

# Leaving Teyvat: Gendered Expectations and Exit Discourses

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Player practices, gender representation, thematic analysis, gacha games

## INTRODUCTION

What drives players to quit a game they've invested significant time, money, and effort into? Even as one of the most successful and well-known gacha games, *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo 2020) has not been immune to player criticisms. Especially after the release of the Natlan expansion, players have expressed dissatisfaction with the game's direction, the lack of diverse character representation, and the potential for cultural appropriation. Many players have publicly commented about their intent to quit the game. Interestingly, numerous players specifically named *Love and Deepspace* (Papergames 2024), another gacha game, as a replacement or supplement.

While much has been written about gacha monetization structures, player engagement, and creative communities around games, less attention has been paid to player exit narratives as a meaningful form of player practice. Game studies scholarship recognizes that what players do outside of the game world is central to the study of play. T.L. Taylor (2006) discusses how "extra-game" spaces, such as online discussion boards and fan-organized contexts, are an integral part of the player experience. Similarly, social media sites and Reddit have been established as rich sources for qualitative research on online communities through methods such as netnography (Kozinets 2015) and digital ethnography (Hine 2000). While this study does not rely on ethnographic methodology, it draws on these frameworks to treat Reddit as a meaningful space for player practice, interaction, and critique.

Prior research on players leaving games has often focused on contexts that are not player-initiated, such as game shutdowns (Pearce 2011) and network quality (Chen, Huang, & Lei 2009). Negative player experiences have also been examined, including disengaging from games due to addiction (Lee, Yu, & Lin 2007). Less work has focused on player-initiated quitting or disengagement. A study by Hou et al. (2011) applied migration theory and the push-pull-mooring model to players switching between MMORPG games, finding that switching games was more strongly influenced by the appeal of new games and existing investments in the current game than by dissatisfaction with the current game alone. Additionally, one longitudinal study on game design and player retention (Strååt and Verhagen 2018) investigated how player interest in a specific game declines over time, as players report frustrations related to opaque reward systems, diminishing appeal, repetitive gameplay, and narrative coherence. Building on this work, the present study centers the lived experiences of players who intentionally quit or disengage from a game as a meaningful form of critique.

This paper presents a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of about 400 comments left in a Reddit thread about player migration from *Genshin Impact* to *Love*

*and Deepspace*. The preliminary analysis suggests that quitting or disengaging from *Genshin Impact* functions as critical commentary and rejection of game design and direction, not necessarily a rejection of gacha genre and mechanics.

A major theme in the dataset involves players' frustrations with character design, specifically a lack of male five-star characters and more attention placed on catering to the male audience with sexualized female characters. Similar frustration occurred over Natlan's storylines and perceived bad writing, in contrast to earlier parts of the game. Another common theme was a sense of emotional disconnection; players noted feeling less attached to the game in its current state, driving down engagement. Additionally, overwhelm and burnout are also prominent themes, as some players felt discontent with *Genshin's* exploration and quest design.

Conversely, players characterize *Love and Deepspace* as emotionally rewarding and focused on the female player experience. Players comment that they feel more seen and appreciate the game's focus on emotional intimacy. *Love and Deepspace* also offers more digestible tasks that take less investment, as a mobile-only game that combines visual novel elements with combat.

These exit narratives demonstrate how a subset of players are driven by their dissatisfaction with narrative design, representation, and character choices to not only modify their play or quit *Genshin Impact* entirely, but migrate to a game that offers what they desire. Quitting functions as a quiet but important player critique of a game that no longer meets expectations, suggesting a shift in those expectations as they relate to storytelling and emotional investment.

## BIO

Courtney Lazore is an independent researcher interested in media, fan, and game studies. She is a founding member of the Bangtan Scholars network and currently writes on a wide range of topics surrounding K-Pop artists BTS and the ARMY fandom. More recently, she has branched out to narrative and psychological topics related to games and game fandoms, specifically *Final Fantasy VII* and *Love and Deepspace*.

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