Introduction

Haters Gonna Hate

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‘Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play
And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate
Baby, I’m just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
I shake it off, I shake it off
—Taylor Swift

I twirl on them haters
—Beyoncé

It is commonplace today to see gushing fans lined up at movie premieres, waiting for a glimpse of their favorite stars. Fan art created as homages to adored characters and fan fiction containing “will they or won’t they?” fantasies abound in our social media feeds. In the twenty-five years since the publication of media scholar Henry Jenkins’s Textual Poachers (1992), fan studies—and the cultural value and visibility of fandom—have come a long way. One of fan studies’ enduring strengths is its focus on and valuation of affect, particularly its emphasis on fans’ positive feelings of like and love. Yet examined less frequently are the equally intense, but opposite, feelings of dislike and hatred.

What is the opposite of fandom? Disinterest. Dislike. Disgust. Hate. Anti-fandom. It is visible in many of the same spaces where you see fandom: in the long lines at Comic-Con, at sporting events, in numerous online forums like Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and Reddit (never read the comments sections), and in our politics. This is where fans and fandoms debate and discipline. This is where we love to hate.
Why are some texts and fans targets of hate and anti-fandom more than others? What roles do digital technologies play in the development and practice of anti-fandom? What do anti-fans and anti-fan practices reveal about a text’s construction, appeal, and reception? In their book *Fandom*, media scholars Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington suggest that studies that examine “a spectrum of dislike, distaste, and hate” in fan and anti-fan cultures constitute one of six directions of the third wave of fan studies, the current iteration of the field, which has matured since many of its foundational texts emerged in the early 1990s (2007b, 15). An indicator of fan studies’ maturity, they emphasize, is contemporary scholarship’s interest in changing “the goalposts of inquiry and to broaden our analytic scope to a wide range of different audiences reflecting fandom’s growing cultural currency” (2007b, 8). Demonstrating the possibilities and contributions of anti-fan scholarship, *Fandom* includes essays on dislike and anti-fandom, covering a range of topics from celebrity (Click 2007; Sconce 2007) and sports (Theodoropoulos 2007) to interactions with industry (Johnson 2007) and in families (Alters 2007).

A smattering of articles on anti-fandom followed the publication of Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington’s collection, including among them explorations of anti-fan reactions to celebrity (Claessens and Van den Bulck 2014), cheerleading (Jane 2014), online trolling (Phillips 2015), music (Giuffre 2014), professional wrestling (Hill 2015), television (Gray and Murray 2016), and the vampire franchise, *Twilight* (Gilbert 2012; Hills 2012; Pinkowitz 2011; Strong 2011; Williams 2013). While this work, and the necessity of studying anti-fandom generally, has been enthusiastically received, anti-fan scholarship has progressed only slightly in the last few years, which suggests the area of study needs direction and motivation. This new collection of fifteen innovative and original chapters aims to do just that, by providing a framework for future study through theoretical and methodological exemplars that engage the many questions about anti-fandom that remain.

As the frequent citation in this book (and elsewhere) attests, the description of anti-fans as “those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel,” put forth by Jonathan Gray (2003, 70) in “New Audiences, New Textualities,” has productively shaped scholarship on dislike, hate, and anti-
fandom. Gray argues that the study of anti-fans (as well as non-fans) would help balance audience studies’ nearly exclusive focus on the study of fans, and he also argues that this overreliance on fan populations has stunted scholarly knowledge of textuality, affective involvement, aesthetic and cultural value, and the relationships between text and audience. Although a number of the chapters in this collection, including Gray’s new essay, endeavor to rework the atomic model Gray originally proposed (where fans/protons, anti-fans/electrons, and non-fans/positrons circulate differently around the text/atom), it has nonetheless served as a fruitful starting point for conceptualizing fans’, anti-fans’, and non-fans’ engagement with media texts.

Gray later extended his exploration of anti-fandom through empirical examination of the website Television Without Pity (TWoP) and complicated his metaphorical conceptualization of the connections between fandom and anti-fandom, suggesting the two are not necessarily opposite in nature. He maintains that, “although pleasure and displeasure, or fandom or antifandom, could be positioned on opposite ends of a spectrum, they perhaps more accurately exist on a Möbius strip, with many fan and antifan behaviors and performances resembling, if not replicating each other” (Gray 2005, 845). This move, in combination with his use of TWoP to demonstrate three dimensions of anti-fan engagement with a text—moral, aesthetic, and rational-realist—offered useful frameworks for future studies of anti-fans’ strategies and investments.

