The Discourses of Vincent Chase

Eric Wolf
St. John Fisher College

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The Discourses of Vincent Chase

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the first paragraph of the paper.

There is a common notion that those who make it big, whether it be as a professional athlete, a Grammy award-winning artist, or as an A-list actor, forget where they came from. Fame and fortune go to their heads and they become completely different people than they once were prior to their fame. Though fictional, one could make the argument that Vincent Chase, the protagonist of H.B.O.'s critically acclaimed series Entourage, underwent this drastic shift as the show progressed. One way of analyzing this possible alteration is through the Discourses that Vince was exposed to as a youth growing up in New York and as an A-list actor in Hollywood.
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Growing up in Queens, New York in a working-class home with his half-brother and mother, Vince was exposed to a lifestyle that revolved around family, friends, and hard work. When Vince makes it big as an actor and moves out to Los Angeles another very different lifestyle was brought to light: a Discourse that concerned itself with a “me first” mentality. Despite this drastic shift in not only lifestyle but Discourse, Vince never forgets where he came from and stays true to his roots by always putting others first. By examining Vince’s primary and secondary Discourses, I believe he never truly acquires the secondary Discourse of an A-list actor; rather he combines his partial acquisition with meta-knowledge and strategies to form a mushfake Discourse that allows him to get by and make it appear he has fully acquired the Discourse of an A-list actor when in actuality he has not.

To determine whether or not Vince’s secondary Discourse is actually mushfake, we first have to evaluate his primary Discourse, which according to Gee is how “we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others” through a combination of saying (writing), doing, being, valuing, and believing (6-7). Our primary Discourses are acquired in our home community and are based upon a plethora of factors – race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, location, religious, and political beliefs to name a few of the more influential ones. It is important to note here that Discourses, both primary and secondary, are made up of ideologies which are, according to Foss, “a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (209). Some examples of ideologies are communism, patriotism, liberalism, and feminism. To determine Vince’s primary Discourse, one must look at some of the ideologies he grew up with. As previously mentioned, Vince grew up in a working-class family with his half-brother, Johnny Drama, and a single mother, so one could imagine his financial situation was anything but comfortable. Due to Vince’s lack of money as a youth, he was taught the value of earning a dollar and how much work was required to earn that dollar. He was raised knowing that nothing in life would come easy to him and that if he wanted something he would have to be patient, diligent, and hard-working.

Growing up, Vince was raised to be respectful, use his manners, and share; he applied these teachings to his friendships. Furthermore, as he grew up, he became very close with some children from his neighborhood, E and Turtle, and they eventually became his lifelong best friends. Vince became such a good friend that when he decided to move out to Los Angeles to further his acting career, he took on the tasks of mentally and eventually financially supporting Johnny Drama’s failing career and he brought E and Turtle along. To sum up Vince’s primary Discourse, one can say that he grew up an honest kid who knew the value of a dollar and always made sure to put others first.

When Vince moves to Los Angeles, he is exposed to a completely different lifestyle in that it put more emphasis on the individual rather than the other; it is fast-paced, expensive, and one had more acquaintances and “friends for their careers” rather than real friends. It was a complete one-eighty for Vince as he was used to a much more quiet, honest, and humble lifestyle. Before discussing secondary Discourse, it would be appropriate to define the term first. According to Gee, secondary Discourse is a Discourse acquired through “non-home-based social institutions” such as churches, schools, organizations, or in the case of Vince, a profession as an A-list actor. What exactly is the Discourse of an A-list actor? I think it is important to note here that a Discourse is a kind of “identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write” (Gee 7). Using this so-called “identity kit” we can analyze Vince’s secondary Discourse.
Before analyzing the "identity kit" of Vince, I think it is interesting to note that even before Vince started absent-mindedly spending his earnings on the most lavish items, he already appeared to have a grasp on the Discourse of an A-list actor. Vince is constantly seen with his three best friends. They grew up together, moved out to Los Angeles together, and even work together in most instances. It is these three friends — E, Turtle, and Drama — that form Vince's entourage, yet though they are still the best of friends they all work for Vince. E becomes Vince's manager and is seen doing much of his work — reading the scripts for Vince and going to Vince's meetings while Vince stays at home and smokes marijuana with Turtle. Johnny Drama, though not official, is Vince's personal trainer and nutritionist as he is consistently seen urging (yet always failing) Vince to work out and eat healthy. Lastly, there is Turtle who becomes Vince's chauffeur, though they prefer the term driver and errand-runner. Vince's three best friends work for him and take care of the things that Vince should be taking care of on his own, but if he went to his own meetings, ran his own errands, and took care of himself by himself then he would not be acquiring the Discourse.

