Course Description:
America's Next Top Model. Project Runway. Canadian Idol. Extreme Makeover. Wife Swap. The list of Reality TV programs is seemingly endless, as is our appetite for consuming them. Yet, Reality TV and its practitioners are often criticized for bringing about the demise of “culture.” As many feminist and media scholars have shown though, Reality TV has become the television format par excellence, instructing us on how to become “ideal” consumer-citizens. This function of Reality TV has particular implications for women, who comprise a large proportion of the audience as well as its participants. So on the one hand, Reality TV has opened up more possibilities for the “average” woman to participate in television culture, in addition to broadening the kinds of stories told about women and their everyday lives. On the other hand, the proliferation of Reality TV has opened women up to even more public scrutiny and regulation, from how to dress and act “appropriately” to constantly competing with other women to be the “best” wife, bride, worker, and so forth. Therefore, in order to address these issues, we need to consider the democratic functions of Reality TV; what forms of citizenship does it create and/or close off, and what are the consequences for feminist movement and criticism? These are the overarching concerns which will structure the course.

The first part of the course will focus on unpacking the term “Reality TV” in order to situate its emergence as an outcome of particular social, political, and economic changes. We will consider how neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies are woven throughout reality TV and how they in turn shape our understanding of classed, raced, and gendered identities in the contemporary cultural landscape. During the second part of the course, we will look more closely at specific reality genres such as crime, competition, and cosmetic surgery shows, in order to examine the ways in which they represent women. We will consider in particular how these genres are important sites for the production of narratives of victimization, individualism, and self-transformation. In the final section of the course will broaden our critical scope to consider the cross-cultural adaptations of reality show formats, and what this means for women, as citizens, audiences and participants, across national borders.

Courseware and Course Texts:
- Custom Courseware available for purchase at the SFU bookstore

Recommended Readings:
- A number of recommended readings will be placed on reserve at the library

Assignments and Evaluation:
Attendance and Participation: 10%
Class Presentation: 15%
Reading Responses: 15%
Short Critical Paper (6-7 pages): 20%
Final Research Essay (14-15 pages): 40%

Prerequisite: 6 credit hours in Women's Studies including WS 101 and/or WS 102