The Images You See are the One's You Want to Be: A Look into Body Image within Youth Culture
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Body image in today's youth is a growing concern. Throughout the years, the media industry has become a major contributing factor to this issue and has been known to produce unrealistic physical expectations and alter images that falsely represent the male and female bodies. Through TV shows, movies, and advertisements, messages constantly portray unrealistic images; therefore misguiding the perceptions of what young people should grow up to be. Our primary research consisted of giving high school students a "Body Coloring Task" that contained a front side and backside outline of both male and female bodies. The body outlines were blocked off into sections that the students were asked to color code relative to how they felt about that given body part. The subjects consisted of students in health classes (grades 9-12) in New York and in psychology classes (grades 10-12) in Connecticut. We received 94 responses from 36 males and 67 females. These results confirmed that body image issues do exist in this adolescent population and revealed differences between male and female body positivity. To intervene in this problem, we created a packet comprising a variety of resources for teachers to use in order to teach media literacy to students in grades K-12 in a variety of subject areas, providing educators an opportunity to encourage integrated learning. Media literacy is a way of reading. If students understand how to decipher and understand the messages that are being fed to them, they will have the tools necessary to interpret what is actually being presented, and to speak out against the unrealistic images and expectations perpetuated in media today.