

Television anti-fandom and “hate watching” may be on the rise, but they are nothing new. As with many manifestations of fan behavior, there is a long history of this in soap opera fandom. Online commenters on soap opera message boards have no trouble proclaiming themselves as “fans” and “anti-fans” of the very same show—an apparent paradox made possible by the genre’s narrative and tonal complexity. Take for instance *General Hospital*, which has aired on ABC for nearly half a century now, and has at various moments been predominantly a hospital drama, spy thriller, social-issues melodrama, screwball comedy, and violent mob drama. A fan of *General Hospital* as screwball comedy might have been repulsed by its later incarnation as a violent mob drama, but still watched the show to catch glimpses of her favorite characters. Soap opera anti-fandom is thus often driven by complaints about misallocation of resources—about too much time devoted to the wrong kinds of stories, to the least interesting plots, characters, couples (and not enough time devoted to the fan’s favorites). Furthermore, there is a keen fan awareness of the *competition* for limited resources—most notably the airtime that must be divided between 30 or more regular cast members.

I want to propose that, more generally, complaints about misallocated limited resources are at the root of much television anti-fandom. In these cases, however, the anti-fandom isn’t responding to competition *within* a single television program, but rather *between* multiple programs. On a practical level, television networks have limited promotional budgets and scheduling slots; since they are not able to allocate those resources equally, privileges given to some programs come at the expense of others. Similarly, television critics and websites can only afford to recap and cover a limited number of programs—and single out an even smaller number for Top-Ten lists and TCA awards.

The most rabid “anti-fan” responses online have emerged when the disparities within these economies have been most blatant. For instance, one of last year’s most hate-watched shows, NBC’s *Smash*, was the beneficiary of the network’s prime timeslot and the bulk of its promotional budget. FOX’s *Terra Nova*, which had received months of pre-release publicity touting its expensive effects budget, also quickly spawned “anti-fan” communities on television recap sites.

Excessive media coverage of certain niche shows can also help spawn anti-fandoms. Before it premiered, HBO’s *Girls* was the subject of numerous articles on websites like the *AV Club*,

*Vulture*, and *Slate*—the latter of which assigned ten staff writers to weekly roundtables, discussing each episode of *Girls* in detail. Similar roundtables of buzz shows like *Mad Men* helped to foster a sense of community between *Slate* readers and writers, but the *Girls* coverage only emphasized the gaps between the writers—who had special access to advance screeners and often identified with the show’s particular social milieu—and readers who did not have the same privileges. In the furious backlash against *Girls*, anti-fans often decried behind-the-scenes “nepotism,” referencing the (relatively) famous parents of the show’s four stars. “Nepotism” is perhaps an inaccurate term in this case, but it speaks to a suspicion of an insular media culture, “elite” decision-makers who pay little attention to the tastes and experiences of the “99%” of viewers and readers. Indeed, anti-fans of *Girls* often referenced a scene from the first episode, in which the heroine demands that her parents financially support her for two more years, in order to imply that both the show and its media supporters were hopelessly out-of-touch with the economic realities faced by most Americans.

While most of this media “overhyping” of certain shows is likely a combination of genuine enthusiasm and groupthink, anti-fans are prone to attribute economic motives to the glowing coverage of certain shows. Thus, *Vulture*’s frequent positive pieces on FOX’s new sitcom *The Mindy Project* have come under fire from posters who accuse them of running “a nonstop Kaling PR campaign that portrays as her the greatest thing to hit TV since Philo Farnsworth,” sacrificing journalistic credibility for access and *Mindy Project* “swag.” Another commenter invokes tropes of class conflict by satirically comparing *Vulture*’s defense of *The Mindy Project* to Ann Romney’s infamous defense of her husband Mitt.

Of course, I don’t mean to suggest that anti-fandom is entirely a progressive or revolutionary force. It often has a carnivalesque quality, and like most forms of carnival, it reifies certain power structures even as it challenges others. As might be obvious from my examples, the shows with the most vocal anti-fandoms are often also designed for and marketed to upwardly-mobile young women. Still, I think it would be a mistake to dismiss this anti-fandom as purely a sexist backlash, the product of internet “fanboy culture”; the tensions anti-fandom reveals have as much to do with class and economics as with gender.