Exploring the Notion of 'Grinding' in Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Gamer Discourse:
The Case of *Guild Wars*

by

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Abstract

The grind in Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) has been described by game studies theorists as an inscrutable, paradoxical convergence of work and play (Dibbell, 2006; Yee, 2006), troubling previously held notions about the carefree nature of play as advanced by seminal theorists such as Johan Huizinga (1951). However, despite the recent academic fervor around MMOGs, examinations of the grind offer little insight into why players grind, and even less about what the grind means to its practitioners. Studying the collected forum and interview texts of a six-year old MMOG community, this dissertation adopts a Wittgensteinian approach to discourse analysis in an effort to learn more about the grind and what it means to the players who practice it. This 'mapping out' of the grind's meaning in the *Guild Wars* community is intended to both start and/or contribute to a dialog in game studies that examines how play can be situated theoretically with respect to phenomena so often construed as undesirable by its players while also providing a functional instrument for others to adopt in their further analysis of this phenomenon.

Keywords: game studies; MMOG; grinding; discourse; play

Dedication

To Data, Flix, Niki, Mor Mor, Tanya, my Gramps and my Gran, and of course, my young little Cillian.

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Glossary

Farm/Farming The act of repeatedly killing creatures or performing some in-game act in an effort to reap the results, whether it be loot, faction points or other rewards. Certain creatures in *Guild Wars* occasionally 'drop' certain items when killed, and such drops are tied to a probability ratio. Farmers seek to 'brute force' this probability ratio by simply repeating the given act over and over again until the desired result is triggered. In the case of *Guild Wars* faction points (see Chapter 1), farmers simply repeat the act most likely to yield such points.

Spawn Camping The act of a player(s) waiting in a particular area for a creature to spawn or re-spawn as to defeat it and take its loot. *Guild Wars*' approach to design eliminated this from the outset as each of the game's zones was designed with a pre-determined number of enemies which spawn only for the party who entered it. This makes the availability of a key monster-drop far more equitable, but can lead to instances of farming as players 'zone' in and out of an instance to purposely re-spawn a given creature(s). See 'Zoning' below.

Griefing The act of purposely and maliciously interfering with the play of others in an MMOG, either through lewd or profane chat behavior, (i.e. prevention of the progress of others) or exploitation of the game's rules in a way which would subject other players to an intractable disadvantage.

Constitutive Rules Outlined by Salen and Zimmerman in their text, *Rules of Play*, constitutive rules refer to the "abstract, core mathematical rules of a game. Although they contain the essential game logic, do not explicitly indicate how players should enact these rules". (2004, p. 139). Video games are hard cast in these constitutive rules, and unchecked, oversights in the implementation of these rules can quite often lead to exploitable loopholes.

Vanquishing Refers to the elimination of all creatures in a particular zone in *Guild Wars*. Such creatures usually number in the hundreds per zone.

Given that zones are discrete areas experienced only by a player and their teammates, vanquishing a zone simply means that all creatures have been defeated on that one play-through. Should a player and their party leave and enter the zone again, all enemy creatures will have returned.

Although vanquishing contributes towards a number of prestige titles in *Guild Wars*, vanquishing a particular zone known for certain loot drops by its creatures (farming) is not uncommon. Points for the elimination of creatures in a zone also contribute towards other prestige titles, making vanquishing a popular

activity among title-seekers.

Running	The act of a player trying to rush their character through a particular zone without being killed by any of the creatures within it. In *Guild Wars*, a single player can run through a zone while their teammates stay behind and wait for the whole group to be pulled through to the next zone by the runner (given that only one player needs to enter/exit a zone for the entire team to also be transported). However, entire groups can also join in on the run should they have the appropriate speed and protection buff spells.

Running is usually adopted when a group or individual is trying to get to a destination as quickly as possible where other goals are to be achieved. For example, players collecting points in certain zones for prestige titles will often run through interstitial zones in order to accelerate the process. |
| **Speed-Clearing** | The attempt to vanquish a particular area or route within an area as quickly as possible either in the pursuit of title points or a desired loot drop. Given that a number of *Guild Wars* titles take many, many hours of creature killing to achieve, speed-clearing sections to optimize the balance between rewards and time-expended can make for lucrative faction point gathering. |
| **Zoning** | The act of exiting the gate of one instanced zone and then re-entering it, thereby resetting the creature population within the original zone. When farming for items, players often try and keep farming routes close to a town so they can zone back into and out of the town again with minimal inconvenience.

It should be noted that 'zoning' between non-town areas too frequently will ultimately decrease the amount of potential loot that can be had from creatures within that zone. The game will elicit a warning to players who are frequently zoning between two non-town areas, informing them that loot-drops will decrease through this practice. This decrease is temporary and is ameliorated by simply starting back at the nearest town and trekking all the way back to the area in question. |
| **Skills** | A player-character's collected abilities which can be found throughout the *Guild Wars* world and thereafter placed on one's skill bar. When a player ventures out into the world of *Guild Wars*, one can only take 8 skills with them at a time, or what is known as a 'build'. Therefore, skill combinations in the field are a critical consideration in one's playing of the game as they are the proverbial playing cards one has in-hand. |
| **Nerfing & Power Creep** | Nerfing refers to a sudden re-balancing of a game's system by its designers in an effort to make something in a game less powerful or in order to remove an unfair advantage. In MMOGs, when the |

term 'nerf' is used, it typically means a change was made which has been crippling to a given skill or class. Conversely, where 'nerfing' is a quick and devastating change to one or more game elements, 'power creep' is the slow increase of systemic skill or class effectiveness over time which is brought about by minor tweaks made to the game's system over a period of months or years.

1. The Quandary of the Grind

1.1. Introduction to MMOGs and Grinding

"[...] it would be paradoxical indeed if supreme dedication to an activity somehow vitiated the activity. We do not say that a man is not really digging a ditch just because his whole heart is in it. However, the rejoinder may be made that, to the contrary, that is just the mark of a game [...]"

Bernard Suits, 1978

This work is about 'grinding' in massively multiplayer online games.

Although the genre is only 14 years old, massively multiplayer online games (or MMOGs for short) have left an indelible mark on the video game and entertainment industry alike. With a market worth approximately 1.6 Billion dollars across North America and Europe alone (Screen Digest, 2010), MMOGs are not just having a profound commercial impact as a genre of a larger media market, but along with the Web 2.0 driven social media zeitgeist of this early century, have catalyzed a watershed moment in digital interactive media (Taylor, 2006a). MMOGs and the observable practices of their players continue to elicit social and cultural reverberations that researchers are still scrambling to comprehend (Williams, Yee & Caplan, 2008; Taylor, 2006a), and at the fore of this phenomenon is the now famous *World of Warcraft (WoW)*, which sported approximately 12 million users and owned 56% of the MMOG market during its prime in 2010 (Screen Digest, 2010).

WoW's unparalleled and perhaps even unpredictable fiscal success has since spurred on other developers to reach for that same brass ring of market supremacy, and with every year, more and more notable fantasy and sci-fi properties are digitally extended into MMOG territory. *Lord of the Rings, DC Comics, Star Wars, Lego* and even

Hello Kitty now live on as MMOGs, supporting the daily play of hundreds of thousands of players across the world[1].

Without delving into a protracted history of this 14 year old genre, it can be safely said that today's MMOGs offer a similar experience: sandbox-type environments in expansive 2D or 3D online virtual spaces in which players, often numbering in the thousands, can concurrently navigate, interact with and explore using highly-customizable avatars. A player's avatar serves as the vessel for acquisitions and accomplishments in these virtual spaces, capable of adopting various forms of dress or decorative baubles, displaying prestigious titles and wielding items ranging from the most crude of wooden staffs to the most lustrous of fictional relics. Player representations in MMOGs certainly vary between games of differing themes such as the space-themed *EVE Online*, or the superhero-inspired *City of Heroes*, but the concept remains the same: players assume control of a virtual entity capable of engaging in a conflict with virtual opponents, and in doing so, acquire commodities and various displayable forms of status.

However, all virtual acquisitions in MMOGs whether through items, material resources or levels of progression require the effort or time-investment of a player. Since such games primarily generate revenue for their publishers via a monthly subscription[2], they are engineered explicitly to engender player commitment over a (hopefully) substantial period of time (Schubert, Zen of Design 2007). Due to the costly nature of designing games of this magnitude and the daunting task of incorporating complex systems that can cater to many thousands of players, it has been argued that MMOGs tend to be designed around repetitive, low-threshold mechanics combined with a longitudinally oriented design that privileges time-investment by players (Schubert,

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[1] MMOGs have practically become a form of 'captive marketing' all on their own (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009)

[2] It should be noted that a number of games now either seek to compete with high-budget subscription-based games by turning to microtransaction models, where players pay as they go in order to access either more content or more in-game prestige items. A number of 'second tier' MMOs such as *Age of Conan* have gone 'Free to Play' after a series of years in order to entice new players to join. Such a model typically allows a user to play for a significant percentage of the game before needing to pay and unlock the next threshold.

2010 [presentation]). This is considered by many MMOGers as simply as the a priori context for 'playing the game'. Others refer to it as 'the grind'.

The 'grind' or 'grinding' is a commonly exchanged term within MMOG player communities, and refers to the constant and repeated engagement with one or more already repetitive tasks or mechanics. Those familiar with the MMOG genre likely already possess an intimate knowledge of such tasks: endless hours of clicking on herbs or other shrubbery to raise one's 'shrubbing' level, mouse-clicking multitudinous stacks of consumable items to attain that elusive 'Quaffer' title, or slaying countless hordes in the pursuit of a quest reward or 'farmable' item. Much like the activities described hitherto, a weathered player could likely list specific examples ad-nauseum, but generally speaking, activities associated with the grind are conducted for the acquisition of in-game experience points or virtual goods. In some situations this can even require a player to do as little as clicking a mouse while leaving an avatar completely stationary.

Game scholar T.L. Taylor characterizes the MMOG grind as an "experience of going through painfully boring or rote gameplay with slow advancement. Everyone knows and accepts this as a (flawed) part of the game, but the threshold for tolerating it varies widely" (2006, p. 76). *Star Wars: The Old Republic* systems designer Damion Schubert broadens the definition somewhat, simply referring to it as "what happens when you make the player do something he [or she] doesn't want to do in order to do something he [or she] does want to do" (2010, [presentation]).
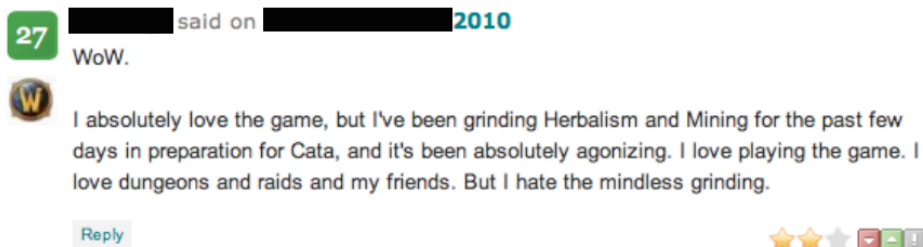
Figure 1- *A comment from Massively.com's blog post on "love and hate" relationships with the grind in MMOGs*

Wired Magazine's Clive Thompson paints a picture of his own elastic tolerance for the grind, reflecting on his experience in the MMOG World of Warcraft:

> "I had to spend the next eight hours planted at my desk, repetitively clicking through the same tasks as if I were an industrial robot making car parts on the Chrysler line. I slaughtered wolves, bears, a few more wolves, some creepy little Kobold humanoids, then -- hey -- some more wolves. I rooted around in their corpses for random junk. (Woo! A candlestick!) Then I did it again. And again. And again. Until 3 a.m., actually.
>
> This is of the most-prodigious mysteries of the gamer soul.
>
> Theoretically, we love multiplayer games because they offer a dramatic alternative to our shades-of-beige meatspace lives. They let us cast off our mundane existence and become a colorful, empowered hero. And what do we do with this second life? We behave like obedient workers in a Soviet collective outside Stalingrad, circa 1971. Comrade, your job is to collect potatoes. For seven years. We pay $20 a month for this privilege.
>
> What the hell is wrong with us?"

Surprisingly, what makes the subject of grinding one of the 'most-prodigious mysteries of the gamer soul' and thus worthy of inquiry is not its monolithic and eminently recognizable tedium. On the contrary, what makes the grind truly fascinating is that it *isn't* 'tedious' to everyone at all. Perhaps even more curiously, those who speak ill of the tedium of the grind in MMOGs often continue to endure it entirely willingly. Some love it openly:

> "There are plenty of people who want to think about strategy and interaction, who find the grind tedious and off-putting. Probably more of those people than there are people like me (after all, you don't see a lot of people hand-weeding their lawns these days). But not everybody suffers through a grind as just a way to get that status-enhancing "massive, glowing, meat cleaver of a sword". Really. And to assume that when designing games is a mistake. Honestly, who plays Katamari _just_ to get a bigger star in the sky, or the praise of the King of the Cosmos? The fun is in the rolling, not in the status. For me, the same is true for MMORPGs. It's the process, even (especially) the mindless parts, that makes these games so endlessly attractive to me.   "
>
> (Liz Lawley, Terra Nova, 2006 [blog])

These definitions of the grind, all fairly conventional, tend to reference monotony, boredom, mindlessness, obligation and rote gameplay in characterizing grinding, and yet these things do not universally map to all player accounts of 'the grind'. Many players despise it, others enjoy it and some players do not even recognize what they do *as* grinding. In other words, there appears to be a subjective component to the grind. Therefore, although it may initially seem a simple matter to identify the grind by its visible symptoms, we have yet to diagnose what the grind actually means to those who engage with it, and are far from being able to plot out those experiences in a comprehensible manner.
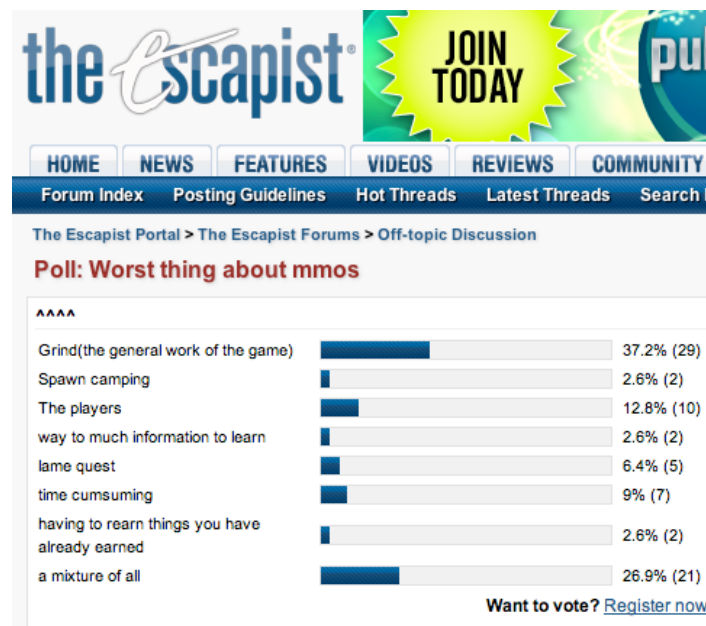
Figure 1 - *A user-generated poll in the forum of the* Escapist Magazine *on the "worst things about MMOs"*

When scholars and theorists speak about the grind they typically do so by adopting rhetorics of 'play' or 'work', situating 'the grind' within the discourse of their native disciplines whether it be psychology (Chou & Ting, 2003), sociology (Silverman & Simon, 2009) or economics (Castronova, 2005). However, as this study undertakes to show to speak of the grind in these ways can often efface the agents that participate in the practice and through whom meaning is manifestly 'realized'. Accordingly, this study is concerned with what "players reckon to be the character of and reasons for their own

participation" (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 16) in grinding, a relatively unexplored subject which has seen only a little scholarly excavation, despite its importance MMOG players. A precondition for asking why players grind in games, though, is querying how they conceive of and experience it. We first need to understand 'what' the grind means to players if the 'why' is to make any sense at all, and this works seeks to explore that 'what' in earnest.

1.2. Research Question and Objectives

This dissertation focuses on player gameplay in MMOGs, using the case study of *Guild Wars* in an effort to seek out and examine the manifold character of the grind by using a variant of discourse analysis that has been selectively informed by the later theoretical work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 1953; Hoenisch, 2006; Spielman, 2008). To this end, I review and analyze a series of player-produced texts including *Guild Wars* forum entries, wiki discussions, interviews and in-game chat transcripts. The idea here is to look at how players speak about the grind in order to not only learn more about the grind itself, but to perhaps understand why players continue to 'grind' even as they decry it. In learning more about what the grind means to players, insights into why players grind ought to become clearer.

I have selected *Guild Wars* for exclusive focus here not only because of its explicit mandate to keep grinding out of its design (Gamezone, 2005), but also for its lack of a subscription fee: a feature which eliminates the financial investment factor frequently attributed to player grinding (MMOGrpg.com, 2007)[3].

1.2.1. *Why* Guild Wars*?*

The creators of *Guild Wars* (Arenanet) originally trumpeted their game as one that privileged skill over time-invested by a player (Gamezone, 2005; GigaOm, 2006). There would be no subscription fee, no farming, there would be no grinding and there

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[3] In fact, the purported de-emphasis of grinding is one of the fundamental reasons I (and many of my friends) became attracted to the game myself as a player.

would be no 'camping' for loot (see Glossary). In the words of then *Guild Wars* Community Manager, Gaile Gray, "*Guild Wars* is designed to eliminate the grind. […] You won't find '10,000 miles of virtual 3D terrain' to wander around in, nor find yourself writing macros and bots to chop wood for 10 hours a day while you play Mario Kart" (Gamezone, 2005).

The original *Guild Wars* was thus designed along an arc of progression which allowed a player to either explore on their own, or to follow the game's story through instanced[4] mission completion that whisked the player both narratively and geographically through the game's content. 'Levelling' a character in the game was designed to be as transparent a process as possible since it was intended that level 20 be the quickly and naturally accessible maximum cap, making grinding and 'between-level anxiety' among players less of a concern (Gamezone, 2005; GigaOm, 2006).

Guild Wars was designed around a single-player styled progression infrastructure, which means levelling occurred seamlessly as in-game challenges were designed to match the level of a player at any given time if one was playing along the game's prescribed arc[5]. Grinding for experience was largely unnecessary and grinding for gold (the game's primary currency) only became crucial in instances of saving up to buy the game's rarest armor from in-game vendors or perfectly modified weaponry from other players. There was no manner to determine what creature would drop the best item nor was there any sort of unique weaponry to desire; creatures in high-end areas typically produced randomly generated and randomly assigned high-end loot. All of this meant that the need to 'farm' (see Glossary) for specific items was kept to a minimum and 'spawn-camping' (see Glossary) was eliminated altogether. In other words *Guild Wars* was designed to subvert the grind.

With the original game released in early 2005, *Guild Wars* sold exceptionally well and was widely considered a triumph. Following this success, *Arenanet* would ultimately

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[4] Instances refer to zones in-game separate from the larger game world. Instances are shared by only a limited number of players who agreed to enter together.

[5] There are of course some exceptions, the most prominent of which include those players who choose to 'run' ahead at a very low level. Such players 'twink' or 'speed-level' their characters in the more advanced stages with the help of veteran players.

release two more episodes or 'campaigns' in 2006, but there would be marked differences between those and the original game.

Factions and *Nightfall,* as the following two campaigns were named, began to incorporate conspicuous instances of grinding into their games. For example, both games would only permit progression in certain scenarios after X amount of points ('Faction', 'Sunspear points' etc.) had been accumulated through repeatable quests and creature kills. Since points of this type could only be accumulated from repeatedly performing very specific tasks, this ensured that players would have to invest a significant amount of time rehashing the game's content in order proceed past these checkpoints. Moreover, these points were also necessary for the acquisition of Arenanet's newly introduced in-game materials and armor.

Between the original *Guild Wars* and *Factions*, 'green' unique weapons were introduced: weapons with high-end, immutable specifications that could only be obtained by defeating one particular creature in a specific instance. This was a departure from previous rare items which, hitherto, were obtainable as a creature drop from nearly anywhere within a certain geographic region and without any assurances as to its statistical attributes. Green weapons were thus very distinct--possessing the highest specifications in-game and the rarest, most ornate designs making them far more desirable than previous high-end weaponry and making the 'farming' of these items a popular pursuit.

There was also the introduction of new 'prestige' titles that displayed on a player-character how many creatures they had killed[6], how many high-end items they had found and how many in-game perishable items they had consumed (e.g. alcoholic items, which serve little to no gameplay purpose other than to assist in the achievement of this

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[6] Although not a literal 'kill-count', kill-related titles in *Guild Wars* are reflective of how many points were scored through obtainable bounties on particular creatures. E.g. 8 Sunspear points for every undead creature killed would count toward one's Sunspear title track.

particular title track through their consumption)[7].

Within the first week of *Factions's* release, the term 'faction farming' or ''FF' became a staple in the exchanges between players in outposts and towns and soon after, there emerged formalized player-made guides on how to farm points towards one's title track of choice with the greatest efficiency (Guildwiki, 2007).

With in-game progression and prestige now inseparably tied to notions of grinding and farming, *Guild Wars*' subsequent iterations (including their most recent expansion pack, '*Eye of the North*' in 2007) have since found themselves succumbing to the time-invested/repetitive task completion model of design despite their no-subscription model--a model which neither necessitates nor demands such time-investments from their players. In fact, a player simply purchasing the game was (and still is) enough to live up to the financial expectations of *Arenanet* from their customers in terms of their no-subscription model.

Guild Wars thus serves as an example of an MMOG where grinding and those mechanics that facilitate it were recognized by designers as 'undesirable', and then subsequently removed and/or discouraged. Yet six years later, the grind is still not only recognized and labelled by players in *Guild Wars*, but heavily (and quite admittedly) practiced. This is especially the case now that *Guild Wars* has recently announced its sequel, promoting players to raise their scores in their personal 'Hall of Monuments'[8] (*Guild Wars* Guru, 2010). Each monument achieved in the Hall of Monuments contributes to a prestige title for avatars created in the new sequel, but most titles ask for the accumulation of points which take anywhere from tens to hundreds of hours of

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[7] It should be noted that achieving the 'Drunkard' title requires only that a player consume in-game alcohol in a town by double clicking on it repeatedly in their inventory. It should also be noted that the highest level of the 'Drunkard' title requires 10000 in-game minutes of character drunkenness, which translates into 6 days, 22 hours, and 40 minutes of real world time. (http://gw.gamewikis.org/wiki/Drunkard)

[8] The Hall of Monuments is a large room in the final *Guild Wars* expansion whose virtual furnishings are specific to the player-avatar standing within its walls at any given moment. The hall houses five large displays, each one reflecting an aspect of the visiting player's achievements, whether it is the mass accumulation of collectable miniature pets, collectable AI companions, craftable weapons or wearable vanity armor sets. However, the fifth and most prominent monument in the hall is the one dedicated to 'honor'. This is where a player's significant titles are displayed. See Appendix for more.

repetitive activity to achieve.

Like many players, I came to *Guild Wars* largely because of its intent to alleviate the grind in MMOGs, but as a six year player of the game, I continue to perform what I would characterize as grinding activities within it. Though grinding is not made entirely crucial by the designers with regard to a player's narrative progression through *Guild Wars*, it is nonetheless heavily encouraged through the steady introduction of repeatable quests and eminently farmable titles and loot. The recent addition of the Hall of Monuments is most emblematic of such enticements. This is precisely why *Guild Wars* makes an interesting example of study: not only because Arenanet formally recognized the grind as an undesirable practice and took steps to remove it, but also because in failing that, Arenanet now unabashedly encourages repetitive tasking among Guild Wars' player-base as a form of preparation for their next product (Xonic, 2005). This prompts the consideration of the relationship between players and designers in these spaces and the meaning afforded various activities within them. If the grind means different things to different people, what does it mean to players in a game that originally sold itself on the elimination of a feature that now consumes the time of much of its community? This question is as objectively fascinating as it is personally perplexing.

1.3. Scope and Rationale of Research

This research into the grind is not, however, merely an extension of my personal quest for answers about my own play in *Guild Wars*. In the last several years of massively multiplayer online game research (Taylor, 2006a; Moberly, 2010; Golumbia, 2009; Yee, 2006), the 'grind' has remained an ostensibly inscrutable phenomenon that has served to illustrate the often-enigmatic relationship between MMOG players and their play. The design and inclusion (Schubert, 2010 [presentation])[9] of game systems which facilitate grinding in MMOGs by designers has been debated, discussed, embraced and rebuked on a number of occasions by researchers such as Nick Yee

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[9] When asked about 'the grind' at a panel of MMOG designers featuring a series of different developer representatives, Turbine's representative, Henrik Strangberg, stated that they wouldn't be pursuing an elimination of the grind from their design moving forward, describing the grind as a (Strandberg, 2009) "somewhat satisfying aspect of MMOs".

(2006) and even prominent MMOG designers such as Ultima creator Richard Garriott[10] (2007) & BioWare designer Damion Schubert (Zen of Design, 2007). The question consistently unanswered is why players elect to grind in MMOGs—especially given the documented resemblance of these games to work and to recognizable forms of toil (Dibbell, 2006; Castronova, 2005; Taylor, 2006a, Consalvo et al, 2010, Silverman & Simon, 2009 & Yee, 2006).

While the grind has been occasionally characterized as a relaxing or welcome diversion from the demands of everyday life (Lawley, 2006), it has also been described in player fora and in-game contexts as an unappealing, repetitive and boring aspect of MMOGs (Dutton, 2007; MMOGCrunch, 2008). What may be the most fascinating aspect of grinding are the players who express discontent with grinding and yet continue to do it (MMOGCrunch, 2008; McCrae, 2003; *Guild Wars* Guru, 2009 [forum]; Gamerhate, 2008 & Yee, 2003). Designer Brian Green muses that it is "interesting that players tend to inflict the grind on themselves. Players tend to take the path of least resistance, even if that path is boring as watching paint dry" (2009). Though this passion for banality does not apply to all players[11], it is this seeming contradiction of Suits' 'paradox' stated at this chapter's commencement; a paradox which suggests that one's dedication to a banal activity can somehow efface the activity itself, that serves as an impetus for the present work.

Today, the grind has become a staple of the MMOG package (Taylor, 2006a; Juul 2005; Dibbell, 2006 & Castronova, 2005) and from both a design *and* player perspective, grinding now very much defines the genre (Dibbell, 2007; Schubert, Zen of Design, 2007). Whereas some designers have vocalized that they acknowledge and will continue to design for the grind[12], a few developers such as Arenanet continue to market their games (both *Guild Wars* and its imminent sequel) on the premise that their games seek to subvert it (Gamezone, 2005).

As players continue to grind, whether they profess to love or hate it, researchers

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[10] Lead designer of what was arguably the first graphical MMO, Ultima Online.
[11] The query being "is grinding is not a grind if it is not recognized as such by the grinder?"
[12] Such as Dungeons and Dragons Online developer, Turbine (Strandberg, 2009).

and thinkers in the field continue to generate copious explanations for why they do it. These explanations range from attributing the grind to a type of behaviorist compulsion to the grind being a digital manifestation of our deeply instilled capitalist proclivities to play out fantasies of efficiency and productivity (Rettberg, 2008 & Dibbell, 2006). It has even been suggested that the grind may very well be the 'maturation' of play itself (Thomas, 2005). As Silverman and Simon remind us, "we need to be mindful that online play like all other social activity is neither determined nor indeterminable" (2009, p. 356). This is why this research hones in specifically on the subjectivity of players and the meanings they construct in and around their own in-game activities. After all, players themselves have many, many things to say about what the grind means to them:

> "GRIND = Repetative actions for things you NEED to have (sic)"
>
> "killing the same 12 groups of the exact same <u>monster</u> for 10 hours **is** fun."
>
> "why should i WORK to **PLAY** a game. hell, [...] i buy games to ESCAPE work, not do MORE work. this was the promise of guildwars. this **is** why tons of us dont like MMORPGs."
>
> "THAT'S **WHAT** PEOPLE DON'T LIKE! HAVING TO LEARN TO DO **WHAT** WE ALREADY KNOW HOW!"
>
> "There **is** that old saying a GOOD WORKMAN DOESN'T BLAME HIS TOOLS. Now if this **is** to be true, then ALL the people moaning about grind to get x skill are actually C**P players as they get beat and blame it on the fact they didn't have x skill"
>
> "**what** we want **is** to not have to do the exact same thing over and over and over and over and over til the right boss **is** there. where have i EVER asked for the skills to be handed to me? all i have asked for **is** to remove the grind. the repetition.if you think doing something 150 times makes you more skilled than someone that does it 1 time, i feel sorry for you."
>
> ("No Grind? Yeah Right", *Guild Wars Guru*, 2005-2010)

T.L. Taylor argues that people simply play differently--"there is no single definitive way of enjoying a game or of talking about what constitutes 'fun' (2006a, p. 70), and as the work of Susanna Millar (1968), Bernard Suits (1978) and Thomas Malaby (2007) would support, there is a certain necessary utility in regarding play as an attitude rather than a discrete activity. However, it is precisely this recognizable plurality of experience that leaves explanations for the grind quite difficult to pin down, drawing due attention to

the fact that asking 'why' we grind may be a premature enterprise. As will be touched upon in the next chapter, explanations regarding 'why' we grind may have been deployed well in advance of answering the far more important question of 'what' the grind actually means to players of MMOGs.

Therefore, it is through this research in *Guild Wars* that I look to unravel the oft-apparent contradictions in player values and player practices with respect to 'grinding', discovering more about what 'grinding' means to players of MMOGs while contributing to the generative work currently being conducted in the field of game theory (Salen and Zimmerman, 2005; Malaby, 2007; Taylor, 2006a; Galloway, 2006 & Juul, 2005). To that end, this work explores the way players describe and situate their own gameplay within MMOG spaces and addresses the questions these accounts raise with regard to traditionally held notions of play (Huizinga, 1950, Caillois, 1961).

In a larger sense, this research is part of a project to understand more about how we come to comprehend our notions of play as the media and language through which we experience such activities continue to shift and change: an exploration of grinding as a quantum of a more intricate matrix of play, sociality and identity. As will be argued, paying closer attention to phenomena such as the grind potentially widens an aperture into the sense and meaning of contemporary digital play, which in turn, may afford insights useful not only in re-theorizing play in general, but in re-informing of contemporary research in the MMOG space.

1.4. The Structure of this Dissertation

This dissertation analyzes the discourse of *Guild Wars* players as collected from in-game chat interviews, online fora and wikis designed for discussion about the game. I turn to these sources in an effort to excavate the kind of discursive data that will allow me to plot out the potentially vast spectrum of player meaning around the in-game activity known colloquially as 'the grind'.