Nudging fan studies’ attention beyond acts of viewing to the performativity of anti-fandom itself, Gray also suggests that community identification and participation can make anti-fandom pleasurable for the like-minded: “Hate or dislike of a text can be just as powerful as can a strong and admiring, affective relationship with a text, and they can produce just as much activity, identification, and meaning, and ‘effects’ or serve just as powerfully to unite and sustain a community or subculture” (Gray 2005, 841). Further, Gray observed the powerful extremes of group mentality in aggressive racist and sexist comments about The Apprentice’s Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth on TWoP. He warned that such comments, fueled by prejudice, resentment, and hatred, reflect the “darker dimensions of antifandom” (852), which require careful examination. Gray’s observations in these areas have been useful for the anti-fan scholarship that has developed from his work.
Gray, of course, was not the first scholar to draw attention to audiences’ strong negative emotions to media texts and figures; in fact, much of the first wave of scholarship on fans and fandom was positioned against the negativity and stereotyping fans endured from those who scorned their interests and activities (see, e.g., Jenkins 1992; Jenson 1992) and also illustrated that audiences and fans have different investments in the media texts and objects they enjoy (Fiske 1992; Grossberg 1992). Direct mentions of dislike and hate are present in a number of early studies of audiences and fans, including cultural studies scholar Ien Ang’s (1985) study of the prime-time soap opera *Dallas*, which explored the variety of emotional attachments, including both love and hate, that viewers develop with media. Through an analysis of the forty-two responses to an ad she placed in the Dutch women’s magazine *Viva* asking for descriptions of why people liked or disliked viewing the popular American drama, Ang asserts that describing one’s relationship to a media text as either “love” or “hate” simplifies the complex and evolving relationships most viewers have with the programs they watch. She suggests that “what they say about *Dallas* is no more than a snapshot of their reception of the programme, an attempt to put a diffuse viewing experience into words. And when something is put into words there are always things which remain unexpressed and implicit” (Ang 1985, 14). Further, Ang argues that letter writers use an “ideology of mass culture” (92) or a belief that some cultural forms, specifically popular texts aimed at large audiences and typically American in origin, are “bad mass culture” (94) to rationalize and legitimize their personal and emotional positions on the program. Ang’s work illustrates that, while discourses of hate emphasize aesthetics and critical distance, they also obscure the role pleasure plays in television viewing. Ang’s study was one of the first to explore television viewers’ different orientations to pleasure, and it remains a valuable exemplar for scholars wishing to study anti-fandom.

Media scholar John Fiske (1987) briefly mentions “haters” of Madonna in his discussion of the strain of television analysis developed from British cultural studies, emphasizing the way dislike of popular culture figures and texts is shaped by traditional gender ideologies. He observed that the hatred of Madonna “centers on her sexuality and—expressed as her presenting herself in whorelike terms—her painting and displaying herself to arouse the baser side of man” (274). Media scholars Laurie Schulze,
Anne Barton White, and Jane D. Brown examine hatred of Madonna in more detail, analyzing Madonna’s “bad press” in the form of replies to a newspaper-sponsored letter writing contest and college students’ writing about two of Madonna’s videos. They found that haters’ dislike was united around “a vision of her as the low-Other” (Schulze, White, and Brown 1993, 31) and resulted in an urge to challenge Madonna’s status on aesthetic, social, and/or moral grounds. Through their emphasis on haters’ particular dislike of Madonna’s transgressive and carnivalesque displays of gender and sexuality, Schulze, White, and Brown insist that, while scholars typically praise audiences’ resistive readings of mainstream texts, such readings may not always be socially progressive.

While some early fan studies scholarship focused directly on those who hate popular figures and media texts, other studies focused on the roles dislike and hate play in organized fan communities. Henry Jenkins (1992), in his ethnographic exploration of the practices and social institutions of media fandom, demonstrates that interpretation, evaluation, debate, and negotiation are integral parts of organized fandom and that fans’ active and resistant readings of the texts they love can result in dislike, frustration, and anger. Through an account of fans’ angry responses to the generic and character changes CBS made in the third season of Beauty and the Beast (1987–1990), Jenkins describes “how it is possible to remain a fan of a program while militantly rejecting producer actions that run contrary to one’s own conception of the narrative” (1992, 132). These fans “scribble in the margins” (152) of their favorite texts, creating fan fiction, video, and music that move beyond simple replication of a text to “rework and rewrite it, repairing and dismissing unsatisfying aspects, developing interests not sufficiently explored” (162).

