Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD) and Restrictive Placement: An Analysis of Systems of Oppression in Research, Practice, & Policy

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Abstract

Before and following the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA; now known as IDEA), special education or de facto special education practices have been informed by systems of oppression such as racism and ableism. Within this context, students from racially-minoritized backgrounds have been disproportionately identified as Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD) for decades. The biases of staff potentially impact special education identification and placement, especially in light of how ambiguity in legal documents may set the stage for cognitive biases to impact decision-making. Further, the escalation of students from racially-minoritized backgrounds into restrictive settings effectively serves as a type of segregation. As such, this multi-study dissertation sought to first examine predictors of restrictive placement for students identified as EBD utilizing a Quantitative Critical Methods (QuantCrit) lens. Results from the first study indicated that exposure to racism and sexism predicted restrictive placement and scales measuring behavior inconsistently predicted placement. In light of the results of the first study, the second study in this multi-study dissertation utilized Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how systems of oppression such as racism and sexism are encoded in policy documents and student records about the behaviors of students identified as EBD. Results from the second study in this multi-study dissertation indicated the ubiquitous presence of White, middle-class norms, color-blind racism, and institutionalized power in student FBAs and policy documents. Recommendations for practice such as the removal of coded language about race and gender in student FBAs have been provided.

Keywords: emotional or behavioral disorder, restrictive placement, critical discourse analysis, disability critical race theory, special education decision-making

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Systems of oppression such as racism have been embedded in special education institutions and practices even prior to the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA; now known as IDEA) and impact research, policy, and practice; for example, Black students are currently and have historically been overidentified for special education classifications such as emotional or behavioral disorder (EBD; Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Dunn, 1968; Heller et al., 1982). Crucially, students identified with EBD are the most likely to be placed in restrictive environments in comparison to students of all other disability categories except autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability (Williamson et al., 2020). In light of the fact that EBD is socially constructed and criteria for it are vague (Sullivan, 2017), there is controversy about whether students from racially minoritized backgrounds are referred to restrictive settings for reasons related to bias (Blanchett et al., 2005).

This multi-study dissertation will analyze research, practice, and policy documents related to how special education placement as EBD is potentially informed by systems of oppression such as racism. This dissertation was conducted sequentially, with findings from the first study informing the second study. The purpose of study one in this multi-study dissertation was to examine factors predictive of student placement in more restrictive settings as EBD through a systematic review of the empirical literature. A Quantitative Critical Methods (Quant Crit) lens was used to analyze research, given the potential for quantitative methods to privilege modes of thought associated with White empiricism (Prescod-Weinstein, 2020). Findings in study one that racism/sexism predict restrictive placement and behavioral scales inconsistently predict restrictive placement implicated an examination of how behavior is quantified for

students identified with EBD. This inconsistent prediction of placement places into question how EBD and the behaviors associated with it are quantified, especially in regard to the subjectivity inherent in behavioral judgments and perceptions (Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021).

Further, biases about race and ability may be present in decision-making about identification and placement for students identified with EBD (Harry & Klinger, 2014), though this finding has not been consistent in the literature (Sullivan et al., 2019). It is possible language indicative of bias may be encoded into policy guidance regarding Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) as well as actual student FBAs utilized in practice. Therefore, the second study in this dissertation served two purposes. The first purpose was to examine language in FBAs of students escalated to restrictive placements through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The second was to analyze policy guidance regarding FBAs through the lens of CDA. The aim of both analyses was to uncover language indicative of systems of oppression and/or narratives that place a deficit focus onto students identified as EBD, especially those escalated to restrictive placements.

Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD)

Emotional Disturbance (ED) is defined by IDEA broadly as disorders involving unsatisfactory relationships, inappropriate behavior or feelings, depression, anxiety, somatization, and/or an inability to learn that can't be explained by extraneous factors such as intellectual disability (2004). However, states across the U.S. define this construct differently in name and criteria, albeit in line with the spirit of IDEA (Wery & Cullinan, 2013). For example, the state of Minnesota defines EBD as emotional or behavioral responses indicative of emotional distress (i.e., depression, anxiety); disordered thoughts, behavior, or communication; or

aggression or hyperactivity (Minnesota Administrative Rule, 2023). To meet criteria for EBD, this cluster of emotional or behavioral responses must negatively impact educational performance, though it is not codified in law what this entails. Since EBD and ED refer to the same construct, for ease, EBD will be the term used for the remainder of the manuscript.

Indeed, this vague codification of definitional criteria for EBD has been cited in the scholarly literature as a considerable limitation of special education identification as EBD (Sullivan, 2017). Foundational texts and articles utilizing vague or ambiguous terms for EBD do little to clarify the construct. Walker and Gresham (2015) broadly define EBD as students who have "emotional and behavioral challenges," inclusive of 20% of all students, while acknowledging that only 1% of the school population is identified as EBD (p. xiii). Farmer et al. (2020) avoid defining the characteristics of EBD; instead, they state that prevalence estimates range widely depending on definitional criteria. Neither of these definitions shed light on the criteria underlying EBD but rather focus on prevalence as a definition of EBD, which makes little sense. In addition, the definition of EBD is often conflated to mean disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), ignoring that special education identifications and mental health diagnoses are separate constructs. For example, Forness et al. (2012) defines EBD as emotional and psychiatric disorders included in the DSM-IV, which does not acknowledge the difference between special education identifications and psychiatric diagnoses.

Further complicating the definition of EBD, IDEA contains a clause that excludes Social Maladjustment (SM) yet defines EBD as behaviors indicative of SM as it was originally defined in the research that informed the earliest EBD policy (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2014). Scholars have

attempted to make sense of this discongruity by creating various definitions of SM that vary in breadth, with some scholars arguing that SM is related to conduct disorders, antisocial behavior, and "delinquent" behaviors that are not part of emotional disturbance (Weinberg & Weinberg, 1990). Other scholars have proposed a broader definition of EBD encompassing SM with the rationale that externalizing behaviors are often part of EBD (Olympia et al., 2004). While no consensus has been reached, the SM clause in IDEA's criteria for EBD further obscures criteria that are vague at best and often subjectively interpreted by special education teams.

The vague and sometimes contradictory criteria of EBD may impede the ability of special education teams to make valid decisions for special education identification due to the potential for teams to rely on cognitive biases or heuristics (Watkins, 2009). Indeed, the scholarly literature indicates that multidisciplinary special education teams may inconsistently apply eligibility criteria (Harris et al., 2015), pointing to the need for additional guidance regarding criteria in law. As such, governmental bodies have released policy guidance documents on related concepts to special education identification. For example, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has released a Dear Colleague letter regarding attentional disorders and multiple letters indicating processes for Functional Behavioral Assessments, which are mandated to be included in EBD identification by MN law (Minnesota Administrative Rule, 2023). These documents can be considered in conjunction with legal criteria; they are considered guiding documents but are not legally binding.

Crucially, special education identification as EBD is linked to a variety of negative outcomes for students (Reid et al., 2004). Students identified with EBD struggle academically in comparison with their peers in reading, writing, and math, performing one to two grade levels

lower (Trout et al., 2003). Given the link between academic struggles and school disengagement, students identified with EBD have also been found to be more likely to drop out of school (Reid et al., 2004). In addition, students identified with EBD have an increased likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline such as suspensions or expulsions (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2021) and may be more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system throughout their lives (Newman et al., 2011). In short, there is a heavy weight associated with identification under the label of EBD in regard to student academic, social-emotional, and life outcomes.

Students identified with EBD have also been found to be more likely to be placed in restrictive settings than all other special education identifications except for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disability (ID; Williamson et al., 2020). In 2015, 35% of students with EBD were placed in separate classes/schools, about twice as many as all students with disabilities (17.6%). While debate exists about the optimal level of inclusion in regard to educational placement, research indicates that students in restrictive academic settings may have worse academic outcomes than students in more inclusive settings (Cole et al., 2021; Theobald et al., 2019). In addition, a systematic review of the literature reported that students placed in restrictive settings had a higher chance of dropping out or graduating with an alternate diploma, which impacted their life outcomes after exiting school (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022).

Theoretical Lenses: Racism in Special Education

The segregation of students of color has been a long-cited problem within education, as evidenced by court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In addition, right-to-education cases in which Black students were denied education, such as *Mills v. Board of*

Education of District of Columbia (1972), showed the continuing presence of segregation in the education system after *Brown.* The positionality of the plaintiffs in *Mills*, all of whom were Black and considered disabled, was indicative of systems of power and privilege regarding the intersection of race and ability. This linkage between racism and ableism exemplifies the way that education prior to IDEA (i.e., PL-94-142) served as a system of de facto segregation based on the linkage between race and ability.

While in theory PL 94-142 was seminal legislation that mandated the legal rights of students with disabilities, Proffitt (2022) contends that the law functioned in reality as a way to label and separate students. From the nascence of IDEA, Black students were overrepresented in special education for subjectively-determined disabilities (e.g., EBD) and placed in restrictive, separate educational settings (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Heller et al., 1982); this trend continues today (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Skiba et al., 2006). In addition, the empirical literature also indicates that exposure to racism may be predictive of placement in more restrictive settings as EBD (e.g., Meyer et al., 2007; Robertson et al., 1998). These findings point to the need for an examination of special education team decision-making processes, especially in regard to students from minoritized backgrounds.

Utilizing theoretical lenses such as Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) and Quantitative Critical Methods (QuantCrit) facilitates understanding of how research and practice in special education may be impacted by systemic racism. DisCrit, as theorized by Subini Annamma, centers on the co-constitution of race and ability by interlocking systems of oppression as deficit (Annamma, 2013b). In short, Blackness and disability have been constructed as "other" opposite the White, able-bodied male, i.e., the bastion of "normality."

QuantCrit similarly indicts racialized oppression but its main focus is on the way quantitative methods privilege a White-centered lens through Western empiricism (Gillborn, 2010). QuantCrit invokes critique of how researchers construct social reality through choices such as definitions of race/ethnicity. For example, defining race as "White", "Black," and "Other" truncates race/ethnicity and elides a spectrum of racial/ethnic identities.

The theoretical qualities of DisCrit and QuantCrit are consistent with the aims of CDA as a methodological framework which endorses social action as a necessary part of research (Fairclough, 2013). CDA aims to deconstruct systems of oppression by analyzing the dialectical way that language and social reality inform and are informed by each other (Fairclough, 2013). As such, CDA is a useful framework to use in conjunction with DisCrit and other critical methodologies to understand the way that systems of oppression operate linguistically as forms of hegemony. CDA can be utilized to analyze policy guidance regarding FBAs in light of how these documents contain coded language regarding power, agency, and identity; further, examining student FBAs through CDA can reveal the way in which deficit-based discourses regarding race and/or ability may be contained in student records.

Current Studies

Historically, the U.S. education system has been informed by systems of oppression such as racism and ableism which continue to impact student experiences in the school setting (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Dunn, 1968; Heller et al., 1982). These power structures inform the experiences of students from minoritized backgrounds identified with EBD, who face considerable stigma from school staff and are considered the least welcome students in the classroom (Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021; Wagner et al., 2006). Special education serves as a form of de facto

segregation when students from minoritized backgrounds are disproportionately placed in restrictive settings (Annamma, 2013b). Further, negative long-term academic and social-emotional outcomes are associated with identification as EBD, which, for students in restrictive placements, are compounded by the potential for these placements to degrade academic and life outcomes (Cole et al., 2021; Foreman-Murray et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2021).