Having introduced its central problem in chapter one, I begin in Chapter 2 with a survey of previous literature on play, MMOGs, and the grind, discussing the way these concepts have been positioned in relation to one another by designers and theorists and

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surveying the ways in which the player relationship to grinding has been explained thus far.

Chapter 3 then offers a summary of the methodology I employed to collect and analyze my research. This entails a discussion of the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the manner in which I have adapted his concepts in the deployment of the discourse analysis I have taken up here.

Working through my collected data, I spend chapter 4 discussing how the collected data was categorized, and outlining the way in which I plotted out a discursive map of the grind vis-a-vis a Wittgensteinian eye to language use in the *Guild Wars* community.

Chapter 5 dives headlong into a more directed analysis of my collected data: using the Wittgensteinian concepts specified in Chapter 3 in order to effectively 'look and see' what is revealed by a deeper investigation of the discursive map plotted out in Chapter 4.

The final chapter then considers the significance of this study's findings, discussing the relevance of the grind with relation to player disposition and laying out the manner in which the work conducted here can be applied to a further conceptual analysis of the grind in MMOGs either via qualitative or quantitative means.

2. Play and Grinding in MMOGs: A Review of the Literature

2.1. Overview

This chapter deals with two areas of literature central to understanding the phenomenon of grinding. Given the grind's enigmatic relationship to the concept of play (both in contemporary literature as well as in player communities such as that of *Guild Wars*), I begin by presenting a general overview of play as its been understood in scholarly literature over the last 60 years, and where appropriate, fleshing out the discrepancies and difficulties inherent in situating the concept in relation to games and work. I follow this section with a review of literature on the grind in MMOGs more specifically, literature which brings to light the strained theoretical relationship between work and play as it applies in virtual game spaces such as *Guild Wars*.

2.2. Theories of Play

"Certainly everyone knows what play is not even if everyone can't agree on just what play is..."

J. Barnard Gilmore, 1971. p. 311

Game studies researcher Thomas Malaby in his work *Beyond Play* (2007) recently surmised that up until now, game theorists may have been attempting to conceive of play and gameplay in ways which are incongruous with the ways they also seek to circumscribe games themselves, positing that:

> *"games have a long-running, deep, and habitual association with 'play,' itself a shallowly examined term, historically and culturally specific to Western modernity. Play, as it is used in both game scholarship and often more widely, commonly signifies a form of activity with three intrinsic features. It is separable from everyday life (especially as against "work"; it exists within a "magic circle"), safe ("consequence free" or nonproductive), and pleasurable or "fun" (normatively positive). None of these features holds as an intrinsic, universal feature of games when they are examined empirically, however (and play itself may be more usefully treated not as a form of activity but as a mode of experience)"*
>
> *(Malaby, 2007, p. 96)*

Although we have had many functional definitions of game brought down to us over the years, Malaby believes that "with the limited purview suggested by the play concept, we are now at a point where a reconceptualization of what games are reveals a whole new vista for social theory and research" (Malaby, 2007, p. 96; Golumbia, 2009). This 'limited purview', Malaby argues, is not a product of the way theorists have sought to define play, but is instead symptomatic of the type of relationships they have assumed play has to concepts such as games and work (2007). Game theorist James Hans concurs, assessing that work on play is often undermined by the initial premise that "play most readily manifests itself in the world of games" (Hans, 1981, p. vi) and that it is especially in the academy "that one finds the most explicit commitments to games as play, and play as fundamentally about 'pleasure', 'fun', or "entertainment." (2007, p. 98). These are accounts which, Malaby notes, fail to hold up empirically.

What are the ways in which academics and game theorists have sought to define play up until now? This section identifies and reviews game theory's canonical theorists on the subject of play. I begin with the 'forefathers' of play and game theory of this century, Huizinga and Caillois, who examine how play lives in and through culture, the ways we can begin to recognize its various manifestations and how the play-element can be disentangled from more 'serious' enterprises. I follow this up with a review of the work of Bernard Suits, who proceeds to deconstruct and define games through a rule-based approach, and in doing so, characterizes gameplay as an attitude-dependent phenomenon that privileges the intrinsic. I then move to the work of James Hans and Georg Gadamer, who describe play less as an extension of the player-subject, and more

as a subject in and of itself: an 'essence' which actively plays players as objects rather than the other way around. Afterwards, I proceed to a short survey of Bateson's and Sutton-Smith's look at the role of discourse and communication as tools in the social construction of play. Finally, I return to Thomas Malaby, considering his view on play as 'disposition' and reflecting on the lineage of theorists that led to that view.

The review below will demonstrate the manner in which play, even as a concept, has been quite thoroughly 'played with'--vacillating between un-structured and structured, activity-based and experience-based--all in a matter of 60 years. I begin this survey of research on games and play with the ideas of two theorists, Huizinga and Caillois, whose groundbreaking discussions of play as a significant sociocultural phenomenon have set the course for games studies as a formal discipline.

2.2.1. *Play as Culture: Johan Huizinga*

One of the 20th century's most celebrated texts on the subject, Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens,* describes play as a 'free' activity apart from ordinary life (1950). Play, Huizinga contends, is a superfluous pursuit that is never imposed upon one by necessity or duty and is voluntary, instinctive and imaginative (1950). But although free and apart from ordinary life, play, he observes, is also very much a part of it. Play permeates the serious obligations of life through everyday forms such as workplace rituals, religious ceremonies and social decorum. It bleeds recognizably into our obligations and our responsibilities, despite at first glance living somehow outside of them. In other words, whether it be performing the role of a cheerful sales clerk seeking a commission or a manager negotiating the competitive gauntlet of office politics, Huizinga believes that we all encounter what he calls the 'play-element' in our daily lives. In this way, Huizinga characterizes play as a phenomenon that is free while also capable of great seriousness, capable of absorbing its players wholly with a palpable intensity (Huizinga, 1950).

Huizinga notes that although it might be tempting to situate play and seriousness as opposites, "the contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid" (1950, p. 8). Huizinga does not conceive of any opposition between work and play, arguing that it would do an injustice to the concept of play to depict seriousness as its opposite (1950).

Rather, his belief is that the play-element is simply of a "higher order" (1950, p. 45), as seriousness, zeal or exertion are all aspects which can be readily found to be present in play. In Huizinga's words, play must be considered a "thing by itself" (1950, p. 45). As a higher-order concept then, the 'play-element' is something Huizinga claims to be effectively irreducible, an experience impenetrable by logic, and yet a phenomenon whose cultural permeation is evident at nearly every turn (1950).

In demonstrating the perceptible and everyday presence of the play-element, Huizinga introduces another concept--that of the 'play-sphere' (1950, p. 51). This is where playful experiences manifest in communally recognizable spaces with recognizable boundaries. The play-sphere conceptually articulates the ephemeral enclosure in which play is allowable--an enclosure that expands and contracts depending on the context and the room for movement within it. This is where Huizinga notes we see the performance of rituals with particular practices unique to those participating in them whether in a religious setting or a litigious one. While these rituals often take place in plain view, the play-sphere is not only defined by its unique customs and voluntary participation, but also by its simultaneously enmeshed and distinct relationship with/from ordinary life. For example, one might see evidence of the play-sphere permeating a boardroom setting as employees perform their designated roles based on their allotted agency, influence and other interoffice political factors. In such spaces, the meek and introverted computer nerd may voluntarily 'play' (perform or imitate) the role of strict authoritarian in managing her employees because of the results it elicits and the implicit expectations for such a role in that setting (Berne, 1996). These perhaps subtle manifestations of the play-sphere crop up in many day-to-day scenarios, but in such spaces there can also be a formal temporal delimitation that makes clear the distinct boundaries of this play-element: a way of formalizing play beyond its occasionally discernible appearances and spatial manifestations.

The magic circle, says Huizinga, is a space conceptually partitioned off from the rest of 'real' life where certain customs are communally consented and adhered to: a voluntary adoption of a given pretence (or in the case of religious ritual, a belief) (1950, p. 57). The customs or rules of the magic circle are known and agreed upon in advance--all participants assume this knowledge prior to entering. However, the magic circle is a temporal as well as a spatial concept, which means that the way time is treated in its

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space is also subject to the customs and rules held by those within the circle itself. For example, a courtroom's procedure may be 'paused' or put on hold by a judge's recess, which all participants agree is a formal break in the legal proceedings. This break in time applies, however, only to the courtroom and its own case, not to other courtrooms and certainly not to the outside world. The magic circle is hemmed off from many of life's larger concerns, altering decorum, behavior and expectations of all participating members within the circle itself. The courtroom is a magic circle within which performances around real-world matters and consequences take place in the most playful and ritualistic of circumstances, even though the consequences and tone of that play remain deadly serious and can have even graver real-world implications (1950, p. 5). In Huizinga's words, magic circles such as that of the courtroom are in form and function, a "playground" (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10) capable of hosting even the most serious forms of play.

The magic circle as a concept, then, can be readily adopted as a lens for examining a great many places and circumstances in culture, society and history, ranging from organized gameplay (chess, hopscotch etc.) to cultural practices such as political rituals (e.g. wig-wearing in the House of Commons), church-going and the dynamics of warfare. Through this formalization, play becomes something that can be transmitted, that "becomes tradition [...] it can be repeated at any time whether it be child's play or a game of chess or at fixed intervals like a mystery" (1950, p. 94). Effectively, the magic circle's spatiotemporal confines allow for the codification of play as a set of repeatable rules for conduct--or what we might call a game.

Huizinga contended that the play-element had been on the wane in Western civilization since the 1700s, encroached upon by the quest for efficiency and routine (1950, p. 206). His sense was that with the momentum of the industrial age, a greater emphasis was placed on outcomes and production, seeking to divide play from the serious. Several years later, French anthropologist Roger Caillois would not only identify this division between play and the serious, but would argue for the need to partition off Huizinga's notion of the magic circle from 'ordinary life'. (1961, p. 4)

2.2.2.   Play as a Structured Activity: Roger Caillois

In reflecting on Huizinga's work, Caillois penned *Man, Play and Games* (1961), a work which, although reverent of Huizinga's book, criticizes it for lacking structure in its dissection of play as a phenomenon, and for placing an overemphasis on the conflictual or competitive aspects of play. When discussing play outside of cultural art forms and mimicry, much of Huizinga's attention is devoted to examining debate and warfare, which for Caillois was a limiting perspective. However Caillois does align himself with much of Huizinga's own definition of play, articulating it as a free activity, separate from daily life with uncertain consequences: an activity that does not produce any external product or good (1961). Unlike Huizinga, however, Caillois considers play as 'marginal' to real life, and an occasion of 'pure waste' (1961). This characterization sets the stage for the division he looks to make between 'wasteful' and 'productive' activities (1961). Thus, while Huizinga sees play as an organic aspect of culture that intersects much of daily practice, Caillois sees it much more as a discrete activity that lives outside of those things we find ourselves obligated to do (1961).

Caillois invests his effort in a systemization of play into categorizable types, along which he plots out a spectrum of engagement between the two poles he labels '*ludus*' and '*paideia*'. Genealogically traceable back to Greek antiquity, *ludus* for Caillois refers to formal rule-based play -- which, similar to Huizinga's concept of the magic circle, has well-delineated customs, which must be followed upon engagement with the activity at hand. *Paideia* on the other hand is a 'free' form of play; play without distinct rules, where customs and rigidity can be spontaneously added or removed at participants' whims. This is a distinction Huizinga alludes to in his own work, but, as Caillois reminds us, neglects to draw out with any specificity.

Caillois proceeds to outline his own categories of play into four sub-types: *agon* (competitive play), *alea* (chance-based play), *mimicry* (simulation-based play) and *illinx* (thrill-based play). Caillois conceives of these categories as four main quadrants of play, which, although they do not necessarily account for all possibilities, serve as core principles around which play-types can be reticulated. He notes that *alea* and *agon* serve as natural opposites given that the former refers to play-types in which players have no control, whereas the latter revolves around players utilizing control to their

greatest competitive effect. *Mimicry* is centered around the idea of pretence, whether it be make-believe, suspension of disbelief or performative acts that serve the aim of entertainment. *Illinx* then refers to a de-stabilization of the senses, a euphoria or thrill brought about by a change in physiological condition. Caillois acknowledges that some of these principles combine well (e.g. *agon* and *alea*), while some do not (e.g. *mimicry* and *alea*), but plotted along his spectrum of *ludus* and *paideia*, Caillois distinguishes and helps segment and partition many of Huizinga's observations about play by splaying the concept open in the form of a typology. This focus leads Caillois to speak more to the notion of play as an organized and separate activity, distancing himself from Huizinga's more flexible take on play as a phenomenon, which itself could be at once both rigid and dynamic.

Caillois builds on the distinction he makes between play and 'real life', arriving at what he feels is one of the sole divisions between work and play--the production of goods or other tangible outcomes (e.g. being paid to grind as a gold farmer in *World of Warcraft*). Caillois offers the example of 'professional' players of games. "It is clear that they are not players but workers" he asserts, "when they play, it is at some other game" (1961, p. 6). The 'other game' implied by Caillois here does not eliminate professional sports from the realm of play altogether (after all, Caillois claims it is also being 'played'), but rather removes it from the spirit of the game in which this newer instrumental game is being played. This view into Caillois' phrasing would see the professional playing of a game as the dependent subset of the original--one which is intended to be played for its own separate, but overlapping purpose. Caillois thereby suggests that a sincere application of oneself to a game and its institution constitutes a more *genuine* play, but any focus on the negotiable consequences that the game might produce whether it be money, fame, status or some extrinsic outcome changes the complexion of the activity

(interestingly, this is not to the exclusion of any exchange of goods within a game i.e. gambling)[13].

Here, Caillois commits himself to a division between play and seriousness in a manner that now clearly departs from the work of Huizinga. While Huizinga felt play to be a 'higher-order' concept which could be serious or not, Caillois situates seriousness as play's diametric opposite: particularly as it pertains to the production of goods: a presumably serious endeavor. In other words, should a game become a purposeful means to an extrinsic outcome which is unrelated to the game's intrinsic aims, such extrinsic outcomes render the activity as work (1961, p. 4). The dependency of an extrinsic outcome on a game encroaches on the 'free' nature of the activity itself, which implies the playing of the game at an instrumental level rooted in necessity. Obligation, for Callois, effectively negates the purity and carefree wastefulness of the play activity.

However Caillois leaves the door slightly ajar to the consideration of player-attitude as a determinant in establishing the character of a play-like activity, noting that, "the nature of competition or the performance is hardly modified if the athletes or comedians are professionals who play for money rather than amateurs who play for pleasure. The difference concerns only the players" (1961, p. 45). It is this notion of player attitude that is focused on more keenly on by the late Canadian Professor of Philosophy, Bernard Suits.

2.2.3.   Play as the 'Lusory Attitude': Bernard Suits

Bernard Suits is now perhaps best known as the author of one of game theory's most venerable contributions, *The Grasshopper* (1978). Although not directly pre-

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[13] Although he does not speak to 'play' explicitly, Jesper Juul does speak to the role of 'negotiable outcomes' in contemporary digital games. He generates a six-factor model of a game, including, rules, quantifiable outcomes, valorization of outcomes, player effort, player attachment to outcome and negotiable consequences (2005, p. 34). Of particular interest to this conversation is the sixth of Juul's factors: a feature which speaks to an idea that challenges mid-century theories of play with regard to the necessity of games having no external or extrinsic motivational factors. But in the wake of online digital play, the purchase and merit that in-game rewards and achievements can have on the 'ordinary' world outside of the game itself have raised the attention of researchers, prompting those such as Juul to embrace an elimination of the intrinsic-only rewards as necessary criteria in determining 'true' gameplay.

occupied with the concept of play, Suits seeks to define the curious concept of 'games', seeking a logical argument to prove that 'game' and its conceptual boundaries could be clearly demarcated.

He argues that:

> *"To play a game is to engage in an activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such an activity…playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."*
>
> *(Suits, 1978, p. 55)*

In other words, Suits believes that a common feature among all games is that they privilege inefficiency to provide their challenge. Any individual could simply walk over to a hole in the ground and place a tiny ball in it, but the game of golf outlines a series of permitted means and limitations which make such a goal challenging, and thereby, such a game possible. These limitations and goals are agreed upon in advance by those participants who shape the game's institutional boundaries--much like the formalized instantiations of Huizinga's magic circle. Suits conceives of a game as a rule-based construct that has life breathed into it by a willing 'attitude', an institution of agreed-upon rules and 'pre-lusory' goals whose delimitations are reified through earnest player enactment. And it is this earnest enactment by a player that Suits describes as gameplay.

For Suits then, in addition to the enactment of a game's rules, the complicit mindset of a game player is presumed as a necessary constituent, a stipulation on which his definition of games depends (1978). He refers to this condition as the 'lusory attitude': the psychological framing a player brings to a game and its 'institution' (1978). That is, a full willingness to play a game, simply for the sake of making the game itself possible, played without any cognitive deviation from its pre-established rules or goals. In sum, gameplay for Suits is a function of the attitude brought to a game by its players.

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Suits contends that those player mindsets which deviate from the game's intended mode of engagement or its established pre-lusory goals fall into other categories that are 'not' gameplay, but something else. These deviations include trifling (following the rules, but pursuing a different goal), cheating (not following the rules, but pursuing the agreed-upon or 'pre-lusory' goal) or being a spoilsport (disregard for both the rules and the goals of the game) (1978, p. 59). Although these other activities may resemble gameplay and can admittedly be forms of play themselves, for Suits they exclude themselves as the genuine compound concept of '*gameplay'*. There is a lusory intent that Suits believes must constitute one's commitment to a game's institution and its pre-lusory goals[14].

Maintaining play as a concept apart from games then, Suits asserts that play is something done for its own sake while work is an activity conducted for extrinsic gains rather than intrinsic ones. In the final pages of *The Grasshopper*, Suits describes a utopian society where all tasks are performed by people who have a genuine appreciation for the tasks they conduct, apart from any consideration of their extrinsic value. Therefore, even if one is 'producing' something from an intrinsically rewarding activity that provides a benefit in real-life, this does not transgress Suit's conception of play as it would for Caillois, and in fact, such accomplishments can even have 'value' in the real world[15].

However Suits ends *The Grasshopper* on a curious note, as he finds his admittedly underdeveloped concept of 'play' covering theoretical ground that his concept of 'gameplay' left untouched, and it raises a contradiction worth noting here (1978). If gameplay for Suits can allowably produce extrinsic goods as long as a player is abiding

[14] A game and its 'institution' are distinguished by Suits as being the difference between the prescriptive manner in which a game is played, vs. the descriptive manner in which one can point to a game's rules being enacted in any given state.

[15] MMOG research perhaps best demonstrates this best, as duly noted by Nicholas Taylor (2008), it isn't uncommon for even game studies researchers to leverage that perceived 'value', referencing their accomplishments in particular games to legitimate themselves as researchers in the spaces they study (e.g. referring to high player level, hours played, number of mature avatars etc.).

by the lusory attitude, and a player is seeking the production of extrinsic goods through their pursuit of a game's pre-lusory goal (i.e. a salaried Basketball player playing for their cheque), then we find ourselves in a scenario where a game is being 'gameplayed', but a player is conceivably *not* playing. After all, the player is being provided an extrinsic reward for his/her participation and may not truly enjoy the sport, but may instead simply be emulating the lusory attitude as a means to be compensated--'going through the motions' as it were. This suggests the possibility that a game devoid of intrinsic value for a player, can still be 'gameplayed' by them, even if play (by Suits' conception of the term) is not necessarily taking place. The institution is being abided by, but play may or may not be. By this token, Suits stumbles into the implication that at any time, gameplay is as eligible to be work as it is play[16]--and in this way, Suits begins to shed light on why the grind might often be characterized by players as both a form of play and a form of work.

2.2.4.   *Play as Structuring the Subject: Gadamer and Hans*

In his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer moves away from the idea of play being an activity at all, describing it as something experienced rather than enacted (1975). From Gadamer's phenomenological perspective play is something that happens to us rather than something we do, arguing that play is separate from us, something which runs through and around us, situating the player not as the subject, but the object of play (1975). Play represents an order of things where there is a repeated movement without goal, effort or strain "it happens, as it were, by itself" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 94; Vikhagen, 2009), like a 'dance' or 'spiel' which has "no goal that brings it to an end" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 104). The player for Gadamer is merely a catalyst in starting that dance, a vessel through which the dance becomes perceptible, much in the way the swaying branches of a tree demonstrate visible evidence of wind. For Gadamer, it is the evidence of structure through the testing and exploration of its limits that makes play recognizable (1975).

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[16] Suits would contend that 'radical instrumentalism' (1978, p. 135) prevents one from being able to seek out a lusory goal simultaneously with a real-life goal, since he believes one is always putting the other at deficit. However, when real-life goals and in-game goals are one and the same (i.e. acquisition of an item to adorn an avatar to gain real-world prestige), such argumentation fails to hold purchase (Taylor, 2006a)

Whereas Suits placed a significant emphasis on player enactment as a constitutive element of play, Gadamer considers play as a "mode of being" more so than a mode of doing (1975, p. 91). Play is neither constituted by us nor, as Malaby would attest, is it explicitly there for our enjoyment (1975). However, when it is experienced, Gadamer describes play as a form of relaxation, a removal of the burden "which constitutes the actual strain of existence" through "pure self-representation" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 93).

Liz Lawley's appreciation of the grind, recounted in Chapter 1, might be considered in this way, with her MMOG grind conceivably being a representation of her off-line persona who admittedly appreciates the routine and quiet predictability of weeding her garden (2006). However, the pleasure of this self-representation for Gadamer also stems from "the knowledge that something is imitated" (Vikhagen, 2009, p. 16), and the key to this knowledge is rooted in the way we recognize the mimetic situation.

As 'players', Gadamer claims that we need to recognize what is being imitated in order to realize the imitation itself e.g. the performance of imitation when wig-wearing in Huizinga's example of the House of Commons, or even the imitation of what constitutes 'accomplished play'[17] in MMOGs (Gadamer, 1975; Vikhagen, 2009). The way we choose to represent ourselves in playful contexts communicates what we construe as the 'spirit' of the game being played, whether it is irreverence (such as a refusal to imitate, as in the classic 'griefer'-See Glossary) or willing indoctrination (one who adheres to the game in a way they believe the designers intended it to be played).

Much like Caillois, Gadamer considers seriousness to be play's opposite (1975), arguing that when authentically experienced, players become lost in their play, caught up in the pretense and imitation of the experience. However, he notes that there is a strong tendency for players to recognize play's structure when it manifests and thereafter seek control over it (1975, p. 92). For Gadamer, this act of scrutinizing and controlling play immediately precipitates play's disappearance. By abandoning all pretense and assuming an inquisitive stance towards play we undermine the structure of

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[17] See Taylor, 2009 for the performance of 'pro play'

play: a structure which has manifested precisely because of the pretense that was originally afforded by its players. For Gadamer, becoming lost in the pretense of play is play's sole objective. Once a player is no longer lost in their play, play's own structure falls away and is thereafter subsumed by the consciously imposed structure of the player whether it be through formalized instrumentalism of play's conduct or an imposed sense of professionalism.

Building on Gadamer's idea of play as a structuring phenomenon, literary theorist and philosopher James Hans, in *The Play of the World*, defines play as "a structuring activity...[a process of] generating new structures...[believing it to be] no more than the infection of the familiar by difference" (1981, p. 28). While Gadamer sees play as the subject which structures the player-object through their experience of play, Hans sees play as a phenomenon which demonstrates structure through a player's activity.

Hans faults Caillois for articulating play as an isolatable activity, accusing him of succumbing to the tendency to "restrict the concept of play to those situations our culture classifies as games" (1981, p. 1). Hans further purports that "play should not be relegated to its own privileged sphere" (1981, p. 2), and criticizes even Huizinga's rather culturally pervasive notion of the play-sphere as a "significant contributor to the decline of the concept" (1981, p.2).

Hans believes that the decline in the play-element that Huizinga speaks of was less of a decline and more of a distinction from the verificationist ethos that arose alongside the 'human sciences' in Western culture. He asserts then that instead of declining, play simply went 'underground' rather than experiencing an actual ebbing; it began to emerge as something separate from truth and rationality (1981):

> *"[play is] differentiated from 'normal' existence because [it] seem[s] to have no relation to the principles on which we act and the truths by which we understand the world"*
> *(Hans, 1981, p. 4)*

Hans, however, believes that we can have a greater sense of what play is by breaking down the artificial barriers we erect between play and work, 'life' or "any of

those aspects of 'normal existence' from which play is usually exempted (1981, p. 5). He proceeds to describe play as a productive activity which generates new structures, bringing about new states, results and realizations. Citing the automotive assembly line as an example of play exhibiting itself through structure, Hans argues (1981) that play's productive qualities are evident in everything from the production of goods (evinced through the accumulative grafting of sub-systems onto larger systems in industrial labor, an exploration of the limits of structure) to the production of knowledge (through the accumulation of classroom knowledge which is then put to use in ways oft-unintended or unpredicted by teachers). It is desire and production then that Hans privileges as the main purposes of play--but not production in the Cailloisian sense. The automotive example he provides situates play not as a literal conversion of the playful into the material product, but rather the exploration of a system and its comprising ideas and technologies as the play, which catalyzed the realization of new possibilities and edification. For Hans, play occurs as an activity until "we have put off our instrumental approach to the world" (1981, p. 11), and only then does play 'produce' meaning, and understanding: "one seeks to play because one believes that the understanding achieved through play is more valuable than the kinds of understanding achieved in other ways" (1981, p. 11).

Therefore, although Hans seeks to exclude the instrumental from play, play for Hans has in some sense, already been accorded an instrumental role in ordinary life (albeit non-prescriptive), arguing that there are numerous places and manners in which play can teach us more about what we already see and do in fields such as science, engineering and design: scenarios that live outside the spatiotemporal limitations previously allocated to the play activity (1981, p. 7). For Hans, each of these things have value in the world and are associated with productive outcomes that live beyond merely the 'understanding' that produced them.

The thesis of *The Play of the World* can effectively be distilled down to the idea that play, despite it being a free pursuit, 'structures' activities everywhere, in nature, in science, on the assembly line and in games. It is the 'free movement' of play that most clearly illustrates the boundaries or structures against which it collides (i.e. the boundaries of a glass cup are demonstrated clearly by where the liquid in its container cannot go). In acknowledging these boundaries, players are capable of modulating their

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perspectives, shifting and adjusting as we learn from our experiences and generate new meanings and desires, and for Hans, this is the kernel of play. When this modulation in understanding or interpretation ceases, Hans believe play itself ceases as well (1981).

2.2.5. *Play as Expression: Bateson and Sutton-Smith*

Where theorists such as Hans sees play as something that reveals structure and thinkers such as Caillois conceive of play as something we ourselves structure, there are those scholars who conceive of play as a product of language, rhetorical discourse and interpersonal communication (Bateson, 2006; Sutton-Smith, 2001).

For anthropologist and semiotician Gregory Bateson, play does not take place in a spatiotemporally delineated magic circle per se, but rather arises from within a 'psychological frame' (2006, p. 186). Bateson discusses the concept of meta-communication, the idea that all activities are mediated through an exchange of signals that indicate the nature of that activity (2006, p. 179). He asserts that every act of 'metacommunication' regarding a particular form of engagement, whether it's staring at a game screen or throwing a ball to a first baseman, psychologically 'frames' that act for the person engaging in it. He further identifies various forms of metacommunication which can shape this framing (e.g. mood, performativity, language). In Bateson's words, "the actions of 'play' are related to or denote other actions of 'not play'" (p. 314). All things 'play' and 'not play' are denoted through cues or signals that we associate, for either state, with the nature of play itself as a phenomenon whose definition can only be approximated through language. For Bateson, then, it is possible that we may point to a cue that we believe to be representative of an act of 'play' because we are surrounded by other signals which communicate 'play' to us, which by Bateson's estimation is a characteristic of unconscious, 'primary-process' thinking. This potential conflict in signal interpretation reinforces the notion that as outsiders we might observe what appears to be the 'nip' of play (that metacommunication which signals 'play'), but this 'nip' does not necessarily denote what the player being observed believes to be play. This contradiction between what is signalled versus what is intended culminates in what Bateson terms "paradoxes of play": when play is signalled, but is not actually occurring, or vice versa (p. 324). Revisiting Suits' 'contradiction' above then, a player may be appearing to be subscribing to a game's institution, enacting its rules, but the player may

not consider this activity to be play at all, despite any outward appearances. In other words, pinning down what the experience of a game means to a player can vary wildly, regardless of what signals they may be communicating through their participation, hence why playing basketball for one person can be considered purely vocational for another, depending on context and disposition.

Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* contributes another perspective on the cultural significance and construction of play's meaning. His characterization of play as "ambiguous" refers to the diverse manners in which play is treated in various disciplines: a consideration of play's numerous interpretations as a product of persuasive discourses in these fields (2001). Sutton-Smith does not aspire to unite various definitions of play into one overarching theory, but instead articulates the multifarious nature of play by outlining a number of these persuasive discourses (which he terms, 'rhetorics') around what play *can* be. (2001). Sutton-Smith discusses each of seven major rhetorics, from 'play as imagination' to 'play as power', categorizing various schools of thought, such as animal development and child's play, under them. He grounds each of these rhetorics in "well-known cultural attitudes of a contemporary of historical kind" (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 15), ascribing each to well-known theoretical advocates such as Fagan (animal play) and Piaget (children's developmental play) whose respective rhetorics uphold the field in which they practice. Sutton-Smith notes that each of these rhetorics not only describes a different disciplinary perspective on play, but in doing so, also differently depicts players (2001). He cautions theorists not to exclude players themselves from consideration or re-shaping of play's definition.

Sutton-Smith believes play is very much a shifting gestalt of persuasive discourses, a broad and ambiguous body which covers a vast array of play's most critical aspects, but which on their own only present one piece of the larger picture (2001). He re-asserts that regardless of how play is represented across rhetorics, its definition must remain "broad rather than narrow, including passive or vicarious forms as well as the active participant forms, including daydreams as well as sports and festivals" (2001, p. 218). Although Sutton-Smith concedes that play may be considered both an attitude and an experience he also regards it as a cultural language, remarking that "it should not be defined only in terms of the restricted modern Western values that say it is non-productive, rational, voluntary, and fun", but rather seen as a form of expression that

is neither good or bad (2001, p. 218). Like Huizinga, Sutton-Smith's interpretation of play is very much something *of* our culture, rather than something *in* it (1950).

When looking across these various rhetorics and their players then, Sutton-Smith concludes that play should not be conceptually positioned as diametric to work--or even seriousness. Rather, Sutton-Smith argues that play opposes depression, remarking on play as the ideal model for existentialism, where free, self-selected expression and agency gives play its meaning (2001, p. 84). The opposite of play then for Sutton-Smith is the inability to express oneself in a context that alleges such a possibility; or to adopt Gadamer's phrasing, the opposite of play is remaining unable to 'self-represent' (1975).