Echoing Jenkins’s findings about fan frustrations with beloved texts, media scholars C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby found, in their study of soap opera fans, that the long-term relationships fans had with their favorite programs meant that sometimes “fans must actively struggle to locate and sustain the pleasure they find in soap operas” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 154). While in the past fans may have at most written letters and made phone calls expressing their unhappiness to producers, or shared their feelings locally, the fans Harrington and Bielby studied were beginning to use more public forums like the daytime press and electronic bulletin boards to voice their disappointments more widely.
Although these soap opera fans were less likely to produce their own fan reworkings of soap opera storylines and characters, Harrington and Bielby observed that the most dedicated and loyal fans did believe that “they could tell better stories than do the writers and producers because they feel they know the characters and fictional community more intimately” (1995, 154). In her participant observation of soap fans on the rec.arts.tv.soaps online newsgroup, digital media scholar Nancy Baym (2000) similarly encountered fans’ criticisms of the shows they enjoy and found that they continued to watch “despite the faults” (104) they saw in the shows. Baym’s study demonstrates that, while fans frequently question the quality and realism of writing, acting, and props, they sustain their long-term investments in the soap operas they watch by fast-forwarding through storylines they dislike and by creatively reworking dissatisfying storylines. The presence of negative feelings in the fan communities studied in early fan scholarship, like the studies discussed above, suggests that dislike and hate play important roles in fan communities as well as outside them.

While the study of dislike, hate, and anti-fandom may not be new, it is even more important in the digital age, where the growth of online communication tools facilitate and increase the scope and speed of the participatory cultures that develop around media texts. As a result, audiences’ engagements with media texts increasingly involve discussions in social media, including, for example, the use of Twitter for “hate watching” certain shows. Websites like The A.V. Club and social media platforms like YouTube often provide anti-fan perspectives on popular shows, and their comment sections are often full of criticisms, frustrations, and hateful declarations. While fan studies generally has examined fan spaces and practices online, few have explored the online communities, behaviors, and texts that have developed around hate and dislike. To demonstrate the important contributions scholarship on anti-fandom is poised to make to studies of online negative engagements about and around media texts, I explore in detail below the specific changes brought on by the development of the contemporary digital media environment that have led to the growth of anti-fandom, and I also explore the growth of the study of emotion and affect from a cultural perspective. These two areas of scholarship have proven fruitful and have much to contribute to emerging anti-fan scholarship.
Digital Media and Convergence Culture

The emergence of digital culture, or what Henry Jenkins calls “convergence culture,” has facilitated the growth and visibility of public expressions of dislike and hatred as well as the growth and visibility of anti-fans themselves. Jenkins describes how convergence—or “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins 2006, 2)—complicates the relationships between media producers and media audiences. In a digital environment in which the World Wide Web hosts multiple platforms offering a diversity of stories, and consumers have increased power to select, use, share, contribute to, and remix the media offerings that interest them (what some call Web 2.0), media producers have been forced to rethink their conceptions of the audience as a homogeneous mass and instead endeavor to build strong connections with consumers to keep their attention and build their loyalty. Television scholar Sharon Marie Ross, for instance, argues that, as early as the 1990s, broadcast and cable television networks began working to deepen their relationships with viewers by using “multi-platforming that gave television programs life in the worlds of film, print, the Internet, etc.” (2008, 5). Aligned with Ross’s description of TV industry efforts, in their book _Spreadable Media_, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green argue that the media forms that most appeal to audiences include content with the potential to be spreadable or that encourage “audiences to share content for their own purposes, sometimes with the permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes” (2013, 3). To best design media content that is spreadable, Jenkins and his co-authors suggest that media producers should work to understand the motivations and practices of users who spread media content, warning that, “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead” (188).

Nancy Baym and Robert Burnett’s (2009) study of international fans of Swedish independent music offers a compelling example of fans’ activities, and their value to producers, in a Web 2.0 environment. They argue that fans’ online activities, ranging from low-investment activities like listing bands as favorites on social media profiles to more engaged media production like blogging, have created “an international pres-
ence far beyond what labels or bands could attain on their own” (Baym and Burnett 2009, 437). These fans’ commitments to and investments in Swedish independent music, Baym and Burnett argue, cast them as “gatekeepers, filters, and influencers on a scale they never were before the Internet” (445–446), making them valuable to other fans and producers alike.

