



Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status

By Michael Z Newman, Elana Levine



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Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status explores how and why television is gaining a new level of cultural respectability in the 21st century. Once looked down upon as a "plug-in drug" offering little redeeming social or artistic value, television is now said to be in a creative renaissance, with critics hailing the rise of Quality series such as *Mad Men* and *30 Rock*. Likewise, DVDs and DVRs, web video, HDTV, and mobile devices have shifted the longstanding conception of television as a household appliance toward a new understanding of TV as a sophisticated, high-tech gadget.

Newman and Levine argue that television's growing prestige emerges alongside the convergence of media at technological, industrial, and experiential levels. Television is permitted to rise in respectability once it is connected to more highly valued media and audiences. Legitimation works by denigrating "ordinary" television associated with the past, distancing the television of the present from the feminized and mass audiences assumed to be inherent to the "old" TV. It is no coincidence that the most validated programming and technologies of the convergence era are associated with a more privileged viewership. The legitimization of television articulates the medium with the masculine over the feminine, the elite over the mass, reinforcing cultural hierarchies that have long perpetuated inequalities of gender and class.

Legitimizing Television urges readers to move beyond the question of taste?whether TV is "good" or "bad"?and to focus instead on the cultural, political, and economic issues at stake in television's transformation in the digital age.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Legitimizing Television offers a crucial intervention in the popular and scholarly conception of television's increasing cultural significance. ... As a teaching tool, Newman and Levine's engaging and clear style make *Legitimizing Television* suitable for both the graduate and undergraduate classroom, especially as a counterpoint to popular or scholarly sources that regard the increased cultural status of contemporary television in a more favorable light." *?Melinda E. S. Kohnen, New York University*

"Trenchantly, Michael Newman and Elana Levine observe that every new attempt to declare some form of television as especially valuable culturally or artistically 'is predicated on the systematic degradation of old television practices' and they demonstrate this insight through sharp history combined with comprehensive analysis of the contemporary context. Most refreshing in this respect is their self-aware sense of TV studies' own contribution to processes of legitimization. A rich, far-reaching study of the values we've given to TV across its complicated history." *?Dana Polan, Professor of Cinema Studies, New York University*

About the Author

Michael Z. Newman is an assistant professor in the Department of Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the author of *Indie: An American Film Culture*.

Elana Levine is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the author of *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s American Television* and co-editor of *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

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