2.2.6.   Play as Disposition: Malaby

Having opened this chapter with a short discussion of Malaby's work, I conclude this section with some further consideration of his take on play, tying in the work of the theorists in this section to his re-evaluation of play's relationship with the concept of 'games': a relationship scholars have often presumed as a theoretically compatible one[18].

Malaby believes that 'play' and 'game', while certainly eligible for intersection, are not conceptually bound to each other by any empirical evidence. He cites philosopher and professor Phillip Stevens, noting that:

> *"game researchers (and social scientists generally) are still prone to forget: if by "play" we are trying to signal a mode of human experience—a way of engaging the world whatever one is doing—then we cannot simultaneously use it reliably as a label for a form of distinct human activity (something that allows us to differentiate categorically between activities that are play and those that are not)"*
>
> *(Malaby, 2009b, p. 208)*

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[18] Salen and Zimmerman (2004) surmise that play can be considered a subset of games, and that conversely, games can also be considered a subset of play. Such a conclusion embodies the typical view held throughout game theory that play and games are inherently theoretically compatible categories that simply need to be re-aligned to one another in order to best understand them.

Malaby instead suggests that we look not at play and game as two entwined phenomena, but rather consider game-like activities (no matter how playfully engaged in) as *cultural forms* in contrast to playful dispositions towards activities regardless of their intended nature, or, subjective and contextual *modes of cultural experience* (2009b, p. 209). This brings us full circle to the work of Huizinga who argues that play itself is a cultural form that expresses our humanity: a form that arises within culture and "never leaves it" (1950, p. 173). This is a sentiment that Malaby echoes.

Much in the same way that Sutton-Smith articulates play as a form of cultural language that expresses our human agency (2001), Malaby's consideration of play as a disposition then explicitly frames the player as "an agent within social processes, albeit in an importantly restrained way; the actor may affect events, but this agency is not confined to the actor's intent, or measured by it" (Malaby, 2009b, p. 211). Play as a disposition is an attitude that is "totalizing in the sense that it reflects an acknowledgment of how events, however seemingly patterned or routinized, can never be cordoned off from contingency entirely" (Malaby, 2009b, p. 211).

What Malaby means here is that gameplay is not simply the enacting of a game's rules, nor is a game only 'truly' being played if one adopts the appropriate lusory attitude as Suits would suggest--such attitudes towards rules only represent one potential aspect of gameplay (2007). Rather, Malaby states that "*games are processual*: every game is an ongoing process. As it is played, it always contains the potential for generating new practices and new meanings, possibly refiguring the game itself" along with the players who make the game itself possible (Malaby, 2007, p. 102). For Malaby play is infinite in its potential, "intimately connected with a disordered world that, while of course largely reproduced from one moment to the next, always carries within it the possibility of incremental or even radical change" (2009a, p. 210). Multiple forms of play are but a natural aspect of play itself, and by extension, the ever-changing contextual and cultural situatedness of a player's agency.

Malaby thus places more of an emphasis on a player's meaning of their practice rather than empirical accounts thereof: one of the most important takeaways from his

work (2007; 2009a; 2009b). "Meaning is generated amid practical experience" and players "retain an inherent capacity to baffle prediction and thus frustrate [the] instrumental use [of games]" (2009b, p. 213). Such thinking re-ascribes prominence to Huizinga's higher-order characterization of the 'play-element', and indirectly criticizes Caillois for his cordoning off of play as 'separate', anathema to seriousness and without consequence.

Malaby thus manages to conceptually reinvigorate Suits' notion of the 'lusory attitude' in a manner, which acknowledges the greater depth, and complexity of the player, not as a rule-enacting automaton, but (in the vein of Hans), as a meaning-making agent. After all, Malaby, like Suits, does not parcel off the possibility of work, seriousness or productivity intersecting with a playful disposition. Our playfulness stems from the meaning we generate based on the actions we choose towards some 'thing', whether it be a goal, activity, social engagement or otherwise. Malaby (2007; 2009a; 2009b) believes taking a step towards a greater understanding of those player meanings, a framing of play as disposition, can help us generate, much like Sutton-Smith (2001) argues, a more complete (even if ambiguous) picture of how we can conceive play.

Migrating away from the larger topic of play then, the following section moves onto a review of literature around the core subject of this dissertation: the grind in MMOGs. The literature reviewed, most notably Malaby's notion of play as a dispositional on-going process of meaning-making, is useful in the conduct of a closer examination of much of what has been observed through field research in grinding and MMOGs up until now: affording a deeper understanding of how new practices and meanings are generated in these virtual spaces by the players within them.

2.3. The Grind and the Grinder in MMOGs

Literature and research trained exclusively on the subject of grinding in MMOGs is notably scant, but a select group of authors have broached the issue. Doug Thomas's early work on what motivates players to grind offers the speculation that the grind may not be a new phenomenon, but rather the maturation of play (2005). Julian Dibbell's personal narrative recounting his attempt to earn 'real' income through 'virtual' play, *Play*

Money, approaches grinding via the practice of in-game gold-farming (2006). Mia Consalvo's recent look at hard work in games concludes, much like *Wired's* Clive Thompson, that the grind in games offers an unfettered opportunity for players to live out 'The American Dream', allowing them to have a no-frills, low-risk opportunity to work hard and be guaranteed a reward for their efforts (2010). Nick Yee's corpus of research discusses the diminishing distinction between work and play in MMOGs and asserts that such games are in fact teaching players to be better workers (2006), while T.L. Taylor's *Play Between Worlds* (2006a) touches on grinding via the notion of the 'power gamer' and the exalted status of efficiency in *Everquest*. Given the prominence of 'power gaming' in relation to the grind in MMOG literature, I begin here with a discussion of the power gamer.

2.3.1.   The Power Gamer

A prolific contributor to the field of MMOG studies research, T.L. Taylor is best known for her book *Play Between Worlds*--an ethnography of *Sony Online Entertainment*'s MMOG *Everquest* player community (2006a). Having spent countless hours in-game playing with and interviewing *Everquest's* players, Taylor offers an intimate view into the world of one of the genre's early exemplars, and her book's scope covers a vast array of in-game subject matter from gender roles to player sociality. Most pertinent to this research is the chapter Taylor dedicates to the discussion of grinding: what she coins as 'instrumental' play in MMOG spaces. She speaks in particular to the observable instrumental practices of what she terms the 'power gamer' (2006a, p. 73).

The 'power gamer', Taylor notes, is not a phenomenon parsed and labelled by herself as a researcher, but a notorious and entrenched player type well recognized by the *Everquest* community (2006a). She unpacks the term, 'power gamer' as one which implies a set of abilities and/or enthusiasm that exceeds that of the 'average' player (2006a): abilities which aren't necessarily the twitch-related skills one might typically associate with video game play.

As designers have noted in the past, designing an MMOG experience differs quite starkly from designing other games, as the skill level required of players in MMOGs[19] needs to be cleverly tweaked and balanced so as to facilitate the broadest level of player retention possible among its subscriber contingency (Schubert, Zen of Design, 2007). This means that, barring any pre-established player competencies, everyone who starts a new MMOG is intended to be placed on relatively equal footing with their peers from the outset, regardless of skill. 'Elite'[20] content notwithstanding then, the threshold for general participation is designed to be quite low (Schubert, 2010 [presentation]). However, as Taylor's work attests, the power gamer is not content with general participation; they are goal-directed, efficient and demonstrate little patience for the suggested servings of MMOG designers. In the endnotes of Taylor's book, she quotes a founder of one of the longest running guilds on her *Everquest* server:

> *"I think there are two kinds of power gamers: [A] power gamer is a gamer who knows the system and plays for the goal. Doesn't play to explore. He plays to reach some goals and that's why he's a power gamer cause he goes straight in for the goal. Level fast, goes very fast for that goal. People around him fall behind and that's why they think he's a power gamer cause he knows the game system, knows all the stuff and just wants to get to his goal. So that's one power gamer. The other power is how much time you spend. The common power gamer spends a lot of time as well. What is a casual gamer that plays like a power gamer? Is he a power gamer or a casual gamer? The guy who logs on and knows exactly what to do but doesn't log on everyday. I don't know what to call that guy. I still think he's a power gamer. I mean the time invested isn't really about power gaming, but really about...uber gaming maybe. [So he's an] uber gamer maybe [laughter about this distinction]."*
>
> *(Taylor, 2006a, p. 170)*

The qualities of a power gamer include dedication and efficiency in the achievement of a specific goal. However, power gaming is not only about time spent in

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[19] Assuming that we frame 'success' in terms of PVE character development and progression.

[20] 'Elite' content tends to refer to dungeons or gameplay zones which require an exceedingly high player aptitude and quite often require an organized group to complete. Elite content is designed for players to distinguish themselves from the general game population as 'the best', and as such, the completion of elite content tends to result in elite 'loot', armors or items that can visually distinguish players from the rest of the crowd.

pursuing that achievement, but time saved. Taylor's interlocutor makes no mention of skill: it is the way in which one applies their knowledge of the game system in a time-saving fashion which is definitive of the power gamer ethos, for this informant..

The 'hyperefficient' practices ascribed to the power gamer by Taylor (2006a; 2006b) Silverman and Simon (2009) often entail (although not necessarily or exclusively) relentlessly mowing through specifically researched hordes of the same monster type for a greater-than-average rate of XP acquisition; repeating a specific 'run' through an in-game region where certain creatures can be killed in a minimum amount of time thereby enhancing the probability of producing some 'good'; discovering special skill combinations that provide an advantage in exploiting an in-game resource; assiduously 'farming' areas with creatures that can be vanquished at an experience rate greater than those of others; or even running several characters on multiple machines in an effort to either assist an individual character's progress or increase the likelihood of an item drop (what is commonly known as 'multiboxing')[21].

Anything that attenuates the time typically required for in game achievements is embraced by the power gamer, and the exploitation of statistical disparities and discovery of lesser-known efficiencies is of particular value (Taylor, 2006a; Dibbell, 2006). Taylor acknowledges that although there are surely 'ordinary' players who don the mantle of the power gamer in the achievement of their aims (and there are surely degrees of dedication when it concerns the power gamer ethos, as will be discussed later), power gamers tend to thrive quite explicitly on perfectibility in the face of a game's constitutive rules: the implicit boundaries of the game system itself (Salen and Zimmerman, 2005). Taylor acknowledges that this kind of devoted hyperefficiency is not exactly what qualifies as 'play' for all people and perhaps not even for most of them, but this is not to say that the overcoming of inefficiencies has no role in games. In fact, games very much depend on some level of inefficiency.

In their respective work on games, both Roger Caillois and Bernard Suits note the intentional inefficiency that games produce (Suits, 1978, p. 48) for purposes of

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[21] This is a term which denotes the concurrent use of multiple game accounts by one player. For more information on multiboxing: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-boxing

entertainment, reminding us that one of the key compelling qualities of a game is the pleasure afforded by their *inefficient* components: the challenging obstacles endemic to games that take a standard task and makes it increasingly difficult, simply for the delight. The enjoyment a player experiences lies in overcoming these hurdles, reaping progress in spite of the predetermined inefficiencies that make this kind of gameplay possible[22]. What matters here is that power gamers minimize the length of time one would need to achieve an in-game goal at a 'regular' pace---even if it means greater tedium[23].

This 'ultra-rationalized' approach to gameplay thus seeks to pull back the veil that shrouds the statistical underpinning of the game itself, or, with Bernard Suits, what we might refer to as an 'institution-bending' approach to gameplay (1978). To briefly revisit the work of Suits, a game's institution encapsulates the spirit in which the game was intended to be played, by following its intended operational rules, recognizing the capacities of its working parts and pursuing its pre-lusory goals (1978). Suits suggests that those who 'bend' the rules or seek out their own non-lusory goals during gameplay drift into other concurrent activities that abandon the game's institution. These player types include triflers, (those who recognize the rules of a game, but not its intended pre-lusory goals) and cheaters, who represent the inverse: those who recognize a game's pre-lusory goals, but not its rules (1978). However, in video games where the rules that make up a game's institution are hard-coded, we are faced with difficultly when applying older theoretical models of gameplay such as Suits'. The ostensible trifling or cheating committed by power gamers in the static, pre-programmed world of the video game is often in stark mathematical defiance of all designer intentions as to what players were 'supposed' to do (see Salen and Zimmerman's 'constitutive rules' in Glossary), and yet they are allowable insofar as they are hard-coded in the system of the game itself. A designer may not have intended a player to achieve a game's maximum level within hours instead of days, but such a thing is now possible and challenging limits imposed

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[22] Power gamers appear to take pleasure in overcoming those obstacles as quickly as possible and in fact, it is the expediency in this achievement which is often the aim more so than the goal-attainment alone. For a power gamer, it is often the 'have done' and its method that tend to outshine the 'doing', since these things are the marks of masterful and efficient achievement. See Chapter 4.

[23] If 'mastery is an asymptote' as author Daniel Pink would suggest, power gamers are arguably grazing the tangent in MMOGs (2009).

by the constitutive rules of the game is seen routinely in both MMOGs and other games as players generate their own goal structures where the constitutive rule systems provide ('illegitimate') berth to do so[24].
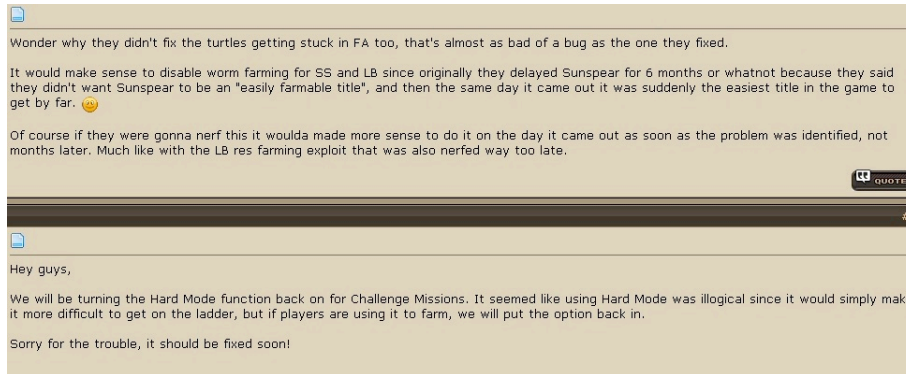
Figure 2 - *A designer responds to a complaint on a Guild Wars forum about a recently removed mode that players were using to grind prestige title points. The mode was re-instated to appease 'farmers'.*

The question that Taylor then asks is "is instrumental play still play?" Taylor herself believes that massively multiplayer rule systems can afford pleasures that fall outside the boundaries of play (from socialization to the flow-inducing, soothing drone of farming), and that these pleasures should be considered as authentic as any other experience in-game for MMO players, whether the source of that pleasure is intrinsic to the grind or extrinsic to its conduct (2006a).

However the grind for a power gamer often transcends a mere choice in play style: it becomes, as Silverman and Simon remind us, a necessary means for attaining prestige in MMOG spaces (2009). In other words, although the practice of power gaming does not necessitate participation in designer-designated 'elite' content, it plays an active role in hewing out a discernible class divide in MMOG spaces.

[24] This is what is often referred to as unanticipated or 'emergent' gameplay. Where players find loopholes or alternative goals in the static constitutive rule systems of a game and pursue them. One famous example of course is *Deus Ex*'s 'mine-stepping' trick, where explosive mines that could be planted nearly anywhere would allow a player to attach them to walls and use them as stair steps to scale objects not meant to be scaled.
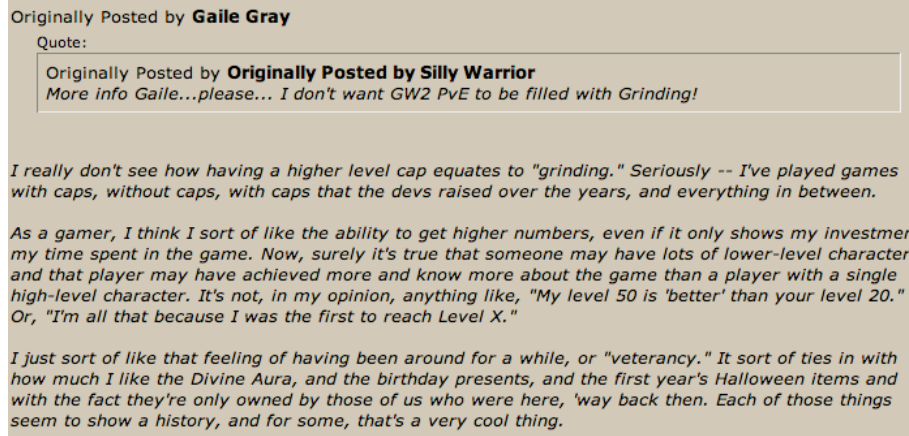
Figure 3 - *'Higher numbers' are a mark of both veterancy and prestige, providing a history or legacy that legitimates a player not only as a 'genuine' veteran in-game, but at the meta-level as well.*

2.3.2. Instrumentalism, Class and the Capitalist Ethos

In a study on interaction patterns in *Star Wars Galaxies,* Ducheneaut and Moore (2004) note that there is an observable incompatibility in MMOG spaces between those players who embrace an instrumental ethos in their gameplay and those who play the game for exploratory or social purposes. T.L. Taylor further notes that instrumenting play, for example through the use of damage meters (GUI modifications which monitor the damage delivered per second by each individual party member) actually serves to segregate and exclude based primarily on particular player-generated statistics, and does so without due regard for other un-recorded player contributions that may or may not even have a statistical equivalent (leadership, research etc.)[25]. In *World of Warcraft*, these modifications (some of them external, but many of them internal add-ons) further privilege the disciplining of players, promoting efficient goal-achievement, and Taylor believes that this, in turn, shapes concepts of 'good' or 'acceptable' play in these virtual worlds (2006b).

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[25] In the words of Hinman (assessing Marx), "Relations between persons are transformed into relations between things, and this reified relationship is expressed in terms of exchange-value. The dominance of exchange-value in capitalist society is such that use-value can only be expressed socially as exchange-value, thereby losing its specifically human quality." (1978, p. 218).

This designer reinforcement of efficiency, Taylor argues, not only pervades the game's calculative add-ons, but thoroughly saturates the very signifiers that direct the most basic of gameplay. In a game like *World of Warcraft* for example, yellow exclamation marks hover over the heads of characters that need to be spoken with, on-screen meters measure how close a player is to their goal and a little skeuomorphic booklet, typically resembling a leather tome or equivalently themed window, automatically records every single quest a player has ever taken, reveals where to solve one's next quest while providing an indicator of one's statistical fortitude to undertake it. Damion Schubert (2010, [presentation]) contends that designers turn to this 'directive' approach to design, and the employment of grind-facilitating mechanics, because players both need and enjoy having direction. Author and columnist Julian Dibbell, on the other hand, believes that this sort of rote transactional transparency leaves a vacuum of meaning: a place for pointlessness to find its point (2006).

Dibbell comes at the grind from a perspective starkly dissimilar to Taylor's. His book, although written in an auto-ethnographic tone, details his earnest attempt to turn his gameplay in the world of *Ultima Online* into a full time job trading and selling in-game gold and commodities to eager players who would rather part with their real-world money than invest the time required to earn the goods themselves (2006). To do so, Dibbell took what he felt to be an exploitable constitutive system that encouraged repetitive behaviors undesirable to the average player, and leveraged it to start a business of his own: a service built on alleviating the burden of the grind for other players at a premium (2006). However, Dibbell did not come by these commodities easily: he spent hours upon hours grinding them into existence, adopting the most efficient methods to maximize his real-world profits (2006), and, as he makes clear, the more efficient he was, the more money made[26].

A personal narrative about how he kickstarted his short-lived career as a 'farmer' in *Ultima Online*, Dibbell's *Play Money* reflects and theorizes on the nature of those things happening to him in and outside of the game world, meditating on issues such as play, labor and virtual economics (2006). His story details the financial hurdles of

[26] Effectively, Dibbell's tale is conceivably that of a self-employed power gamer.

launching his virtual start-up, the personal strife that ensued and even his somewhat comical discovery of what was, at the time, the phantom competition in the virtual currency market: the much-mythologized 'Chinese gold farmer'. But upon announcing 'retirement' from his enterprise, Dibbell produces some rather curious concluding commentary, musing:

> *"...the work was hard, and more to the point, the work did not fit any definition of play handed down to us by tradition. It was not simply a diversion from the path of life; it was the path itself, for a time, and just as fraught with existential care as that path ever is."*
>
> *(Dibbell, 2006, p. 289)*

For Dibbell, not only did his experience confound his own conception of play, but it elicited for him what he characterized as a capitulation to the market conditions that made his endeavour possible (2006). For Dibbell, the grind of the game, like the grind of capitalism, inevitably binds us "to its pointlessness against our wills" and he contends that with our societal subconscious so thoroughly nourished by that ideology (MMOGs not to be exempted) he surmises that we invariably attempt to turn that "pointlessness" to some point. "What easier way is there of contriving meaningful activity than through the mechanism of play?" (2006, p. 299) he asks.

Dibbell does not believe he turned play into work by commencing his online trading venture in *Ultima Online*, but rather, that he turned what was already fundamentally designed as work in the game, a cyclical process of production (design) and consumption (gameplay) saturated by the capitalist ethos, into something that set the stage for challenging his own productive abilities against an overlapping set of self-imposed rules. Although he'd turned to the gold trade as an escape from the grind of a material job, Dibbell felt that the grind was already 'escaping from itself' under the guise of leisure, a phenomenon he terms, 'ludocapitalism' (2006)[27].

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[27] To be sure, Dibbell was at best only 'playing' at his escape from the conscious notion of work by superficially shrouding it in the cloak of leisure in *Ultima Online*. After all, it was he who sought to turn his play into a business to begin with, making his personal derivation of ludocapitalism somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy here.

Yet, as Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter note, "gold farming is not a revolutionary repudiation of ludocapitalism but itself a capitalist venture" (2009, p. 149): and a number of authors note that player engagement facilitated in MMOGs is in large part inflected by our deeply entrenched capitalist proclivities. Theorists such as Rettberg (2008) have extended this argument, borrowing from Max Weber's concept of the Iron Cage (1958) in their assessment that the grind itself is a social and behavioral manifestation of a compulsion to enact a deeply instilled protestant work ethic; to frame the grind in MMOGs as 'good' work conducted in our leisure time thus makes it a guilt-free pursuit (Silverman and Simon, 2009). The monotony and teleological efficiency of the grind thus privileges a "uniformity of life which today so immensely aids the capitalistic interest in the standardization of production" (Weber, 1958, p. 169). Kevin Moberly paints his own picture of the grind and its political and economic ramifications:

> *"...this is the triumph of third-stage capitalism as it is articulated and "plays out" through World of Warcraft. Indeed, as players consume the game, struggling to restore order to a world that has been torn apart by its spectacular antagonisms and thereby remedy the fragmentation imposed upon them by these antagonisms, they do not somehow "earn" or secure their liberation. Unable to do so, they instead reproduce the illusion in which their alienation is rooted: the illusion that the categories through which the spectacular hierarchies and inequalities of late capitalism are manifested: the consent of players to produce themselves and perform as fetishized images within the three-dimensional space of the game"*
> *(Moberly, 2010, p. 222)*

Moberly proceeds to argue that player consumption of these spaces produce an exciting and enthralling exercise that breeds enthusiasm in the face of subjugation and that, despite such games being "consciously designed to disorient, confuse, and bewilder", a player continues to produce value from their inherent emptiness (2010, p. 226). Along with Dibbell, Rettberg, Moberly and others, Golumbia, too, sides with this sentiment, remarking that MMOGs not only "resemble the capitalist structures of domination but … directly instantiate them and, in important ways, train human beings to become part of those systems." (2009, p. 194). Moberly continues by detailing the seemingly generous fictional boundaries of MMOGs with their overtones of boundless exploration, high-narrative stakes and unbridled agency, brandishing a bill of goods that implies much more than can be technically afforded a player in the game itself. He surmises that players are "paradoxically only able to struggle against the spectacle"

(2010, p. 228), consuming whatever affordances there are be it repetition or automation and exalting the confines of the MMOG "iron cage" (Silverman and Simon, 2009, p. 374)[28]. Moberly aligns with T.L. Taylor in this respect, which is to say that given those actions permitted in modern MMOGs, there are particular modes of interaction privileged by the game which go a long way towards implicitly structuring these games as social hierarchies that cultivate inequity and silently disenfranchise less 'rationalist' player types (Taylor, 2006b).

Mia Consalvo et al (2010) stand apart from Moberly and others by emphasizing the salience of player-ascribed values and meanings over the broad-sweeping portrayal of players as the casualties of ludocapitalism (Galloway, 2006). Rather than asking what games 'do' to players, Consalvo and her co-authors revisit the notion of the value that players continually produce from their engagement in these 'inherently empty' spaces, asking, "what is it about online games or the player that makes such work so compelling?" (2010, p. 381).

It should be noted here that the 'grind' in Consalvo et al's piece on the 'performance of hard work', very much characterizes the grind *as* work in these spaces with very little hesitation, but they do so with some caveats:

> *"We refer to the repetitive, tedious work of boxers and videogame players as "hard work," acknowledging that the modifier "hard" is somewhat imprecise, as it can also reference dangerous, physical labor. However, the term "hard work" is also synonymous with capitalist and Protestant cultures, for its emphasis on continuous effort applied to a particular goal, and we draw on it for that meaning."*
> *(Consalvo et al, 2010, p. 382)*

As with Rettberg, hard work and its rewards are implied as commensurate with the grind here, but it is a hard work we choose rather than blindly submit to. And though we are reminded of how often the tedium of the grind is the primary reason given by

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[28] This line of thinking with regard to MMOGs should not be considered as 'new' to theory around play, however. Hinman notes on his discussion of Marx and alienated leisure that "the discussion of alienated leisure has shown the way in which the values and needs characteristic of capitalist society (i.e., the need for having) dominate contemporary play." (1978, p. 210)

departing MMOG players for their abandoning of the game (Yee, 2007), for those who stay, grind-like investments in these games are not waste of time in the same way that their real-world equivalents might be (Consalvo et al, 2010; Dutton, 2007). In fact, this form of 'hard work' has certain benefits when contrasted with lived realities. Simply put, players cannot ensure that any outcomes will result from the labor put towards any given real world initiative, since in life there are no such assurances. Consalvo et al's contention then is that in the MMOG game space, a space in which tasks and their outcomes are so precisely measured, there comes a certain guarantee. You can get what it is you seek if you simply jump through the necessary number of hoops, "it WILL happen. The reward WILL come. All the player has to do is put in the hard work." (Consalvo et al, 2010, p.398).

Springboarding off this notion of hard work in MMOGs, Nick Yee offers that rightly or wrongly, MMOGs are becoming training spaces for the players that inhabit them (Yee, 2006; Golumbia, 2009). His assessment of MMOGs not only acknowledges the growing distinction between player types within them (see T.L. Taylor), but paints MMOGs as spaces where players are taught not to be better players, but better workers; fostering hierarchies such as those discerned by Taylor and illuminating the distinction between 'good' workers and 'bad' ones (Yee, 2006). This is a conclusion echoed by Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter who contend that business itself is migrating towards the adoption of digital play not only as a "generalized form of work preparation for immaterial laboring, through simulations and training, but also generically as a benchmark of virtual skills", heralding Xbox Live Gamercards and MMOG levels as some of the soon-to-be hallmarks of a model employee (2009, p. 32).

With the exception of T.L. Taylor above then, contemporary theorists tend to paint a very monolithic picture of the grind—one of monotony, simplicity and repetition. Furthermore this picture frequently situates MMOGs as a means of masking or enabling some form of labor. This has culminated in a trend in social media and business, termed 'gamification'--a concept spearheaded by Byron Reeves, Amy Jo Kim and Jesse Schell (Deterding, 2010). 'Gamificationists' suggest that adopting the predictable mechanics of games (such as points, badges, levels or achievements) can be leveraged to extrinsically motivate nearly anyone to engage in what otherwise might be a less than entertaining activity (Edery & Mollick, 2009; Deterding, 2010). Heralded by Schell (2010)

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as the inevitable future of social motivation, what he terms the 'gameopalypse' predicts the widespread use of point systems to encourage participation in anything from social activities, learning, charity and personal hygiene, to commerce, bringing the efficiency of the grind to real life where he feels it can be applied for extrinsic social good. With the unrivaled success of MMOGs and time-intensive social media games such as *Farmville* and *Cityville*, Schell believes we've already been primed for this inevitable shift to 'gaming' real life. For Schell, player 'work' in games becomes a preparatory step for making the leap to turning our lives into a giant Xbox Live Gamercard. As Thomas Malaby muses, "the disposition of play is, in many ways, the latest sentiment to have been turned into the object of institutional desire" (2009b, p. 216).

2.4. Conclusion

It stands to reason that much of the literature on grinding in MMOGs continues to monolithically characterize MMOGs as sites for the conversion of play into work (Dibbell, 2006; Yee, 2007; Dutton, 2007; Moberly, 2010)--and this of course overlooks the obvious issue that Taylor and Malaby remind us of, which is that as much as grinding doesn't constitute 'play' for everyone, it also fails to constitute 'work' for everyone as well (2007). Despite the efforts of Huizinga, Hans and Malaby in seeking to disentangle work and play from one another, it continues to be the presumption of play and work's polarization that proves to be a significant hurdle when speaking to the grind in MMOG literature. However, this obstacle makes evident an even greater impediment to furthering academic discourse around the grind: the fact that contemporary game theorists tend to conceive of the grind in one way: a way characterized by pervasive elements of labor, monotony and a reduction and/or elimination of player agency. This ontological hurdle in game studies is perhaps the greatest that we face in broaching what the phenomenon of the grind actually is or what it means to players, less why people practice it.

To overcome this hurdle, this work proceeds to apply Malaby's reconceptualization of play, to the grind itself: considering the grind not simply as an activity, but rather, a dispositional phenomenon rooted in player subjectivity and context (2007; 2009a; 2009b). The next chapter outlines a methodology which looks to examine

these contextual dispositions in the MMOG *Guild Wars* through player discourse: a reading of player language use within the *Guild Wars* community, adopting an approach to discourse analysis informed by Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

3. Methodology: Wittgensteinian Discourse Analysis

3.1. Methodology Overview

> *"The limits of my language are the limits of my world"*
> *(Wittgenstein, TLP 5.6, 1922)*

Having presented a review of literature on the subject of grinding and play in Chapter 2, this chapter outlines the methodology for the present study, laying out the key concepts of a Wittgensteinian discourse analysis, and explaining why it is particularly useful for studying the texts of *Guild Wars* players.