Although research, policy, and practice are intrinsically connected, research may inconsistently impact policy and practice due to the research-to-practice gap (Oliver & Boaz, 2019; Riley-Tillman et al., 2005). As a result, though the three domains influence each other, research, practice, and policy are siloed as separate domains of thinking and being (Oliver & Boaz, 2019). It is imperative to account for all three ways of understanding and quantifying experience when considering systems of oppression vis-à-vis educational placement as EBD. The first study in this multi-study dissertation, a systematic review of empirical research regarding factors predicting placement as EBD, was informed by QuantCrit to center the limited way race and racism may be defined in extant literature. Further, the second study in this multi-study dissertation utilized CDA to analyze policy guidance regarding how student behavior is defined in light of existing power structures reflected within FBA processes utilized in EBD identification and placement. The second study further analyzed student FBAs through the lens of CDA to consider how oppression-laden language indicative of ableism, racism, and other systems of oppression may contribute to narratives for students. Thus, this dissertation will seek to answer the following research questions across two studies:

1. How can predictors associated with restrictive placement for students identified with

EBD in K-12 schools be understood through the lens of QuantCrit?

2. (a) What can discourses contained in national-, state-, and district-level policy guidance reveal about the social context and bodies of power and privilege that may inform the FBA process?

   (b) How do discourses about race, ability, gender, and sexuality manifest in FBAs included in special education evaluations for students identified with EBD moved to federal setting IV schools?

Chapter 2: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD): A QuantCrit Systematic Review

Students identified with EBD are more likely to be placed in restrictive educational settings than all other students with disabilities except those with ASD or ID (Williamson et al., 2020). The impact of restrictiveness of placement is crucial to consider for Black (Cruz & Rodl, 2018), Latinx (Moreno & Segura-Herrera, 2013), and Indigenous (Mejia & Gaither, 2018) students, all of whom are disproportionately identified with EBD; this disproportionate identification may be linked to systems of oppression which center Whiteness as the norm (Steen, 2022). Given disproportionality in special education identification for EBD, it is likely that students from minoritized backgrounds are also disproportionately placed in restrictive settings under the label ED or EBD (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

As such, it is crucial to study restrictiveness of placement for students identified as EBD, especially given the negative outcomes that are associated with the label. Students identified with EBD have some of the worst outcomes of any disability category, including high dropout rates and a greater likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline (Bradley et al., 2008). In addition, it is rare for students to move back to less restrictive settings (Cartledge, 2005). While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) made school segregation illegal, the intractability of restrictive special education placements leads to the exclusion of students of color identified with EBD, i.e., segregation under a different name (Beratan, 2006). This is also a violation of the concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), which mandates inclusion for students with disabilities in general education to the greatest extent possible.

Subjective placement decisions for students identified as EBD are informed by interlocking and intersecting systems of oppression which include historical, legal, and sociopolitical institutions. Given how the Eurocentric lens of Western empirical research has traditionally privileged Whiteness (Prescod-Weinstein, 2020), examining predictors associated with placement for students labeled EBD necessitates the use of a critical framework. As such, this systematic review is grounded in QuantCrit, a framework that deconstructs White-centered assumptions of quantitative research. The primary aim of this study is to understand predictors of restrictive placement for students identified with EBD in kindergarten through twelfth (K-12) grades. These predictors will be considered utilizing the lens of QuantCrit to make visible the ways in which the framing of these predictors is impacted by racism and other types of prejudice.

Author's Positionality

An author's positionality is crucial to consider in research because no study is absent from the influence of the author's subjective interpretation of data (Crawford et al., 2018).

As an author, I am a White, cisgender woman from an upper middle-class background. All of my experiences, identities, and privilege should be considered relative to my work, and I only speak considering my own positionality within this nexus of identities and experiences. I am currently pursuing an advanced degree in school psychology, and I have worked in the U.S. education system as a school psychology practicum student specializing in working with kids with disabilities, particularly those identified with EBD. Due to these experiences, I am passionate about research that examines equity related to restrictive educational placements for students identified with EBD. My goal is to look at the way in which White supremacy interacts with educational bodies of powers and privilege to oppress students from minoritized backgrounds

identified with EBD.

IDEA and LRE

Historically, the concept of LRE was part of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA; now known as IDEA) in 1975 (Crockett & Kauffmann, 1999). Language about LRE in the EHA was added in response to right-to-education cases about educating students with disabilities with peers in the general education classroom (Williamson et al., 2020). Today, IDEA (2004) defines LRE as the following:

Each public agency must ensure that –

(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and

(ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Section 300.114)

The two main principles of LRE are summarized thusly. First, children with disabilities, regardless of setting, should be educated with non-disabled students to the greatest degree that is possible. Secondly, children with disabilities should only be removed from the general education setting for alternate instruction if their disability is severe enough that they cannot be educated with supplementary aids/services. In accordance with the letter of the law, this definition of LRE is enforceable and deviations from it are grounds for legal action.

Since the definition of LRE is broad, states, districts, and schools interpret it differently

(Crockett, 2000). For this reason, among others, interpretation of LRE is a contentious issue in special education case law (Turnbull et al., 2015). There is considerable ambiguity in the criteria for what the greatest extent appropriate means in terms of inclusion (Lanterman et al., 2021). Moreover, the word 'appropriate' is subjective and can be defined differently depending upon the context and person making the judgment. The criteria for the continuum of placements (CAP) schools are required to provide by IDEA differ based on case law among circuits because the Supreme Court has not ruled on a definition of CAP (Hyatt & Filler, 2011). In short, there are differing ways of determining LRE, further problematizing the concept of whether LRE decisions are consistently applied.

Special education researchers disagree about the optimal level of inclusion for students in regard to LRE. Although the inclusion debate continues, research may indicate that students educated in more inclusive settings have better academic outcomes than students in restrictive settings (e.g., Cole et al., 2021; Theobald et al., 2019). Outcomes such as high school completion are also implicated; a longitudinal study by Powers et al. (2016) found that secondary students with conduct disorder in restrictive settings had higher rates of high school noncompletion compared to propensity score-matched peers in less restrictive settings. Further, there may be concerns about behavioral contagion in restrictive settings due to interaction with other students who display behaviors perceived by others as aggressive (Dishion et al., 2008). In short, restrictive placements may not help students with high levels of behavioral needs and evidence suggests that these placements have the potential to be harmful in multiple ways; this may critically impact the outcomes of students identified with EBD.

Restrictiveness of placement is especially of concern for students of color, given the

history and current status of special education as an institution that has disproportionately been filled with students from racial and ethnic groups considered "other" (Ferri & Connor, 2006). This disproportionality can be linked to the intersection of racism and ableism, in which students of color with disabilities are separated from those considered "normal" (i.e., White, middle-class; Annamma et al., 2013a). Further, Annamma names special education as de facto segregation: "dis/ability status justifies segregation and unequal treatment for students of color compared to their White counterparts" (p. 7). Disproportionately placing students of color in separate classrooms or schools segregates them from systems of power (i.e., Whiteness, particularly Whiteness as property) and influence, asserting the hegemony of White supremacy. This effectively maintains power structures which privilege Whiteness as the norm.

EBD and Restrictiveness of Placement

IDEA (2004) defines the disability category of ED broadly, indicating that it must include one or more of the following symptoms: physical symptoms or fears about school; depressed mood; inappropriate behaviors or feelings; challenges with interpersonal relationships at school; and/or difficulties with learning that are not related to other health factors. Scholars such as Sullivan (2017) have pointed out the inherent ambiguity and lack of consensus about what this operational definition of ED actually signifies. Given that SM is an exclusionary factory for ED and is not defined in IDEA, there has also been a longstanding debate about whether SM can be differentiated from ED even though Bower's empirical definition of ED on which IDEA is based defines ED as SM (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2014). Indeed, scholars suggest that IDEA's exclusionary criteria of SM for EBD was motivated by lawmakers' desire to deny special education services to specific groups of people and avoid allocating resources to them (Skiba et al., 1994).

State terminology for EBD as a category and definitions of it vary widely, given the vague definition of ED in IDEA. In a review of the literature, Wery and Cullinan (2013) found 16 distinct terms for EBD across the United States, from "emotional disturbance" to terms emphasizing behavioral rather than emotional disorders. Definitions also varied: While 100% of definitions included the phrase "disorders of emotion/behavior," concepts such as a need for special education (10% of definitions) were inconsistently included in criteria. In short, there is considerable ambiguity in how EBD is named and defined across states. If there is no consensus about what EBD is, does EBD exist as a disorder or is it simply a category used to define and label students as "other"?

This question becomes even more relevant in light of the aforementioned history of disproportionate identification for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students as EBD (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Heller et al., 1982; Mejia & Gaither, 2018). Through the conceptualization of a DisCrit framework, Annamma et al. (2013a; 2013b) theorized about the way in which race and disability are socially constructed. Although race and ability don't exist - they have been arbitrarily created and quantified by society - they negatively affect the lives of those deemed "other." Annamma problematizes the ideal of normal as an ascription that has existed to characterize difference as deviance to privilege the ideals of the dominant (i.e., White supremacist) culture. Ideals of normalcy serve to oppress students from minoritized backgrounds when culturally- or contextually-appropriate behaviors are pathologized and linked to stigmatized labels such as EBD (Sullivan et al., 2021).

Although EBD and disability are socially constructed, identification as EBD is associated with a number of poor outcomes, such as lower academic achievement, higher rates of drop-out,

and increased rates of experiencing exclusionary discipline (Reid et al., 2004; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2021). Students identified with EBD are also considered some of the least welcome students by teachers, which may negatively bias teacher perceptions of academic competence and further degrade academic outcomes (Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021; Wagner et al., 2006). Of particular concern are teacher interactions with students of color identified with EBD, given that biases of White teachers and deficit thinking about ability has the potential to degrade outcomes for minoritized students (Douglas et al., 2008). The intersectional identities of students of color with disabilities implicate multiple and interlocking forces of oppression that combine to impact outcomes differentially across students.

Critical Quantitative Methods

The history of quantitative methods has traditionally been linked with empiricism. Empiricism is defined as a theory that knowledge is gained through observation, particularly through observable evidence from experiments (Kuczynski, 2012). However, empiricism has a historically Eurocentric frame which privileges power bases structured in Whiteness as "objective" entities (Prescod-Weinstein, 2020). The need to integrate Critical Race Theory with quantitative methods to combat the White supremacy inherent in positivist quantitative methods led to the creation of QuantCrit (Gillborn, 2010). QuantCrit is based on five guiding principles: (1) Racism is complex and not easily articulable through quantitative methods; (2) Numbers are not neutral; (3) Categories (i.e., race) are not biologically determined; (4) Data must be informed by the experiences of historically minoritized groups; and (5) Statistical analyses can be useful to achieve social justice but are not inherently valuable (Gillborn, 2010). These guiding principles can be used to critically analyze the assumptions of quantitative research and address the

subjectivity inherent in all forms of research.

An example of the subjectivity found in quantitative methods is explanations about exclusionary discipline for students of minoritized racial groups, in which researchers come to vastly different conclusions from the same data. Some researchers consider race as a fixed, biological factor, whereas others consider race a proxy for exposure to systematic racism (Lett et al., 2022). For example, while Wright et al. (2014) concluded that racial disproportionality in school suspensions is due to differential behavior among races, Huang (2020) pointed out that considerable sample selection bias in the data set meant that race was not a meaningful predictor of suspension rates. These differences in explanation for the same phenomenon highlight that it is necessary to provide a critical eye to studies about factors associated with placement for students identified with EBD to see if similar biases exist in the way that data are interpreted vis-à-vis the positionality of the researcher.