Baym and Burnett’s (2009) study demonstrates the motivational and promotional power of fans’ engagement with media that resonates with them. Jenkins (2006) argues, in line with this, that affective economics and brand loyalty are key to producers’ reconceptualizations of the audience and to media production in a digital environment. Affective economics, “which seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions” (Jenkins 2006, 64), encourages producers to build networked communities around their media offerings by engaging consumers emotionally, and instructs that long-term brand relationships, a necessity for survival in the digital age, are built through such emotional engagements. Media producers’ opportunities for observing and learning from audiences’ existing emotional engagements with media content have increased in the contemporary digital environment because fan cultures and participatory practices have become more visible in the age of networked communication, as evidenced by Ross’s assertion that “looking to past examples of how and why fans developed into social audiences” (Ross 2008, 7) has been a strategy used often by those in the TV industry.

Interactivity has emerged as one of the primary tools through which media producers can motivate audiences’ affective engagements with media texts, and Web 2.0 is notable in large part for the growth in a range of interactive media offerings, from companion websites created to invite audiences deeper into media texts, to programming that encourages audiences to discuss and vote on outcomes. Tools of engagement, like interactivity, create media texts that offer multiple levels of participation and leave openings for audience members to share their perspectives, ultimately producing what Fiske (1989) has described as “producerly” texts and what Ross has described as “tele-participation” or “invitations to interact with TV shows beyond the moment of viewing and ‘outside’ of the TV show itself” (2008, 4). Such textual qualities
are more likely to attract audience members into participatory relationships with media content and other audience members as well and are valuable to producers because “having something to do also gives fans something to talk about and encourages them to spread the word to other potential audience members” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 136). While these textual elements and audience practices may have once been considered “cult,” or outside of mainstream culture, the increased production of producerly media content in our digital environment has normalized fan behaviors once considered subcultural. The result is that the increased mainstream offerings of producerly media texts have moved subcultural fannish engagements, relationships, and practices with media into the mainstream, opening the activities previously associated with fan cultures to mainstream culture. Such mainstreaming has also “amplified and widened the scope of the activities of this already socially networked and participatory audience” (167).

While convergence culture has normalized affective and interactive fan practices typically considered to be cult or subcultural and media producers have increasingly sought niche audiences to build long-term relationships through media texts, audiences’ affective engagements with media texts have also led to the increasing visibility of fans’ negative affective evaluations of media texts and media audiences. Two issues related to the expression of anti-fandom in convergence culture stand out as important to an exploration of anti-fandom: the divisive potential of the critical or “snarky” stances some digital audiences perform online, and the privileges convergence culture offers to those groups with greater online visibility. Media scholar Mark Andrejevic’s (2008) analysis of the user community on Television Without Pity—one of the first online sites fully focused on the cultivation of skeptical and cynical discussions of television programming—explores the enjoyment users receive from the now-defunct site’s mocking recaps of shows deemed unworthy of praise and acclaim. Andrejevic also explores the pleasure received from fellow users’ recognition of their successful development and performance of the kinds of ironic, sarcastic, and detached commentary the site promotes. The TWoP community in many ways embodied the kind of active engagement with media programming that Jenkins encourages producers to seek in the era of convergence culture. Participation on TWoP thus made watching television texts a prereq-
uisite for a more public and interactive enterprise—community review and discussion of television programming. As Andrejevic points out, the site’s “real entertainment” involved users developing a deeper engagement with television texts, “which [took] the form of its online comeuppance: the gleeful dissection that takes place after it airs” (2008, 31).

Such a dissection required a healthy investment of users’ time to develop the “critical, sarcastic repartee” so coveted on *TWoP*, and Andrejevic underscores that to successfully participate on *TWoP*, users had to carefully watch and rewatch the numerous programs under scrutiny on the site (2008, 31). *Television Without Pity* users also worked to develop the skills necessary to be critical viewers, thinkers, and writers; these skills were seen as so critical to successful participation on the site that those who felt unsure of their abilities refrained from commenting and lurked instead. While Andrejevic suggests that producers’ use of *TWoP* users’ uncompensated labor as market research constitutes exploitation, a topic also addressed by Baym and Burnett (2009) and others (e.g., De Kosnik 2013; Gregg 2011; Terranova 2000), Andrejevic found that *TWoP* users’ investments of time and development of critical analysis skills increased their investment in and enjoyment of programming and the *TWoP* site.