As pointed out by Malaby in the previous chapter, a game player's observable participation is rarely enough to establish what a player is experiencing from their engagement with a game. Similarly, it often remains unclear as to what a player's activity in games--what is typically called gameplay--actually means to them.

Chapter 2 further considered the argument that play is a dispositional phenomenon that escapes ontological qualification and lives beyond observable affect. Rather than simply reshaping the concepts used to unilaterally 'partition' what players do in games, Malaby calls for a focus on players themselves: a rigorous analysis of the conceivably fragmented nature of player disposition towards a given activity (2009b). I call for the same focus here with regard to the grind.

Malaby's focus on player disposition emphasizes subjectivity and context, which I contend can be understood and studied through an analysis of player subjectivities as these are expressed through player language within communal discourse. Adapting

from Wittgenstein (1953) a philosophical perspective that focuses on contexualized language use, I analyze player discourse within the *Guild Wars* community. Through language, *Guild Wars* players explore the array of meanings, characterizations and motivations that they ascribe to their own grinding, and they discursively seek out the commonalities and relationships among them. I argue that an analysis of player discourse affords a window into the gamer disposition through the medium that Wittgenstein argued was the ultimate conduit to meaning: ordinary language use, or in this case, though players' 'ordinary language use' as it is expressed in-game and in player community media. I spend this chapter not only discussing that use of discourse analysis here, but also the specific contributions of Wittgenstein's thinking around language and meaning to that analysis.

However, before discussing the theoretical work behind that approach, I begin with an overview of my data collection and coding procedure.
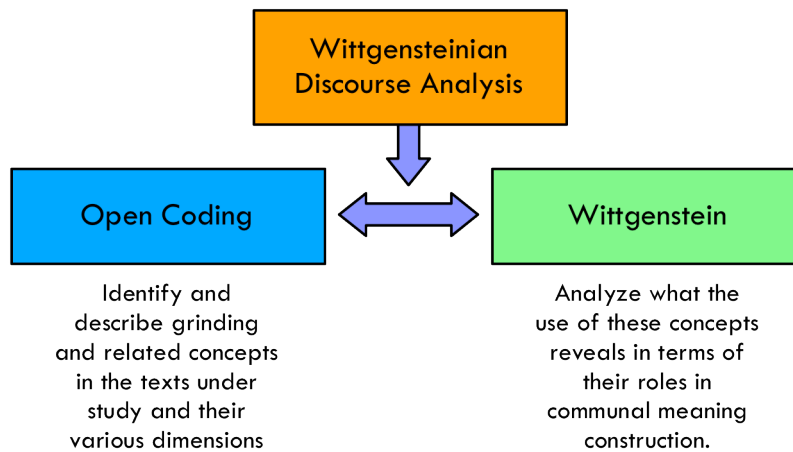
Figure 4-*Methodological Structure for a 'Wittgensteinian Discourse Analysis'*

3.2. Data Collection and Coding

3.2.1. Collection and Data Sources

Data sources for this research include 1136 pages of *Guild Wars* forum discussion, 18 player transcripts, 7 research conversations and 40 pages of threaded *Guild Wars* wiki discussion. These outlets are the primary hubs for *Guild Wars* community discussion. Forum and wiki pages were extracted from their original sources and converted into PDF format for purposes of marginal annotation. In-game chat transcripts were recorded in the form of successive screen captures made during a conversation, which yielded both a snapshot of the text chat and the concurrent activity in-game. In the event of screen capture failure, such conversations were also transcribed by hand. I collected my own gameplay data in *Guild Wars* for approximately one hour a day in the evenings (PST) for a period of 2 months[29]. The data I coded was drawn from 3 sources: *Guild Wars* community fora, *Guild Wars* community wikis and players in the *Guild Wars* game itself. Below is a summary of the study population for these sources along with the four ways I collected data from them: via in-game transcripts, research conversations with players, fora discussion threads and game wiki pages.

3.2.2. Study Population

This work trained on English speaking, predominantly North American *Guild Wars* players, given that the game server on which this study took place handles strictly North American player activity. Since this researcher is a monolingual English speaker, this was a necessity.

Traffic to the *Guild Wars* website itself is approximately 52 percent male and 48 percent female, based on US visitors (Quantcast, 2012a). By contrast, gathering similar

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[29] For more information regarding my background as a player, see Chapter 1.

statistics on the game's most popular forums and wikis, visitor statistics describe a gender split of 74% male/26% female (*Guild Wars* Guru) and 69% male/31% female (GuildWiki) (Quantcast 2012b; 2012c).

The *Guild Wars* player base (along with MMOGs such as World of Warcraft and others) is typically assessed as being between ages 18-35 (Hursthouse, 2005, Yee, 2006). The subject population for this study would be what developers have frequently identified as MMOG's most prolific participants--males ranging from late teens to approximately 30 years of age, with a mode average of 25-26 years of age (Yee, 2006). Demographics collected by researcher Nick Yee suggest that most MMOG players work at a full time job or are full-time students (2007).

There is a final note regarding both the study population and the timing of this study, which came at an interesting point in *Guild Wars'* lifespan. In the fifth year of its lifecycle, the game's imminent sequel was formally announced. To generate excitement for the new game, Arenanet announced its 'Hall of Monuments' calculator[30]: an online module that allowed players to tally their designer-designated achievements earned in-game, indicating what items those achievements would translate into in the upcoming game. These translatable rewards ranged from unique items that could be equipped by new players in *Guild Wars* 2 to prestige titles that would carry over to the new game (see Hall of Monuments in Appendix). With the promise of seeing rewards translate from the original game to the sequel, many former players flocked to *Guild Wars* out of renewed interest. A combination of *Guild Wars* faithful, returning veterans and newer players, along with the game's maturity, arguably stimulated a highly goal-oriented atmosphere and with it, a potentially uncharacteristic study population from which to draw. With this in mind, when collecting data, I selected longitudinal transcripts that dated as far back as

[30] Available at www.hom.guildwars2.com

possible (2005) to ensure I was obtaining a representative slice of player texts from throughout *Guild Wars*' 5-year history[31].

3.2.3.   In-Game Conversational Transcripts

In-Game Transcripts consisted of collected 'spoken' conversational excerpts (in the form of "in game text chat), recorded via screenshot from public player chat and identified based on relevance to this study's initial themes which include, but were not restricted to 'grinding', 'farming', 'vanquishing' and other cognate terms[32] (See endnote for full list and Glossary for definitions). I did not participate or interrupt any instances of conversational transcripts under this method of collection. My selection of keyword themes in choosing appropriate excerpts was based on the centrality of said keywords to discussions on grinding: an assessment based on my own experiences as an 8-year player of massively multiplayer games and which correlate with those raised in works (see Chapter 2) which have dealt extensively with MMOG games (Taylor, 2006a; Dibbell, 2006 & Castronova, 2005). These search terms served as an entry point—a place to begin my exploration of the discursive constellation of grinding. This investigation then was "directed not towards phenomena, but as one might say, towards the possibilities of phenomena" (Wittgenstein, PI, 90, 1953).

3.2.4.   Research Conversations

Where In-Game Transcripts did not involve any participation on my part, research conversations consisted of recorded public conversations taking place between players in *Guild Wars*, during which I would either interrupt or interject. Typically, I encouraged players to elaborate on subject matter that, in some cases, was already the

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[31] Despite making sure to include data from before the resurgence of interest catalyzed by the Hall of Monuments, this study was undeniably situated in a deliberately-engineered 'hype-bubble', in which Arenanet sought to re-stimulate player enthusiasm for older repetitive content vis-à-vis new, yet-to-be determined incentives. I speak to the relevance of this factor in subsequent chapters.

[32] The list included 'grinding', 'farming', 'vanquishing', 'running', 'speed-clearing' and 'zoning' as a baseline list for terms. Given my familiarity with Guild Wars and player practices within its space, these concepts felt like a good core to start with. Variants on these are of course numerous. See Glossary for the definition of these terms.

focus of discussion. For example, I would join in on a public discussion with players talking about their farming habits, encouraging them to speak more about their activities and how they situated them (enquiry guided by the initial themes above). As with the in-game conversation transcripts, these conversations were captured in screenshots, and where necessary, by hand notation. For ethical reasons, study details were given to conversation participants in a pre-created blurb in the public chat channel, with participant consent being obtained through an affirmative or negative response from the players in question (See Appendix for Ethics).

3.2.5.   Forum Thread Data

To access forum-based discursive data, I looked at *Guild Wars*' most popular fora as determined by web traffic according to Quantcast (2012): guildwarsguru.com and guildwars.incgamers.com. These fora serve as a community for players to discuss any aspect of *Guild Wars* they desire. I ran keyword searches in these fora using the keyword terms noted above[33] (see endnote for full list). To find discussion threads for analysis, I carefully selected textual samples which contained discussion data that dated back to the game's launch date, so as to provide a representatively longitudinal perspective on players' discussions of the grind and related topics. I then exported these discussion threads as annotatable PDF files, each containing the date, subject and timestamps of each thread.

3.2.6.   Wiki Data

Guild Wars wikis are hubs for information about the game. They follow in-game events closely, hosting guides and detailed walkthroughs that enable players to find answers to questions about anything happening in the game. Besides being an information resource, these wikis also feature discussion pages that track and thread conversations between players on page-specific topics. Every page on a wiki is accompanied by a discussion page that allows users to discuss and debate its content.

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[33] As outlined in the prior endnote, the list was comprised of 'grinding', 'farming', 'vanquishing', 'running', 'speed-clearing' and 'zoning' as a baseline list for terms.

In collecting wiki data I ran the above mentioned keyword terms[34] (see endnote for full list) keywords through the wiki search engines at both gw.guildwiki.org (the unofficial wiki) and wiki.guildwars.com (the official wiki) and analyzing both the wiki page entries from those search results as well as the user discussion pages on those entries which feature users talking about a wiki entry's contents as it has changed over time.

3.3. Coding

My coding process consisted of an iterative procedure that was refined through two distinct passes, and which dealt somewhat more with the generation of categories than with the generation of codes.

Discursive Map of the Grind Research Procedure

Based on literature review + self expertise

Initial Category Creation

First coding pass → Refining discursive categories → Second coding pass

Developing nuanced properties for each discursive category → Sorting into Characteristics and Dispositions

A Wittgensteinian Discursive Map of the Grind

Performing Wittgensteinian Discourse analysis

Figure 5-Breakdown of Coding and Categorization Procedure

The first of these passes was a scouring of all data sources to identify discussions drawing on my initial keyword list. My experience as an MMOG player and a multi year player of *Guild War*s, aided in the narrowing of my focus, for instance knowing

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[34] Again, the list included 'grinding', 'farming', 'vanquishing', 'running', 'speed-clearing' and 'zoning'.

to hone in on an in-game conversation about someone's Hall of Monument achievements and how they earned them due to familiarity with such achievements and their various shorthand expressions in-game (see Glossary for definitions). Through an iterative open coding process, which borrowed in part, from the inductive methods associated with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I generated and ongoingly re-fashioned categories throughout the analysis of collected forum and wiki data, beginning with placing analytical notes in the margins of my data and then revisiting those descriptions and applying categorical labels to them as I continued to collect and analyse the study data. I continued to add, eliminate or refine categories by testing them against contemporary literature including that of T.L. Taylor (2006), Turkle (1984), and Csikszentmihalyi (1990), which allowed me to build up and develop these categories, establishing the relevant relationships between them.

In my second iterative pass, I adopted a Wittgensteinian-influenced approach as a focus for this pass, training less on obvious keywords and more on the manner in which language was being used by *Guild Wars* players in their exchanges. This was a crucial departure from typical coding processes, which allowed me to both qualify and further elaborate my established categories by developing and attaching nuanced properties to them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 63). I elaborate further on the precepts of such an approach in the next section below.

The reason why I chose to borrow from Grounded Theory's inductive aspects (rather than use grounded theory in its entirety) is two-fold.

First, given my experience both in *Guild Wars* and as an MMOG player in general, I already knew in large part what key terms I would be looking for, whereas orthodox grounded theory methodology requires that codes be generated inductively 'from the ground up', that is from the data and *not* from prior theory or research or from researcher preconception. However, I wanted to benefit from the insights my past game experience afforded me, while also remaining open to and aware of possibly relevant terms and phrases that I had not foreseen--hence the use of both pre-selected coding (for which likelihood of identification of discussions around grinding were high) and 'open' coding. This two-stage approach allowed me both to pursue new avenues of discussion that I might not have previously considered germane to this work, and to

benefit from my, by then, fairly extensive prior knowledge of and experience with MMO's generally, and *Guild Wars* in particular.

The second reason for my less than fully orthodox deployment of grounded theory methodology was theoretical. I approached this study from an already-formulated philosophical perspective, specifically, one that builds upon Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations (1953), which articulates a theory of meaning rooted in analysis of language use, and thereby offers an approach to understanding player discourse on which I am already drawing[35]. Such a pre-selected deductive framework significantly departs from one of Grounded Theory's fundamental tenets (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which is that "hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6).

Once my coding and categorization was complete, I proceeded to dimensionalize properties negatively or positively for which there was more than one observed use of the property in the discourse under study (See Chapter 4). These multiple uses often meant that a number of properties were shared across two or more of my generative categories, and this made dimensionizing these properties "important to recognize and systematically develop" the properties of a number of these coded concepts as not only to discern how they related to one another, but to see how their categories related to one another as well (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 70).

For example, the property of 'reference to visibility' was one shared by both the categories of 'Personal Accomplishment Discourse' and of 'Prestige Discourse'. Through dimensionalizing the property of visibility along a continuum of 'privilege' and 'derision', it became evident that visibility tended to be a privileged by players who already held the notion of grinding as a means to prestige. By comparison, for those speaking primarily about the grind in terms of their personal accomplishments, 'visibility' was only occasionally spoken of with high regard and more commonly referred to with indifference or derision.

[35] It should be noted here that by the term 'discourse' here, I refer to it in the 'little d' sense--that of written, spoken or enacted communication. It is not to be confused with, as James Gee puts it, 'Big D' Discourse, which itself carries more significant conceptual weight (1999).

CATEGORY		PROPERTIES		DESCRIPTION	
POWER AND RESISTANCE		Designed Goals		Mention of importance of designed goals to grinding	
		Designer Targets		Mention of role of designer-created targets to player grinding	
		Efficiency		Mention of importance of efficiency to one's grind.	
		Limits		Consideration of a game's rule-bound limits	
		Gimmicks/Exploitation		The use of gimmicks or exploits to attain something or grind faster.	
		Own Goals		Importance of achieving one's own designated goals	
PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT		Achievement		The importance of achieving something	
		Personal gratification		Achieving something for personal gratification	
		Pride		Pride in accomplishment	

Figure 6 - *Snapshot of Coding Scheme In Early Iteration*

Figure 7 - *A Screenshot of Forum Data /w Margin Codes after first open coding pass.*

Having used my open coding phase to identify and describe the various uses of language relating to grinding, I turned to the second phase of analysis, using as an analytical framework a formalization built up from Wittgenstein's theoretical analysis of language use and meaning (1953). I discuss this next.

3.4. A Methodology to 'Look and See'...

This study draws on a methodological framework formulated in terms of Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of "language-games" (Wittgenstein, 1953; Williams, 1999; Brenner, 1999; Finch, 2001 & Ambrose, 2001). Though not initially devised as a methodological framework, Wittgenstein developed his theory of language-games as a tool with which investigations into language-use could be launched--and this is precisely how I strive to use it here.

In Wittgenstein's work on language and philosophy, "language-games" refer to the rule-based nature of discursive transactions, and how such transactions foster a communal understanding of shared knowledges as communicated through 'moves' (in the same sense that games have 'moves') by their participants. Using language-games as a conceptual tool in his own work Wittgenstein embarked on the close inspection of the insular language of metaphysics (1953). His estimation was that language was not merely reflective of knowledge, but constitutive of it, and that language and its use serve as the underpinning of meaning (1953). For Wittgenstein, a cognizance of and reflexivity about the use of language can shed light on particular concepts under study, allowing one to determine the range of intelligible meanings and the manifestation of these meanings in practice. But more specifically, Wittgenstein implored his readers to 'look and see' what uses of a phrase or concept might have common among them, since it was in this way that we could begin to establish the rough boundaries of a concept and its numerous and often overlapping meanings (1953, p. 27). Building on this emphasis on *language use* as a lens to uncover the *meanings* behind enigmatic concepts, I have adopted Wittgenstein's language-game centric 'look and see' approach as the basis of my methodological perspective here.

Wittgenstein himself does not formally conduct a 'discourse analysis' in his Philosophical Investigations, therefore I have leveraged Roger Spielman's more formal approach to Linguistic Discourse Analysis (LDA), which in Spielman's terms, "aims to discover and describe as nearly as possible a complete roster of the features that contribute to the purpose of a particular purpose or talk" (2008, p. 158). Given that Spielman looks at ordinary language-in-use in his own application of LDA in the examination of Ojibwe discourse, the intersection of values between both Wittgenstein's

philosophical approach and Spielman's methodological structure finds a home in this research, serving as a fusion of philosophical theory and empirical material.

Spielman offers the central methodological tenets of LDA as: 1) a close examination of the morphology and context of a discourse; 2) an observance of references made in a discourse to people, places and things; 3) a keen notice of the structure of a discourse and differences between discourse types; and 4) a mindfulness of linkages, or paragraph boundaries as an interlocutor moves from one topic to another (2008, p. 150). As this research is not dealing extensively with written monologues or personal narratives, 'linkages' becomes something less relevant for this work. This research places greater emphasis on content and ordinary language use and less so on the morphology of speech, making the analysis of the data collected here much more akin to a 'close reading' (Paul and Elder, 2008) than any traditional approach to LDA.

This methodology does not seek frequency or probability of conceptual occurrences, but rather fosters a critical reading of the ordinary language of a group in attempt to explore the breadth of conceptual meanings within that discourse. This approach is not only one which best embodies the 'look and see' principle so avidly touted by Wittgenstein in his work, but one which I argue would likely precede any estimation of frequency, probability or projected likelihood.

I speak next on the unit of study around which a Wittgensteinian approach to discourse analysis revolves: the language-game.

3.5. Language Games

Expressed through a series of interrogative aphorisms in his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein characterized the way language functions using the model of games[36]: highly contextual and rule-based forms of engagement involving two or more

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[36] In analogizing language to games, it was Wittgenstein's intent to communicate the rule-based nature of language. But primarily, he discussed the nature of what constituted not only communication via that language-game, but an actual understanding of the game itself.

participants (1953). For Wittgenstein, the notion of a language-game supports the idea that a language-game is not only a composition of words, rules and utterances, but a meaningful activity consisting of "language and the actions into which it is woven" (1953, PI, 7). It encompasses the context, the position of its interlocutors and the broad interpretative schemas in which a given exchange of language is taking place—something Wittgenstein exemplifies in his renowned allegory of the 'Builder's Language'.

3.5.1. The 'Builder's Language'

The Builder's Language is a vignette presented by Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations in which one builder, 'A', calls out to a second, 'B' for materials required in some construction endeavour. The materials include slabs and pillars and so forth. As A calls to B for particular materials, B learns within the context of the language-game not only which materials are the correct ones (insofar that they correctly correspond to what is being called for as verified by A), but also provides a basis on which new dimensions to the game can be added, such as taking the requested material to a specific location. The builder's language thus situates the two interlocutors in terms of role, context and communal understanding, and as moves are made in this game, the fact that their exchange continues unabated indicates that the language-game is being played properly. Should A ever call for a slab and be presented a pillar by B, the game would immediately come to a halt. Thus, Wittgenstein surmises that it is by remaining attentive to these 'moves' in a language-game—moves that allow such a game to continue to be played—that we can learn more about the meaning of concepts in everyday language (Wittgenstein, 1953).

For example, one's understanding of a language-game's subject matter is not the case for Wittgenstein. Rather it is an awareness of the rules of the game itself and what they entail. For example, should one person ask another "What's 1 + 1?", the other party would be correct in answering "2". Whether or not they understand why this is the case is irrelevant. "2" is simply the correct thing to say in this language-game. Wittgenstein here demonstrates that the logic underlying the response in a language-game is separate from the rules governing the correct response--and it is this divide that raises much concern for Wittgenstein in the way of prying apart meaningful propositions and empty ones.

'Forms of life'[37], for Wittgenstein, are what enable language-games such as that of the builders to function as they do: they are the fertile soil that allows the growth and development of language-games and the basis from which language grows and develops. Forms of life are the underlying foundation for human understanding and meaningful exchanges within particular conditions and cultural contexts and thus for language-games themselves (Brenner, 1999; Finch, 2001), or as Wittgenstein himself puts it, forms of life are the "common behavior of mankind" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 82).

> *"our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses […] to imagine language is to imagine a form of life"*
>
> *(Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 8)*

In other words, something like grinding may be considered part of the forms of life of anything from 'commerce' to 'regional social customs': the boundaries between a given form of life, and language-games are blurred over one another (Wittgenstein, 1953, PI 21) and can never be considered solitary, monolithic entities. Language-games are 'active' and are made comprehensible by the form of life in which they are nested (Finch, 2001). As such, the analysis of the research conducted here on grinding frames its outcomes very much in terms of the forms of life that player language-games bring to light--the specific forms of life in which we see language-games around grinding 'play out' in player discourse, not only as 'gameplayer', but also as 'parent', 'employee', 'administrator' and 'designer'. The way we 'know' the game we are playing is highly inflected by the form of life in which our language-games are themselves enacted.

Returning to the builders in Wittgenstein's allegory then, we can see that A & B continue to develop a shared knowledge on which more complex language-games can be played. Their knowledge and their communal understanding and expectations further shape the meaning of their exchanges, coloring each new move as it is made. In the more sophisticated context of MMOGs and their players, we witness an intersection of

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[37] "Forms of life' is a concept which, although remains a core principle of Wittgenstein's later work, was still only mentioned five times in the entirety of the Philosophical Investigations (Finch, 2001).

many forms of life and with them, a plethora of subjective frames brought to bear by their interlocutors. Yet, the language-games of MMOG players carry on without any critical breakdown, and concepts such as 'grinding' are readily exchanged in MMOG player language-games without the need for communal acknowledgement of the variance of its communal meaning. This is because the resemblances between uses of a concept within a given language-game can make overt distinctions unnecessary in everyday language. The downside of this convenience is that such resemblances can also make a concept like the grind appear monolithic and one-dimensional by an outside observer of the discourse—much in the way the grind has been painted thus far by a number of the theorists discussed in Chapter 2. This is why it remains important for a Wittgensteinian examination of the grind to train even on the smallest of moves made in language-games around the grind, to draw out resemblances (and differences) and focus on those communal assumptions formed around uses of the concept in language.

3.6. Why is it Useful?

Considering Wittgenstein's approach to language-games and meaning, there is considerable utility in applying his theoretical work on language-games to the analysis of the discourse of a specialized group. He privileges looking at language as constitutive of knowledge, and conceives of meaning as the construction of conventions formed through language exchange and use, and this makes it a productive theoretical tool for framing and analyzing players' discussions as language-games. Wittgenstein's conceptual toolkit lends itself well to discourse analysis as a method, providing specific criteria for seeking out the 'moves' in language games and piecing together both the meanings they elaborately construct and the dispositions they bring to light. It is this toolkit that I employ in the analytical portion of this study.

3.6.1. Family Resemblances, Bedrock Practices and Hinge Propositions

> *"'Gamer talk' becomes increasingly implicit, using terminology provided by the game and their shared context of playing the game. Over time, communication among game player group members generally become more efficient and less penetrable by members outside the group (such as new players), as players engage in culture-building activities around their shared context"*
> *(Sharritt, Matthew J; Aune, R. Kelly; Suthers, Daniel D, 2011)*

The above is a quotation from a recently published chapter on gamers' language, and it illustrates one of the obstacles researchers are initially faced with in learning more about player meaning in communal discourse--namely the opacity of language and the seeming shorthand researchers are often faced with when presented with the idiomatic exchanges of well-entrenched gamers. Although my extended tenure as an MMOG player affords me some experience in grappling with the idiomatic language of gamers, 'gamer talk' does remain a challenge when attempting to penetrate unfamiliar or complex discourses (Spielman, 1998). Across the body of his later work, ranging from the *Philosophical Investigations* to his posthumously published *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein informally offers up a toolkit of concepts which he implores us to use in further examining these foggy areas in discourse; the nooks and crannies where meanings seem to hide and play. These concepts are family resemblances, bedrock practices and hinge propositions.

Family Resemblances

As Steven Hoenisch notes, "Wittgenstein's appeal to ordinary language [offers] a non-reductionist principle that forms the foundation" for an analytical framework that looks at language as something which functions beyond merely the conveyance of thought (2006, p. 3). Hoenisch (who briefly tested, but never fully executed a Wittgensteinian discourse analysis of the work of Dostoyevsky), notes that a

Wittgensteinian approach that leverages the key concepts of the Philosophical Investigations in its deployment, can be quite useful in un-earthing rules and customs one might not have previously observed at first glance (2006). This seeking out of breadth is in-line with the research objectives laid out here. Adopting Wittgenstein then is intended to not simply observe 'named' instances of a concept (i.e. considering everyone who mentions the grind as meaning it the same way), but to focus on language use in order to distinguish between the ways a single concept such as grinding is used across contexts. This notion of looking for similarities in language use draws on a concept Wittgenstein named 'family resemblances', and it implores us to look at those things common between uses of a concept, querying phenomena and their varying instantiations and noting those ways in which they converge as to build a corpus of knowledge around their intersections and divergences (1953). Wittgenstein states that "phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, but that they are related to one another in many different ways" (PI 65, 1953). As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, a concept such as the grind can be seen to form a family, with each member sharing certain likenesses, but with no likeness necessarily common to all of them. Looking at those things common and different between uses of a concept such as the grind, and noting the ways in which those commonalities and differences they converge or diverge can assist in building a body of knowledge around their intersections as well as places where commonalities fail to manifest (1953).

Bedrock Practices

A Wittgensteinian approach also drives the way in which one can identify normative linguistic practices firmly instilled within a language game by attending to the spoken assumptions within communal discourse around the concept in question—what Wittgenstein terms 'bedrock practices' (1953). When participants within a language-game exhaust all other justifications for following a particular rule in a language-game, they reach what Wittgenstein refers to as 'bedrock': the normative assumptions of a language-game on which more sophisticated language-games are built (Brenner, 1999). Simply speaking, bedrock is the normative foundation on which we can, without hesitation or reflection, operationalize language-games without bringing them to a halt. Such practices include statements of (or deference to) obviousness such as; 'we all

know', 'it's just done this way', 'that's how it is' etc. These are statements about one's practice that points to communal 'facts' held as given: a rule following in a language-game predicated on an unquestioned and widespread agreement in action (Wittgenstein, 1953; Brenner, 1999; Rietveld, 2008). The presence of a bedrock practice in a language-game can point out where one can learn more about what comprises normativity within a community (Wittgenstein, 1953; Rietveld, 2008, p. 985), and from this, we can learn more about how the grind is situated by players with respect to normative communal practices.

Hinge Propositions

A concept explored in Wittgenstein's On Certainty, 'hinge propositions' is a similar and yet fundamentally distinct notion from bedrock practices (1974). Hinge propositions are assumptions that serve as the basis of communally held certainties in a language-game.   Where bedrock propositions serve as spoken conventions in a language-game in which a person cannot justify their practice further, hinge propositions are propositions that quite often remain unspoken or indirectly addressed because they are so thoroughly entrenched in the make-up of a given practice that they are beyond any doubt (Wittgenstein, 1974; Moyal-Sharrock, 2003). In Wittgenstein's words, hinge propositions "lie apart from the route travelled by enquiry" (OC, 88).

Wittgensteinian scholar Danielle Moyal-Sharrock provides the best example of a hinge proposition by citing the function of a cloakroom token. When one takes a token to the cloakroom to exchange it for their jacket, there is no need to explain what the token does, its transactional value or why it is being offered in the first place. The many underlying assumptions that underpin the token exchange allow the transaction to proceed smoothly precisely because they do not need to be revisited, discussed, or even acknowledged (2003). In fact, the entirety of the cloakroom operation can be completed wordlessly precisely because the propositions that underlie the exchange are so distanced from any uncertainty. If either actor in this scenario paused, offered a quizzical look or failed to respond accordingly, only then might one might begin to doubt that they had given the token to the right individual, had the right cloakroom etc., but one would never doubt that this is how cloakroom exchanges work. In Wittgenstein's words, "the questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were, like hinges on which those turn" (Wittgenstein,

1973, OC 341), and identifying such indubitable propositions can be as crucial in determining what constitutes both certainty and normatively in a community. In many instances then, such propositions speak to very deeply seated epistemic claims that shape player epistemologies within player communities (Moyal-Sharrock, 2003).

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the data sources for this research, outlined the process of data acquisition and coding procedures, and provided a review of my methodology. I have explained how the discourse-analytic methods I use builds directly upon the theoretical framework of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language while adopting the more formalized methodology of Spielmann in applying a close-reading-styled variant of discourse analysis in the examination of *Guild Wars* player texts. I then identified and explained the three primary Wittgensteinian concepts that make up the analytical toolkit underlying my approach to discourse analysis—family resemblances, bedrock practices and hinge propositions.

Following in-line with the organization of my analysis as illustrated at the fore of this chapter, the next chapter embarks on a discussion of this study's categorization schema and the manner in which I identified key concepts in the data collected.