Current Review

Examining the placement of students identified with EBD is crucial given the disproportionality within EBD identification for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students linked to systems of oppression (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Mejia & Gaither, 2018; Moreno & Segura-Herrera, 2013). The literature about predictors related to restrictiveness of placement for EBD K-12 students is diffuse and scant, and no existing review provides clarity about predictors of placement. As a result, there is a lack of understanding about changeable factors to intervene upon for restrictiveness of placement as it relates to students identified as EBD. It is essential to intervene on such factors, given the poor outcomes that are related to being identified with EBD (Bradley et al., 2008) and that are related to restrictiveness of placement (Cole et al., 2021;

Peetsma et al., 2001). Further, using QuantCrit as a framework facilitates understanding of the way that systems of oppression impact how others have measured and interpreted predictors of placement. Critiquing the literature is an opportunity to advocate for systems and policy change about how research is conducted and disseminated about student identity. Utilizing the lens of QuantCrit, this study addresses the following research question: What are the predictors associated with restrictive placement for students identified with EBD in K-12 schools?

Method

Search Strategy

The search included peer-reviewed journals and dissertations/theses published between 1997 and 2021. This date range was chosen due to changes in the definition of EBD when IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 to drop "serious" from the previous terminology of "serious emotional disturbance." Given reports that removing "serious" from state terminology may have lowered state prevalence of EBD (Knitzer et al., 1990; Tallmadge et al., 1985), this federal definitional change is noteworthy and necessitates the use of this date range. While IDEA was again reauthorized in 2004, the definition for EBD did not change. Peer-reviewed journals and dissertations/theses were included in order to maximize the relevant results found during this review. Search databases included ERIC, Education Source, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. An ancestral search was additionally conducted of references in the literature identified through the database searches.

The initial search was conducted on December 28th, 2021. There were two general strings of search terms, though the exact search terms varied by database. The full search string for each database is located in Appendix A. Depending on the database, the two components that

were identified through search strings were restrictive placements and K-12 schools. However, search terms were translated to meet the syntactic and context-based needs of different databases. For example, search databases that are education-based (i.e., Education Source, ERIC) did not contain search strings regarding K-12 schools, given that it is assumed education is the subject of the databases.

Selection and Inclusion

This study did not limit itself to any one field in its inclusion and exclusion criteria to encompass the greatest number of relevant results. Inclusion criteria consisted of the following: (a) a study published between 1997 and 2021; (b) the context of the study was a K-12 school setting; (c) the publication type of the study was peer-reviewed literature or dissertations/theses; (d) the study had placement as the dependent variable; (e) the study reported a predictor for special education placement; (f) the study disaggregated results for students identified with EBD or synonymous terms (i.e., Emotional Disturbance or ED; Serious Emotional Disturbance or SED; emotional disability; emotional impairment; behavioral disorder); (g) the study utilized a quantitative design; (h) the study was reported in English; and, (i) the study took place in the United States. The exclusion criterion for this study consisted of articles that were reviews or not empirical studies. In regard to criterion (e), it should be noted that the predictor variables found in the majority of articles did not use a longitudinal design and therefore temporal prediction rarely occurred, but studies were included if they framed their analyses as predictive.

The author screened 11,691 unique records (i.e., 10,252 peer-reviewed articles, and 1,439 dissertations/theses) via abstract and title. For the first gate of screening, studies were screened for whether they were an empirical article, in a school setting, and related to special education.

After the initial screening, 514 records remained. A second screening was conducted that was a search of the full text using inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 508 studies were excluded after the second search for reasons such as ineligible outcome (n = 316), ineligible population (n = 66), results not disaggregated for students identified with EBD (n = 63), study not located in the United States (n = 29), ineligible publication type (n = 14), placement is not a dependent variable (n = 6), ineligible year (n = 5), not quantitative (n = 4), same data set and analyses as published article (n = 2), ineligible age group (n = 2), or not published in English (n = 1). This left six articles that met inclusion and exclusion criteria. No articles were identified through an ancestral search.

Coding and synthesis

The author utilized an Excel spreadsheet in order to code categories of data for each included record. Categories included sample characteristics (gender, age, grade, race/ethnicity, percentage of low-income students, English Language Learner (ELL) status), features of the study (author, data source, publication year, publication type, sample size, sample size of students identified as EBD, school location, school urbanicity, unit of analysis, type of school, and school setting), and methodology of the study (research design and statistical analyses). Key variables such as dependent and independent variables and statistical significance were also coded. Finally, variables related to critical quantitative methods, such as the author's positionality, whether systems of oppression were identified, and the author's theoretical framework were identified and coded.

Interrater-Agreement

In order to verify all relevant records to include in the present study, one additional

graduate-level psychology student screened 10% of all the records at both the first and second stages of the selection process, coding, and quality appraisal. A codebook was developed to standardize coding (see Appendix B). The author conducted one training session for the additional rater using a coding document. The author and additional rater then screened and coded two sample articles and discussed any discrepancies in ratings until inter-rater agreement was established. Independent coding then began. After screening and coding approximately 10% of the records, the author and additional rater compared coding spreadsheets and calculated percent agreement. 90-percent agreement was attained in screening for stage one, and 92-percent agreement was obtained for stage two. 93-percent agreement was obtained for coding and 89-percent agreement was found for quality analysis. The raters met in order to discuss discrepancies in screening, coding, and quality analysis to attain 100-percent inter-rater agreement for all stages of coding and screening.

Quality Appraisal

Study quality was assessed through a modified version of the Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies (AXIS), given the high prevalence of cross-sectional designs among studies reviewed (Downes et al., 2016). This tool includes quality indices, such as appropriate study design for aims of study, clarity of statistical methods and indices of significance, and the relatedness of the study sample to the population under question. AXIS item responses were compiled into an Excel spreadsheet for each study coded, with “yes” coded as 1 and “no” coded as 0 and then summed. Through quality analysis, the rigor of each study was evaluated, which impacts the inferences that can be drawn from the present study’s results. 89-percent agreement was obtained between raters for a quality analysis of 10% of the records. Results were

interpreted in light of quality ratings.

Results

Six records were identified that met inclusion criteria for this review. A synthesis of the included records is provided. Results are summarized based on participant and study characteristics, the research question ("what are factors that predict restrictive placement for students identified with EBD in K-12 schools?"), QuantCrit, and quality analysis.

Sample Characteristics

Records reviewed included peer-reviewed journals (n = 3) and theses/dissertations (n = 3). See Table 1.1 for complete information in regard to demographic characteristics. All of the documents were published between the years 1998 and 2007. Schools were located in the United States, including in the Northeast (n = 1), West (n = 3), and Midwest (n = 2). All of the schools were public (n = 6). None of the studies reported the percentage of low-income students or English Language Learners in the school. School urbanicity was reported as metropolitan (n = 1), urban (n = 1), or not included (n = 4).

Data regarding race and ethnicity was limited, with few reports of race/ethnicity in the samples beyond White (n = 3), Black (n = 3), Latinx (n = 3), and "Other" (n = 2). Gender was often represented as a binary (percent male). Two of the included studies (i.e., Lane, 1999; O'Reilly, 2000) did not include basic demographic information about race/ethnicity, when it is an important factor to include regarding placement. Considering results through the lens of QuantCrit, race and gender were framed as immutable categories instead of heterogeneous identities constructed and informed by power and privilege. For the authors who included information about race/ethnicity, framing race/ethnicity as White, Black, and Latinx effectively

overlooked students outside these categories. Further, "Other" was commonly used in studies to denote persons who did not conform to the author's categorizations of race, homogenizing the experiences of these students. This signifies how imperative it is for researchers to thoughtfully quantify identity in research, as this affects what consumers of research consider to be factual and to whom results can be generalized.

Study Characteristics

The majority of studies examined student-level data (n = 5) and one study examined staff-level data through a vignette (n = 1). Independent variables consisted of student demographic variables (e.g., gender; n = 5), scores on tests of behavioral or emotional symptoms (n = 3), family characteristics (e.g., family composition; n = 2), school-related variables (e.g., attendance; n = 2), and teacher characteristics (e.g., classroom management skills; n = 1). Dependent variables measured placement, and were characterized by a dichotomous variable of restrictive vs. less restrictive (n = 3) or a continuum of placements varying by restrictiveness of placement (n = 3). Placement was framed as indicative of the characteristics of a group rather than as the result of a team decision-making process, which does not consider the way group decisions may be impacted by bias. For more information about specific analyses, see Table 1.2.

Data sources utilized in the studies varied; sources included were teacher ratings or choice on vignette (n = 2), service coordinator notes (n = 1), existing clinical, program, or school records (n = 2), and statewide data in a Student Information Systems database (n = 1). The interpretations about predictors of placement that can be gleaned from these data sources are not equivalent. Perspectives on a student's behavior vary based upon who is rating the student and the different settings in which the student's behavior is rated. It is also unclear who measured and

reported the data collected in student records; for example, did students self-report race and gender or were those characteristics ascribed to them? Therefore, what is known from these data are that these are characteristics that others considered students identified with EBD to have, and these perceived characteristics predict restrictive placement.

Predictors Associated with Restrictiveness of Placement and EBD

This study examined predictors of restrictiveness of placement for students identified as EBD. Significant student-level demographic predictors included gender (Meyer et al., 2007), age (Meyer et al., 2007; O'Reilly, 2000), socioeconomic status (SES; Frey, 2000), and race/ethnicity (Meyer et al., 2007; Robertson et al., 1998). Male students were predicted to be placed in more restrictive settings than female students (n = 1). Younger students were predicted to be placed in less restrictive settings than older (n = 3). SES was operationalized in a vignette as the caregiver's type of employment; identifying a student's caregivers as unemployed predicted teacher choice of student placement in a more restrictive setting (n = 1).

Results for race/ethnicity are complex. A Black race/ethnicity was found to significantly or nearly significantly predict restrictive placement (n = 2), as was a Latinx race/ethnicity (n = 1). A Caucasian race/ethnicity predicted less restrictive placements (n = 1). One study did not report race/ethnicity as a significant predictor of placement (Frey, 2000), though it should be noted that this study was based on teacher selection of student placement after reading a vignette. While vignettes have been found to have ecological validity (Krolak-Schwerdt et al., 2018), the use of self-report measures, particularly in regard to race, is vulnerable to social desirability bias (Arnold & Feldman, 1981). Vis-à-vis the first and third tenets of QuantCrit, it is instructive to note that there is no information about how the authors operationalized the socially-constructed

categories of Black, Latinx, and Caucasian, or the racism experienced by persons ascribed to these categories.

An additional student-level predictor reported was scores on emotional/behavioral assessments (Lane, 1999; McTaggart, 2005; Robertson et al., 1998). Authors made the assumption that severity of symptoms of EBD are one of the main determinants of placement. Two of the included records reported that elevated scores on behavioral assessments (i.e., CAFAS, DSDM, TRF) predicted more restrictive placements, while two studies found a non-significant result for behavioral assessments predicting placement (i.e., CBCL, DT/CEP). If these assessments are valid measures of the emotional symptomology of EBD, lack of prediction or inconsistent prediction indicates that students identified with EBD are put in restrictive placements for reasons other than having severe emotional or behavioral symptoms.

Student-level factors such as lower rates of attendance (n = 1) and documented instances of running away from home (n = 1) were also found to be predictive of more restrictive placements. Reasons why authors used attendance and running away from home in an analysis of restrictive placement are unclear. Prior experience with the juvenile justice system (n = 1) and the presence of substance use (n = 1) specifically predicted the more restrictive setting of a juvenile justice educational placement. While both of these variables are relevant to include in models regarding juvenile justice placement, the choice of variables focuses on student deficits as the main determinants of placement.