While the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to participate in snarky repartee about television can be (and has been) seen as positive, Andrejevic’s work demonstrates that the ironic and cynical stance that many *TWoP* users developed could encourage them to think that their savvy perspective sets them “apart from the rest of the audience” (Andrejevic 2008, 40). Through their scrutinizing focus on the intricacies of programs’ production values and marketing strategies, Andrejevic observed that many *TWoP* users came to adopt a producer-oriented insider’s perspective. They used this perspective to demonstrate that they were not dupes and to claim superiority over viewers whom they deemed less critical. Andrejevic argues that this insider’s perspective turns the progressive potential of a “mediated interactivity” (24) with the power to rework the imbalance between producers and consumers into a kind of “participatory submission” (45). Andrejevic’s work is useful for studies of anti-fandom because the complexities it demonstrates are associated with the ironic stance many *TWoP* users adopted. While users’ critical analysis of television programming may warrant
praise for the deep thinking it engendered, some used their critical skills to reassert the divide between producers and audiences by encouraging the development of an uncritical identification with media producers and of a dismissive differentiation from the mainstream media audience by positioning them as unthinking dupes. This identification could produce dangerous divisions among anti-/fan cultures on- and offline, and thus such orientations warrant further exploration.

While Andrejevic demonstrates the complexities of the snarky stance that has come to be associated with some forms of anti-fandom, other scholars have focused on the antagonism that has developed among fan groups, a partial result of the media industry’s valuation of some forms of fandom over others. In Spreadable Media, Jenkins and his co-authors indicate that the increased number of media offerings and platforms in digital culture has fragmented media audiences, leaving producers with “uncertainty about how much value to place on different kinds of audiences” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 116). Producers, despite their increasing dependence upon audiences in the convergence culture era, continue to view some audiences as more valuable than those they consider “surplus,” or outside the target demographic. The dominance producers retain in this reconceptualized relationship means that they continue to be more eager to please the consumers that are most desirable to them, especially white, middle-class and college-educated males (Jenkins 2006).

Building upon such concerns, media studies scholar Suzanne Scott (2011) argues that new cultural and industrial visibility is available only to those fans the industry deems profitable and ideologically safe. These fans, whom Scott (drawing from obsession_inc 2009) deems “affirmational” fans, tend to uphold the sanctity of the text as produced and value relational ties with (and even pursue employment in) the industry and popular press; they also tend to be male. The convergence-era visibility these “fanboys” have received and cultivated overshadows “fangirls,” whom Scott asserts are “transformational” fans, who develop orientations and practices that tend to involve resistive strategies of (re)reading against the grain of the text as produced. Through numerous examples from Twilight’s female fans “ruining” San Diego Comic-Con 2009 to Supernatural’s representation of fangirl character Becky Rosen, Scott demonstrates how fanboys have gained cultural visibility, commanded
representational diversity, and accrued value to the media industry as desirable tastemakers. In contrast, fangirls, in part through their own strategic actions undertaken to stay off the industry’s radar, have become more alienated and pathologized, and their work obscured and devalued. The resultant disparities are exacerbated by convergence-era discourses that suggest that digital technologies enable new fan-industry relationships and new depathologized portrayals of fans, in many cases producing antagonism among fan cultures. Scott’s case studies demonstrate the importance of the ways “an understanding and interrogation of these boundaries between the mainstream and the margins, historically central to fan studies, is increasingly vital to any study of contemporary fan culture” (2011, 305). Gender is at the center of the dynamics Scott studies, which makes clear that explorations of race, class, sexuality, and nationality, among other identity categories, are crucial areas of investigation for future work in anti-fan studies.

The emergence of digital media culture, or convergence, has forced a reassessment of the traditional relationships between media producers and audiences, normalizing fan practices once considered cult or marginal, and encouraging producers to build long-term relationships with audiences by creating texts that encourage affective investments and inviting audiences to interact with media texts in a variety of formats. One outcome of these changes is the growth and increased visibility of anti-fan practices and cultures that both value and produce critical analyses of media texts and potentially also encourage antagonism among fannish groups. Digital media is only one contributing factor to the increased visibility of anti-fandom. Anti-fandom, as I explore next, must be understood as well through cultural approaches to emotion and affect.

Emotion and Affect

Whether seen as a “cultural turn” in emotion studies (Harding and Pribram 2009) or an “affective turn” in cultural theory and criticism (Clough 2008), the study of affect and emotion developed in the early to mid-1990s to address cultural questions not easily examined through the lenses of contemporary approaches such as poststructuralism and deconstruction (Clough 2008). But, despite its value for the exploration
of questions involving identity and power, among others, cultural studies scholars Jennifer Harding and E. Deirdre Pribram (2009) argue that cultural scholars have been slow to examine emotions because of their association with the personal and experiential, with women and other “irrational” groups, and with biology and psychology.

