

Schneider, C. (2007). *When journalism and scholarship collide: A critical analysis of Newsweek's Annual Report on America's Top High Schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Abstract

This study seeks to systematically uncover one part of the complex organism of systemic racism. By analyzing the way in which the popular media defines (and does not define) the success of the public school, we are able to theorize possible explanations for the continued pervasiveness of educational inequality in America. By using *Newsweek's* annual report on America's "Top" High Schools as the focus, this research intends to raise awareness to the reality of educational inequality in contrast to the myths and misconceptions that are created and sustained by the general media and current trends in classifying educational success. Therefore, the study has three concomitant purposes: to critically analyze the way in which academic excellence and the educational success of schools are currently defined in American rhetoric and discourse; to investigate the attention and effort of the media related to issues of educational inequality; and to call for a deeper and broader response to educational inequality (i.e., the achievement gap) by grounding the debate around educational excellence and academic success in theoretical notions from Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory. After a review of the literature related to educational inequality in America, the author launches the investigation into *Newsweek* magazine, its annual high school report, and the schools on its 2006 list. By seeking out and presenting additional educational information on the Top 10 schools on *Newsweek's* 2006 list, significant gaps in student achievement and student composition reveal that educational inequality is not a factor in determining overall quality according to *Newsweek's* selection criteria. Further information related to the debate surrounding the annual high school report provides additional evidence that issues related to educational equality remain largely unaddressed by the dominant discourse. The broad implications of these realizations are discussed in the context of key components from Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory such as hegemony, ideology, discourse, the purpose of education, race as factor of inequity, and the role of counter-storytelling.

Through an analysis of *Newsweek*, its annual report, and the debate surrounding it, the author concludes that *Newsweek's* annual high school report represents perceptions about American education and educational success that largely support the perpetuation of educational inequality. This realization, that educational inequality and social injustice are supported by institutions outside of the field of education, necessitates that we re-conceptualize our current understanding of the way educational inequality is created and sustained and work to redefine American perceptions about what constitutes educational success and the true purpose of American public education.