Family-level predictors found to be significant were reported family history of mental illness (Robertson et al., 1998) and family composition (McTaggart, 2005), with the presence of a family history of mental illness predicting placement in less restrictive settings. In terms of

family composition, students living with a relative and students living in foster care were predicted to be in less restrictive settings than students living with a biological parent. Significant staff-level predictors included teachers' self-rated effectiveness with classroom-management and teacher beliefs regarding how external factors impact student outcomes, with higher self-rated classroom-management skills predicting teacher choice of a less restrictive placement (Frey, 2002). The self-rated belief that teachers can influence the outcomes of students regardless of uncontrollable outside factors predicted teacher choice of a more restrictive placement. While Frey (2002) emphasized the centrality of staff-related vs. student-related factors in his model, he did not include additional predictors salient to placement such as staff race/ethnicity or staff years of education.

Quantitative Critical Methods

Additional variables coded included those related to tenets of quantitative critical methods, such as whether an author described their positionality, identified systems of oppression, and linked their analyses to theoretical frameworks. None of the records acknowledged the author's positionality or grounded their work in theoretical frameworks. Six of the six records acknowledged the limitations of the quantitative methods used in their study. However, the authors discussed the limitations of the quantitative methods used in their paper rather than critiquing quantitative methods as a genre. For example, Frey (2002) referenced self-selection bias and Lane (1999) articulated that measures utilized were not intended to predict placement. While these are important limitations to articulate, they do not critique quantitative methods or address the way that quantitative methods, like all forms of research, are inherently subjective. This is not consistent with tenets of QuantCrit indicating the importance of

acknowledging that numbers are not neutral and statistical analyses are limited.

Further, with no acknowledgement of intersectionality across articles, it cannot be assumed that one monolithic aspect of a student's identity fully or even partially describes their experience. A nuanced analysis of intersectional identities might uncover the differential effect of multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. For example, Robertson et al. (1998) analyzed a plurality of demographic predictors (e.g., race, age) but did not consider them in tandem with one another. Adding the interaction of race by age would have allowed for greater understanding; for instance, it's possible that being Latinx and in high school predicted restrictive placement but being Latinx and in elementary school did not. In addition, the framing of the population in the study (race as Black, White, or Latinx) did not include a thorough spectrum of identity.

Finally, systems of oppression were identified in two out of six articles and consisted of racial overrepresentation in special education (Frey, 2002; Meyer, 2007). However, authors were not always able to articulate the effects of racism through methods used (i.e., Quant Crit tenet 1). Meyer (2007) referenced racial overrepresentation as related to the cultural competence of staff but did not indicate the impacts of sociopolitical systems in her analyses. While Frey (2002) gestures at findings of overrepresentation in the literature, the statement that "children of color may not be discriminated against when other factors are considered" overreaches based on findings (p. 134). Such interpretations indicate that it is important for authors to interpret results bounded within the purview of their study rather than overgeneralizing results. Analyzing factors identified in the author's study through a critical theory lens would allow authors to interpret the *why* behind factors related to placement in light of larger social constructs.

Quality Analysis

The AXIS tool was utilized to assess the quality of the studies included in this systematic review (see Table 1.3). Attributes analyzed included the clarity of the aims/objectives of the study, appropriateness of study design, adequate description of basic data, and whether the authors' conclusions were justified by the results. The mean quality rating across the seven included studies/reports was 13.67 with a range of 11-16. The studies with the highest quality ratings were Frey (2002) and McTaggart (2005), whereas the study with the lowest quality rating was O'Reilly (2000). Areas of strength across studies included justification of sample size, the appropriateness of the sample in representing the population, and discussion of the limitations of results. In comparison, areas of weakness were whether statistical methods and methods for determining significance were well-described, conflicts of interest reported, and the internal consistency of measures made known. It should be noted that the studies included in this review lacked rigor, with no studies reporting effect size and one study reporting limited data on analyses (i.e., no *p* values or statistics).

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to systematically review the empirical literature about predictors of restrictive placement for students identified with EBD in K-12 schools, utilizing the lens of quantitative critical methods. Overall, results indicate the presence of multiple levels of predictors for the restrictive placement of students identified as EBD, including student-, staff-, and family-level predictors. Significant student-level predictors were gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Individuals with a male gender, an older student age, and a Black or Latinx race/ethnicity were predicted to be placed in more restrictive settings than a female

gender, a younger age, and a White race/ethnicity.

This finding is consistent with research indicating an association between a Black race/ethnicity (e.g., Crofford et al., 2013; Garcia Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Skiba et al., 2006; White et al., 2019), a Latinx race/ethnicity (Garcia Fierros & Conroy, 2002), older student age (Gonzalez, 2003), a male gender (Gonzalez, 2003), and restrictive placement under the EBD label. However, it is important to consider that the way that the authors operationalized variables oversimplifies reality by homogenizing identity into two or three discrete categories. Another way to understand results is considering predictors as proxies for experiences of oppression. In other words, students who experienced racial oppression due to being ascribed a Black or Latinx race were predicted to have more restrictive placements. This reframing emphasizes the impact of systems of oppression on students ascribed with certain identities and avoids a deficit lens indicating that identity markers in themselves are predictive of placement.

Teachers predicted more restrictive placements for students whose parents were represented as unemployed in a vignette. Symptomology of EBD (as measured by rating scales) was found to predict placement inconsistently. This indicates that factors outside of the severity of a student's EBD predicted placement. Factors found to be predictive of restrictive placement at a staff-level consisted of low staff self-rated effectiveness at classroom management and the self-rated belief that student outcomes can be impacted despite external factors. Students who had a reported family history of mental illness were predicted to be in less restrictive settings, whereas those living with biological parents rather than foster parents or relatives were predicted to be in more restrictive settings. These results should be interpreted with caution when considering that family systems in these analyses are framed as isolated entities that are not

impacted by ecological systems and bodies of power and privilege.

Utilizing a quantitative critical lens centers the considerable limitations of this body of literature, including a lack of acknowledgement of positionality, theoretical frameworks, intersectionality, and systems of oppression. Scientific fact and empiricism, the basis of quantitative methods, are socially constructed and impacted by an author's identity (Prescod-Weinstein, 2020). In other words, numbers are not neutral (i.e., QuantCrit tenet 2), and critical analysis of the articles reviewed indicates places in which authors' choice of variables and definitions impacted findings. For example, Frey (2002)'s conceptualization of race/ethnicity as either African-American or Caucasian overlooks a considerable number of racial/ethnic identities and highlights the importance of informing research design vis-à-vis critical theory. None of the articles were informed by the experiences of minoritized groups (i.e., tenet 4 of QuantCrit); rather, these perspectives were represented numerically and without consideration of their appropriateness, impact, and usefulness to the groups discussed.

Limitations

This systematic review is not without limitations. Since states across the U.S. do not use the same definition or terminology for EBD, it is possible that the results of this study would not be generalizable to every student identified with an emotional or behavioral disorder in the U.S. Further, it is important to acknowledge that EBD is a social construct that is vaguely defined and poorly understood, again affecting to whom we can generalize results. An additional limitation is that it is possible that studies were missed with this systematic review if potential search terms were missed. The author worked with an information science professional to identify all relevant terms, but this does not guarantee that all terms were identified.

The scarcity of articles in the literature denoting predictors of restrictive placement for students identified with EBD is a further limitation of this review. Since a relatively small number of studies were identified, results should be interpreted with caution. Additional limitations are methodological weaknesses in the body of literature. One of the studies indicated the statistical significance of their data but did not include statistics or *p* values denoting significance; odds ratios had to be calculated by hand to make meaning from their data. Only one study utilized a longitudinal design that reflected a temporal relationship between predictors and placement. However, the results from this study did not differ in substantial ways from the other studies included in the review.

Implications for Research

Future research in this area might look at additional predictors of restrictiveness of placement for students identified with EBD using longitudinal designs. In several studies, discriminant functions utilizing the independent variables in studies were barely above chance at correctly categorizing students (e.g., 53% correct placement of students in Roberts et. al [1998] and 53.5% in Lane [1999]). In addition, it was noted as a limitation that an author's independent variables only accounted for a small amount of variance (Meyer et al., 2007). This suggests that there are other important predictors beyond student-level characteristics for placement in restrictive settings. Teacher characteristics would seem to be implicated, as indicated by Frey (2002); it would also be interesting to examine school- and macrosystem-level variables to see if these predict placement. In short, placement is an immensely complex topic of which the current literature does not provide more than the beginning of an understanding.

In addition, quantitative researchers would benefit from incorporating a QuantCrit lens in

their research. While QuantCrit has been used in special education (Cruz et al., 2021), postsecondary education (Duran et al., 2020), and chemistry (Van Dusen et al., 2022) research, it does not yet have widespread use in the literature. Utilizing the lens of QuantCrit, researchers might acknowledge their positionality, the social construction of race and gender, and the primacy of systemic oppression to qualify their results. A QuantCrit lens also has implications for the extant published literature because of the positivist, "objective" epistemological focus of quantitative studies (Al-Ababneh, 2020). While the replication of studies is considered integral to the scientific method and the body of scientific research (Simons, 2014), many psychological studies have not been replicated or (re)considered through the lens of critical theory (Ferguson, 2015). Rather than thinking that the data "speak for themselves," researchers must deconstruct the assumptions underlying data (Crawford et al., 2018).

Implications for Practice

This review indicates that having a Black or Latinx race/ethnicity, a male gender, and an older student age are predictive of a more restrictive placement for EBD. The fact that race/ethnicity, gender, and age predict placement points to the subjectivity of special education processes for EBD. The definition of LRE is broad enough that there is little guidance about discerning placement for individual students beyond the spirit of the law, which is that individuals with the most severe disabilities should be in restrictive placements (Crockett, 2000). In practice, LRE becomes a de facto form of segregation when students from minoritized backgrounds are placed in separate settings. This is not in line with the spirit of IDEA, which states that students should be in the least restrictive environment that the severity of their disability allows (IDEA, 2004). There is a need for greater clarity about LRE in federal policy to

mitigate the potential for bias in placement decisions.

Further, multiple levels of educational systems are involved in special education identification and placement–indicating the need for dynamic, widespread solutions. Since staff biases are thought to be involved with special education disproportionality, scholars regularly recommend cultural competence training on a school- and district-level (Maydosx, 2014). This training should consider all systems of oppression that may be at work in the educational system, including ageism, racism, and sexism. Staff involved in the special education process should also receive training in the importance of informing parents, particularly parents who may have language barriers, about IDEA safeguards to address differential access to information across families (Morgan, 2020). In addition, there is a need for school and district leadership to prioritize equity in the school setting for staff and students through a critical examination of school and district policies.

Insufficient guidance at the state- and national-level about reducing racial disproportionality in identification and placement gestures at the importance of policy change. IDEA was amended in 1997 and again in 2004 to include requirements for states to monitor and address racial disproportionality in special education identification, placement, and school discipline (Skiba, 2013). However, scholars suggest that state Local Education Agencies have interpreted language about "inappropriate identification" to obscure disproportionality existing in data (Albrecht et al., 2012). Although additional language about what constitutes significant disproportionality was added to IDEA in 2016, the language remains ambiguous (Sullivan & Osher, 2019). Changing the language in IDEA to clarify significant disproportionality, as well as ensuring fidelity to guidelines, facilitates actual change in disproportionate practices rather than

"change" to appease federal regulations.

Conclusion of Study One

Through legal doctrine in IDEA (2004), the special education system in the U.S. is founded on the premise that students with disabilities have equal opportunities in education. However, racial disproportionality in special education identification (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Wiley et al., 2013) and this study's findings challenge the assumption that the education system provides an equal playing field for all. Through special education labels such as EBD, students from minoritized groups are marginalized, and special education has and continues to be a means of de facto segregation for students with minoritized identities (Annamma et al., 2013a; Erevelles, 2005). This de facto segregation affirms Whiteness and ability as property values which carry considerable economic weight that is denied to those deemed 'Other', maintaining the status quo (Annamma et al., 2013b). Thus, the most important aspect of systems change in education is addressing White supremacist assumptions to deconstruct how students are defined, identified, and placed in special education, as well as how student behaviors are quantified. Working towards equity for students considered "Other" requires nothing less.