Reverting back to the "identity kit" previously touched upon, a solid place to start would be to look at the "costume" or wardrobe of Vince now that he lives out in Los Angeles. Being a big name actor and having to uphold a reputation and impress the paparazzi, Vince is consistently seen wearing the most fashionable clothing money can buy; even his laid-back clothing is more expensive than most people's formal wardrobes. His very outspoken publicist, Shauna, is usually the one who picks out the clothes for him. When one thinks of Hollywood clothing, they think of top-of-the-line and extravagant articles; the actors and actresses who have unprecedented success tend to let it be known and one way of doing this is through their clothes. Vince is no exception to the rule.

It did not stop there for Vince though, as he was keen to not only purchasing the most expensive clothing, but also the most sumptuous automobiles and grandest homes. In the episode "Aquamansion" the boys go house shopping with a budget of approximately 1.2 million dollars. The real estate agent takes them to what appears to be a very middle-class looking house. As they peer around the house Drama says to Vince, "you can't be living in a dump like this ..." and Turtle states enthusiastically that "this place doesn't even have a pool!" Vince agrees as under his breath he sighs, "a million bucks ain't what it used to be." He politely asks the lady for anything more "M.T.V. Crib style" and she informs them of a 10,000 square foot Spanish estate for four million dollars — Marlon Brando's old home. Though three million over budget, Vince agrees to buy the house because not only was it Marlon Brando's old home (arguably the greatest actor of all time) it was also a chance for him to show off his recent successes. Just a year and a half ago, he and the guys were living in a two bedroom apartment. Actors and actresses are seemingly always trying to outdo each other and Vince fell victim to the madness; within just a few short years of residing in Los Angeles, it appears that Vince is beginning to acquire the Discourse of an A-list actor.

Further support for this claim is evident when Vince continues to display a clear understanding of the A-list actor Discourse in "The Review" when he purchases a 320,000 dollar Rolls Royce Phantom, simply because Turtle chanted "just do it" and the dealer said he would give him 1,000 dollars off if he signed an autograph for his daughter. E advised him not to make the purchase by citing the fact that a) he did not need it b) he just received horrible reviews for his newest movie Head On and c) he just missed out on a movie deal that would have guaranteed him 4 million dollars. Sadly, a Rolls Royce Phantom was not the only automobile that Vince blows his money on. He bought a Hummer and Cadillac Escalade solely to be driven around in. He also buys E, Drama, and Turtle all Ducati motorcycles in the episode "A Day in the Valley" after the numbers for his new movie Aquaman come in and it is reported that they surpassed Spiderman as the biggest opening weekend in cinema history at nearly 117 million dollars.

Now yes, Vince is carelessly spending money to show off his new found wealth, but that is not the only reason he buys the Ducatis; he buys them as a token of his appreciation to his friends for being there with him every step of the way. Here it begins to become obvious that Vince may not have fully acquired the Discourse of an A-list actor; rather he has "made do" with a mushfake Discourse which, according to Gee, is the "partial acquisition coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to make do... with something less when the real thing is not available" (13). In a mushfake Discourse, one has

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acquired some aspects of the Discourse they are trying to join and these "some aspects" are just enough for one to get by and give off the impression that they have fully acquired the relevant Discourse; when in actuality they have not. The example that Gee uses refers to when prison inmates make hats from underwear to protect their heads from lice because actual hats are not available to them; the term mushfake comes from prison culture (13). This is the case for Vince as it appears he was beginning to acquire the aspects of the Discourse of an A-list actor by having an entourage and spending haphazardly on the newest fashions, the most lavish homes, and the most exorbitant automobiles.

However, it is these same signs — the signs that make us believe Vince is acquiring the Discourse of an A-list actor — that proves to us that he is actually not. How exactly do these signs prove that Vince is not truly acquiring the Discourse of an A-list actor? The signs, primarily buying Ducatis for his best friends, show us that he still has his primary Discourse of always putting others first and not always having the spotlight on him. The next question that arises is "can't Vince not only have but apply both his primary and secondary Discourses at the same time?" The answer, surprisingly, is no according to Gee; once one fully acquires a secondary Discourse they become a stranger, if you will, to their primary Discourse and will no longer have any need for it. Vince's act of buying his best friends all Ducati motorcycles as a thank you for all that they have done for him is not only an act of kindness, but also an act from his primary Discourse of always putting others first and if this act is from his primary Discourse, which it is, it can mean only one thing: Vince never fully acquired the Discourse of an A-list actor and has applied a mushfake Discourse as a substitute.

The instance of Vince buying Ducati motorcycles for his best friends is not the only example of Vince's primary Discourse appearing in his secondary Discourse environment. Continuing on the topic of automobiles, Vince in the episode "My Maserati Does 185" is given a free Maserati from a Beverly Hills dealership, but instead of keeping the car to himself, he hands the keys over to E as a thank you for accepting the role as his manager. Vince also gave away the Hummer that was used to chauffeur him around town. One of the guys' best friends, Dom, was recently released from jail on good behavior and flew out to Los Angeles to be with them. After a few episodes of Dom living in the house with everyone else and acting as Vince's security guard, Vince sets him up with his own apartment and gives him the Hummer as a "severance package" because Vince owed him for taking the blame for his marijuana possession years ago.

