . . . why do I care?" Firstly, according to *cnbc.com*, Marvel movies in total have made over $22,000,000,000 in the box office (Whitten). That doesn't count DVD sales and merchandise. If it has had this big of an impact, we should be paying attention to what we are consuming. Secondly, we need to be aware that discourse groups are a huge part of our lives. We are each involved in so many. If we don't realize this, communication can get confusing. We have to be thinking about who will understand what stories and what terms to use when talking to people. If I tried to talk to my Dad about music (who has never played an instrument) the way I would my future-music-teacher sister, we wouldn't get very far. But if I talked to him about politics, we could have

a good conversation. Thinking about our discourse groups can help us really connect with other people.

Works Cited

Babyninjawolf. "Marvel Memes." *Wattpad*, https://www.wattpad.com /590682457-marvel-memes-you-do-not-leave-before-the-credits.

Clearwood, Skye. "When I Take a Test." *Pinterest*, https://www.pinterest.com /pin/224898575115604403/?lp=true.

Hauntedbreezy. "36 Spoiler-Free Marvel Memes for Your Virgin Eyes." *Cheezburger*, Memebase, 26 Apr. 2019, https://cheezburger.com /8246533/36-spoiler-free-marvel-memes-for-your-virgin-eyes.

Strom, Peter. "10 Marvel Nursing Memes To Prepare You For Avengers Endgame." *NursingCE*, 22 Apr. 2019, https://www.nursingce.com/blog /10-marvel-nursing-memes-to-prepare-you-for-marvel-endgame.

"Top Lifetime Grosses*." Box Office Mojo*, IMDb.com, Inc, https://www .boxofficemojo.com/chart/ww_top_lifetime_gross/?area=XWW.

Whitten, Sarah. "Disney Bought Marvel for $4 Billion in 2009, a Decade Later It's Made More than $18 Billion at the Global Box Office." *CNBC*, 22 July 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/21/disney-has-made -more-than-18-billion-from-marvel-films-since-2012.html.

Allison Mool is currently a Sophomore molecular and cellular biology major and theatre minor at Illinois State University. She is interested in going to medical school in the future. She is usually doing homework, but when she catches a break, she might be watching a Marvel movie or hanging out with friends.