Chapter 3: Constructions of Behavior in Functional Behavioral Assessments: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Evidence suggests that exposure to racism is associated with Black or Latinx students identified with EBD, especially boys, being placed in restrictive educational settings (Gonzalez, 2003; Robertson et al., 1998; Skiba et al., 2006). While harmful behaviors are considered the most common reason why students are escalated into restrictive settings (Hoge et al., 2014), perceptions of behaviors of students identified as EBD are subjective and prone to bias (Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021). During special education identification for EBD, MN law mandates that school staff complete a Functional Behavioral Analysis in which target behaviors are identified (Minnesota Administrative Rule, 2023). However, policy is broad and may open the door for staff biases to enter the FBA process (Sadeh & Sullivan, 2017). Therefore, the first aim of this study is to utilize CDA to investigate the social context of district-, state- and national-level policy guidance regarding the FBA process and the way it may be informed by systems of oppression. Within the frame of this guidance, the second aim is to examine staff discourses regarding student behavior in FBAs for K-12 students identified as EBD who are moved to restrictive settings. Specifically, I am utilizing the lens of CDA to examine how discourses may contain coded language associated with intersecting systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism.

Placement, Intersectional Identities, and EBD

The principle of LRE in IDEA states that students must be educated in general education unless their disability is severe enough that this cannot be accomplished with supplementary supports (IDEA, 2004). Although case law serves as a guide and in certain circuits as a binding

precedent for placement decisions, the definition of LRE is broad enough that states, districts, provide a continuum of placements from least to most restrictive environments, with general education as the least restrictive and separate schools, hospitals/institutions, or homebound as the most restrictive placements (IDEA, 2004). In theory, LRE ensures the equitable assignment of students to educational settings based on need, and the severity of disabilities is the determining factor.

However, factors outside the severity of disability have been found to be associated with students identified as EBD being placed in a more restrictive educational setting. Exposure to racism and sexism are linked to placement as EBD in more restrictive settings for Black students, Latinx students, and boys (Gonzalez, 2003; Meyer et al., 2007; Skiba et al,. 2006). Crucially, the intractability of restrictive placements serves as functional, albeit unnamed, segregation (Beratan, 2006). It is important to consider multiple facets of identity rather than a single, unitary factor when analyzing the impact of systems of oppression. In doing so, intersectionality, a framework regarding the interconnectedness of social identities, becomes salient (Bowleg, 2012).

The term "intersectionality" was termed by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the impact of multiple systems of oppression on individuals from minoritized backgrounds, particularly Black women. Broadly, intersectionality as a concept is linked to systems of power which serve to create, constrain, and facilitate which identities are available to an individual (Overstreet et al., 2020). Macro-level factors such as systems of oppression impact societal understanding of individual-level variables such as race, ability, sexuality, gender, and other socially-constructed vectors that are commonly understood to differentiate individuals (Gilmore & Bettis, 2021). As

such, intersectionality is a question of intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression and privilege more than the intersection of individual identity markers, though considering individual identity markers can be salient within the context of larger systems (Aguayo-Romero, 2021).

Therefore, it is reductive to think of intersectionality as simply a combination of societally-ascribed demographic characteristics that are not influenced by other factors or levels of influence. Rather, intersectionality is informed by ecological or environmental variables that impact identity formation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is important to account for factors involving the child's microsystem when considering intersectionality; for example, how do facets of the microsystem such as teacher demographics impact how students experience the race/identity ascribed to them? However, it is also crucial to consider the impact of more distal environments (i.e., exosystems) such as school and district policies, teacher training curriculum and programs, and policy guidance about special education evaluations. Ultimately, intersectional identities are informed by historical, legal, political, educational, economic, and sociocultural systems that serve to privilege certain identities over others (Hernández Saca et al., 2018).

One facet of intersectionality is the intersection of racism and ableism. Artiles (2013) articulates a racialization of disability, in which the construction of disability has involved deficit narratives justifying discrimination against racially-minoritized groups. The racialization of disability can also be understood through the theoretical framework of DisCrit, of which Subini Annamma is a main theorist. DisCrit emphasizes the interdependent, socially-constructed nature of race and disability (Annamma et al., 2013b). Racism and ableism intersect to define what is considered to be normal behavior and what is pathologized (Annamma et al., 2013b). Disability and race are co-constituted, with White, able-bodied individuals defined as the norm opposite

racially-minoritized groups and individuals with disabilities, who are pathologized as deviant and "Other" (Annamma et al., 2013a; Artiles, 2013). The framework of DisCrit can be used to deconstruct race and disability as well as question hegemonic assumptions of normalcy that impact how student behavior is quantified and defined. For example, tenets of DisCrit such as materiality and historicity can be used to understand EBD identification and placement as fraught, subjective processes (Sullivan et al., 2021). Materiality emphasizes how the consequences of being identified as EBD differ based on the racial/ethnic identities ascribed to an individual, and historicity relates to how the label of EBD has been used presently and in the past to justify oppression (Sullivan et al., 2021). In short, historicity has been the mechanism through which disproportionate identification and placement (i.e., materiality) has denied students from minoritized identities their basic rights. Special education is thus implicated as a system of oppression which is positioned to remediate "deficits" within an individual but instead operates as a form of structural exclusion that perpetuates oppression (Artiles, 2013).

Crucially, the disproportionate placement of Black and Latinx students impacts academic and social-emotional outcomes. Data suggest that students with disabilities in inclusive settings have more developed social skills due to having more opportunities to communicate with a wider social network and peer group (McDonnell et al., 2002). Similarly, students with disabilities who have the opportunity to participate in inclusive settings show more growth in academic subjects such as reading and math (Cole et al., 2004; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). In short, students' placement in restrictive settings is associated with poorer social-emotional and academic outcomes in comparison to students in inclusive settings (Cole et al., 2021; Peetsma et al., 2001). Inappropriate placement into restrictive settings is thus an issue of social justice implicating

multiple processes within educational systems, operating differentially across and among axes of student identity, and potentially degrading student outcomes.

Staff Positionality, Perceptions, and Bias

The main rationale for placing students in restrictive settings is the perception that student behaviors are extreme or disruptive enough that students cannot be educated in a general education setting (Hoge et al., 2014). However, perceptions are subjective, and considerable staff biases exist about students with EBD, who are considered the least welcome group of students in the classroom (Shapiro et al., 2016). These biases are especially marked for teachers regarding students from minoritized backgrounds (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). The ambiguity in policy documents regarding identification and placement increases the potential for staff to rely on cognitive heuristics or biases to make decisions (Watkins, 2009). This may impact group decision-making processes for special education identification, of which the literature notes a lack of adherence to IDEA criteria (Harris et al., 2015).

Further, teacher demographics are a factor that potentially affects how the behaviors of students from minoritized groups are interpreted in the classroom. A primarily White teaching force serves a diverse student body, and schools whose students are mostly from minoritized racial identities paradoxically have more White teachers (NCES, 2020). This contributes to what has been coined a "White female culture of schools" (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Historically, White female teachers have been positioned as rehabilitating "ignorant" students of color by teaching them Christianity (Beecher, 1846). The echoes of this notion remain, with White women positioned as "saviors" of students of color, maintaining White supremacist notions of education as a homogenizing, civilizing force (Leonardo & Boas, 2013). This may engender a

culture of White fragility in which the behaviors of Black students, especially males, are perceived as hostile (Harry & Anderson, 1994). This aligns with research regarding antiblackness and the adultification of Black children (Gilmore & Bettis, 2021). Black children are positioned as deviant and considered older and more adult than they are, "perceived as innocent only until deemed suspicious" (Goff et al., 2014, p. 541). Denied the innocence of childhood allotted to those considered White, Black children are not allowed to make mistakes without consequence.

The adultification of Black children may affect the way that teachers view the behaviors of students from minoritized backgrounds. For example, the implicit biases of teachers have been found to be associated with monitoring the problem behavior of students from racially minoritized backgrounds in high frequency (Gilliam et al., 2016). It is logical that monitoring the behavior of students more closely would result in seeing and punishing more behaviors; in addition, this ties to the assertion that Black childhoods are shaped by surveillance and subsequent discipline (Dumas & Ross, 2016). In a similar vein, Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2019) found that teachers were more likely to expect additional behavioral incidents from Black students vs. White students in a vignette. Finally, educators' implicit biases have been found to be predictive of choosing to give Black students more disciplinary consequences and special education referrals than White students in a vignette (Xie, 2015). It is thus critical to examine staff perceptions of student behavior for the presence of biases that may impact student placement and outcomes.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a means of interrogating existing bodies of power and

privilege through language. In this way, CDA combines critical social analysis with the study of language, particularly of how discourse is used as a tool of power and oppression (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough, who is one of the main theorists of CDA, framed CDA as explaining rather than describing social realities, to get at the "why" of inequity through critical analysis of mechanisms underlying systems of oppression such as discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Social realities are reflexive in that they both create and are created by how others experience and interpret the world. In other words, analyzing social realities through discourse is instructive because discourse constitutes our experience of reality as well as reflects the realities of those creating it. For example, Lai and Vadeboncoeur (2012) utilized CDA to examine the discourse of caregiver involvement in policy documents. Their findings indicated that the discourse of caregiver involvement contained in these documents represented caregivers in limited ways (i.e., over-involved vs. under-involved), which impacted the degree to which parents could be involved in their child's education.

Through CDA, I aim to target master narratives about disability, race, gender, and sexuality in student FBAs and national-, state-, and district-level documents that guide how to implement policy. Master narratives are defined as "culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors"; compulsory, rigid, ubiquitous, and invisible, they contain narratives about identity that hold structural power in society (McLean & Syed, 2015, p. 323). Policy guidance documents were chosen as one unit of analysis because of their impact on public and staff understanding of legal responsibilities; the choice of language in guidance documents makes them more accessible to and utilized by audiences in comparison to documents containing legal jargon (Lewis et al., 2019). Further, the stated intent of these documents is to facilitate

transparent communication, efficiency, and fairness, which necessitates further examination of whether this intent is realized (United States Department of Justice, 2022). Meanwhile, using student documents as another data source indicates how this policy guidance was understood and instantiated in practice. Utilization of both data for the presence of discourses indicative of systems of oppression is critical to understand how staff might avoid perpetuating harmful narratives about race, ability, sexuality, and gender in special education.

Present Study

Exposure to racism and sexism is associated with placement in more restrictive settings for students identified with EBD who are Black or Latinx and male (Gonzalez, 2003; Robertson et al., 1998; Skiba et al., 2006). While it is understood that staff biases influence perceptions of students of color (Gilmore & Bettis, 2021), a gap in the literature exists regarding how these biases are codified within student FBAs. FBAs examine student behaviors perceived as challenging in the school environment, and their inclusion is mandated in evaluations for EBD through MN law (Minnesota Administrative Rule, 2023). There is also a lack of consensus for the FBA process, with numerous guidance documents existing yet no clear, standardized process encoded in law. Legal ambiguity is an opportunity for bias to enter decision-making because it necessitates the use of clinical judgment in uncertain situations, which may be subject to heuristics and biases (Sadeh & Sullivan, 2017; Watkins, 2009). As such, it is also instructive to examine discourses contained within policy guidance about FBAs to examine how these documents reflect and create the social context regarding the FBA process. These documents, in conjunction with student FBAs, are ideal to textually analyze utilizing CDA, a framework that examines language as a type of social practice indicative of bodies of power and privilege

(Fairclough, 2013). My research questions for this study are the following:

1. What can discourses contained in national-, state-, and district-level policy guidance reveal about the social context and bodies of power and privilege that may inform the Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) process?
2. How do discourses about race, ability, gender, and sexuality manifest in Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) included in special education evaluations for students identified with Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD) moved to federal setting IV schools?