4. Developing a Coding Structure

4.1. Towards a Discursive Map of 'The Grind'

The previous chapter on methodology presented both a run-down of my research procedure and a detailing of my analytical framework. This chapter addresses the coding procedure in detail, specifically outlining how relevant categories and properties for the systematic exploration of the grind were developed through an iterative coding process aimed at constructing a complex and inter-related conceptual-discursive map of the grind.
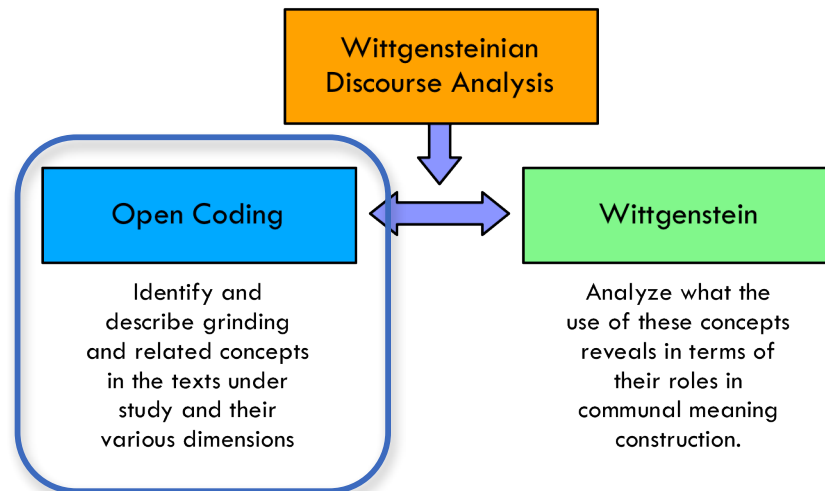
***Figure 9** –Identification of Concepts through Open Coding*

In Chapter 3 I discussed the manner in which I embarked on this discursive mapping process by mobilizing a combination of background literature specifically addressing aspects of the grind, as well as my own extensive expertise as both a *Guild Wars* player and game studies researcher. With approximately 3000 hours of registered Guild Wars gameplay under my belt across two game accounts, I was able to leverage my awareness of terms and concepts frequently associated with grinding in the *Guild Wars* community in this first pass through the dataset, ensuring not only the identification of direct references to 'grinding', but also searching for cognate and related terms including 'farming' and 'vanquishing' (see endnote 27 for core list and Glossary for definitions). As a result, I constructed what would form the main pillars of my preliminary coding structure – an array of general categories to serve as discursive codes of relevance to grinding. I examined these categories against existing literature including T.L. Taylor (2006), Turkle (1984), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) in order to validate and build up their conceptual-discursive characteristics. I then conducted another pass of coding the data, this time with a particular eye towards further detailing and qualifying these categories – discursive constructs – by developing and attaching properties to them. These properties help further fill out and define each discursive category and seek to account for the richness and interplay between each of these constructs. Some properties also indicate either a positive or negative undertone in language-use where applicable—aspects which also helped shape each category.

Following my categorization procedure, I divided my coded categories into two groups: 'Characterizations' and 'Dispositions'. 'Characterizations' refers to player conceptualizations of what they are doing when they grind, or simply put, how players describe their grinding activities. 'Dispositions' refers to player attitudes towards the activity of grinding itself--how players frame the conduct of their grinding activities. This distinction, commensurate with Malaby's (2007; 2009a; 2009b) posit that play is best framed not as a type of activity, but rather as a dispositional act, was the first step in breaching the uniform portrayal of the grind as represented in the contemporary literature on grinding discussed in Chapter 2. The sub-headers below reflect to which group each category belongs.

Considering 'dispositions', it should be noted that I have not categorized attitudes towards grinding which in anyway represent generic enjoyment (e.g. grinding is fun!) since, as will be discussed, many reasons for enjoyment of the grind are thoroughly bound up in nearly all of the categories I have laid out below. Instead, I have focused on those attitudes that have raised interesting questions about player motivations, namely the initial quandary raised at this work's commencement: the question of why players continue to grind when they proclaim to detest it.

Furthermore, the categories I have outlined here do not represent discrete player types: there is rarely a situation in which only one characterization or one disposition uniformly represents a player's relationship to the grind. As I discuss my categories both below and in Chapter 5, these overlaps in characterization and disposition will become apparent.

Finally, although labelled as 'coding' the coding component of this research was not a search for conceptual frequency, but rather was employed as a means to conceptual analysis, an attempt to, as I mentioned earlier, build and plot out (and in some ways, complicate and trouble) a discursive map of grinding. As discussed in Chapter 3, this research does not train on pinpointing a quantitative answer as to 'why' we can say that *Guild Wars* players grind, but rather seeks to qualitatively identify and plot out the key concepts that uphold player discourse around grinding in *Guild Wars*. It is through a mapping out of these discursive meanings of the grind that we can then use as a basis for getting at a sense of 'why' players grind in all of its breadth.

For clarity of illustration, I recall the flowchart from Chapter 3 below. It reflects the research process that I undertook in order to systematically build up the aforementioned discursive map of 'the grind'. In the sections to follow I proceed with a detailed discussion of each discursive property and the categories under which they were organized, explaining how these categories were developed and structured through a two-stage iterative 'open coding' pass of the data.

**Discursive Map of the Grind
Research Procedure**

Based on literature review +
self expertise

Initial Category Creation

Developing nuanced
properties for each
discursive category

Sorting into Characteristics
and Dispositions

First coding pass → Refining discursive
categories → Second coding pass

A Wittgensteinian
Discursive Map of
the Grind

Performing Wittgensteinian
Discourse analysis

Figure 10-Revisiting the Coding and Categorization Procedure

4.2. Characterizations: Power Gaming Discourse

For this and each subsequent category, I elaborate in more detail its theoretical lineage through existing literature, provide justification for adjustments and proposals stemming from my own gaming expertise, and describe its properties as they were employed in an iterative coding process in order to build up the category in question. The (-) or (+) symbols that appear next to properties of the discursive categories refer to the characteristic connotation (negative vs. positive, laudatory vs. derisive, etc.) that such discursive instances typically contained.

In the case of the Power Gaming category, there is already some contemporary literature which lays out what properties define such a concept, the most notable of these being 'efficiency' (Taylor, 2006a). The category of Power Gaming assembled here as an aspect of a 'grinding' discourse is one which makes reference to designed goals, efficiency in the pursuit of those goals, demonstrates a keen player awareness or appreciation for the mathematical limits imposed by the game's constitutive rules, demonstrates a player complicity with and/or practice of circumventing those rules, and favorably characterizes the solo pursuit of such goals.

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Power Gaming Discourse		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Reference to designed goals (+)	Reference to design-intended goals such as quests, player levels, etc.	Grinding out a new title in-game
Reference to efficiency (+)	Reference to gaming efficiency related to grinding	Grinding as part of efficient multitasking (questing, etc.)
Reference to game-imposed limits (-/+)	Reference to game boundaries and restrictions to player achievement	Loot-scaling based on number of players in a party – diminished return for each player
Reference to exploiting game-imposed limits (+)	Reference to cheating or exploiting game-imposed boundaries in order to maximize game achievement	Employing a strategy to subvert a particular zone's built in levelling limits.
Reference to solo gaming(+)	Reference to playing alone for the purposes of goal-attainment	Solo gaming in order to receive all loot drops and gold

*Table 1-*Power Gaming Discourse Schema

Discursive Category Formation

The properties I've identified as belonging under the Power Gaming category essentially hold up to T.L. Taylor's own rubric: one defined by dedication and efficiency in the achievement of a specific goal and time saved in doing so (2006a). The primary distinction here between my codes and Taylor's own characterization is the presence of 'soloing'—a factor that authors occasionally dismiss in their discussion of the power game. In fact, Silverman and Simon note that "it is not possible to be a power gamer on one's own; the conditions for high-level or end-game play in MMOGs do not permit it" (2009, p. 357), but there is a salient distinction between 'elite' play and 'power' play that should be teased apart here.

It can be fairly said that an MMOG's designer-designated elite content - whether it be high-level dungeons, end-game content or PVP - usually demands an instrumental or 'rationalist' approach if success is to be achieved with the lowest probability of failure (Taylor, 2006a; 2006b). At the other end of the power gamer gradient are those players

who efficiently seek out both institutional and/or personal goals in their own way, and in this light, a player such as the 'solo farmer'[38] is as emblematic of the power gamer ethos as any member of an elite-content-oriented guild. In fact, solo-farming a specific route in the same territory over and over for hours on end in order to achieve a vanity title or trinket in the most expedient fashion is arguably the highest form of efficiency in these games: it sheds the division of loot acquisition, the bulk of social obligations and the variable of party dynamics that can beleaguer a group seeking to accomplish an otherwise quite complicated task[39].

Discursively speaking, players congregate at least as avidly around forum threads dealing with solo-oriented topic matter as they do group-based matter--and fellow players are always quick to proffer advice to anyone seeking tips on how to shave minutes off their respective solo grinds, how to perfect their 'routine':

> *"Delver can be pretty easy if, as others have suggested, you go for it via the Snowmen dungeon at Umbral Grotto. I have heard rumors that the snowmenz are not particularly more vulnerable to fire damage, despite them being visually made of ice, but Fire damage is relatively easy to use and nice vs. the large clumps of snuumenz. As others have also mentioned, it can get rather boring, and the end reward of that dungeon is never particularly lucrative, money-wise. That being said, once you get the routine down, you can practically do it in your sleep..."*
>
> *(Player,* Guild Wars *Guru, 2012)*

[38] Farming refers to the process of seeking one specific goal in an MMOG (whether it be experience, items or something else) by performing the same task or routine over and over again. Such items are usually 'farmed' because they are not easy to acquire through standard gameplay and require a much greater time investment to attain.

A solo-farmer is one who approaches farming alone in order to maximize the amount or likelihood of one's goal. Since experience and loot are typically divided up among party members in an MMOG, playing alone ensures that one is the sole recipient of all rewards attained. Because much of MMOG content is suited to group-play, solo-farming often demands a very precise approach to gameplay which ensures personal survival and allows maximum probably of a farming outcome in as little time as possible.

[39] As Myers (2007) and Golumbia (2009) both contend, despite their multiplayer affordances, MMOGs are often played alone with much of such games designed in an effort to cater to the individual player rather than the group.

Discursive Property Descriptions

As noted in Chapter 3, given this work's Wittgenstein inspired approach, coded properties were not simply empirical accounts of a word or phrase, but rather the identification of particular uses of language in the player data. Given that I draw on Wittgenstein for my analysis, it was paramount that there be a consistency in adopting his language-use-centric approach in the coding phase.

To begin, the first code under Power Gaming*,* reference to *'designed goals'*, was assigned when players in the collected forum and interview data referred to *Guild Wars'* designer-intended goals in their discussions with myself or other players. An instance coded as a mention of 'designed goals' specifically refers to a player discussing goals that *Guild Wars'* privileges as a player-objective in the game, whether it's quest completion, item acquisition, or the achievement of one of the game's prescribed series of prestige titles. For example, a player talking about grinding out a new title added in the most recent expansion would be coded as a designed goal reference. If the same player mentioned that they were glad new content and objectives were recently added or if they demonstrated an eagerness to obtain new weapons skins added to the game, this was dimensionalized as a laudatory reference to the game's 'designed goals'. When a player mentioned the game's prestige titles as 'meaningless' or a 'waste of time', this was dimensionalized as a derisive reference to designed goals. We see a laudatory reference below:

> *"Titles for the most time part I respect, because even if don't they require a lot of skill, they still require a lot of time and dedication (say, Savior of the Kurzicks or Luxons, where you must HFFF repetitively). So I still get amazed when I see a high title (KoaBD ones, Hero, Glad, Champ, Kurz, Lux, Lucky, etc), knowing I myself will take a while to get there (if ever!)"*
> *(Player, Guild Wars, 2010)*

Also mentioned in discussions around designed goals by players, was the property of *efficiency*. Efficiency, or any reference to doing something as quickly as possible or with minimal effort or time, was something found mentioned in player discussions around the achievement of a game's designed goals. For example, a player discussing their hunt for a prestige title while noting their desire to complete it as quickly as possible (see below) by using a series of shortcuts or by grinding only a readily

available groups of monsters would be coded as a concurrence of both privileging designed goals and privileging efficiency in their pursuit. The following player not only describes their grinding as an efficient means to obtaining their PVE (Player vs. Environment) titles, but also as a means to multitasking while doing so.

> *"The fastest ways to max the pve-skill-linked titles invole [sic] much grind. When I was maxing the Sunspear title, I did lots of wurm runs. I tossed the henches into mobs and let them do all the work while I did something less boring and stupid"*
>
> (Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2007)

I assigned the code in reference to game-imposed 'limits', when players mentioned the boundaries of player achievement being restricted by *Guild Wars'* constitutive rules (See Glossary). Such vocal acknowledgements were referenced alongside discussions of efficiency. Forum exchanges about *Guild Wars'* 'limits' would generally precipitate a discussion of mathematics and probability: pushing the efficiency of one's in-game practice to the maximum allowed by the game. For example, as one player notes:

> *"There is a fixed amount of Raptors (33?) and it's more efficient to go at it alone as opposed to bringing a party of 8 to tackle just 33? foes. Regardless of loot scaling you're mathematically going to get a decrease in drops because your drops will be divided/assigned to someone other then [sic] yourself."*
>
> *(Player,* Guild Wars *Guru, 2010)*

In the above instance, a player discusses the best way to minimize input so as to maximize the output of their gains (Morgenstern & Von Neumann, 1944). Of particular salience here are the player references made to the mechanical limits imposed on them by the game, such as 'loot-scaling'. Loot scaling refers to a mechanic in *Guild Wars* designed to reward playing in larger groups with greater chances of loot; an incentive structure designed to discourage playing solo or in smaller groups. The player quoted above explains how not only to be efficient in the pursuit of one's goals, but also how to bend and maximize the mathematical probabilities of the game in one's favor by working around the factor of loot scaling, using repeated individual runs through the zone in question to do so. This illustrates how, although the game itself has an invisible rule-set in place to discourage players from playing alone to obtain large amounts of loot, players

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can use repeated solo excursions into the zone in question (one which involves killing Raptors) and still maximize their output in ways unintended by *Guild Wars'* designers. The player quoted here has clearly operationalized their knowledge of the game's limits in this scenario, and this brings us to the next code under Power Gaming discourse: references to 'exploitation of game-imposed limits'[40].

Where 'limits' refers to the player-expressed knowledge and the importance of a game's technical boundaries, 'exploitation of limits' refers to player-discussion about the *breaking* through or circumventing these boundaries.

As an example of one such exploit, one of *Guild Wars'* original prestige titles, 'Legendary Defender of Ascalon' (LDOA)[41] was created in response to players finding a way around the game's rules. The title was created once designers realized that players were using a loophole in the game's hard-coded rules to grind their way to the maximum level of 20 in a zone, which had a designed maximum level cap of 15[42]. Instances in which players mentioned adopting exploits (such as the one below) were coded as 'exploitation of limits'.

---

[40] The coded property of limits thus lives separately from the code of efficiency, with limits referring quite specifically to an acknowledgement of Constitutive rules that keep a player bound within certain normatively held probabilities and a recognition of their importance. As such, a player can exalt efficiency without necessarily overtly acknowledging or recognizing a game's Constitutive limits.

[41] There are certainly other popular exploits in the game, but Legendary Defender of Ascalon is perhaps the most notorious. Other exploits have included the ability to obtain two conflicting titles together (Legendary Survivor, which requires never dying and Legendary Defender of Ascalon, which required a lot of dying) or the ability to copy or clone valuable resources collected in the game without needing to earn them.

[42] Players had figured out a way to have monsters in a zone known as 'Pre-Searing Ascalon', kill their avatar repeatedly, exploiting the design of the monsters themselves and allowing them to level up from the defeat of human players. Leaving one's avatar for hours, only to be repeatedly killed by surrounding monsters near a resurrection shrine would then allow the player to die and automatically revive without even needing to be at the keyboard--effectively allowing the monsters to grind humans.

Once surrounding monsters had accumulated enough XP of their own through their repeated slaughter of a player's character, players could then take to dispatching the monsters, who were now worth enough experience points to allow the player to continue levelling themselves past the originally designed cap. This process, termed 'death-levelling', was the subject of some controversy before it was finally observed, acknowledged and surprisingly rewarded by designers with a prestige title for the discovery of the exploit.

"When I did LDoA [Legendary Defender of Ascalon], two years ago, it took me 30-40 minutes a night to do the big lure. You have to kill (most) Shamans then lure each mob of 2-3 to the res shrine separately from the far reaches of The Northlands. It wasn't even a case of getting aggro and running back: you have to pull them, take them beyond their extension limits, let them go back a bit until they stop running and start walking, re-aggro, and repeat until they're locked at the res shrine. You have to do this rigmarole dozens of times to finish the title."

(Player, Guild Wars, 2011)

Wherever this particular code required interpretation as to what would constitute a gimmick or exploit, I relied on both player commentary and my own knowledge of the game to determine when the 'exploitation' code applied. This discursive property was generally found proximal to the coded instances of 'efficiency' and 'limits' in the data.

The code 'soloing' was used to account for when players would discuss the practice of going into *Guild Wars* game zones alone without any human or AI assistance. The code was applied whenever a player explicitly mentioned playing alone for the purposes of goal-attainment. Those who mentioned playing alone for other reasons (misanthropy, role playing etc.) were not coded for here. Discussions of the practice of soloing were observed to be present in player discussions of the concept of 'efficiency' and 'limits': particularly the grinding of creatures along specific routes or regions known to yield particular loot types. This is because soloing, or playing alone in spaces intended for groups, was something not considered a tenable proposition in the game's original design. So whereas certain regions might have been specifically designed to reward group play, 'soloers' can actually reap more loot or experience by completing such regions on their own: despite the limitations imposed by hard-coded mechanics such as loot-scaling:

"I'm not talking gold items but actual in game cash or platinum if you will. If for example X monster drops 200g, that 200g is divided among the number of people in your party whereas in a solo situation you keep that 200g to yourself."

(Player, Guild Wars *Guru, 2010)*

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4.3. Characterizations: Prestige Discourse

In the context of a discursive map of the 'grind', a prestige category applies to players who grind in an effort to achieve visibility in the *Guild Wars* community: to be recognized by others as having achieved specific designed goals. Once again surveying player language in the data for concepts referenced through their language-use, the Prestige category is comprised of the three properties of 'visibility', 'reputation' and 'designed goals'.

Prestige Discourse		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Reference to designed goals (+)	Positive references to having attained game-designated achievements	Displaying or mentioning of prestigious in-game accomplishments or challenges attained
Reference to visibility and recognition (in-game) (+)	Public bragging about one's in-game accomplishments, implicitly or explicitly	Publically displaying grindable title, high-level gear, etc. to highlight time spent attaining them
Reference to reputation (gaming community) (+)	Public references to being well-known or famous for their accomplishments	Public mentions of desiring notoriety recognizable by the game's community.

Table 2-Prestige Discourse Schema

Discursive Category Formation

Prestige as a category encompasses player discourse that characterizes the grind as a means to establish the public visibility of accomplishments, underlined by a favorable view on enhanced communal reputation. Such a high-profile reputation is most attainable almost exclusively through the achievement of *Guild Wars'* designed goals and as such, designed goals are spoken of quite positively by players in this category. Although a general operational sense of the game's controls and skill combinations do require skill and familiarity, most titles in the game require simply the expenditure of many hours performing the same or similar tasks. This, in Consalvo et al's terms, is the

concerted application of oneself in the face of a known time-investment, and this 'diligence' of the grind can be shared with and verified by others only through the display of exclusive titles, with grinding often being the primary (or at least the quickest) means to achieve this visible form of recognition (Consalvo, 2010).

Discursive Property Descriptions

The property which underlies the Prestige discourse category is that of 'visibility': instances in which players speak of their grind as a means to attaining something in the game precisely so that it can be seen or verified by other players. As observed in forum exchanges, players speak about their grind as an avenue to achieve various types of rare armor, weapons or wearable titles that can be seen as public evidence of the achievement itself. A title for something like 'vanquishing' (obliterating the entire monster population of an in-game continent), which can only be earned in the game as a result of much repetitive monster killing in a single session, is visible evidence that one performed a duty that required considerable time or effort. Positive instances of 'visibility' were coded when either proud mentions of displaying a grindable outcome were made or when a player would talk about pursuing a grindable goal for the sake of public display.

Effectively, the more time spent grinding and achieving titles, and the greater one's dedication, the more evidence – discursively speaking - that one is a 'better' player. One player, a Ranger quoted below, not only lauds his own efforts in the *Guild Wars* Guru forum, but started a blog where he pre-empts the description of his character with a 'definition' of skill:

> Waldläufer - Level 20 - Tyria
>
> Gildenmitglied bei None but Fools [nuts]
>
> *Skill:(also called talent) is the learned capacity to carry out pre-determined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy, or both.*
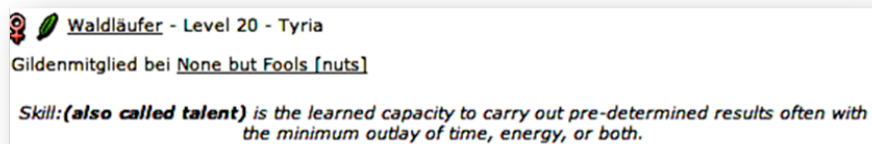
Figure 11 - *An excerpt from a Ranger player's homepage, 'defining' skill in a way that conspicuously heightens his accomplishments.*

With a picture of his character prominently on display, the Ranger proceeds to list all of his character's awards and accomplishments, in a manner that reads like a curriculum vitae. This includes when they were "born" (even though a character's birthplace is not a category designated by the game itself), the number and type of titles achieved, rare miniature pets acquired, how many years spent in the game, bronze capes attained and so forth. This celebration of time spent in the game is accompanied by a list of accomplishments over that time—the value of which is legitimated by a self-referential 'definition' of skill. As Veblen (1912, p. 29) would describe it, this is the exaltation of efficiency as pure esteem (see endnote 46), and given the non-exclusivity of titles and items in *Guild Wars*, the speed with which one achieves these things are all players have to distinguish their achievements from that of others and the only means to developing a reputation or legacy recognizable within the game community.

This brings us to another discursive concept found alongside player mentions of visibility: that of reputation[43]. Player references to being well-known, famous or notorious for their accomplishments in the *Guild Wars* community were coded as 'reputation'. Players who openly valued reputation in their discussions also demonstrated an appreciation for showing off their accomplishments, hence making visibility and reputation a natural discursive coupling. Player mentions of desiring notoriety or an enhanced communal profile were coded as a positively dimensionalized instance of 'reputation' on a scale from 'laudatory' to 'derisive'.

> *"I really wouldn't mind if the grind titles were made easier, since i really cbf [sic] maxing them, and yes the barriers to extra character creation are reduced. But the problem with making the titles easier is that the titles as they are would have less prestige."*
>
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2007)*

---

[43] Reputation in *Guild Wars* has two distinct meanings. The first refers to the point-based system in the game in which reputation points can be earned by a player in increasing their standing with an in-game faction. The other refers to the general sense of the word in social or communal context. And although the former can influence the latter in *Guild Wars*, the coded property here refers to reputation in its more traditional meaning.

What makes it possible for a player to achieve high visibility and notoriety in the *Guild Wars* community is the completion of time-dependant goals that all community members recognize. Choosing obscure and marginal accomplishments do not tend to garner attention in *Guild Wars*. Instead, popular recognition stems from achieving goals within the designed and well-known reward infrastructure of *Guild Wars.* Hence, players who openly privileged visibility and reputation in their discourse invariably tended to also privilege *Guild Wars'* designed goals, since such goals are the basis by which one may pursue the most recognizable form of recognition. Again, laudatory player references to *Guild Wars'* 'designed goals' were coded as positively dimensionalized instances.

4.4. Characterizations: Personal Accomplishment Discourse

"Now after 54 months and 5076 hours of game time, this is what I remember... How proud I was of myself the first time I got Legendary Survivor. I jumped out of my chair and did a dance when I reached 'Kind of a big deal' title. To others that won't seem like a big accomplishment, but to me, It was huge."

Guild Wars *Player (*Guild Wars *Guru Forum)*

Personal Accomplishment as a category does not refer, in this study's use of the term, to the gratification or feeling of achievement one experiences when one completes a goal, but rather that player discourse of taking the less trodden path--both with regard to the game's designed goals and the game community's privileged behaviors. In short, personal accomplishers are players who characterize their grind in a manner that defies what popular sentiment would suggest or encourage them to do. They pursue personal goals with little regard for either efficiency or exhibitionism.

Personal Accomplishment Discourse		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Reference to designed goals (-)	Expressing contempt for game-designed goals	Expressing lack of concern with achieving a prestigious title or completing a challenging quest
Reference to personal goals (+)	Articulating one's own personal goals and rules for success	Emphasizing one's own personal standards and goals over game-imposed ones.
Reference to in-game visibility (-)	Dismiss the importance of in-game visibility as bragging	Publically dismissing significance of a particular title, rare loot or high-level armour.
Reference to efficiency (-)	Downplaying mainstream notions of in-game efficiency	Rejecting traditional efficiency in favour of personal standards of play.
Reference to exploiting game-imposed limits (+/-)	Reference to using exploits and gimmicks in-game	Exploits only used towards accomplishing personally defined goal.

Table 3—Personal Accomplishment Discourse Schema

Discursive Category Formation

The properties above were derived through iterative coding of discursive data originating either from discussions between myself (the researcher) and a single player or in forum threads. In my formulation, Personal Accomplishment discourse as a category generally de-privileges the importance of designed goals and instead emphasizes personally held and/or created goals by *Guild Wars* players. This category of player discourse also disregards the importance of achievement visibility and generally disregards the importance of efficiency in goal-directed pursuits.

Discursive Property Descriptions

Although reference to 'designed goals' was a property dimensionalized positively in the Power Gaming discursive category where designer goals are upheld as ideal objectives to pursue, 'designed goals' under Personal Accomplishment are spoken of with some contempt or disregard by players. Even when there was evident cross-over between a player's reference to their personal goals and to the game's designed goals in a forum discussion or interview, they would supplant the designer emphasis of a goal

with their own. Coding and dimensionalizing for negative characterizations of a game's 'designed goals' in player expositions about their own personal accomplishments was the first prominent marker in distinguishing Personal Accomplishment as its own discursive category.

As noted most particularly in one-on-one interviews, players expressing ill-regard for the game's designed goals would bring the discussion back to their own personal in-game goals, and as will be further explored in Chapter 5, these were things players would talk about in significant detail. In terms of consistent coding then, any mention of a player's 'own goals' (e.g. "I'm doing this for me", "it's my own thing", "it's personal")[44] was coded as a discrete property under this category.

It is here where 'visibility' again became useful as a code property, since players who tended to speak the most effusively about the pursuit of their own goals for purposes of personal pride or gratification tended to also dismiss the importance of any visible evidence of their accomplishments, emphasizing that their goal's achievement was not for bragging to others. Examples of applying this code dimensionalized with a derisive connotation include instances when players would vocally dismiss the importance of a demonstrable title, loot item or piece of publicly displayable armor in the achievement of a goal'.

In forum discussions and interviews, players who privileged 'personal goals' also tended to hold the notion of efficiency with either disinterest or noted disapproval, instead supporting the idea of grinding at their own pace or proceeding at their own leisure. Although initially coded as 'personal pacing' in the first pass of the data, I elected to revise naming these instances in player discussions as a neutral-to-derisive dimensionalization of the existing code reference to 'efficiency,' especially given that one's personal pacing and efficiency are not necessarily mutually exclusive phenomena.

[44] For example, a player talking about their grind for Lightbringer points in an effort to earn 1M points was coded as an instance of a privileged personal goal. And although the player in question might have been using a designed mechanism to reach that goal and even be obtaining a designed prestige title in the process (a title earned at 50,000 points), it was reaching 1M points that defined their goal as their own and no one else's. *Guild Wars* does not reward a player for acquiring such a copious amount of points—the reward for the player in question comes only through an expressed self-gratification, not any form of visibility or external legitimation.

"My characters are in no way limited because I choose not to grind out another meaningless max title. I can do everything in this game that anyone else with max titles can do. A little trickier? Mayhap,but much more rewarding for my time. What other reason would I have for bringing a second character to the same area to grind the points to max the title? Why to grind points with a different character of course! I'm still grinding."
(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2008)

In a one-on-one online interview, one *Guild Wars* player expressed how much having goals in the game meant to them, regardless of who set them. The player, a monk, had performed certain in-game feats such as the full completion of the cartographer title's criteria (a full pixel-for-pixel exploration of the game's world map) before the developers of *Guild Wars* had even thought to assign a title to it: "[...] the computer-generated reward is irrelevant to me...sword, title, pet, whatever...I don't care".

What is critically nuanced here is how the discourse of personal accomplishment takes note and care of one's self-imposed direction—any associated prestige is either secondary or unimportant. When I asked the same player if they would still pursue their achievements if there was no way of displaying it to others, they promptly replied "yes, regardless if other people know, I know".

Finally, some players surveyed in the data who spoke about their own goals with high esteem also spoke about taking a more principled approach to 'exploiting in-game limits' in their grind, eschewing them in the pursuit of their goals. Although, some players did admit to circumventing some of the game's hard-coded rules on occasion, these players typically adopted a gimmick in an effort to achieve a personal goal which held no visible reward in the *Guild Wars* community. As such, instances of player discourse deriding the use of shortcuts of gimmicks in their grind was coded as a negatively dimensionalized property of the Personal Accomplishment category.

4.5. Characterizations: Ideal Stimulation Discourse

This category encapsulates a type of discourse that describes the grind as a type of perfect form of stimulation either because of the quality of the grind itself, or its

convenience. In other words, the category covers both the grind as an ideal challenge for a player (i.e. Turkle's notion of the Perfect Contest[45]) or simply the ideal fit for one's lifestyle. Although previous categories required some prior knowledge of the idiomatic terminology and phrasing used by *Guild Wars* players as to understand what was being discussed, discursive properties for this category were conveyed mostly through quite conventional language, revolving around personal feelings on what *Guild Wars* offered them as an individual 'outside' of simply playing the game.

Discursive Category Formation

The discursive category of 'ideal stimulation' has obvious theoretical roots in and lineages to concepts such as [game] 'flow', 'excitation/arousal' and other phenomena that refer to players' emotional and physiological enjoyment of games. Bryant & Davies refer to this tendency of individuals to select entertainment that lets them achieve an optimal level of arousal as "excitatory homeostasis" (2006, p. 183), and suggest that over-stimulated individuals choose media that presents calmer forms of engagement, while under-stimulated people choose highly frenetic and provocative forms of entertainment to occupy themselves with (2006). But they suggest that once engaged, players seek to adjust their interaction with or reception of an entertainment form by seeking out the qualities that best fit the homeostatic state desired--like tuning a knob to select a desired radio frequency. As one player states, they keep turning to *Guild Wars* "cause I'm bored out of my mind, and need something to calm it down" (Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2011).

In the discourse data under study, players often referred to the rhythmic stimulation of their play as something which was challenging in a way that did not exceed their capabilities--a concept evocative of what is popularly known as 'flow'. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's flow theory characterizes the way individuals become absorbed in activities as a trance-like state: a state of mastery, optimality of performance

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[45] "In a video game there is no place to hide, no excuses of chance or accident. For someone like David, searching for the sense of urgency that comes from real danger, this is crucial to the games' seduction. It is a place where there is "pure you."" (Turkle, 1984, p. 90)

in handling a particular challenge (1990). Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell and Moore speak to the notion of 'flow' as the central motivating appeal of MMOGs such as World of Warcraft (2006). Csíkszentmihályi's flow theory has been well received in the domain of game research and design, even forming the conceptual basis for Jenova Chen's eponymous break-out casual game, Flow (Chen, 2006) which has since become a success on multiple gaming platforms. With reference to grinding, this theory is typically used to argue that players continue to grind in MMOGs because it presents players with a scenario in which they always possess precisely the right amount of ability to meet the challenge presented to them when grinding, and they savor this experience: the intrinsic pleasures of being in 'the zone' (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Humans take pleasure in performing well in an activity that meets our capabilities perfectly, being attuned to our practice (Ducheneaut et al, 2006; Douglas and Hargadon, 2004).