Furthering the mushfake assertion in the episode "Aquamom" Vince's newest movie, Aquaman, is set to premiere yet he does not have a date to bring. Shauna, Ari Gold, his extremely critical and rude yet lovable agent, and the guys all give him different advice on who to bring but they all agree (except Drama) on him bringing someone more famous than him because it will illuminate his success; Drama advises against bringing someone more famous because "they will steal the limelight away from" Vince. Vince, does not seem satisfied with everyone's suggestions, so he goes out on a limb and asks his mother to fly out all the way from Queens to be by his side as he walks down the red carpet. She agrees, at first, but she has never left New York City due to a fear of traveling, so she backs out. E, realizing how important this means to Vince, also flies out his and Turtle's mothers to be along their side for the premiere so that Vince's mother would not have to travel alone. Turtle seems to be the only one against this idea because the night of the premiere is "the biggest pussy night of the year" and with all the girls invited, it will be a "feeding frenzy." Vince does not care about "the biggest pussy night of the year," or the fact that he will be able to pick and choose which girl he spends the night with; he ignores the advice from all of his advisers who supposedly know the Hollywood scene the best and he opts out instead to bring his mother, who he says is "the most beautiful woman in the world" and the woman who is by far the most near and dear to his heart. His mother was and continues to be the catalyst for his primary Discourse of always putting others first and being humble. By bringing her out to Los Angeles, his actions show that Vince is not a stranger to his upbringing. He not only goes against the Discourse of an A-list actor which would have been to bring someone famous to the party, but he also brings out his primary Discourse in his secondary Discourse environment, which is a perfect example as to why Vince made do with a mushfake Discourse and never fully acquired the Discourse of an A-list actor.
Aquaman was such a hit that a sequel was in the works with Vince once again in the starring role. However, at the same time Aquaman II would be shooting, so would Vince’s dream movie, Medellin. The director of Medellin had no problem with Vince shooting both movies at the same time (as E had come up with a brilliant plan to do so). Warner Brothers, the studio that owned the Aquaman franchise, however did not approve as they could not have their superhero who was worth billions to them “blowing coke in theaters worldwide” (Crash and Burn). To get Vince on their side, Warner Brothers offered Vince 12 million dollars for the second movie, but Vince was impervious to this lucrative offer as he was determined to star in Medellin, his dream movie. For Vince it was obviously not about the money, which is apparent because Medellin was a low budget, independent film. In fact, Vince turned down Warner Brother’s deal of 12 million dollars without even being assured the starring role as Pablo Escobar in Medellin. Vince worked and worked, persuaded, flirted, and demanded his way to the starring role. A lot of actors these days seem to be taking roles that they have no interest in simply because of the money they could make. Vince is an exception though as he turned down a guaranteed 12 million dollars, which did not include the money he would be making off of action-figure sales, theme park rides, and other shoot-offs from the movie.

Prior to the Medellin premiere, an insurmountable amount of buzz was generated as the trailer leaked on YouTube and many were looking forward to the second installment of the “Dream Team”, which consisted of Vince as actor, E as producer, and Billy Walsh as director. The first installment of the highly publicized “Dream Team” was Queens Boulevard. Offers came flying in from everywhere of studios wanting to buy the movie, yet they were told they would have to wait until the movie was shown. Much to the chagrin of Vince, the movie was a theatrical disaster and as the credits rolled, Harvey Weingard, a fictional character based off of Harvey Weinstein, and a very well-respected film producer, offered to buy the film for 1 dollar. Though Vince was crushed, it was not because of the millions of dollars of money he lost out on, but because he poured his heart and soul into this movie and it went unappreciated. If Vince truly acquired the Discourse of an A-list actor he never would have been put into the situation at Cannes because he would have jumped at the Warner Brothers offer of 12 million to do Aquaman II. When Vince refused the Aquaman II offer, it became obvious that he had not fully acquired that Discourse. When Vince went through hell to get the role of Pablo Escobar in Medellin, it became blatant that he was reverting back to his primary Discourse.

It is extremely imperative to remember that Vince is an actor and as an actor he assumes the role of someone else. It is this fact that makes it appear that Vince easily acquired the Discourse of an A-list actor, when in reality he had not. He was only acting like he had acquired it. Vince assumed the role of an A-list actor through his use of mushfake Discourse. In actuality, Vince was still the same kid from Queens, who always put others first, knew the true value of a dollar, and remained humble despite his successes.

Works Cited