Method

Analytical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis is a heterogeneous approach to analyzing discourse; numerous ways of conducting CDA that draw from multiple disciplines and researchers exist (Ulinnuha et al., 2013). The approach outlined by Fairclough (1992) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) utilized in this paper draws upon constructivist structuralism. Constructivist structuralism is a dialectical theory that posits that language is instantiated by structures but also is part of processes which structure reality (Chouliaraki, & Fairclough, 1999). While texts draw upon existing social structures, they are "located in specific and potentially new ways in social life" that can lead to socially-driven changes in these structures (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 141). In short, social structures and discourse shape, constrain, and ultimately construct one another. Fairclough (1992) defines discourse both on a textual level but also as how language is used for social and ideological purposes. Discourse can be understood as semiotic representations of the social; in other words, discourse includes written, spoken, nonverbal, or even visual communication (e.g., films).

CDA includes three domains: Discourse-as-text, discourse-as-discursive-practice, and discourse-as-social-practice (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse-as-text can be described as the concrete, linguistic dimensions of discourse that include lexical cohesion, grammar, and narrative structure (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). An example of analyzing discourse-as-text is looking at how verb forms (i.e., passive vs. active) affect how readers interpret agency within discourse. Discourse-as-discursive-practice centers on the function of discourse as something that is "produced, circulated, distributed, [and] consumed in society" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). In other words, discourse-as-discursive-practice relates to how discourse functions as a product of society; for example, analyses of intertextuality (texts directly or indirectly drawn upon; Fairclough, 1992) reveal how other texts are utilized to create communal meaning. Discourse-as-social-practice is the way that discourse operates as a type of hegemony, which is defined vis-á-vis Marxist theoretician Gramsci as domination through the manufactured consent of subordinate groups (Fairclough, 1992). Analyzing text through discourse-as-social practice entails focus on the way that social context, particularly identity, is constructed and maintained through discourse; for example, how do discourses of race and identity influence the text?

In addition to these lenses inherent in Fairclough's iteration of CDA, my research was informed by DisCrit. DisCrit is an offshoot of Critical Race Theory that emphasizes how race and ability are socially constructed and mutually constitutive: race and ability do not exist but have been defined and utilized in tandem to justify discrimination (Annamma et al., 2013a; Annamma et al., 2013b). Through this lens, I examined the ways in which oppression is multifaceted and manifests differentially based on systems of oppression which ascribe social identities to an individual, particularly in terms of identities relating to ability, gender, and race.

Data Collection and Analysis

I utilized sources from policy guidance documents at the state- and national-level regarding the use of FBAs, district guidance about FBA implementation, and student records of FBAs. In this study, policy guidance documents were defined as texts released by governmental bodies to provide advice to the public regarding "how an agency understands, and is likely to apply, binding statutes and regulations" (United States Department of Justice, 2022, para. 2). Policy documents "lack the force and effect of law" (United States Department of Education, 2023, para. 15) and their definition does not include legislative rules, statutes, regulations, rulings, or administrative actions (United States Department of Justice, 2022). Rather, policy guidance documents "collect related statutes, regulations, and other requirements in a single place" (United States Department of Justice, 2022). Examples of policy documents include letters regarding the implementation of IDEA, memos, and governmental reports or documents providing guidance on special education procedures required by law (e.g., due process).

Theoretical sampling was utilized for state- and national-level policy guidance documents, consistent with CDA methodology (Mullet, 2018). To ensure a breadth of relevant documents, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) website was searched for state policy guidance documents and the United States Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) policy guidance database for national documents. Search terms for both databases were "FBA" and "functional behavioral assessment." The search occurred on October 16, 2023, and the first 5 pages of results of each search were reviewed. Selected documents were published between 2004 and 2023, with the rationale that IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. Additional inclusion criteria involved that documents were framed within the text or on the government website as guidance

documents regarding policy. Documents that engaged with the topic of FBA incidentally (i.e., for no more than one to two sentences or mentioned as part of a list but not defined or engaged with) were excluded. Due to theoretical sampling, sources cited within the texts that qualified as guidance documents from OSEP or MDE were additionally sampled until saturation occurred (Low, 2019).

Additionally, district-level documents guiding district policy for the FBA process were requested from school psychologist contacts at the home districts of students in the FBAs analyzed. The researcher requested documentation about FBA definitions or guidelines, different components of FBA, procedural information about FBA, or other FBA guidance documents. Templates were not included, given the focus on guidance documents rather than exemplars of FBA for the national-, state-, and district-levels of analysis. Information was requested via email on three occasions over three months. Five of the six home districts sent documents to the researcher. Of the five districts, four provided usable guidance documents for the study (i.e., documents that were about aspects of FBA but were not templates) that were then analyzed by the researcher. The last data source consisted of FBAs of move-in special education evaluations of students at a federal setting IV school district in the state of Minnesota. 20 student FBAs were requested and data analysis continued until saturation occurred, in light of guidance regarding minimum sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although 20 documents were requested, the school district provided six documents from six different home districts due to feasibility constraints.

When applicable, state-, district-, and national-level policy guidance documents were coded for author, publication year, publication type, unit of analysis, title of document, content

headings, and aspects of FBA examined. Although the concept of CDA described by Fairclough (1992) was utilized as a main framework for this manuscript, a breadth of concepts related to critical discourse analysis were coded in order to facilitate theoretical triangulation among different analytic approaches. For example, Halliday's (1994) theory of transitivity and process types guided how the author analyzed agency within verb forms for discourse-as-text. For research question one, when applicable, policy documents were coded for aspects of discourse-as-text (lexical cohesion, transitivity) discourse-as-discursive-practice (intertextuality, interdiscursivity) and discourse-as-social-practice (social context, identity).

Student FBAs were coded for the following information, when available and explicitly defined: Student gender, student race/ethnicity, student age, student number of years in special education, staff job title, staff gender, and staff education level. In addition, FBAs were coded in light of the Technical Adequacy Tool for Evaluation (TATE), a measure addressing the comprehensiveness of included FBA components, and assigned a quality rating (Iovannone et al., 2017). Policy documents were coded for author, publication year, publication type, unit of analysis, title of document, content headings, and aspects of FBA examined. Given the nature of student data (i.e., no sources cited), student FBAs for research question two were not coded for intertextuality. For definitions of these concepts, reference the codebook in Appendix D.

Peer debriefing with two advanced doctoral students served as a facilitator of the credibility of findings, as well as theoretical triangulation utilizing multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Peer debriefers were individuals familiar with research regarding EBD, placement, and systems of oppression who provided critique about methods and interpretations. A peer debriefing session occurred after the completion of an initial draft of the results and discussion. I

also engaged in reflexivity throughout the paper to reflect about how my own biases, perspectives, and experiences informed my interpretation of data.

Role of the Researcher

The positionality of an author impacts how research is presented and interpreted; it is thus integral to articulate positionality in order to understand the experiential, epistemological, and ontological assumptions a researcher brings to their work (Holmes, 2020). I am a White, upper middle-class, cisgender woman of European descent who does not identify as having a disability. I have a Master's degree in English literature, in which my research focused on constructions of race, sexuality, and gender in 20th century American literature. I have worked in the U.S. education system as a school psychology practicum student in a variety of settings, which include a federal setting IV school and federal setting III center within a school. As a school psychologist, I primarily work with students with disabilities and have taken specialized coursework regarding students identified as EBD. Due to my experiences, I am passionate about achieving equitable outcomes for students identified with EBD placed in restrictive settings. My experiences and opinions are embodied in my work and informed by my privilege. Overall, I aim to understand the way that White supremacy, heterosexism, ability, and sexism intersect to oppress students while acknowledging that I am only able to speak in light of my own positionality within this nexus of intersectional identities.

Results

I used a deductive codebook (see Appendix D) to conduct critical discourse analysis of national-, state-, district-, and student-level data. This deductive codebook was based on research and literature regarding critical discourse analysis, especially Fairclough (1992), and included

dimensions such as discourse-as-text, discourse-as-discursive-practice, and discourse-as-social-practice. Coding of deidentified documents occurred in Google Docs, with each separate text having its own file. After completing coding for texts at each level of analysis (e.g., district, state), I inputted the data into NVivo for each level of analysis. I then began an iterative process of developing themes in NVivo using information coded from the deductive codebook, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and finalizing themes. This is consistent with best practices in thematic analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Results are summarized based on the research questions.

Research Question One

Research question one analyzed how discourses in national-, state-, and district-level policy guidance are related to the social context of educational spaces and bodies of power and privilege implicated in the FBA process. Background information about basic qualities of the documents is recorded in addition to thematic analysis of documents among the levels of discourse-as-text, discourse-as-discursive-practice, and discourse-as-social-practice.

Background Information

Data about the author/publisher, title, publication date, level of guidance, content headings, document description, whether the document was a section or full text, length of text analyzed, and aspects of FBA were coded for state-, national-, and district-level policy guidance (see Table 2.1). All of the national-level documents were published by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), while the state-level documents were published by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). National documents were published between 2007 and 2013, whereas state documents were published between 2011 and 2021. In terms of content headings,

the four national documents were in letter format (i.e., header, greeting, body paragraphs, signature), and the four state documents were formatted as either question-and-answer documents with cited authorities or as reports with a heading and descriptive text. All of the national documents were full documents; three of the four state documents were sections of a larger document, and one of the four was a full document. While national documents ranged from 625 to 1896 words, state documents were shorter, ranging from 291 to 736 words. Aspects of FBA that were coded at the national level varied, with one of four documents looking at solely the purpose of FBA, one of four documents looking solely at the procedures for completing an FBA, and two of four documents looking at a combination of purpose, procedural, and/or content information. State-level documents also varied, with two of four documents looking at procedural information only, and two of four documents looking at a combination of purpose, procedural, and/or content information.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted separately for national-, state-, and district-level documents before I derived common themes among these different levels of guidance regarding the social context of educational bodies of power and privilege providing guidance about FBA. These higher-level themes emerged if each level of analysis (i.e., national, state, district) had one or more types of evidence (i.e., discourse-as-text, discourse-as-discursive-practice, discourse-as-social-practice) to support a given theme. Themes gleaned from national-, state-, and district-level documents included institutionalized power, inconsistent guidance for staff, ambiguous student agency in FBA, intersection of race and class, and color-blind racism.

Institutionalized Power. National- and state-level data evoke the theme of

institutionalized power, which is an example of discourse-as-social-practice that reflects social context. This is substantiated from discourse-as-text (i.e., lexical cohesion), discourse-as-discursive-practice (i.e., intertextuality), and discourse-as-social-practice evidence regarding identity. The theme of institutionalized power refers to the way that documents utilize formalized language and jargon, make grammatical choices, and draw upon other sources to bolster their importance and build a sense of expert authority. These choices allocate power in the hands of the authors of the documents, which consist of institutions such as OSEP and MDE, rather than potential readers.

Evidence regarding lexical cohesion consists of the repetition of jargon and overly formalized lexical choices. In the state and national data sets, the MDE reports and OSEP letters utilize jargon associated with special education such as "manifestation of a disability," "function of the behavior," "disciplinary removal," "reinforce the problem behavior," "maintain the problem behavior," and "interim alternative setting." Sources also mention "functional behavior assessment" without always defining what it means. Exemplars of formalized language within the documents are "constitute legal advice," "complete rendition of applicable federal and state law," "determining the nature and extent of a student's need for special education," "our responses are provided as informal guidance and are not legally binding," "impeding his or her learning or that of others," and "you ask to which interpretation your school district should give deference." The combination of jargon and formalized language serve as markers of expertise that point to the privileged intellectual position of institutions in the documents as sources of expert knowledge.