My own treatment of the discursive occurrence of 'Ideal Stimulation' is an attempt to not only further nuance the notion of flow in relation to grinding, but also to relate it to other discrete extrinsic benefits players identify via community discussion – namely, grinding being a reprieve from time, labour, tedium, obligation or exertion. The next sections elaborate further on these discursive properties.

Ideal Stimulation Discourse		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Reference to Reprieve from labour (+)	Describing the grind as taking a break from "work"	Gaming as an escape from the mundane work life
Reference to Convenient timing (+)	Describing the grind as easy to schedule around, optimal duration and easy to time well	When grinding, one makes their own time restrictions
Reference to Reprieve from obligation (+)	Describing the grind as productive by choice and not imposition.	Grinding as a free-form activity free of obligations of life/work
Reference to Reprieve from exertion (+)	References to the grind as mentally relaxing	Grinding in order to stop thinking, calm mind, give brain a break
Reference to Ideal challenge (+)	Describing the grind as an optimal form of play/challenge	Taking pleasure in the 'flow' of grinding, being 'in the zone'

Table 4-Ideal Stimulation Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first property identified in this category is that of 'reprieve from labor' references. This property was coded for when a player would discuss their grinding in terms of it being an effective break from their daily work or study.

> *"The only **titles** I usually garner are from normal play or helping others although I deliberately went for skill hunter on my main as it was great fun […] I do boring and repetitive stuff all day at work to attain materialistic goals. For me gaming is an escape from that mentality but each to their own"*
>
> *(Player, Guild Wars, 2010)*

The second discursive property is that of a 'convenient timing', applied when players would make mention of the fact that their grind in *Guild Wars* was convenient and/or flexible because of the way they could easily make time for it in their daily or weekly schedule. This code was also applied when a player referred to their grind as way of 'taking a moment' from one's routine without requiring an excessive investment of time.

The third property was that of reference to 'reprieve from obligation'. This code was applied when a player would talk about enjoying grinding because it was something that felt productive in a way, which was by choice and not imposition. Instances of this property were often situated in direct contrast with a player's brief discussion of their mandatory workplace regimen.

The discursive property in reference to 'reprieve from exertion' describes when a player would identify their grind as something which mentally relaxed them, allowing them to 'park their brain' or 'zone out'. Although often associated by players with the notion of a 'reprieve from labor', exertion here refers explicitly to mental exertion--often referred to as a break from having to think.

> *"It's boring, but it's kind of great at the right times. I've got like an hour between school and home for me, so when I get home I just zone out with some vanquishes and put on my headphones. It lets my mind let go of the day for a bit and just chill out."* [46]
> *(Player,* Guild Wars *[In-Game Interview])*

Finally, references to 'ideal challenge' are perhaps the quintessential property of the 'ideal stimulation' discourse as they describe the pleasurable 'in-the-zone' state of player engagement at just the right amount of game challenge. In addition to Csíkszentmihályi, flow has also been taken up by a number of researchers such as Cowley, Charles, Black and Hickey (2008) who have argued that there is a connection between flow, game play and motivation and a number of players under study here describe their own grind in terms of this phenomenon or something similar--grinding as a means to enter a state in which the activity provides ideal stimulation:

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[46] I would note here how the actual language of flow and other academic terminology has been occasionally taken up by players in their description of their own practice in MMOGs. The adoption of the language of disciplines that specifically interrogate player practice has resulted in player-references to concepts such as 'flow' as a way of either legitimating their own in-game practices, or in the case of likening the grind to behavioral conditioning (using terms such as 'skinner box' etc.), disavowing responsibility for it altogether. Here players often lean on the hinge legitimacy of scientific discourse to either eject any sense of negativity directly associated with one's own practice, or to attribute their behavior somehow to a phenomenon outside of their capacity to control. This phenomenon however is not frequent enough to merit a formal reporting in this research, but was an interesting find all the same.

"I work during the day, so I don't want to have to work at night. But I still wanna be getting something done you know? It CAN be a total pain in the ass if runs are botching, or it gets really boring, but usually I come here and enjoy just grinding out my ectos and shards. It's simple and zen. And Im done the missions so I'm glad because it's as simple as that now for me and I don't have to worry about much else"

<div align="right">

(Player, Guild Wars [In-Game Interview])

</div>

4.6. Characterizations: Sociality Discourse

"Playing 100b in FoWSC is easy, relaxing and you can normally get chatting with the people. The shards are a nice bonus and after 100s of runs i've never had anything valuable from the end chest but I don't care at all"

<div align="right">

(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2011)

</div>

"I grind with friends. Takes away some of the pain"

<div align="right">

(Forum participant, Game Maker, 2011)

</div>

Stenros, Paavilainen and Mayra note that, "separating the sociability of the players and the social play in a game is mandatory in order to fully grasp the importance of social interaction in a gaming situation." (2009, p. 83), but admit that, "the division in massively multiplayer games is not clear cut" (2009, p. 87)--and one could as easily say the same with regard to sociality and the grind. The discursive category of Sociality here deals with references to the range of social affordances *Guild Wars* offers players vis-a-vis the grind and the many different vectors along which the social dimension of the grind reveals itself in *Guild Wars* discourse.

Discursive Category Formation

Sociality is a category built up around the player-expressed importance of the social element in their grind, whether it is grinding at a get-together event with friends, using friends as a lever by which to make the grind less cumbersome or simply grinding as a way of meeting new people. It is important to note here that players who expressed

interest in grinding with friends, tended to look poorly on the prospect of having to grind on their own or with strangers. In describing activities such as raids or dungeons or in-game outings of greater consequence, socializing plays an important role in MMOGs. Writes Huizinga, "the feeling of being apart together in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms...the club pertains to play as the hat to the head" (1950, p. 31). But although sociality might be considered by Huizinga to be 'essential' or 'intrinsic' to play, grinding itself is not generally held up as what one would characterize as an 'exceptional' situation. Commensurately, players under study here speak of the manner in which enduring a burden such as the grind together is not a thrilling enterprise, but simply something to make that burden less of an encumbrance.

Sociality Discourse		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Reference to spending time with friends (+)	Talking about the grind as a way of socializing with friends	Going into the game just to help friends farm/grind
Reference to meeting new friends (+)	Talking about grinding as a way of meeting new people	Forming pick-up groups to perform grind quests
"The more the merrier" (+)	Discursively privileging grinding with friends as a principle	Opting out of grinding or playing at all if there is no one to play with
Reference to solo gaming (-)	Negative references to soloing because of its lack of sociality	Derisive remarks and incredulity as to why anyone would solo

Table 5- Sociality Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first property, reference to 'time with friends', describes players talking about grinding in *Guild Wars* as a means to spend more time with their guildmates, friends or real-life colleagues online. In the collected data it was found that players talk about the grind as something which allows them to spend time with friends or guildmates. Social grind outings might then range from being the social vestige of older in-game relationships where friends or guilds once performed a game's other activities together, or it might be real-life couples going into the game together to share a simple, low-

threshold activity. Either way, grinding items or titles in *Guild Wars* remains one of the few activities players can conduct together without much planning or preparation. As Stenros et al remark, "playing can be an excuse to hang around together[...] It seems that as long as enough people are playing a game, everyone present need not even actively participate" (2009, p. 87)--the same can be said for grinding as a discursively player-acknowledged activity.

For many players, the sociality of grinding provides the lubricant that eases players through to their objectives or keeps them interested in the repetitive content of the game. Earning obsidian shards or other valuable items through grinding runs might be a mild concern, but the success of the runs are often considered secondary or at least as worthwhile to just being with other people and enduring the rote aspects of the game in good company. As Stenros et all remark, the grind itself is not even characterized by players a mandatory practice: its existence is often simply talked about as the pretext for a social exchange. In this way, socializing during a grind-based activity (vanquishing, farming etc.) isn't necessarily approached with an earnest intent to conduct the activity, but is rather an agreed upon catalyst for social assembly which is rarely interrogated for the integrity of its conduct.

> *"We'll get together to run a dungeon [...] we can talk and joke for hours. A lot of the time though we either die or never even get halfway done because we're just enjoying each other's company [...] and sometimes we'll even get together just to do a farming run and end up standing around just inside an instance."*
> *(Player, Guild Wars [In-Game Interview])*

Players who privilege sociality over other aspects of gameplay ("the more the merrier") typically refer to the grind as something alienating and disagreeable. Only in a group does such a pursuit become palatable to many players, and occasionally, if there is no one available to aid in that pursuit a player will simply put it off for another time.

> *"even if I was into grinding there's no reason to come on anymore if there's no one to do it with"*
> *(Player, Guild Wars [In-Game Interview])*

This is not to say that players only come online to rekindle pre-existing social relationships. Players also talk about the grind as a means to cultivate new social ties. One player talks about the social motive for participating in "shard" runs (a farmable item) in a location in the game known as the Fissure of Woe (FOW)[47]:

"I PuG [pick up group] FoWSC [Fissure of Woe] because it's fun to encounter different people and I don't really care if the team fails"
(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2011)

The term 'pick up group' or PUG refers to the custom of teaming up with random strangers in order to farms for items or grind out a quest. Although not always desirable, for some (such as the player above) it is a means to meeting new faces in-game. Although quite similar to references to 'spending time with friends', this discursive dimension of sociality describes players' specific mentioning of meeting new people by means of the grind

'References to soloing' is the same code encountered in the discursive category of Power Gaming except this time it is dimensionalized with a derisive connotation. Those players who spoke of appreciating grinding for its social affordances obviously looked somewhat poorly on the act of soloing. In short, players who were looking to maximize their sociality in the game spoke of soloing as though it had little to no value for them.

4.7. Characterizations: Role Play Discourse

"The "grindy" elements are part of the storyline. The role playing game part. The elements that affect your character..."
(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2007)

This category, containing only two codes, circumscribes player discourse dealing with the creation or projection of a character identity in *Guild Wars* specifically through means afforded by the grind.

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[47] In FOW, players, simply take a choice path through the instance, killing creatures in a pre-determined pattern over and over again.

Discursive Category Formation

Whether as a source of grind amelioration of simply as a means to an end, the pleasure of role-play can also be framed as one which stems from "the knowledge that something is imitated" (Vikhagen, 2009, p. 16)--the recognition of one's mimesis as a source of enjoyment and wonderment. But in a game such as *Guild Wars*, the player is both the actor and the spectator-- both performing and watching the performances of their player-character. The trials faced by a role-playing *Guild Wars* player may come to define that character for a player, but here, discursively, trials become obstacles to be overcome, hardships to be endured as a core aspect of the identity construction in-game.

Role Play Discourse		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Identity projection (+)	Talk about character's identity as integral to the grind	Describe a character in terms of grind titles – 'survivor', etc.
Identity performance (+)	Referring to the grind favourably as something that reflects players' real-life character	Talking about striving for a particular (grind-heavy) title because it relates to real identity

Table 6- Role Play Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first code in this category, references to 'identity projection' was developed to account for moments in the data when players would describe their character's grinding as a means or opportunity to develop and/or reflect their character's personality. As an example, a player might grind through a candy-eating title because having a sweet-tooth is a quality they ascribe (or project onto) to their player-character in-game. Or they might take to vanquishing the local animal population of a wooded zone because 'animal control is what Rangers are responsible for'. Either way, references to identity projection in this discursive context applies to instances in the data in which a player

referred to the grind as something which allowed their character to develop or more accurately reflect a desired persona.

"The PvE grind titles are part of your developing your character's storyline. You develop your character to become a survivor, to become a cartographer, to become a guardian, etc."

(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2008)

Grinding for titles are trials which define a player-character through evidence, making the grind an agonistic or competitive feat which fuels the performance of the player-character's mimicry, making it both more believable as a spectator and increasingly cathartic as a player (Caillois , 1961).

Who is ▉
My ranger is my favourite character in GuildWars. She was born 17th of august 2005 in Beetletun and reached the currently highest PvE rank mid-december 2007 and became a "God walking amongst mere mortals".

I've been a member of a few top 100 guilds during the early days of GuildWars ▉
▉ Like many GuildWars players I took a break and was inactive during the second half of 2008 till februari 2009.

Currently I log on to observe my guild, chat with friends, work on some PvE achievements or occasionaly PvP with my guild.

Mythology
A▉eek Î±ï¿½â‚¬żÎ‌®) a Greek word for 'ruin, folly, delusion', is the action performed by the hero, usually because of his/her hubris, or great pride, that leads to his/her death or downfall. There is also a goddess by that name (Atï¿½½) in Greek mythology, a personification of the same.
▉

Figure 12- *On a bio page a player has created for their Guild Wars Ranger character they discuss the etymology of their character's name, and of course, all of the accomplishments this character has seen in their 'lifetime'.*

Noting the language in the bio above, the player does not refer to their character as someone who has earned the notoriously grind-heavy title, "God Walking Among Mere Mortals", but refers to the character themselves *as* such--a legitimation of a player's efforts through the subtle exaltation of their character's status. As Raph Koster argues (2004), game characters become a vessel worth filling because of the intense

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time invested in them through a player's achievements. And although achievements don't necessarily need to be grind-based, in *Guild Wars*, the highest forms of prestige require repetitive and time-consuming activities measuring in the hundreds to thousands of hours and consist of some of the most cathartic challenges one can complete[48]. The performance of the player-character, which employ narrative and make-believe, lend a special credence to these achievements in distinguishing what are otherwise commonplace achievements in the *Guild Wars* community.

Related to but separate from identify projection through avatar-oriented discourse of the grind is the property of 'identity performance' denoting utterances in which a player's identity itself is constituted discursively through the grind. Rather than dealing with instances of a player talking about making a player-character more faithful to their fictive in-game persona, identity performance reflects situations when players would discuss adopting the grind as an opportunity to make their character more reflective of themselves. Players would often speak of performing grinding tasks in a game in order for their character to best represent who they actually were. (e.g. I want my character to grind out all the skill titles because I consider myself to be a skilled person). In a thread discussing grind-based titles, one player offers the following:

> *"I also like titles that kind of "define" you. For example, I love to read and love sweets in real life, so I want the Sweet Tooth and Wisdom titles for their statues (Wisdom has books, that's why I want it - not saying I'm a genius hehe)"*
>
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2009)*

Here, the player speaks of the acquisition of these titles as something that enables their on-screen representations to reflect or represent their real life self in their

---

[48] Entire forum threads are dedicated just to those who have finally finished some of the most grind-intensive titles, to allow players to not only show off their accomplishments to a group of peers, but also indulge in some celebratory (and highly legitimating) catharsis.

Guild Wars character[49].   Such utterances characterize the grind as means by which players can construct these representations and further frame the grind as an appealing avenue for this process.   In other words, players can and do frame the grind as a requisite step in enabling a particular representation for oneself or one's character (Turkle, 1984)[50].

4.8. Dispositions: Discourse of Complicity

With the category of Complicity we now begin to discuss player attitudes towards the grind as dispositional accompaniments to discursive characterizations of the grind listed above. While the categories mentioned thus far address the numerous ways the grind was described by players in the data surveyed, Dispositions addresses personal orientations to notions of the grind itself. Complicity as a category deals with player discourse that not only is favourable of the grind, but in particular demonstrates a vested interest in maintaining grinding as a primary form of in-game engagement in either *Guild Wars* or MMOGs in general.

Discursive Category Formation

References to complicity with the grind as a category reflect the observed regular concurrence of several archetypal instances in the data--namely instances in which players affectively characterized the grind as something which was not only an ideologically perfect form of in-game engagement, but one that they felt ought to be embraced. A number of instances in the data demonstrated player discourse in support of this sentiment by calling on the designers as an authority to be respected in this

[49] To provide some context, the Sweet Tooth title requires that a player consume 10,000 pieces of candy by clicking on them. This candy must either be purchased, farmed or casually collected over months during the game's special seasonal events.The wisdom title requires players either find or purchase lockpicks for special chests, find those chests and then identify the rare items inside by double-clicking on an Identification Kit. This needs to be performed tens of thousands of times in order to achieve the title. Many simply try and purchase the requisite number of unidentified rare items and proceed to identify them in large batches.

[50] Fictional role-play and identity projection are also not mutually exclusive phenomena.

matter or by insisting on the 'grind as status quo' as a means to dismiss arguments to the contrary.

Complicity with the Grind		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
"One ought to grind" (+)	Expressing an ideology of complete acceptance and normativity of the grind	Referring to the grind as the quintessential way ofin-game engagement in MMORGs
"Grinding is the best way" (+)	References to grinding as the best way of playing MMORGs	Referring to the grind as the most efficient/best way of playing
Reference to grind as designer intention (+)	Acknowledgement of the grind as legitimate designer intention, to be respected	References to the authority of game designers with regard to the grind as designed action
Reference to grind as status quo (-/+)	Uncritical acknowledgement of the grind	Referring to the grind as "it's just how it is"

Table 7- Complicity Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first property in this category is the 'one ought to grind' discourse —a dimension reflecting when a player would suggest that the grind was a form of in-game engagement in *Guild Wars* that represented the way such games (MMOGS) *should* be played. This property typically occurred in threads specifically pertaining to player opinions on the grind in *Guild Wars*, but was also found to be readily discernable in casual in-game conversations.

This property was also found regularly paired with references to 'grinding is the best way'—a dimension reflecting when players would opine that grinding was simply the perfect form of engagement in either *Guild Wars* or MMOGs in general. Although closely related, these first two codes are actually quite distinct. After all, there were players who felt that the grind, even if not ideal, ought to be the primary form of ludic interaction in *Guild Wars* because the grind is what defined *Guild Wars'* overarching genre for better or for worse. With that said, both of these properties typically revolve around a discourse that maintains the grind as the key form of engagement underpinning both *Guild Wars* and the MMOG genre at large. The regularly observed

concurrence of these two discursive properties served as the original basis for this category.

Perhaps the most unique and colourful instance of 'grinding is the best way' property occurred during a conversation I was having with a participating player about their faction point farming efforts, to which another proximal player interjected:

"Stop   Complaining   [about   the   grind]—it's   beautiful"
(Guild Wars Player, 2007)

This notion of the grind as being 'beautiful' or the ideal form of engagement with the game's content is rarely articulated so bluntly, but it sums up those moments when players have little justification to offer, outside of it simply being a 'good' thing.

Whereas instances of 'one ought to grind' typically appealed to some universal standard for what defined *Guild Wars* and MMOGs alike, references to 'grinding as designer intention' was created to account for when players felt that the designer's vision of a game with grind in it was the correct creative vision for the game, musing that if grinding is what the designers wanted, then those intentions should be respected. This 'pro-establishment' attitude towards the grind was often raised in support of the prior two codes in discussions about the grind in *Guild Wars.*

Lastly, references to 'grinding as status quo' was a discursive property assigned when players would dismiss the grind as 'just being the way it is in MMOGs'. These instances were dimensionalized positively if a player made such a statement in dismissal of another player's critique of the grind or alongside an instance of a laudatory reference to the grind in *Guild Wars* or other MMOGs.

4.9. Dispositions: Unrecognition

A neologism generated for this study, 'unrecognition', refers to instances in the collected data in which players expressed a lack of recognition of the grind as a phenomenon, or simply dismissed 'grinding' as a label undeserving of formal recognition.

Discursive Category Formation

Unrecognition encompasses player discourse which positions the grind as something either unseen or wilfully unacknowledged. Although this is usually coupled with a neutral attitude towards the subject of grinding when raised, it seems to be more often accompanied by a general dismissal of the phenomenon as beneath concern.

Unrecognition of the Grind		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
Lack of perception of the grind	Lack of awareness that one has ever engaged in 'grinding'	Being unfamiliar with the phrase 'grinding' and/or having the impression it doesn't apply
Un-acknowledgement of grinding	Lack of acknowledgement typical play as a 'grind'	Reflections on using 'grinding' as simply another word for 'playing'

Table 8- Unrecognition Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first property under Unrecognition is a lack of perception of the grind, expressed discursively. This property reflected cases when a player would not only fail to recognize grinding as a term when it was raised in conversation in the course of data collection, but also could not reconcile a broad definition of the term with anything they had ever encountered in *Guild Wars*. Such players, regardless of how long they had been playing, simply either had not discursively framed their in-game engagement as repetitive or 'grindy', even when their descriptions of their own activities fell within the boundaries of what might be considered repetitive engagement[51].

Unrecognition's second discursive property is that of 'unacknowledgement': applied when a player would muse on never having acknowledged their own repetitive activities in *Guild Wars* as a discrete phenomenon, less one that could be labelled

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[51] Notably, this property was exclusively coded in in-game player-interviews, and most players whose discourse was coded for this property had admitted to not frequenting community fora or websites.

'grinding'. This situation typically arose because of their impression of such activities as representative of the genre as a whole, the common rejoinder being that 'the grind' was simply another way of saying 'playing the game'.

4.10. Dispositions: Discourse of Critical Complicity

The category of Critical Complicity refers to discourse in which players would remark on their attitude towards the grind as negative, and yet something they felt compelled to either uphold, perform or accept nonetheless.

Discursive Category Formation

Player-expressed attitudes under this discursive category were those that typically described the grind in *Guild Wars* as something endured for an alternative reason. These reasons could be memories, some alternative value (such as friends) or the prior investment of time and energy. What is key here is the conflictual nature of the player discourse coded within the category—discourse which expressed a dislike for the grind coupled with a compulsion to stay and endure it for one of a number of reasons.

Critical Complicity with the Grind		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
References to punitive design (-)	Comments about the game's design forcing players to grind	Referring to the grind in games as an abusive relationship
Value Justification	Negative references towards the grind followed by positive validation of the game's design	Hates to grind but while grinding enjoys the pretty environment, relationships they've made etc.
Reference to commitment	Negative references to the grind but recognition of time committed towards the game as reason to go on	Hates to grind but can't stop now after all the time and effort spent in the game
Reference to grind as status quo (-)	Negative comments about the grind being 'just the way it is' in MMORGs	Acknowledgement that this sentiment exists, negative attitude towards it
"One ought to grind" (-)	Negative invocation of the ideology that one should grind in MMORGs	Acknowledgement that this sentiment exists, negative attitude towards it
"Grinding is the best way" (-)	Negative invocation of the ideology that grinding is the best way to play the game	Acknowledgement that this sentiment exists, negative attitude towards it

Table 9- Critical Complicity Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first property coded under this category was that of references to 'punitive design'. This property was coded for when players would speak about the grind in *Guild Wars* as somehow being disrespectful or unjust to players. Phrases such as 'forced to' or 'they make us' were found proximal to such coded instances in the data.

> *"But it's like being in an abusive relationship where Anet treats me poorly but I still reminisce of the fun times we had together and wish for a happier future (aka updates!)"*
>
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2011)*

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"Those titles cannot be done by anything else but banging your head up against a wall, so you choose the lesser of two grinding evils."
(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2011)

The code of 'value justification' was assigned to reflect instances in the data in which a player would claim disliking the grind, but would then seek to discursively redeem *Guild Wars* in other ways as to justify why they still played. For example, a player might declare the grind to be an unenjoyable feature of *Guild Wars*, but then claim that they stayed for the beautiful environments, nostalgia or the friends they had made over the years. This code was only assigned when a player immediately followed a statement of dislike for the grind in *Guild Wars* with something they explicitly qualified as redeeming.

'References to commitment' was a discursive dimension assigned to instances in the data in which players would claim that in spite of disliking the grind, they felt they had invested too much time and effort in *Guild Wars* and its grind to simply walk away from it. The distinction between 'value justification' and references to commitment then is that of investment: whereas the former might justify value in other parts of the game as a reason to endure the grind, players in the latter category explicitly noted that it was the time and effort they had put in to their characters that prevented them from walking away from their grind.

The final three dimensions of this discursive category – references to 'grind as status quo', 'grinding is the best way' and 'ought to grind' were essentially the negative, or derisive aspects of affective utterances around the grind, in contrast to these same properties being typically used in positive formulation within the 'Complicity' discourse space. In this rather more critical perspective of the grind players would refer to it as simply 'being the way it is' in spite of their criticism of it; the grind being perceived as a sort of necessary evil.

4.11. Dispositions: Critical Rejection of the Grind

The discursive category of 'Critical Rejection' of the grind is one that essentially embodies the sentiment, 'if you're not enjoying the grind, stop doing it'.

Discursive Category Formation

This category deals primarily with players who talked pragmatically about there being no reason for staying in *Guild Wars* and enduring something they did not enjoy. This player discourse elicited mention of less-than-enjoyable design elements, and would even acknowledge these things as the status quo in MMOG design, but only alongside a declaration that they would also not stay to endure it. This was a more empowered discourse than that of Critical Complicity, with players determined not to subjugate oneself to the grind, but rather to remove oneself from it.

Critical Rejection of the Grind		
Properties	**Description**	**Instances**
"No means no" (-)	Reference to leaving or having left the game because of distaste for grinding	Announcing in public forums or in-game one's departure because of the grind
Reference to punitive design (-)	Negative reference to the game design of grinding being unfair to players	Stating unfairness of the grind as reasons to leave the game
Reference to grinding as status quo (-)	Rejection of the sentiment that grinding is simply 'the way it is' in MMORPGs	Stating a rejection of this sentiment as reason for leaving or planning to leave the game

Table 10- Critical Rejection Discourse Schema

Discursive Property Descriptions

The first and most prevalent code under this category is something I have labelled 'no means no'. Plainly put, 'no means no' was coded for when players in the forum and interview data said they were either going to leave or have already left *Guild*

Wars because of a distaste for the normativity of the grind in the game—a commitment to no longer endure something they did not enjoy.

There were also instances in the discourse when players would reference the repetitive and/or grind-filled design of *Guild Wars* as being punitive or unjust. These instances were dimensionalized along a range of 'accepting' and 'rejecting' attitudes. While in the discursive space of Critical Complicity such comments around punitive design were negative yet still accepting of the grind. However, in the context of Critical Rejection such instances were dimensionalized wholesale as 'rejecting'.

The player below articulates quite clearly as to what their boundaries are with regard to the things they both are and are *not* willing to grind for:

> *"I still think LDoA [Legendary Defender of Ascalon] is utterly retarded. Survivor I have interest in, but my way..[…]My Elonian Cartagrapher [sic] will remain at 98% forever. […] I have 30+ HOM pts.. and have never done any of the endgame areas.. and still have no interest. After 5+ years in EQ2 I just don't have any interest in camping dungeons. I do the manditory [sic] missions in them..that is enough."*
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2011)*

Finally, the references to the grind as a 'status quo' were applied similarly to their counterparts under Critical Complicity, except rather than dismissing any criticism of the grind and embracing 'the way it is', players in this discursive context tended to dismiss the grind entirely—and thereafter choosing to abandon it. The concept of 'status quo' under this category then, was dimensionalized as 'derisive'.

4.12. Summary

This chapter introduced the development of a discursive mapping of the grind performed through an iterative open coding process applied in accordance with the Wittgensteinian take on discourse analysis put forth in Chapter 3. I have further elaborated on the theoretical underpinnings (where applicable) and concept refinement over the two stages of coding of my data, with detailed descriptions of the final discursive categories and the properties that comprise them.
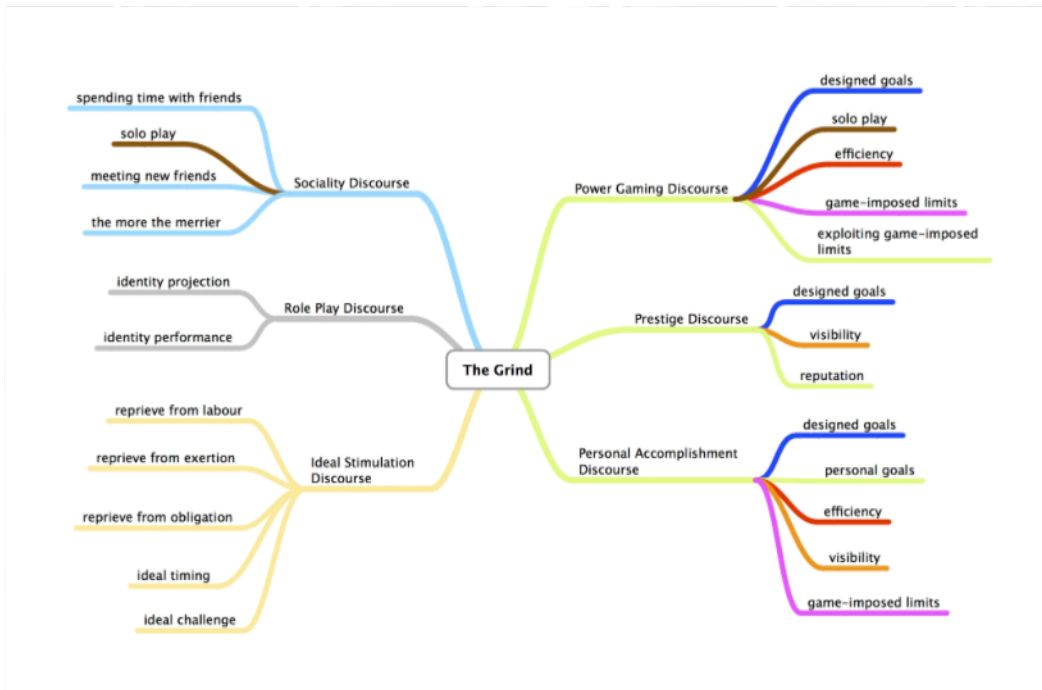
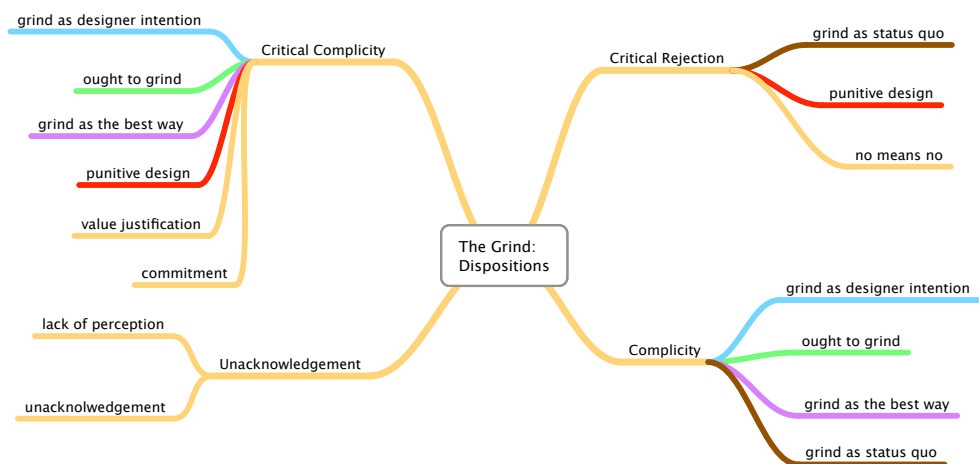**Figure 13-**Sketching out a Discursive Map of the Grind
(Characterizations)

Figure 84-Sketching out a Discursive Map of the Grind (Dispositions)

The result of this discursive mapping of the grind confronts us once again with the fact that it remains a near impossible task to 'slice up' what a player is doing in any given moment of 'the grind'. Yet, it duly raises the point that if we make the analytical distinction between 'characterizations' and 'dispositions', we are afforded some insight into the conceptually incoherent practices at play here. The categorizations committed to here allow us to unpack the puzzling or seemingly contradictory aspects we often see in research around the grind—an aspect which sees players as holding seemingly negative attitudes towards a prima facie distasteful task, and yet failing to explain why they continue to do it. However, based on the above, a player can conceivably characterize their game play both as a rote grind towards a prestige item, and a personal accomplishment while still exhibiting both a positive *and* negative disposition towards their task.