Recognizing—and rejecting—such biases, cultural approaches argue against understanding emotions as only individual, as qualities possessed only by some groups, and as produced inside bodies; contemporary affect scholarship argues instead that emotions are social and cultural. Cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), asserts that emotions are historically rooted, performative speech acts. Instead of trying to understand what emotions are, Ahmed suggests scholars should investigate the circulation and impact of emotions—in short, what emotions do. Building upon Marxist notions, Ahmed describes emotions as a form of capital; she maintains that “affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation” (253). This postulation means that, instead of being an “origin and destination,” the subject, with respect to the circulation of emotion, is “simply one nodal point in the economy” (254). Ahmed also stresses that emotions do not circulate freely; some emotions stick, affix, and transfer more easily and powerfully to some signs and bodies (especially those with historical connections to particular emotions), and it is these attachments, repetitions, and accumulations of emotion that make individuals and collectives meaningful. She also indicates that frequency of circulation modifies signs’ affect: “Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become” (253).

Underscoring Ahmed’s assertion that “emotions are bound up with the securing of social hierarchy” (Ahmed 2004, 4), Harding and Pribram maintain that emotions work to create, and endeavor to fix, power relations and social identities. They suggest that “emotion relations, like power relations, are productive: they not only subordinate, they create” (Harding and Pribram 2009, 19). Further, emotions have no essence, no essential qualities; they shape and are shaped by the contexts in which they circulate. While emotions’ cultural circulation and impact are “insufficiently understood” (19), Harding and Pribram suggest that the tactics and sites involved in struggles over the emotional investments that
create and re-create gendered, raced, ethnic, sexual, and national identities are subject positions that are also likely locations where the power and impact of emotion can be challenged and reworked.

Crucial to the study of anti-fandom, Ahmed’s discussion of hate and disgust illustrates how emotions work as forms of capital. Hate, Ahmed argues, is a response to feeling threatened and is wielded as a form of defense against potential harm. Hate differentiates among subjects (creating a “them” against which groups are positioned) and positions the other (“them”) as a threat whose proximity endangers something that is loved (e.g., a media text, celebrity, or convention). She stresses that histories among and between subjects are present in such differentiations, and thus “some bodies are already encountered as more hateful than other bodies” (Ahmed 2004, 259). This does not mean, of course, that those seen as hateful are indeed hateful. Quite the contrary, it underscores that hatred has historically circulated around, and through repetition has stuck to, specific bodies or signs. Ahmed argues that individuals’ opposition to the hated is simultaneously constitutive of collectivity: “How we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically ‘takes shape’ only as an effect of such alignments” (260). The hated object, then, is crucial to the formation of the collective, and the expulsion or incorporation of the hated other is needed to maintain the collective identity.

While hatred produces powerful alliances and antagonisms, Ahmed argues that hate’s economic or circulating nature makes it difficult to easily locate it in an object or figure. To sustain hate, expressions and acts of hatred must be continually repeated and recirculated, meaning that hatred is “a differentiation that is never ‘over’” (Ahmed 2004, 255). Further, the collective, and the identities that compose it, are dependent upon the enduring association of hate and the othered “them.” These collective identities built around repeated actions of hate form the basis for many anti-fandoms and anti-fan activities.

As with hate, Ahmed argues that the expression of disgust is permeated by power relations. While disgust involves feelings of repulsion assumedly provoked by the proximity of an offending object, disgust also involves an angered acknowledgment of vulnerability to that which disgusts: “Bodies that are disgusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage, a rage that the object has got close enough to sicken, and to be taken over
or taken in. To be disgusted is, after all, *to be affected by what one has rejected*” (Ahmed 2004, 86; emphasis in original). Further, the expression of disgust involves a desire to differentiate oneself from and position oneself above the disgusting object. Ahmed argues that objects are not inherently disgusting, but some are more likely to be seen as disgusting because of connections with objects already framed as disgusting. She describes the act of calling something disgusting as a performative act that brings the object into being through its allegations: “To name something as disgusting . . . is performative. It relies on previous norms and conventions of speech, and it generates the object that it names” (93). Disgust, then, gains its power through its ability to relate, and subsequently bind, objects to each other, making it difficult to disentangle objects from these negative associations.

The successful positioning of an object as disgusting also requires others to repeat the condemnation, and Ahmed emphasizes that the community involving the shared desire to maintain distance from the disgusting object is built through this shared goal: “A community of witnesses is generated, whose apparent shared distance from an event or object that has been named as disgusting is achieved through the repetition of the word ‘disgust’” (2004, 94). As with hate, Ahmed argues that expressions of disgust cannot fully or permanently eliminate the vulnerability the disgusted feels, and thus the act of naming the object as disgusting must be continually reiterated.