Intertextuality evidence also indicates that the authors are eliciting a sense of authority

through the use of citations. State and national data sets have a high number of citations; on average, the state-level documents have seven citations to national or state-level legal guidance documents, whereas national-level documents have an average of 18 citations to legal guidance documents. Examples of citations are Minnesota statutes, IDEA, the Code of Federal Regulations, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, various OSEP letters, and reports about the implementation of IDEA. Since all of the citations are related to governmental regulating bodies or policy, each citation invokes authority through its association with power. Together, this evidence exemplifies Bucholtz and Hall (2004)'s principle of authorization and illegitimation in identity formation. This principle centers on how authority can be created through utilization of linguistic markers of expertise that are associated with structural power. In this case, the jargon used is indicative of IDEA as well as ideologies of behavior management (Levy et al., 2022); in combination with citations to institutional bodies of power, this creates an identity of authority for OSEP and MDE.

It is also notable that district documents evoke a theme of institutionalized power, albeit to less of a degree than state and national documents. District documents have no citations, in comparison to the numerous citations to authoritative sources in state and national documents. However, there are two instances of quotes from authoritative documents in the district data. These quotes are from MDE and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). MDE is a state organization which releases legally-binding policies, meaning that this quote is linked to institutional power. Similarly, linking to the NASP competency domains implies that the content that is being covered is important or authoritative, given that NASP is the governing body of school psychologists and school psychologists were the audience of this particular

district-level document.

In addition, evidence from lexical cohesion of jargon and formal language link to institutional authority in the district documents. Examples of formal language in the four district documents include "utilized," "conducted," "conclude," and "ultimately," as well as sentences such as "various errors can occur if the team isn't able to use a convergence of data to identify patterns." Meanwhile, behavioral jargon in the four district documents consists of "function," "reinforcement," "antecedent," "PBSP," and "IEP." This formal language and jargon obscures the meaning of texts and limits its accessibility to staff, while bolstering the authoritative identity of the school district.

Finally, the district documents contain language related to the concept of evidence-based practices (EBPs). EBPs can be defined as practices in schools that are supported by empirical research; they are utilized with the goal of obtaining the "best available evidence for decision-making" about students (Kratochwill, 2007; Li et al., 2019, p. 1). Narratives about EBPs evoke institutionalized power by emphasizing that only certain types of knowledge are considered the "best" – in this case, knowledge associated with academia and empirical research. As such, EBPs are associated with White empiricism, the settler colonial epistemology that knowledge is based on what is observable, quantifiable, and measurable by those with expert knowledge (Prescod-Weinstein, 2020). This allocates power in the hands of those who have had the access and capital to learn practices which are considered evidence-based by institutions of knowledge-based power such as universities and colleges.

Repeated words indicative of EBPs in the district documents include "effective," "implementation," "data," "objective," "fidelity," "evidence," "outcomes," and "measure." For

example, district documents note to “ensure that interventions and strategies are evidence/research based” and to “determine what (if any) training will need to occur for the intervention to be implemented with fidelity.” The way that districts have selected and utilized language in these documents emphasizes the importance of research-based interventions and practices that are consistent with scientific principles of consistency such as fidelity. As such, drawing on discourses related to EBPs is another way for districts to associate themselves with power and authority.

Inconsistent Guidance for Staff. The theme of *inconsistent guidance for staff* relates mainly to state and national documents but also includes district guidance. Regarding national guidance, one of the main functions of OSEP is to communicate its policies and priorities for educating students with disabilities to interested constituencies (e.g., parents, organizations, school systems; OSERS, 2023a). It accomplishes this, partly, through responding to letters written to OSEP to achieve consensus on how OSEP’s policies should be implemented. Tellingly, OSEP considers parents and schools their customers and employs customer service representatives to answer questions (OSERS, 2023b). Similarly, a main function of MDE is to communicate statewide policies relevant to education, and one of its guiding principles is to do so in collaboration with school leaders and the community (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). As such, both bodies of power and privilege have an interest in achieving cohesion among the documents that they release in order to prevent confusion in messaging to reduce the need for further documentation.

However, evidence from discourse-as-discursive-practice (i.e., intertextuality) indicates that the OSEP documents lack cohesion in content and citations. Intertextuality evidence for both

state and national documents show that numerous sources are cited but there is little consistency among sources beyond that all of the documents cite IDEA. For example, three documents about FBA that were released within the period of one year (i.e., OSEP, 2007; OSEP, 2008a; OSEP, 2008b) cite six unique OSEP letters and documents despite having similar topical foci. This suggests, at best, redundancy among OSEP documents and, at worst, the potential for conflicting narratives that obfuscate OSEP's message. Indeed, the focus of OSEP (2007) is clarifying differing messages among OSEP documents in response to contradictions in OSEP's policies. The fact that OSEP needs to release additional documents to clarify the point of previous documents implies that cohesion is not being achieved.

Evidence from discourse-as-text also indicates a lack of content cohesion among state documents. Specific topics in which a lack of content cohesion is implicated include the definition of FBA. MDE (2018) defines FBA as a way of understanding student behavior that involves problem behaviors, antecedents, setting events, functions, alternative behaviors, and a hypothesis. Meanwhile, MDE (2012) explains that FBA is meant to gather information for IEP teams to develop positive behavioral supports. While these definitions do not contradict one another, neither do they indicate the same purpose for FBA; rather, one focus is on the behavioral management components of FBA and the other is on how an FBA is linked to behavioral support through an IEP team. This is potentially confusing to a reader who does not have prior knowledge of FBA, positive behavioral supports, or jargon associated with behavior management; it is also confusing to staff looking for a consistent definition of what an FBA is and who is implicated in decisions about FBA.

Content cohesion across state and national documents is also in question. An example is

the discrepancy between MDE (2021), a state document, and OSEP (2007), a national document. MDE (2021) states that an FBA is not necessarily considered an evaluation but rather can be conducted as a stand-alone process, while OSEP (2007)'s position is that any FBA is considered an individual evaluation unless it is conducted for an entire school. While this is due to new policy, existing documents are not amended to reflect this change, leading to inconsistency among documents. This lack of content cohesion among state and national documents does not lend itself to clarity in staff interpretations about FBA definitions and procedures.

Finally, district documents vary widely in both content and format, with guidance that is at times incompatible with other district documents. For example, while one district mentions that it's important to avoid subjective terms such as appropriate, another district highlights appropriate as a main modifying term for behavior. The district documents are unpublished documents associated with different school districts and therefore do not have the same assumption of cohesion as published guidance by the same agency. However, the idea of content cohesion remains relevant, given that (in theory) all FBA guidance is compliant with national and state regulations and would contain similar information. This points to the fact that state- and national-level documents would benefit from more specificity in their guidance to ensure that district documents are more coherent among different school districts.

Further complicating this potential confusion for staff, additional evidence from discourse-as-text (i.e., transitivity) in the national, state, and district documents indicates a lack of clarity regarding which team members are responsible for completing an FBA. The way this is often seen in the documents is through the usage of lexical choices that obscure who is completing an action and nominalizations. For example, the following statements lack a clear

subject who is completing the FBA: “it would be atypical…for progress to be assessed through conducting an FBA,” and “that an FBA conducted subsequent to the initial evaluation was a reevaluation.” In regard to nominalizations, representing verbs such as “implement,” “evaluate,” and “collect” as nouns like “implementation,” “evaluation,” and “data collection” obscures who is responsible for the action. Particularly for high-stakes decisions such as evaluating or assessing a student, information about *who* is completing an action as well as their qualifications for the relevant task is needed to establish credibility.

Also of note is that none of the documents define who should conduct the FBA but rather that it should be someone “appropriately and adequately prepared,” which does not give sufficient detail about what this preparation looks like. This creates ambiguity for the FBA process as well as further diffusing responsibility about who is in charge of or accountable for the document, beyond the school or district itself. This may create confusion at a school- or district-level about which staff members are required to or have the qualifications to complete an FBA, potentially impacting the quality of FBAs. There is a need for more direct guidance about what the FBA process entails, staff qualifications for completing FBA, and staff roles in the FBA process.

Ambiguous Student Agency in FBA. The theme of *ambiguous student agency in FBA* indicates a contradiction about student agency, in which most documents represent the student as passive but some give students a more active (or perhaps culpable) role. This theme is supported from data from discourse-as-text (i.e., transitivity). Lack of agency for students is established in national and state documents by a tendency for the student to be placed as the object of prepositional phrases or the entity being acted upon rather than one with subjecthood. For

example, regarding the usage of child/student as the object of prepositional phrases, we see "intervention plan for a child," "evaluation of an individual child," "behavior needs of the student," "what happened to a child," and "services for children with disabilities." As the object of a prepositional phrase, the child/student is not in control of their own destiny; rather, something is being acted on in relationship to them without their input or necessarily even knowledge.

Meanwhile, the student/child is frequently acted on in national and state documents with clauses such as "a student is removed," "a student is placed," "child whose placement is changed," and "to evaluate an individual child." In other sentences, a student is not directly acted upon but is otherwise helped to complete an action; for example, "to enable the student to continue to participate in activities" or "to enable the child to make the measurable annual goals set out in the IEP." In these examples, the student is either not the one completing an action or not able to complete the action on their own, indicating, at least linguistically, a lack of control or subjecthood. This is telling of the way that students are not involved in the process of FBA but rather have their behavior represented through staff narratives in which staff objectivity may be in question.

District documents are contradictory in how they depict student agency, with students represented as both passive objects of behavior and active subjects of behavior. Half of the district documents show passivity in student agency, either by placing students as the objects of prepositional phrases (i.e., recipients of actions) or representing them with primarily relational clauses. Relational clauses ascribe qualities to a student or show the relationship between a student and object. Examples of clauses in which the student is placed as an object include

"conducting a comprehensive evaluation of a student," "complete FBAs for students with behavioral needs," and "conduct a comprehensive evaluation of a parent or guardian's student." In these clauses, students are passive because they are not in control of the action taking place. Examples of relational clauses in the district documents are various iterations of the statement that "the student has an FBA/PSP." This allocates agency away from the student by representing the student through associations with the FBA/PSP rather than as someone in control of their own thoughts or actions.

The other half of district documents represent the student primarily using material process types (i.e., action verbs) in which they are the subject (i.e., person completing the action). Examples include "the student engages in loud verbal refusal," "the student starts engaging in self-injurious behavior," and "the student gains access to [a] preferred activity." This combination of material process types with subjectivity indicates that the author considers students responsible for and in control of their behavior. This is a departure from the passive way in which students are represented in the remainder of the state, national, and district documents. While this depiction allows students more agency, it also may indicate a tendency towards conferring culpability upon the student. In other words, it may be a way of stigmatizing the student for behaviors by assuming the "problem" related to behavior is within the student without taking into account the influence of outside factors. This lack of consistency in how student agency is represented among documents encapsulates the theme of ambiguity regarding student agency in FBA guidance documents.

Intersection of Race and Class. The intersection of race and class is implicated in national, state, and district documents as a type of social context indicative of

discourse-as-social-practice. The way that race and class intersect is through White, middle-class norms, which can be understood through the lens of abstract liberalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Abstract liberalism is defined as ideas associated with political and economic liberalism such as equal opportunity and individual rights (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Similarly, key tenets of White, middle-class society include individualism, objectivity, conventionality, and productivity (Gray, 2019; Jones & Okun, 2001; Reay, 2008). Rather than merely representing middle-class values, these tenets are associated with Whiteness due to modern racial ideologies which combine "The American Creed" with internalized racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). As such, middle-class values are weaponized to justify racism against minoritized groups in a coded manner in which racism is not explicitly endorsed – implicating intersectional oppression related to the combination of racial and class identities.

