



Distinguishing Disability: Parents, Privilege, and Special Education

Colin Ong-Dean

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Students in special education programs can have widely divergent experiences. For some, special education amounts to a dumping ground where schools unload their problem students, while for others, it provides access to services and accommodations that drastically improve chances of succeeding in school and beyond. *Distinguishing Disability* argues that this inequity in treatment is directly linked to the disparity in resources possessed by the students' parents.

Since the mid-1970s, federal law has empowered parents of public school children to intervene in virtually every aspect of the decision making involved in special education. However, Colin Ong-Dean reveals that this power is generally available only to those parents with the money, educational background, and confidence needed to make effective claims about their children's disabilities and related needs. Ong-Dean documents this class divide by examining a wealth of evidence, including historic rates of learning disability diagnosis, court decisions, and advice literature for parents of disabled children. In an era of expanding special education enrollment, *Distinguishing Disability* is a timely analysis of the way this expansion has created new kinds of inequality.

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