Although emotion and affect have always been crucial components of fan studies’ interest in how feelings of love and like shape reception of media texts and bind communities of the like-minded, this scholarship has been less focused upon the circulation and effects of emotions than on the alliances and practices such feelings produce. Further, fan studies has neglected to produce an engaged examination of how negative emotions, like hate and disgust, are implicated in fans’ expressions of love—both as tools for creating unity and for maintaining community borders. The cultural approach to emotion sketched here offers much food for thought for such explorations. A renewed focus on what emotions do in fan practices and communities would enable scholars to understand how fans’ emotions are rooted historically and would allow scholars to address questions about how, why, and to what emotions stick. Further, the cultural approach’s understanding of emotions as attempts to fix
power relations and shape social identities is crucially important for fan studies scholarship that aims to understand fan practices and communities as intimately connected with identity categories, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and nation.

Media studies in general has been slow to engage with cultural approaches to affect (notable exceptions include De Kosnik 2013; Gregg 2011; Hills 2015; and Ouellette and Wilson 2011), but media scholar Emma A. Jane’s (2012) work on “e-bile”—a term she employs to unite online texts and speech, including cyberbullying, flaming, and trolling—suggests that the critical analysis of hate is crucial to understanding, and maintaining civility in, our digital media environment. Based on the textual analysis of a range of material archived between 1999 and 2012, Jane describes e-bile as characterized by its “reliance on profanity, ad hominem invective, and hyperbolic imagery of graphic—often sexualized—violence” (Jane 2012, 3) that frames female targets through sexually violent language as stupid or hyperbolic and male targets as homosexual or effeminate. Despite evidence that “on-line hostility is getting more prevalent, it is getting uglier, and it has a number of distinctly gendered characteristics” (4), Jane argues that academic scholarship has tended to praise the creativity and resistance of e-bile producers while trivializing its impact on its victims. She asserts that scholarship must take such “textual sadism” (12) more seriously because its circulation affects users’ willingness to participate openly online and thus may have serious consequences on the inclusivity of online cultures.

Jane further demonstrates how crucial an ethical understanding of e-bile and its impact are to scholarship on anti-fandom in her exploration of cheerleading anti-fans, a group she argues is composed of a diversity of social groups that simultaneously positions cheerleaders as “objects of derision and desire” (Jane 2014, 179). She points out that the digital environment has enabled anti-fans to directly contact their targets and their families, to target ordinary people, and produce commentary that is “hyperbolic, threatening, and misogynist in nature” (185). She critiques scholarship on anti-fandom that has characterized the objects of anti-fandom only as texts, and anti-fans themselves as only audience members, asserting that anti-fans are “powerful media producers, and their targets can include human subjects who may suffer real-life pain and suffering” (186). Thus, given that the targets of anti-fan ire may be
the reputations and careers of public and private individuals as well as television characters or series, we can better understand the agency, responsibility, and impact involved in anti-fandom if we reconsider conceptions of anti-fans as critical thinking, resistive audience members. Insistent on the need to hold anti-fans responsible for the personal, social, and legal impact of their vitriolic expression, Jane maintains that, “when disgust and hate are expressed about a person or a group of people outside of media contexts (especially when this disgust or hate is based on a priori prejudices), it is usually known by other terms. ‘Sexism’, ‘racism’, ‘homophobia’, and ‘hate speech’ are a few that come to mind” (177). Although Jane’s call to more seriously consider the ethical questions surrounding anti-fandom has been present in some anti-fan scholarship, particularly scholarship examining *Twilight* anti-fandom (e.g., Pinkowitz 2011; Strong 2011), her suggestion that scholars more carefully consider what anti-fandom *does* marks a crucial area of inquiry for anti-fan studies, and one with which cultural approaches to emotion can help. If indeed emotions are “investments in social norms” (Ahmed 2004, 261), anti-fan scholarship should seriously consider the goals and impact of such investments. Recent fan/anti-fan entanglements, like #GamerGate (e.g., Chess and Shaw 2015) and the harassment of Leslie Jones, star of the 2016 *Ghostbusters* film, on Twitter (Rogers 2016), suggest that scholarship on anti-fandom can—and indeed, should—contribute to and further our understanding of the circulation and impact of dislike and hate through digital technology. In fact, studies on dislike, hate, and anti-fandom, rooted in scholarship on digital media and in cultural approaches to emotion, have a crucial role in helping us fully understand the form and function of our contemporary media environment.