This means that while players can express their grind through a series of characterizations (e.g. power gamer, sociality, role-play), they can also simultaneously exhibit multiple dispositions towards them (i.e. a negative attitude held towards the rote aspect of their gameplay and a positive attitude held towards what that gameplay affords them). Of particular note is the manner in which players can either express value in something the game intrinsically affords them (prestige items, new titles, efficient run times) or in something the game extrinsically affords them (sociality, a means to role play, a way to relax during off-hours). The grind here can thus effectively exceed the confines of the gamespace and become a tool, a means to something else, an act imbued with a meaning that stands apart from the game's systemic value system of productivity and goal-seeking. Though this complicates the grind ontologically, it assists in pencilling in the boundaries of the grind, albeit blurry, through the language-games of *Guild Wars* players.

But what can we now say about these language-games with respect to Wittgenstein's analytical toolkit? The following chapter proceeds with an analysis of those findings presented here. I move through each of the three toolkit concepts mentioned in Chapter 3, offering an elaboration on and detailed interpretation of the data through their respective lenses.

5. A Wittgensteinian Analysis

5.1. Overview

With the previous chapter having identified and categorized key concepts by applying a 'Wittgensteinian eye' to the discourse data, this chapter proceeds with an analysis of that data by employing some of Wittgenstein's more critical concepts around language and language-use.
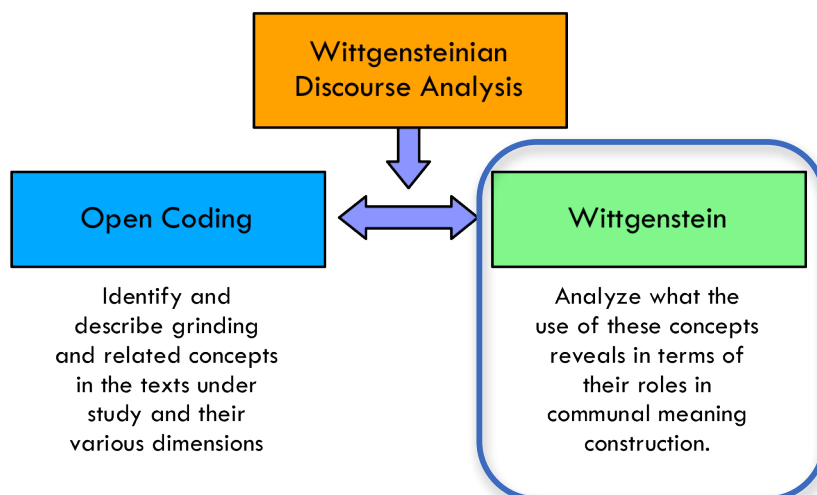
***Figure 95** – WDA Phase 1 to Phase 2: An Analysis of Coded Data via Wittgensteinian Toolkit*

As elaborated on in Chapter 3, the key concept and fundamental premise on which my Wittgensteinian toolkit is predicated, is that of the 'language-game' (Wittgenstein, 1953). This concept of language-game frames linguistic exchange as a series of moves between speakers within the context of a shared activity. Looking at discourse through the concept of the language-game focuses not only on what is said,

but privileges speaking itself as an activity, which for Wittgenstein, cannot be detached from any earnest pursuit of meaning in discourse (Wittgenstein, 1953; Williams, 1999).

From this perspective on language, I mobilize three further Wittgensteinian concepts (introduced in Chapter 3) bedrock practices, hinge propositions and family resemblances to identify and elucidate what players in *Guild Wars* invoke when they talk about the grind. In each section, I illustrate the key roles of these concepts in a Wittgensteinian discourse analysis by relating them to the characterization and disposition features of the discursive map of the Grind, presented in Chapter 4. I argue that these three concepts, used as lens for understanding both the language-game of the grind as a whole as well as individual utterances within it, are the key to a critical and nuanced excavation of the meaning of grinding for players of *Guild Wars*, and the relationship between their discursive acts and their normative in-game practices.

Discursive Map of The Grind

Power Gaming	Complicity
Presstige	Critical Complicity
Personal Accomplishment	Critical Rejection
Ideal Stimulation	Unrecognition
Socialization	Role Play

***Figure 106**– An abbreviated rundown of grinding's Discursive Categories as Identified in Chapter 4*

Employing discourse analysis as a method privileges a keen examination of the situatedness of utterances to excavate meaning from language in everyday use: use which itself relies on a series of contextual assumptions, social and cultural scaffolding, value systems, patterns and conventions (Gee, 1999; Kress, 1984). Player utterances in ordinary language-in-use constitute an instance of what James Gee refers to as 'small d' discourse (1999). Leveraging an analysis that actively situates and contextualizes these utterances assists in sketching out a broader picture of the *Guild Wars* player community: a picture which considers the lived realities of *Guild Wars* players and how players in such a community come to understand their world and the practices within it through language exchanges. This broader picture, what Gee refers to as 'big D' Discourse, is that discourse which extends beyond language into enacted customs and practices (1999). The Wittgensteinian toolkit discussed here then is used to move from an examination of moves in player language-games, instances of 'small-d' discourse (as reticulated and assessed in the map in Chapter 4), in an effort to further explore the territory of the 'big D' Discourse around the concept of grinding.

5.2. Bedrock Practices: The Normativity of Grinding and the Displacement of Play

"[play is] differentiated from 'normal' existence because [it] seem[s] to have no relation to the principles on which we act and the truths by which we understand the world"

(Hans, 1981, p. 4)

As discussed in Chapter 3, adopting the concept of bedrock practices as a lens into everyday language alerts us to overt normative practices in a given community. As with the 'builders' in Wittgenstein's allegory (see Chapter 3), the function of bedrock is to provide a layer that prevents language-games from coming to a halt by eliminating the imperative to justify why it is that the game's participant's may make certain moves. Bedrock is, what Wittgensteinian scholar Meredith Williams describes, as "shared judgments of normative similarity with respect to salient objects and properties in the world" (1999, p. 7), and though such shared judgments provide a language-game with a

sense of certainty they do above all else, provide a basis for normativity in discursive exchanges (Wittgenstein, 1953).

In his Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein exemplifies the 'standard metre' as a unit of measurement that serves as a bedrock paradigm in our language-games: "something with which comparison is made" (PI 50, 1953). No matter how arbitrary it might be as a chosen method of comparison, the metre functions as a normative standard by which everyone referencing the length of something can call upon in order to communicate with others in generating an understanding, effectively signalling participation in a shared language-game. Such 'standards', as methods of representing distinctions and comparisons can remain reliable enough to allow a language-game to carry on. As long as these standards are communally assented and committed to with each move made within a language-game, even if one does not paradigmatically subscribe to them, their use does not immediately necessitate rationalization or justification by its users (Wittgenstein, 1953).

Such paradigms of comparison of course need not be restricted to numeric measurements or other mathematically delineated phenomena such as the 'metre', but apply to any concept which sees itself attached to multiple moves in a language-game. One of the interesting things found in the categorization of the discourse data presented here (and in a handful of the sample quotations drawn on in Chapter 4) was the manner in which Guild Wars players uniquely situated notions of 'normal play' to 'the grind':

> *"I had always wanted themed elemental summons for my Ele. The Asura summons are perfect for that. I've been testing them with my Sol Mesmer, and they aren't uber powerful, but they are decent skills and get serious style points for a matching build. So it's off to grind I go. But **normal play**, and turning in both NM and HM Hero's and Dungeons books will do it nicely with no extra **grind** needed, so what's the problem?"*
> *(Player,* Guild Wars Guru*, 2010)*

> *"The flaw in these titles is that the fastest way to max them involves tons of **grind**. If you decide to get your points "**normally** as you progress", then it'll be a very looooong time before you get at least 1 maxed.*
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2007)*

*"once you completed the storyline and begin to look at what you can do now, you see the monstrous freak of nature that is LdoA [Legendary Defender of Ascalon], and even if most probably will say "no way am I doing that!", you still accept that the game past level 20 is all about **grind and abnormal play**, ruthlessly exploiting mechanics to get what you want."*

(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2009)

As these quotations help illustrate, 'normal play' is a concept in player discourse used by players in distinguishing grinding from 'non-grinding' practices—and this notion of 'normal play' points us to what may be the most crucial bedrock practice in *Guild Wars* discourse around the subject of grinding. By qualifying their play as 'normal' (the regular or average approach to play), players signal the manner in which 'play' is not the normative practice (the correct or conventional approach to play) in *Guild Wars*. Although 'normal play' receives a designation by players that imbues it with a status of 'ordinariness', its qualification as 'normal' demonstrates that grinding is in fact positioned as the standard convention of in-game practice. Subsequently, the designation of play as 'normal' serves to discursively marginalize play itself, revealing the manner in which the normativity of the grind does not need to be explained or qualified within the *Guild Wars* community as something different from play—the grind simply becomes the bedrock on which communal notions of play rest and are measured against. Players thus discursively designate normal play as 'normal' precisely because it is *not* the grind. The spectrum of difference between 'normal play' and the 'grind' is irrelevant here; the mere positioning of 'normal play' as 'not-grind' tacitly allows the grind to remain the metre stick, the rule-of-thumb by which *Guild Wars* players recognize and communicate what serves as the conventional approach to *Guild Wars* content and what does not. This rule following and recognition of the appropriate metre-stick in a language-game solidifies into the 'common practice' of a community—its bedrock practices (Williams, 1999, p. 175).

Of course those things that cement the rules of the bedrock practices of a group, do not simply appear from thin air, but rather instantiate themselves over time after their introduction to a group or community. Gramsci's concepts of 'spontaneous' and

'normative' grammars are useful here in investigating the manner in which bedrock practices take hold, particularly as it pertains to how the introduction of newer words and their uses can come to be taken up as normative practice in language-games (1971).

Spontaneous grammars for Gramsci are those constantly emerging grammars of everyday exchange – new rules and modes of linguistic exchange which surface amid the use of traditional normative grammars (1971). These things can be idiomatic or just a simple repurposing of existing words or concepts. Spontaneous grammars emerge and are often taken up as normative grammars by a dominant regime in an effort to re-uphold particular paradigms, whether consciously or unconsciously (Gramsci, 1971; Ives, 2004). Spontaneous grammars thus encapsulate words and their associations that arise in communal contexts: we continually develop our social lexicon though our linguistic exchanges and praxis and, as Gramsci would contend, this lexicon evolves into a normative one (Gramsci, 1971; Ives, 2006)[52].

The term 'grinding', having found its origins as a largely pejorative term among players in the early days of MMOGs (Taylor, 2006a), has since been taken up by both players and developers as common vocabulary to describe a typical form of engagement with MMOG game content. MMOG players in particular will simply distinguish between the severities of grind between MMOGs rather than debate its inclusion--a sentiment exemplified by one *Guild Wars* player who suggests, "there's far less grind here for me than there was there or in other games like LOTRO."[53] Even designers, such as the Turbine representative quoted in Chapter 1 who brazenly states that his company will assuredly continue to design for the grind, now go un-assailed about such claims. This is

[52] In *Guild Wars* terms, there emerges an ostensible consent by players at-large to accept the implicit grammars that begin to permeate a game; a consent which sees a re-appropriation of controversial 'spontaneous' grammars (such as the concept of 'grinding') as 'normative' ones (Gramsci, 1971, Ives, 2004). As Niels Helsloot writes:

"Gramsci is in line with Wittgenstein; normativity is not a matter of opinions, but of a form of life [...] Norms and rules develop within a community, parallel to the political aims the community produces, in other words, to its self-definition. Normative grammar, and the efforts spent in patiently learning it, discipline people" (Helsloot, 1989, p. 557)

In Wittgenstein's words, "some things stand unshakeably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it" (1953; OC 144).

[53] https://forum-en.guildwars2.com/forum/game/gw2/What-happened-to-the-no-grind-philosophy

only a few years after heavyweight designers in the industry such as Richard Garriott spoke out openly against the grind, remarking that "the fact that people use the nomenclature 'grinding' to describe what they do in online games [was] a bad sign" (Gamasutra, 2007). However, in 2013, the grind is as normative fixture in *Guild Wars* discourse as it is in the meta-discourse around MMOG play and design.

Returning to the case of the *Guild Wars Guru* forum community, Wittgenstein's point regarding the actual understanding of rules in a language-game comes to the fore. The rules or normative conventions of language-games around the grind and normal play in *Guild Wars* are clearly followed discursively by players as though they are well-understood—yet no one needs to stop and explain what the grind is, less justify it. It simply remains important that there be bedrock to provide a communal distinction between grinding and more general conceptions of play[54]. Of course, players do not agree to the meaning of these conventions because they necessarily understand them. "Meaning is not a matter of our assent. Without conventions, we could not understand in the first place" (Smit, 1991, p. 36): which is why identifying these conventions around the grind is integral in garnering a deeper perspective on the grind as a discursive phenomenon.

To illustrate this point, let us attend to a reading of one of the first player utterances quoted in this section, regarding the player pursuing their 'Asura Summons':

> *"I had always wanted themed elemental summons for my Ele. The Asura summons are perfect for that. I've been testing them with my Sol Mesmer, and they aren't uber powerful, but they are decent skills and get serious style points for a matching build. So it's off to grind I go. But **normal play**, and turning in both NM and HM Hero's and Dungeons books will do it nicely with no extra **grind** needed, so what's the problem?"*
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2010)*

The player above begins by noting his/her pursuit of 'elemental summons' that can match the theme of their elementalist—a modest form of character identity performance. This, plus the further mention of "serious style points", also suggests a pursuit of communal visibility—but more on this later. Looking for the bedrock practices

underlying the statement here, we first note that the player remarks that they want the elemental summons, 'so it's off to grind [they] go', showing a dedication and commitment to their objective. This clause might not appear to have a sense of resignation were it not for the following sentence, which then explains that by adopting 'normal play' and using "Hero and Dungeon" books[55] allows them to reach their goals with no 'extra grind'. This now suggests the grind as something to be avoided in excess. Furthermore, the latter part of this utterance, "no extra grind needed", produces a tacit admission by the player that collecting full Hero and Dungeon books is not necessarily 'grind-free', but allows for less grind than the alternative. We see a revelation here of the manner in which the player situates 'normal' play in direct contrast to grinding as their ideal approach to reaching his/her goals. Their subscription to any grinding at all not only reveals the player's dispositional complicity towards the normativity of the grind (since they're willing to do some grinding, but not 'extra' amounts) while at the same time, providing an even more subtle look at the spectrum between normal play and grinding given that the player in question clearly implies that the distinction is not a clear one. However, the player's silent dismissal of any grind associated with Hero and Dungeon books also reveals a critical unacknolwedgement or 'unrecogntion' of grinding as evident in the statement that "Hero's and Dungeons books will do it nicely with no extra grind needed". This is a notable oversight given that completing Hero and Dungeon books require a process that demands the same in-game tasks be completed many, many times in succession (see endnote 56). The player would thus appear to characterize their efforts as 'less grindy', by appealing to the normative bedrock practices of the *Guild Wars* community— something further punctuated by the final statement of "what's the problem?" as though the grind is, at least in some part, avoidable, but also not necessarily a bad thing (see Family Resemblances below). Attending to the bedrock practices underlying this utterance then, we note that it is not a matter of escaping or denigrating the grind for this player, it is simply a matter of how little of the grind one needs to do to get what they want.

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[55] Hero and Dungeon books effectively require a player to complete all missions and or/dungeons in a territory in order to complete a book which can then be handed in for faction points. A player can then receive a new blank copy of the book and start the process all over again. If one chooses this method of reaching a faction level threshold that allows one to purchase faction armor, these books must be completed many, many times.

In summary, analysing the grind in *Guild Wars* player discourse with an eye to bedrock practices, we see the grind as a pivotal fixture in *Guild Wars* discourse around which communal conceptions of play orbit. Although talking about 'playing' itself might discursively contain the possibility of grinding in casual player exchanges (i.e. "I'm going to head in and play *Guild Wars* for a bit" or "I'm going to play through Tyria on my Monk"), when the distinction arises between the two, it is 'play' that is automatically labelled as the irregular or 'special' phenomenon. And as the player utterance above demonstrates, no matter how negotiable meanings of the grind itself can be (and for this particular player, its meanings are certainly negotiable), its discursive relationship to the concept of play remains well delineated in the everyday language exchanges of *Guild Wars* players.
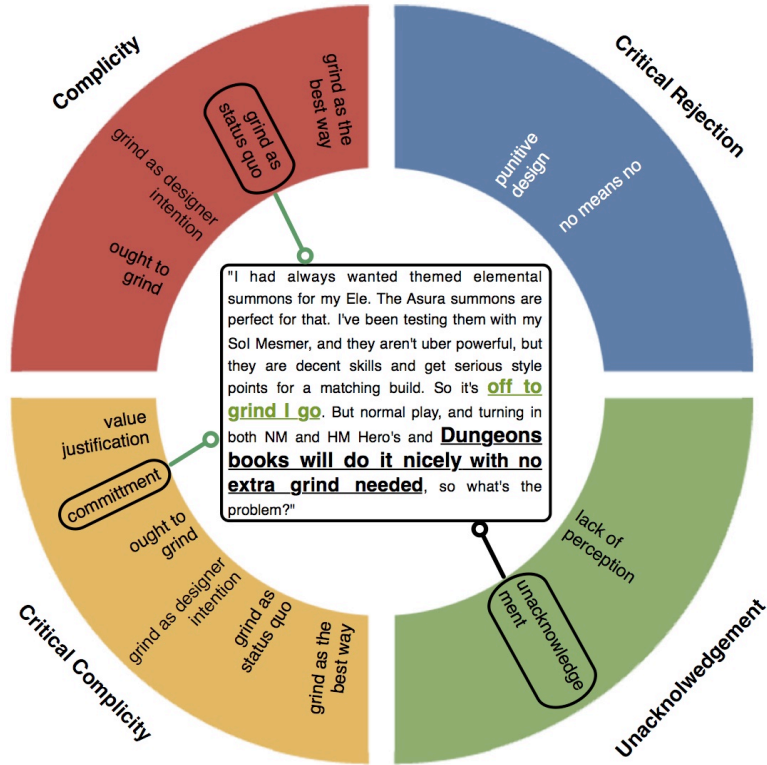
Figure 117– *Reticulating excerpts from 'elemental summons' example to map codes of Disposition.*

5.3. Hinge Propositions: The Certainty of Time Investment

Leveraging the concept of 'hinge propositions' in conducting an analysis of *Guild Wars* player discourse allows us a view into those things which are held as 'certain' in the player community. Similar to Moyal-Sharrock's 'cloakroom token' example from Chapter 3, hinge propositions in a language-game present a statement or proposition about the assumptions held by language-game participants. Bedrock notions of 'normal play' and 'the grind' serve as a normative metre stick convention by which to measure in-game practices and accomplishments, and these terms are freely exchanged in language, but simply never justified. Hinge propositions, however, are phenomena which remain rarely addressed because they comprise such deeply seated beliefs that without

them, language-games would not be able to be started, less played out. Hinge propositions assume a given context and leave that context in the background—they are the certainty on which doubt can be based.

In his manuscript, 'On Certainty', Wittgenstein uses the example of G.E. Moore's hypothetical claim of being able to declare authoritatively that a tree stands before him. Wittgenstein here acknowledges that one could perhaps not reliably make the knowledge claim that there was, philosophically speaking, a tree standing before him or anyone else. However, with regard to language-games around the discussion of the world and its properties, Wittgenstein elects to concede that in such instances, we must simply operate on the assumption that the object being referenced by Moore is indeed a tree, for should we suggest that epistemologically, there is objectively no such thing as anything (trees included), we find ourselves needing to stop and qualify every single aspect of our language. In short, hinge propositions, like our acceptance that a tree is indeed a tree and that a forest consists of such things in number, are propositions on which we depend as for our language-games to make any sense. Without hinge propositions, our claims, and exchanges based on those claims, have no basis around which to swivel (Wittgenstein, 1953).

Looking at *Guild Wars* player discourse, one such hinge proposition, and one that surfaced prominently in my dataset, is the proposition that grinding invariably requires the investment of time. This assertion perhaps seems as trivial as anyone's claim to a tree being a tree, but how does a hinge proposition perspective bring us to this seemingly mundane conclusion? The key, as Wittgenstein notes, is remaining mindful of those things absent from language (Williams, 1999; Wittgenstein, 1953). Let us look at discourse around some of *Guild Wars'* prestige titles.

Let us take, for instance, the title, 'God Walking Among Mere Mortals' (GWAMM)--a prime example of prestige recognition among grind-based titles given that it requires the attainment of nearly all the game's lesser titles and is thus the most sought after in the community. This title is worth considerably more repute than say, 'Connoisseur of Confectionaries' (a title requiring a player-character to click-to-consume 10000 in-game sweets), which although is itself exceptionally time-intensive, is but one of the necessary titles required to complete the 'GWAMM' title itself. Players respond

quite instinctively to high time-investment titles without requiring the need to explain their awe:

> *"when i first saw rank3 bambi i thought woah, i must get that"*
>
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2010)*

However, it is the time-invested in a title that it most consistently referenced by players when discussing their own title grinds, and it becomes evident that prestige titles in *Guild Wars* reticulate to a known quantity of time that it took to achieve them.

> *"[…] this has been different in that most of the time is spent afk, so the repetition is only in the task of gathering the groups of Charr up to the shrine, which is less than a one-hour endeavor, and then the inconvenience of the inability to do anything else in GW during that time. […] So here I am, the Guild Wars game window reduced in the background, watching the Charr kill me over and over at the rez shrine, waiting for them to level up to my level. And I am now level 18, and 38% of the way to level 19. Not long now. A week perhaps. Two if I spend a lot more time on helping hubby vanquish."*
>
> *(Guild Wars Player [Blog Entry])*

Some players, in fact, are very explicit about their categorization of titles on their requisite time-investments:

> *"My first character (ele) achieved GWAMM after about 3,400 hours of play in the course of two years. Naturally, I spent a substantial number of those hours learning to play, enjoying festivals, farming up cash to pay for a GH and NPCs, etc. So I would guess you might be able to pull it off with maybe 1,000 hours.*
>
> *The accomplishment-based titles (Guardian, Cartography, Vanquisher, Skill Hunter, LMotN) should take a negligible amount of time compared to the grind titles (reputation titles, consumable titles, Treasure Hunter, Lucky/Unlucky, Wisdom). Get the accomplishment titles done first, except maybe LMotN, and then decide which of the others you'll use to fill in the remainder to GWAMM."*
>
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2012)*

Of course, this notion of time invested is not always expressed explicitly in weeks, or days, but concepts which imply time, or its endurance, are plentiful in player discourse around completion of the most prominent grind-based titles:

> *"Along with the LDOA you can easily get Drunkards, Sweets, and Party maxed out in pre-searing--**if** you have the patience for them."*
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2012)*

And of course, as we see in the example below, there are player references to normal play taking longer than grinding, with the acknowledgement that grinding still takes a long time. However, it should be pointed out that the player below remarks that 'normal play' here might actually be considered more efficient than grinding if one is pursuing several titles at once.

> *"Still, we're talking about 130 hours doing the normal way by playing normally (but getting some progress done on other titles) vs down to 10 hours if you grind it Kilroy hm."*
> *(Player, Guild Wars Online.net, 2010)*

Of all the factors mentioned in player discussions of titles, regardless of those things that vary between discursive instances e.g. skill, repetition), it is time-investment that remains a key for players seeking to explain or describe the value of the game's grind-based titles. It is a rare occurrence for a player to even discuss titles without it, since it's simply so difficult to do. Even when claims to 'skill' titles as being the most prestigious are made, the qualifier of time is invariably included:

> *"Nothing in PvE impresses me because most of it is done with time>skill. However, PvP has the titles I respect. They take huge amount of time to max and usually skill. I highly respect any Champion titles"*
> *(Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2008)*

Guild Wars players operate on the idea that titles hold a communal value and that such titles bear a relative value to one another (i.e. GWAMM is worth more than a Vanquisher title, which is worth more than a Skill Capture title). The certainty of this fact however derives from concrete empirical judgments made by players—the perceived esteem of titles in the *Guild Wars* community--are intrinsically obvious within the

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community itself. As with grinding itself, even if a player does not personally share in the esteem certain titles might hold communally, they discursively recognize those values nonetheless. The perceived esteem of such titles are not epistemically undoubtable, but are simply psychologically undoubtable—here, the normative belief of a grindable title's value holds fast (Williams, 1999).

Guild Wars titles stand, not as a part of a larger knowledge claim, but as part of a functional mindset willingly adopted and shared by a community of people. Those outside the game of Guild Wars would likely look at a player's fully-furnished Hall of Monuments, comprehend the enormity of the time investment, but still not see the value. To say, then, that a 'God Walking Among Mere Mortals' title is the most valuable title in the game is not a claim to knowledge, but rather a proposition that stands fast for the community in which it finds root. Titles are of such certainty in the Guild Wars community and whose relative esteem to one another are so well-cemented in the mindset of the community, that there is rarely a need to speak to what titles hold greater value than others, or why that is the case. Such relationships are held as certain: all title values operate on the investment of time and said investment correlates directly to these values in effectively laying the groundwork for an economy of prestige in Guild Wars that allows players, at a glance, to recognize praiseworthiness.

> "For a titles that is solely about an individual's prestige in the game, changing it to account based destroys it's value. Right now if you see a character with KoaBD [Kind of a Big Deal] or PKM [People Know Me], etc. you know that the player spent the time and effort required to achieve those titles - which becomes all the more impressive when it's not one of the more popular and easier to achieve with classes"
> (Guild Wars Wiki, Title/Talk, 2007)

Reviewing the relationship of [time investment=title value] then, we note the hinge proposition that underlies this dynamic: namely that the grind involves an investment of a player's time. Or to modify the formula above:

[title=(time investment=grind)=value]

The grind's relationship to time investment remains the hinge proposition on which a title's value swivels. Notions of efficiency, of effort, of labor, or even of work fall away here—they remain unnecessary in holding up the value of grind-based titles in *Guild Wars*. And although some players might make the argument for skill as playing a role in the game's more revered PVP titles (such as the Champion rank, which requires intense and sustained cooperation with a group of people in an on-going tournament environment), such convictions are never unbound from the communally held certainty that time-investment is required to attain such a status[56].

To summarize, suggesting that 'time-investment=grind' is a hinge proposition in player discourse might seem as trivial as any off-hand acknowledgement of a tree truly being a tree. However, it is important to note that the illustration of 'time-investment=grind' as a hinge proposition is instrumental in identifying not only the meaning-content of player language, but also its function as a discursive act situated within a larger web of language-games pertaining to the grind. From a Wittgensteinian perspective, uncovering what discourse is intended to *'do'* and not simply '*say'* is where we begin to understand something about the epistemic practices that accompany *Guild Wars* player discourse. Revealing the hinge proposition behind the value of prestige titles tells us that as negotiable as meanings of the grind may be in *Guild Wars* discourse, what remains entirely non-negotiable is the knowledge of the time-investment that any grind requires—regardless of the manner in which players might overtly characterize it as repetitious, prestigious, mindless or otherwise. A grind-based title's value is a psychological certainty in the *Guild Wars* community only because the time investment of a grind remains an epistemic one. It is, as Wittgenstein reminds us, the certainty on which any doubt surrounding the value of in-game titles are based. Much in the way that stripping away the concept of a tree eradicates the concept of a forest, without an underlying knowledge of the demand of a player's time, the grind--and the prestige titles it lends value to—would both cease to exist as concepts in the *Guild Wars* community.

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[56] In the words, of Wittgenstein, "it isn't, for example, just my experience, but other people's, that I get knowledge from" (OC 275, 1974).

5.4. Family Resemblances: The Ambiguity of the Grind

"But is a blurred concept a concept at all? Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need?"

(Wittgenstein, PI, 71)

The literature review in Chapter 2 detailed the work of a number of thinkers in game studies who construe the grind as a phenomenon predominantly characterized by repetition, monotony, effort and laboriousness. However, the discursive mapping conducted in Chapter 4 shows us that instances of the grind in player discourse reveal a lot more about the different ways in which players both describe and characterize their grind, highlighting nuances of attitude and the importance of context.

In Chapter 3, I discussed 'family resemblances': an approach Wittgenstein used to talk about the multiple uses of a concept in language that all share similarities, but without sharing a single quality among them all. Considering the two overarching categories derived in Chapter 4—'characterizations of the grind' and 'dispositions towards the grind'--we can already see the manner in which Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' opens up a broader perspective on the grind's meaning to players that is in-line with Chapter 4's findings. That is to say, 'families', which may on the surface appear to share the generic characteristics of monotony here and repetition there, and even be characterized by players as such, may (also) live in instantiations of personal enjoyment, subversion of designed goals and even role performativity. Family Resemblances yields how disparate and varied a concept such as the grind can be, such that we often find discursive accounts of the grind at once so similar and yet so entirely unrelated to one another.

Turning to Wittgenstein's own work in the Philosophical Investigations, he notes that in seeking out universal features among conceptual phenomena, we quickly see the way in which the outward characteristics of a concept we group together under a label, can quickly disappear when individual instances of that concept are subjected to closer examination. He uses the example of games to discuss:

"Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! […] And the result of the examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail."

(Wittgenstein, PI 65, 1955)

Of note, is the manner in which Wittgenstein himself distinguishes between 'characteristic features' of a game and the other feature he refers to in passing as the 'element of amusement'. We would note that characteristics as Wittgenstein describes them are restricted to the manner in which we might seek to universally describe the phenomenon of 'game', be it through, 'skill' or 'luck', but he also aims to include the likelihood of 'amusement' in the scenario of a game, which invites its own type of engagement, namely ring-a-ring-a-roses. Although Wittgenstein himself is taking a somewhat prescriptive stance here with regard to disposition in an effort to make his point regarding the criss-crossing of conceptual features across language-games, his distinction between the characteristics of a concept and one's dispositional orientation to that concept aligns with the discursive mappings outlined in Chapter 4. That is to say, the descriptive features of a game are not only capable of variance, but so is one's disposition towards such an activity. Intensity, amusement, sociality, escapism: each of these drastically change the meaning of a concept in discourse around games in general or within specific games themselves.

Returning to Chapter 4 mapping of the grind, one need only look at the categories of 'grinding-as-role-play' or 'grinding-as-sociality'--and the player dispositions towards either of those two characterizations--to realize how unrelated these activities can be. A player is entirely capable of participating in an outwardly intense, repetitive grind for a weapon drop, only to frame the experience as a varied and pleasurable means to social engagement with friends. Only through careful examination of language content within its discursive context (the language-game of the grind), through the lens of normative practices and their critical underlying hinge propositions, can we begin to address what players are really referring to—what they mean--when they talk about the

grind. Let us return one more time to our player pursuing their 'elemental summons'—this time with an eye to Family Resemblances:

> *"I had always wanted themed elemental summons for my Ele. The Asura summons are perfect for that. I've been testing them with my Sol Mesmer, and they aren't uber powerful, but they are decent skills and get serious style points for a matching build. So it's off to grind I go. But* **normal play**, *and turning in both NM and HM Hero's and Dungeons books will do it nicely with no extra* **grind** *needed, so what's the problem?"*
>
> (Player, Guild Wars Guru, 2010)

On the surface, this player's declaration that 'off to grind they go' could be construed as reference merely to achieving efficiency via the game's imposed limitations; at the same time a reference to 'no extra grind needed' could signal an affirmation of the undesirable nature of the grind. But as I note in my bedrock analysis above, the player in question is not necessarily granting a wholesale pejorative status to the grind at all—their utterance, when parsed with an eye to language-use, in fact shows a complex disposition towards the grind itself. Prima facie interpretations of such instances might observe superficial Family Resemblances that falsely characterize the grind in this discursive instance: ascribing qualities of monotony and undesirability to the activity described. While such resemblances might appear to best characterize the content of the utterance on a surface level, we lose sight of the discursive act as it is situated in the larger language-game of the grind. In the case presented above, we see a player who elects to characterize some aspects of the grind as acceptable, and some as undesirable. They ultimately exhibit a mostly uncritical and positive disposition towards their chosen route to their prestige outcome, despite that activity's outward resemblance to standard conceptions of grinding. In short, it is nearly impossible to pin down anything resembling grinding's supposed universal qualities here as articulated by contemporary literature. This, however, would be Wittgenstein's point with regard to language-use—we are all too often 'bewitched' or seduced by a skin-deep commonality that appears to exist between concepts in language when in fact, we should be looking at such concepts (the grind included) in a more variegated manner. Such bewitchments in language result in the erroneous positioning of the elements of mental life (i.e. disposition) as though they could be ascribed to some logical or empirically observable

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category, what Gilbert Ryle would describe as a 'category mistake' (Ryle, 1949). The grind as conceived monolithically as a repetitive, efficient, monotonous and laborious act produces a category, which in fact, forestalls a deeper and more useful interpretation of what players are doing when they partake in what we call 'the grind'. This leads to greater misunderstandings of 'play' and 'grinding', and precluding those meanings constructed by players as agents through their in-game practices.

In summary, Wittgenstein asks that we interrogate the grammar of our language-games--grammar that has affixed itself to the lexical definitions of concepts such as 'grinding', or 'play'. Such grammar, which erroneously seeks to capture the 'essence' of a concept like grinding, deceives us, precipitating Wittgenstein's warning that we remain wary of language and categories that force their grammars on situations whose full context lies well outside of empirical observations (Wittgenstein, 1953). Without a critical examination of those things that uses of 'grinding' do and not share in player language exchanges, we find ourselves with an empty and misleading characterization of what is otherwise a robust phenomenon. In short, the 'indistinct picture', as articulated by Wittgenstein, is precisely what we need when pursuing player meanings of the grind in *Guild Wars* (Wittgenstein, 1953).
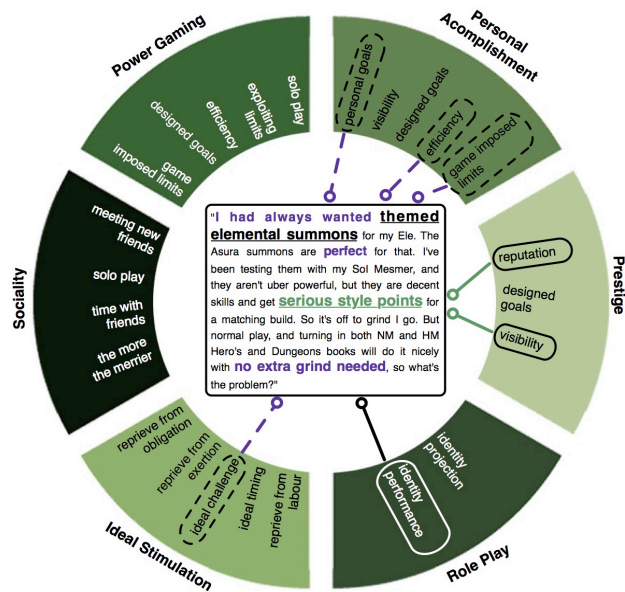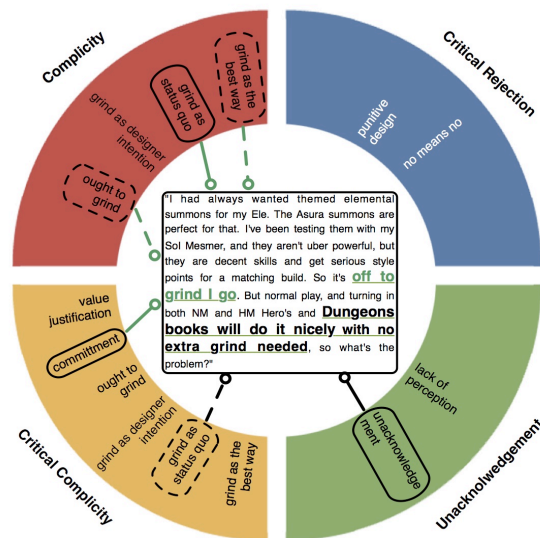
Figure 18– The dotted lines in the above two circles highlight commonalities, which at face value, would otherwise reinforce uniform conceptions of the grind as articulated in Chapter 2.

5.5. Summary

This chapter has offered a more granular analysis of the discourse data collected for this research under the Wittgensteinian rubric laid out in Chapter 3 while paying particular heed to the categories developed in Chapter 4--now informed and re-framed by the contextual notions of normative (bedrock) practices, hinge propositions and family resemblances found in *Guild Wars* player discourse. Applying a Wittgensteinian lens to the discourse data collected, I came upon three analytical findings.

First, training on the discursive 'bedrock practices' of the *Guild Wars* community, I discussed how the concept of the grind has firmly established itself as 'normative' in *Guild Wars* discourse, displacing typical notions of play, through its ironic qualification as 'normal', and as a phenomenon marginal to the grind itself.

Secondly, focusing on the 'hinge propositions' in *Guild Wars* player discourse, I elaborated on the underlying certainty of value of time-invested vis-à-vis the grind as it pertains to the game's economy of prestige. This was revealed by the manner in which I observed the grind's relationship to time-investment to be a held certainty in *Guild Wars* discourse that upholds not only notions of title prestige, but the concept of the grind itself in *Guild Wars* discourse.

Finally, in looking at 'family resemblances' between instances of the grind as elaborated in Chapter 4, I remarked that although the grind might outwardly share similar features (i.e. monotony, repetition, labor), individual moments of 'the grind' can not only be characterized in very different ways by players, but are likely to entail very different player dispositions as well. Drawing the connection between my findings in Chapter 4 and Wittgenstein's theories around conceptual ambiguity in language, I conclude that a broader, albeit fuzzier conception of the grind, affords us a greater understanding of the concept than contemporary monolithic approaches in game studies.

Moving on to this work's final chapter, I recap and draw together the insights gained through this work, showing in particular how Wittgensteinian 'tools', both with regard to discursive coding and discursive analysis, have enabled new subtle, meaningful insights into what players mean by 'the grind'--and what such insights portend for future research.

6. Conclusions

6.1. A Review of Objectives

In Chapter 2, it was Brian Sutton-Smith who declared that play's definition ought to remain "broad rather than narrow" (2001, p. 218). An examination of Chapter 4's discursive maps under the lens of Wittgenstein's Family Resemblances would appear to yield the same conclusion as it concerns the grind. Perceiving the grind as simply the act of monotonously and repetitively engaging with a task, not only robs us of the breadth of the activity, but also obstructs the possibility of deciphering the grind's cultural language—a language not merely rooted in value-systems and ideologies of the observer, but the experiences and dispositions of the player. Much like Sutton-Smith's take on play, the grind "should not be defined only in terms of the restricted modern Western values", but rather seen as a form of expression that is neither good or bad (2001, p. 218). The work conducted heretofore thoroughly supports the estimations of Sutton-Smith and Malaby with regard to player discourse around the grind in *Guild Wars*.

On that note, I begin my summation of this work by revisiting this work's objectives.

This research sought to do two particular things:
1) To 'look and see' how players speak about the grind in *Guild Wars* in an effort to explore and map out the grind's spectrum of meaning in player discourse, and by extension;
2) To discern what a Wittgensteinian analysis of this map affords us in looking at player-meanings of the grind.

Chapter 3 presented a Wittgensteinian means to each of these goals: first via the close-reading inspired coding process trained on language-use (a focus on Gee's little d discourse) which helped me identify and map out the discursive territory of the grind in

Guild Wars in Chapter 4, and secondly via a more keenly trained Wittgensteinian analysis of the player texts in Chapter 5 (through the lens of bedrock practices, hinge propositions and family resemblances) which helped draw out some of the communal meanings, worldviews and enacted practices in and around the grind in *Guild Wars* (Gee's Big D discourse) (Gee, 1999).

The results of that analysis provided a series of investigative outcomes, which I review next.

6.2. Investigative Findings

Chapter 4's coding and categorization of player discourse in *Guild Wars* brought attention to the multi-faceted nature of the grind, mapping out in some detail, the breadth of meaning that the grind has to offer. The coded categories were divided into two overarching groups: discourse that described a player's grinding (Characterizations) and discourse that outlined a player's attitude towards their grinding (Dispositions). These discursive categories were never discrete phenomena in the data, but rather were always found to be co-present and overlapping at nearly all times in *Guild Wars* player exchanges. The categories are as follows, beginning with Characterizations:

1) **Power Gaming Discourse**: This discourse type embodied the type of player who spoke of the grind with positive reference to the game's designed goals, an efficiency in the pursuit of those goals, a keen awareness or appreciation of the game's limitations, a complicity with the practice of circumventing such limitations and a favorable characterization of the solo-pursuit of such goals.

2) **Prestige Discourse**: This discourse category applies to players who talk about grinding as an effort to achieve visibility in the Guild Wars community: to be recognized by others as having achieved specific designed goals. This category is comprised of the three properties of 'visibility' (being seen), reputation (being known) and the leveraging of a game's designed goals to achieve these things.

3) **Personal Accomplishment Discourse**: This category encompasses player discourse that described the grind as a means to taking ownership of a

particular accomplishment, not because it can be exhibited, but rather so that there can be a sense of personal achievement for the player. This discourse tended to eschew the conventional communal acknowledgement of what comprises prestige while also rejecting a conventional acknowledgement of what the game's designers encourage players to do.

4) **Ideal Stimulation**: This category encapsulates a broader type of discourse through which players describe the grind either as an ideal challenge or form of stimulation (i.e. Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow', Turkle's 'perfect contest') or as an ideal fit for one's lifestyle either as a reprieve from labor, from exertion or from obligation.

5) **Sociality:** This discursive category was built up around the player-expressed importance of the social element in their grind, whether it is grinding as a reason to get together with friends, using friends as a lever by which to make the grind less cumbersome, or simply grinding as a way to meet new people.

6) **Role Play:** This category deals with discourse that described the grind either as a means of realizing an in-game character's fictional identity in the game, or as a means to project the player's own identity onto their character, thereby having their in-game character represent them as accurately as possible.

And the Dispositions:

7) **Complicity Discourse:** This discourse straddled a series of different aspects of player sentiment that were ideologically complicit with the grind in some capacity. Discourse in these situations either construed the grind as ideal, as a designer intention that ought to be respected, as the way MMOGs were generally to be engaged with as a genre, or simply as a status quo to be accepted for what it was.

8) **Critical Complicity Discourse:** A category in which the attitude towards the grind was construed largely as a 'necessary evil'--something players felt compelled to either uphold, perform or accept in spite of disliking it. Discourse of this type were often accompanied by value justifications for enduring the grind.

9) **Critical Rejection Discourse:** This category essentially embodied the sentiment, 'if you're not enjoying the grind, stop doing it'. Players producing this type of discourse typically had the same qualms as those expressing critical complicity, but spoke in favor of doing something about it either by adjusting their play style or leaving the game altogether.

10) **Unrecognition Discourse:** Unrecognition here refers to discourse in which players either expressed a lack of recognition of the grind as a phenomenon or simply dismissed 'grinding' as a label undeserving of formal recognition.

Accompanying these charted discursive findings in everyday *Guild Wars* player language, Chapter 5 offered a Wittgensteinian analysis of these discourses, which produced three findings that relate to the enacted practices, underlying belief systems and general worldviews of *Guild Wars* players as it pertains to the grind:

1) First, it was determined that the grind is a bedrock layer in *Guild Wars* player discourse: a concept now so normatively fixed in player language that it is the metre-stick against which discursive notions of play are measured. In short, the communally held qualification of play as 'normal play' in player discourse is effectively the bedrock practice that cements the normativity of the grind in *Guild Wars*.

2) Secondly, by seeking out the hinge propositions that underlie player discourse around grinding in *Guild Wars*, particularly via an examination of the communal esteem associated with *Guild Wars* prestige titles, I concluded that the grind's relationship to time-investment was an epistemic certainty in player discourse. In other words, a grind-based title's value in *Guild Wars* is a psychological certainty only because the time-investment of the grind remains an epistemic one.

3) Finally, wielding a Family Resemblances approach to the discourse at hand reveals that player meanings of the grind cannot be effectively distilled to a series of universal cross-familial characteristics. When conceived simply as a repetitive, laborious and monotonous act, we produce a false categorization of grinding that precludes a broader

understanding of what players are actually doing. In brief, there is no single characteristic and/or disposition common to all discursive uses of the grind in *Guild Wars* player discourse.

The first reaction to these findings might be to say that the epistemic certainty of the grind as evinced by the hinge proposition of time investment=grind, would invalidate the third finding of there existing no single characteristic or disposition among player meanings of the grind. This, however would be a misunderstanding.

Firstly, we have a distinction between what the second finding offers (the epistemic basis of a concept's certainty in discourse), versus the third (the variability of meaning of a concept in discourse). A hinge proposition provides us an underlying epistemic basis on which players can 'know' what the grind is with some certainty, as to be able to reference the concept in a language-game without any confusion. This finding does not in anyway conflict with the finding that meanings of the grind remain legion in player discourse and that any way in which players elect to characterize the grind or their disposition towards it, are copious in their permutations.

Secondly, the conclusion that time-investment serves as the basis for a hinge proposition in player discourse around the grind lends little conclusivity on its own. However, isolating time-investment=grind as a hinge in *Guild Wars* discourse around the grind serves in large part to shed the inessential features often ascribed to the grind as epistemically axiomatic, allowing us to discard the notion that these things (efficiency, labor etc.) should be considered as either epistemic or discursive certainties in conceptions of the grind. As the player quoted in Chapter 5 remarked, it was in fact, quite possible for instances of normal play to be more efficient that the grind depending on the context and disposition, upholding this work's stance that there is no one feature common to all meanings of the grind in *Guild Wars*.

Furthermore, the category labeled in Chapter 4 as Unrecognition, provides us reason to conclude that for some, the grind has either a non-normative place or no place at all in *Guild Wars* discourse. In such situations, the hinge-proposition of time-investment=grind often fails to hold since players under this category are simply not

operating on the epistemic certainty of there either being such thing as a grind, or are unwilling/unable to unbind any notions of their own in-game time-investment from general notions of play. In other words, 'unrecognition' here serves as a paradigmatic example of a different bedrock practice—an instance in which players without such a time-based epistemic certainty rely on their own normative assumptions regarding their in-game practice (i.e. Wittgenstein's "this is simply what I do").

Finally, with regard to game design implications, this work's mapped outcomes get at the array of meaning players derive from their grinding in commercial games such as *Guild Wars*, and I would posit here that these findings could quite feasibly be used by designers as a starting point by which to take stock of what players are doing in MMOGs. The categorical maps presented in Chapter 4, along with their respective property trees, offer an avenue into the way in which designers can cater in more of a 'top-down' approach to the design of experiences that can perhaps, as a first priority, cultivate the meanings sought out and derived by these players from the grind.

Ultimately, the aim here was not to definitively and exclusively isolate these Wittgensteinian lenses as the only means to a cogent analysis of player discourse around the grind, but demonstrate that a Wittgensteinian approach (in particular, a focus on language-use) has much to offer in broaching the landscape of grinding as a discursive concept, and as such, inform a more nuanced conception of 'grinding' as praxis. A focus on language-use reveals the utility in splaying the grind open, not as a typology, but as a form of conceptual cartography: the generation of a working conceptual/discursive map for not only surveying the breadth of the concept of grind, but also a functional instrument for someone to use for further analyzing the phenomenon of grinding across different games and game types.

More specifically, however, this work shows us aspects previously unconsidered with regard to the grind in contemporary literature: particularly the characterizations in this work that reveal the grind as a means to enhance or enable sociality, a means to role-play and even a means to the pursuit of goals a game's designers had never considered. These things illustrate that there are still things about the grind to discover, and perhaps other aspects of engagement in MMOGs that have even yet to be touched

upon. Even looking at something as simple as 'role-play' through the lens of the dispositions outlined here, we get a sense as to how designers and theorists may have been thinking about this Bartle-esque 'category' of player all wrong as it concerns their motivations and their attitudes (1996). This brings us to the methodological contributions of this work.

6.3. Methodological Findings

As a pilot investigation in the realm of qualitative analysis, this work's contributions are also methodological in nature— offering a new Wittgensteinian methodology as a means to re-theorizing the concept of the grind for those actively involved in game studies.

In terms of contributions to the field of game studies, beginning with a representative sample of discursive data in a game such as *Guild Wars,* has allowed me to cover extensive ground categorizing various incarnations of the grind in an effort to trouble the notion raised by a number of contemporary theorists in Chapter 2: namely that the grind can be generalized as an unvarying phenomenon both discursively and in practice. In short, this work has drawn due attention to the fact that players talking about the grind don't necessary *mean* the same thing and people doing something that looks like the grind aren't necessarily *doing* the same thing either.

Moreover, my own expertise as a community member of this particular discursive community has allowed me to make a personal contribution to a framework that I believe pioneers a different type of discourse analysis, and evinces that a Wittgensteinian toolkit as employed here can be used in a critically important way to highlight complex interrelated aspects of grinding discourse. I believe such an approach such as this can assist in ultimately moving the field past what we as researchers empirically think we see players doing and get at what their in-game practice actually means to them. To some players, the grind is a means to achieve personal goals and take ownership over in-game objectives, to others it's a way to take a break from work without feeling the guilt associated with a lack of productivity, and to others still, the grind is turned to precisely because they're seeking to be unproductive—a respite from their daily routine.

To reiterate an earlier point then, this research has not sought to describe the grind through the frequency of word or term occurrences in the collected texts, and I feel this has been a strength of the work. As noted in Chapter 5, a strictly 'counting' approach to this work serves only limited conceptions of the grind as a discursive entity devoid of context, agency and disposition. Given the limitations of my work, which are mainly rooted in piloting a sufficiently complex discourse analysis procedure informed by a Wittgensteinian lens on a first outing, a logical next step in furthering this research would involve a more large-scale and systematic application of this analytical method. Such an application could involve counting instances of the discursive categories and configurations established herein in an effort to build up cross-game/genre themes and establish patterns with some empirical validity.

6.4. Final Thoughts

In this work's initial coding phase, I drew a distinction in the data between two types of player discourse. The first type of discourse, which I named 'characterizations', dealt with the manner in which players would speak about their grind as an activity: describing the activity itself and why they do it. The second type of discourse, which I labeled 'dispositions', dealt with the way in which players would describe their attitudes towards their grind: their feelings towards the activity and/or about the concept itself. One of the broader, but perhaps most salient point emerging from the coding of these two types of discourse in Chapter 4, was the necessity to disentangle them from one another in order to better comprehend the complexity of those activities they articulate: to pry the characterization of the grind and its presumable laboriousness from those reported player attitudes towards it. This work has shown that when this discursive disentanglement is pursued in earnest, we not only see the sheer breadth of the grind as a multi-faceted experience, but observe more clearly that perspectives which parochially construe the grind as an ontologically uniform practice, are in fact most responsible for framing the grind as the contradictory act it can often appear to be.

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As recounted in this work's literature review, authors from Dibbell to Moberly to Yee each articulate the grind in MMOGs as an arduous, work-intensive enterprise, furthering the notion that these games train us (or for Golumbia, 'discipline' us) in the ways of rudimentary labor. However, an evaluation of player discourse in *Guild Wars* would suggest that players make rather complex decisions around their engagement with the game and its outwardly laborious facets--including the manner in which such activities can often comprise a form of resistance rather than complicity.

Do players consider activities such as the grind repetitive and labor-intensive as many contributors to Nick Yee's 2006 study would claim (2006)? Sure: but not all of them, or at very least, not as the only things which define their dispositions towards such activities in these ways. Damion Schubert speaks of the grind as "what happens when you make the player do something he [or she] doesn't want to do in order to do something he [or she] does want to do" (2010, [presentation]), but as this work would propose, the grind can be both a desirable and undesirable act, all at once. The grind isn't always an objectionable means to achieve something 'afterward', for as the categories identified in Chapter 4 such as Sociality and Role Play would evince, it can also be a means to enjoy a concurrent act bound up with the grind itself. As Malaby emphasizes (2009), dispositions are not static phenomena. For a number of players whose discourse was under study here, the grind was painted as painstaking some of the time, playfully engaging other times and relaxing at a later point: work is not work all the time. Occasionally we enjoy our labors and occasionally we do not. The way we characterize our jobs has a certain relationship to our dispositions, but such characterizations are not deterministic of our dispositions towards them: and the same can be said for the grind in MMOGs.

In closing then, Bernard Suit's 'lusory attitude' as discussed in Chapter 2, helps us frame the grind as a activity around which our foci, thoughts and moods constantly vacillate, where there can be split-seconds, prolonged moments, entire durations where the seemingly perfect objective notion of a laborious grind is not being conducted precisely because of the way a player is thinking about their activity. What might appear laborious, repetitive, unenjoyable, onerous and monotonous often does not feel this way-

-and vice versa--despite the characterization of the activity by a player. I would recall one player in Chapter 4 who characterized their grind as monotonous, boring and rote, but who still exempted the activity from the realm of 'work' or even 'effort'. It is the disposition towards the activity that is the ultimate determinant of what the grind is and what it means at any given moment. The grind is as complex as the player mindsets of those who recognize and participate in it.

In terms of the broader field implications, work by thinkers such as Thomas Malaby (2007; 2009) have already gone a long way to show us that up until now, we may have been attempting to conceive of play (and even gameplay) in ways which are incongruous with the ways we seek to circumscribe games. And although this dissertation has not been explicitly about the expansive topic of gameplay, it is here where the quandary of 'the grind' lives--a thin, but broad slice of ludic life, an activity we encounter in today's landscape of digital gameplay which pushes up against the definitional membranes of 'game' and 'play', challenges assumed dichotomies of 'work' and 'leisure' and slowly erodes the frail division between intrinsic and extrinsic notions of pleasure and motivation. The contribution of Wittgenstein helps bring us face-to-face with how dispositionally complex the phenomenon is, reminding us that the concept of the grind, less concepts as expansive as play, should not be left to ontological confinement, but rather as Sutton-Smith suggests, celebrated as an epistemologically fragmented, contextual, subjective and culturally situated phenomenon that lives and breathes the ambiguity of the human disposition (Wittgenstein, 1953; Sutton-Smith, 2001). Remaining mindful of the metacommunicative signals in the everyday language of *Guild Wars* players presents for us a picture of exactly how conceptually varied the grind is and can be both between and among individual players *and* individual moments (Bateson, 2006).

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Titles and the Hall of Monuments

This research took place during a time when *Guild Wars'* creators had recently created and popularized a mechanism for 'legacy' generation: the Hall of Monuments. The Hall of Monuments is a large room in the final *Guild Wars* expansion whose virtual furnishings are specific to the player-avatar standing within its walls at any given moment. The hall houses five large displays, each one reflecting an aspect of the visiting player's achievements, whether it is the mass accumulation of collectable miniature pets, collectable AI companions, craftable weapons or wearable vanity armor sets. However, the fifth and most prominent monument in the hall is the one dedicated to 'honor'. This is where a player's significant titles are displayed.

Titles are wearable labels given to players as a reward for achieving in-game accomplishments whether it is finishing one of the game's campaigns along with its bonus criteria or successfully capturing all the skills a player can possibly possess in the game. However, the majority of titles call for more time-consuming objectives with some titles rewarding players for having their avatar collect and eat a plethora of in-game consumable candies (for example, eating 10,000 candies earns you 'Connoisseur of Confections') or killing every single monster in the world on the game's most difficult setting (also known as the Vanquisher family of titles). In towns, *Guild Wars'* only 'public' spaces, any player displaying a title on his/her avatar ensures that their title is visible to all others present. Visitors to that player's Hall of Monuments can also bear witness to all of the titles they have accumulated over time, each represented by a tiny effigy. Some titles are specific to one particular player avatar, while others are reflective across all avatars on a player's entire account (titles, which can be collectively contributed to by all avatars on the given account).

Although the Hall of Monuments was introduced in 2007 as part of a transitional mechanic that would allow players to carry over their *Guild Wars* accomplishments into the imminent sequel, it was only recently announced by Arenanet as to how a player's titles and accomplishments would specifically translate into a legacy in the new game.

Figure I - *A snapshot of the* Guild Wars *Hall of Monuments Calculator*

In 2010 it was declared that the value of one's Hall of Monuments achievements would be represented on a point scale of 50. Earning 30 points worth of monuments in one's hall on this scale ensured that a player could benefit from all the special item rewards to be had in *Guild Wars* 2. Anything higher than 30 points however, would simply translate into more prestigious titles that could be brandished by characters created in the new game. This meant that the latter 2/5ths of the Hall of Monument's point-based requirements (and undoubtedly the hardest to obtain) could only be secured for purposes of visible prestige. There would be no in-game utility to be gained in earning 50 points in one's Hall of Monuments other than some of the minor benefits that some contributing titles might have in augmenting a handful of in-game skills[57]--and even these skill augmentations would only ever apply to the current and soon-to-be obsolete original game.

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[57] There are some titles that give small benefits to a player, allowing them to maximize buffs in certain regions of the game or allowing one of a handful of faction-based skills to be more effective in battle. Such benefits only apply to PVE situations and often only present situational advantages.

Figure II - *Inside the Calculator: A Point by Point Breakdown*

As of the writing of this work, the most active community category at the *Guild Wars* Guru forum, 'Riverside Inn' sported among its top five posts a Hall of Monuments thread with over 27000 views discussing title achievements by various players--and there continues to be at least 5 lengthy ongoing threads (many which have been restarted over the last 3 years). These threads are dedicated to players who wish to share screenshot images of their newly acquired titles. In both these and other threads (and of course in the game itself) many players are admittedly not only seeking out the basic 30 of 50 points in *Guild Wars*, but are ardently seeking out the full 50. And although the cumulative number of hours to achieve this point total lies in the thousands, the prospective 'honor' that comes with the title for having earned a full 50 points (also known as Champion of the Gods, God Walking Among Mere Mortals or more popularly, GWAMM 50/50), is the incentive that Arenanet has dangled for their player contingent to strive for.

Appendix B.

Informed Consent Script for Interviewees

Study details were given to participants beforehand in a pre-created blurb via the public chat channel. If a player expressed interested in allowing our conversation to be recorded for research purposes, they were presented the succinct description of the study shown below to inform them of the reason behind the study. Given the size of a standard consent form, the text limit of in-game chat inputs and a player's inability to actually sign anything, the abbreviated consent message was parsed up into three messages reading:

> *Message 1: The purpose of this research is to explore player sentiment around the notion of grinding in MMOGs to see how players think about their gameplay. This will simply involve the recording of our discussion around your opinions on grinding and your thoughts on what the grind means to you.*

> *Message 2: Although your user name will be stored for purposes of confirming consent, all of your data will be kept confidential and anonymous, and you can withdraw from our conversation at any time or request that I not use its contents.*

> *Message 3: You can contact Nis Bojin, SIAT, Simon Fraser University nbojin@sfu.ca to make this request or to obtain any further info. If you have any question regarding the ethics of this study, you may contact dore@sfu.ca for further information. Do you agree to participate?*

Consent was obtained through an affirmative or negative response from the players in question. Silence was construed as a negative response.

The reference number for this DORE-approved research is 2010s0454.

Appendix C.

Ethics Approval

Date	File	Approval	Principal Investigator
7 September 2010	[2010s0454]	Approved	Bojin, Nis

Risk	Title	Start
Minimal	Grinding: Exploring Notions of Work and Play in Massively Multiplayer Role Playing Gamer Discourse	7 September 2010

SFU Position	Department / School	Supervisor	End
Gradute Studnt	SIAT	Bowes, John	7 September 2013

Hello Nis,

Your application has been categorized as 'Minimal Risk' and approved by the Director, Office of Research Ethics in accordance with University Policy r20.01.
(http://www.sfu.ca/policies/research/r20.01.htm).

The Research Ethics Board reviews and may amend decisions made independently by the Director, Chair or Deputy Chair at the regular monthly meeting of the Board.

Please acknowledge receipt of this Notification of Status by email to dore@sfu.ca and
Include the file number as shown above as the first item in the Subject Line.

You should get a letter shortly. Note: All letters are sent to the PI addressed to the Department, School or Faculty for Faculty and Graduate Students. Letters to Undergraduate Students are sent to their Faculty Supervisor.

Good luck with the project,

Hal Weinberg, Director
Office of Research Ethics

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