**Anti-Fan Is the New Fan**

The cutting-edge, previously unpublished research included in this collection explores anti-fandom and dislike through gender, generation, race, nationality, sexuality, taste, authenticity, electoral politics, and celebrity with a diversity of theoretical and methodological positions. This volume answers the call put forward in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, in which the editors argued that the study of hate and anti-fandom is an important direction to be
undertaken by the third wave of fan studies, a wave that is charged to “tell us something about the way in which we relate to those around us, as well as the way we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience” (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007b, 10). Anti-Fandom: Dislike and Hate in the Digital Age, as a result, gives drive and direction to the study of anti-fandom and dislike in the contemporary digital environment, with a particular focus on the pleasures, performances, punishments, and practices that constitute anti-fandom.

Part I, “Theorizing Anti-Fandom,” aims to broaden the study of anti-fandom by sketching the diversity and complexity of the topic and by offering theoretical frameworks to help ground future work. Jonathan Gray builds upon his foundational work in anti-fandom by examining a range of types of anti-fandom, many of which are discussed in the chapters that follow, and illustrates how exploration of a range of orientations to dislike and hate can fill gaps in media studies scholarship. The utility of anti-fan scholarship is the question Emma A. Jane raises through an examination of six case studies. She argues that changes in networked digital culture, as well as in anti-fans’ threatening and violent discourse, require anti-fan scholars to carefully rethink their analyses of hate. Anne Gilbert examines the role irony plays in anti-fan cultures, arguing that snarky, sarcastic comments are less motivated by dislike than a desire to perform for an audience; in fact, Gilbert suggests such performances build anti-fan community. Focusing on the Glee Equality Project, Louisa Stein revisits Jenkins’s suggestion that challenging and reworking beloved texts is a crucial component of fandom. Stein suggests that sharing dissatisfaction can help fans turn negativity into creativity. Matt Hills uses Doctor Who fandom to illustrate how lifelong relationships with enduring texts create generational boundaries around particular eras of texts that are policed with dislike.

The roles identity politics play in the expression of anti-fandom is the focus of Part II, “Anti-Fandom and Identities.” Electoral politics is the focus of Cornel Sandvoss’ chapter, in which he explores case studies involving politicians in the United States and Europe to demonstrate the ways anti-fandom can affect political participation and democracy generally. Holly Willson Holladay and Melissa A. Click explore Breaking Bad fans’ gendered hatred of Skyler White and suggest that fans’ feelings
for the series’ complex antihero Walter White, and their biases about gender roles, activated their strong negative feelings for Skyler and Anna Gunn, the actress who portrays her. Alfred L. Martin, Jr.’s interviews with black female viewers of Tyler Perry’s films help reveal why these Perry anti-fans continue to watch his films. Despite their adamant dislike of the representations of African Americans that Perry produces, viewing these films helps anti-fans perform important familial, social, and political functions. The global anti-fan movement against reggaetón music is the focus of Michelle M. Rivera’s chapter; in it, she demonstrates the complicated ways that gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality are inflicted in anti-fan response to the Afro-diasporic musical form. Roberta Pearson’s examination of anti-fan responses to programming changes at BBC Radio 3 demonstrates the importance of studying a range of cultural forms, including those considered high culture forms. The anti-fan comments she analyzed support her argument that “supracultural” fans are not always complicit with structures of power.

Part III, “Anti-Fandom in Real Life,” explores a diverse collection of lived experiences of anti-fandom. Richard McCulloch examines the ways that European football fans criticize their own teams, arguing that, while expressions of anti-fandom may be regular discourse among fans, such expressions are governed by norms and expectations. Whitney Phillips investigates audience reaction to TLC’s Here Comes Honey Boo Boo and argues that the show invites expressions of dislike that reinforce normative ideologies of race, class, and gender. These expressions challenge scholarly perceptions of anti-fandom as counterhegemonic. Bethan Jones argues that BDSM community members’ negative reactions to Fifty Shades of Grey were bolstered by the subcultural capital they accrue as practitioners. While their experience bolstered their credibility with readers, it also affected the approaches they took to challenge the series’ representations of BDSM. Understanding angry exchanges between fans and actors on Twitter structures Bertha Chin’s chapter, where she demonstrates that the immediacy of social media changes the nature and tone of relationships between fans and celebrities. Fans’ relieved reactions to the ends of television programs is Rebecca Williams’ focus. She suggests that the creation and circulation of “rejection discourses” help fans cope with the psychological strains that come with cancellation.
Together, the chapters that constitute *Anti-Fandom: Dislike and Hate in the Digital Age* provide the emerging area of anti-fan studies with a productive foundation and demonstrate the importance of constructing a complex knowledge of emotion and media in fan studies. Love them or hate them, my hope is that the concepts and cases these chapters contain will generate new perspectives for understanding the impact of dislike, hate, and anti-fandom on our identities, relationships, and communities.

REFERENCES