Individualism can be defined as an emphasis on individual achievement, autonomy, choice, and self-interest (Jones & Okun, 2021; Yu et al., 2022). Repeated words (i.e., lexical cohesion evidence) indicative of individualism in the national, state, and district data sets are "individual," "take," "gain," "preferred," "choice," "best," and "control." These words are reflective of choice, competition, self-control, and self-interest. Objectivity vis-à-vis White middle-class norms can be understood as endorsing a worldview that objectivity exists, linear thinking and logic are objective, and subjective emotions are not valuable (Jones & Okun, 2001). Lexical cohesion evidence indicates that the three data sets repeat words associated with objectivity such as "hypothesis," "data," report," "academic," "knowledge," "information," "observation," and "consistent." By evoking objectivity, these words emphasize empiricism and the scientific method in that an individual gains knowledge (e.g., data, information) through

observation after making a hypothesis, with methods in place to ensure reliability or consistency.

Conventionality in the context of White, middle-class norms can be defined as internalized social norms about what is considered acceptable behavior by society (Crowe, 2000; Heckert & Heckert, 2004). Conventionality is indicated in the documents through the repetition of lexical choices such as "appropriate," "typical," "expectations," "other," "problem behavior," and "standard." These words all relate to social norms about what is considered normal, acceptable behavior, as well as consequences for deviating from the norm (i.e., being considered other). Finally, productivity is defined as an emphasis on the efficiency of production inputs (e.g., the labor involved with school) to produce or complete outputs (e.g., student grades; test scores) in a given time frame (International Labour Organization, 2020). Discourses about productivity in the documents are elicited through the repetition of words such as "work," "successful," "progress," "completing," "results," "effectiveness," and "efficiency." These words are all about stages of work, outputs of work, and ways to assess the productivity of work being completed.

This lexical cohesion evidence represents the intersection of racial and class identities in national, state, and district documents as the construct of White, middle-class norms. White, middle-class norms are a social context (i.e., discourse-as-social-practice) created by discourse-as-text (i.e., lexical cohesion), with definitions, processes and procedures about FBA in guidance documents steeped in language that privileges knowledge and practices related to Whiteness. That this discourse is contained in documents at every level of guidance indicates the pervasiveness of White supremacy in documents meant to train or guide staff about FBA. The prevailing ideology surrounding FBA is that it is intended to manage the behavior of individual

students (i.e., individuality) who are perceived as different from the norm (i.e., conventionality) utilizing evidence-based practices steeped in empirical science (i.e., objectivity) to maximize student success in school academically and social-emotionally to prepare them to be citizens (i.e., productivity). In short, FBA guidance documents epitomize White, middle class norms.

Color-Blind Racism. Although the documents contain coded discourses related to White, middle-class norms, there are no explicit discussions of race and racism in district, state, or national documents. This evokes the theme of *color-blind racism* in the documents. This theme is an example of discourse-as-social-practice that reflects social context. A lack of discussion of race and racism is consistent with the ideology of color-blind racism, as described by Bonilla-Silva (2021) as an articulation of neutrality about race ("I don't see race"). Race neutrality is a false equivalency that everyone is the same and race doesn't matter. It obscures and minimizes the impact of institutionalized racism on the experiences of individuals from minoritized groups because it falsely assumes that racism is not present or relevant. As part of colorblindness, individuals erase explicitly racialized words from their vocabulary and speech to avoid engaging with the topic of race (Marcucci & Elmesky, 2022). This allows them to seem neutral or even progressive about race while reproducing systems of power and privilege related to white supremacy (Annamma et al., 2017).

Policy documents about special education processes such as FBA necessitate an engagement with race, given the disproportionate identification of students from minoritized groups in special education (Cruz & Rodl, 2018). Further, given the positionality of school staff as largely White women (NCES, 2020), some of whom likely ascribe to color-evasive or color-blind ideologies, potential readers also would benefit from an awareness that race and

racism impact the FBA process. These policy documents, however, are largely intended to serve the interests of the bodies of power and privilege which release them, interests which likely do not include antiracism as institutions representing law, order, and tradition. Given my positionality, engagement with these topics is crucial to avoid reproducing Whiteness as the unmarked norm in hierarchical opposition to the "other," and further to advocate to include race and other aspects of intersectional identities in discussions of special education policy.

Research Question Two

Research question two centered on how discourses about race, ability, gender, and sexuality manifest in the move-in FBAs of special education evaluations for students identified as EBD escalated to federal setting IV schools. Demographic data and data about technical adequacy from the TATE are detailed below, followed by a thematic analysis of deductively-coded CDA data.

Demographic Data

Demographic data for students and staff involved in the move-in FBAs analyzed (n = 6) is available in Table 2.2. The sample was primarily male (n = 4) and student race, when reported, included White (n = 1), Black (n = 1), and mixed race (n = 1). Most of the students were enrolled in elementary school (n = 4) and had spent six years (n = 3) or zero years (i.e., initial evaluation; n = 2) in special education. Information provided about staff was scant. The titles of staff completing the FBAs, when provided, were special education teacher (n = 1), school psychologist, (n = 1), or a team of a school psychologist, special education teacher, and board-certified behavior analyst (n = 1). Staff degrees were rarely reported, with limited information suggesting staff had Master's degrees (n = 2), and staff gender was never reported.

TATE Quality Analysis

The TATE quality appraisal tool for FBAs was utilized to determine the rigor of the FBAs reviewed and is available in Table 2.3. The nine questions on the TATE that were about FBA were scored, with items about the quality of operational definitions, baseline data, antecedents, consequences, function of behavior, etc. Components were scored 0-2, with 0 as not addressed, 1 as partially addressed, and 2 as completely addressed. The maximum score an FBA could reach was 18. The mean quality score of analyzed FBAs was 9, with a range from 5 to 16. The median quality score was 8. Items about the extent to which the FBA detailed when the selected behavior was least likely to occur, setting events, and the linkage of the function to research and other FBA data were rated lowest. Items about the operational definition of behaviors, antecedent events, and hypothesis statements were rated highest.

Thematic Analysis

I conducted thematic analysis of coded data in the student FBAs, with a particular interest in how discourses about race, ability, sexuality, and gender manifest in the documents. Themes derived from the data largely focused on student identity, with themes about race and class (*i.e., FBA as assimilation to White, middle-class norms*), ability (i.e., *disability as a within-person deficit*), and race and gender (i.e., *race, gender, & language implying criminality*). The final theme centered on issues of power and privilege surrounding the positionality of school staff in comparison to students (i.e., *authority of school staff and student culpability*). Of note is that no themes surrounding sexuality were identified in the texts, which is potentially related to the small number of FBAs that were received from the partner district (n = 6).

FBA as Assimilation to White, Middle-Class Norms. The theme *FBA as assimilation to*

White, middle-class norms is an example of discourse-as-social practice that is substantiated through discourse-as-text (i.e., lexical cohesion) evidence. This theme builds on findings from research question one that district, national, and state documents contain discourses implicating the intersection of racial and class oppression through the presence of White, middle-class norms. The proliferation of lexical cohesion evidence about White, middle-class norms in student FBAs in combination with language about behavior management indicates that FBAs may serve as a way to instill compliance in students to White, middle-class norms.

White, middle-class norms can be defined through their association with the constructs of conventionality, individualism, productivity, and objectivity (Gray, 2019; Jones & Okun, 2001; Reay, 2008). Conventionality refers to perceived appropriate or acceptable behaviors which are considered normative (Crowe, 2000; Heckert & Heckert, 2004). Norms about conventionality are evoked through words in the student FBAs such as "appropriate," "inappropriate," "typical," "expectations," "respectful," "disrespectful," "other," and "different." These words can be divided into two subcategories of conventionality: Expectations about normality (i.e., typical, other, different) and conventions describing un/acceptable behavior (i.e., appropriate, inappropriate, respectful, disrespectful).

The idea of conventionality in FBAs is often associated with a subjective violation of social norms and tends to be racialized. Language in the FBAs about a violation of social norms includes "loud," "disrespect/disrespectful," "disruptive," "defiance/defiant," "non-compliant," and "breaking rules." Further, when describing the operationalized behavior of verbal disruption/inappropriate vocalization, an FBA notes that: "This includes vocalizations that are too loud, that are not appropriate for the educational environment, or that exceed the social

norms for age/environment." Loud is a racialized term that has been used to describe spaces that deviate from White, middle-class norms about propriety (Marcucci & Elmesky, 2022). Similarly, appropriate is a subjectively-defined term that differs based on cultural norms, context, and expectations; as such, the word appropriate has been found to be culturally biased and to defer to White, middle-class norms (Weems, 2004; Yu et al., 2022). Further, the assertion that a behavior "exceeds the social norms" is vague and, again, subjectively-defined; there is no predetermined authority that has defined what exceeds social norms. Rather, the reader is supposed to be able to figure this out, which opens the door for biases about race and other intersectional identities to manifest. Given the primarily White teaching force and increasingly diverse student body, this is consistent with research about how cultural mismatch potentially impacts educator perceptions of student behavior (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; NCES, 2020).

Individualism and productivity, vis-à-vis White, middle-class norms, are both related to neo-liberal principles that emphasize the importance of personal achievement over the collective good and occupational success as a part of identity (Taylor-Gooby & Leach, 2018). Productivity also relates to the efficiency of work inputs to produce occupational success; it is reflective of the myth of American meritocracy or that the more that you work and the more work outputs you create, the more success you will achieve (Liu, 2011). In the student FBAs, individualism is reflected in words such as "self-control" or "self-regulation," "wants," "desired," "earn," "take," "gain," "control," "performance," "preferred," "choice," and "expectations." These words relate to individualism through their association with agency (i.e., control, take, self-control, self-regulation, gain), individual achievement (i.e., performance, earn), self-interested goals (i.e., wants, desired) and choice (i.e.., preferred, choice). As such, through lexical cohesion, the FBAs

evoke the ideology of individualism and related concepts.

Words that evoke productivity in the student FBAs include “work,” “tasks,” “successful,” “performance,” “results,” “progress,” “off-task,” “on-task,” “complete,” and “effective.” Specifically, these words emphasize production inputs (work, tasks), task efficiency (successful, effective, on-task, off-task), and finishing a task (complete, results, progress). This implicates capitalistic notions of the student becoming a worker who fulfills ideals of productivity to contribute to the interests of those in power in the nation-state. In this way, the focus is on the student and their work as capital that will benefit others rather than on the act of learning being important for itself or the student’s interests.

Discourses related to individualism and productivity can serve as instruments of oppression in educational environments. For example, educators may blame individuals from minoritized backgrounds who experience disproportionate suspensions and expulsions through a rhetoric of individual choice rather than looking at contextual factors such as the presence of stereotypes and biases against students (Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018). Similarly, a focus on individual achievement or productivity can underlie deficit discourses about academically “at-risk” students from minoritized backgrounds which do not acknowledge systemic racism and inequitable resource allocation as crucially impacting academics. Further, a focus on self-control does not acknowledge the fact that students come to educational spaces with different experiences, including disability and neurodiversity, which can impact their ability to meet expectations for behavioral norms and standards.

Objectivity relates to the understanding that knowledge is gained through observable, quantifiable phenomena that are (in theory) perceived similarly among people (Jones & Okun,

2001). Objectivity in the student FBAs is implicated with words such as “hypothesis,” “data,” “report,” “academic,” “knowledge,” “information,” and “observation.” These words indicate scientific objectivity (i.e., hypothesis, data, information, observation, academic) or the outputs of linear thinking (i.e., information, knowledge, report).

An emphasis on objectivity is a way to invalidate the experiences of those who do not cohere to assumptions of Western empiricism, such as individuals from minoritized groups such as Indigenous communities. This links to the finding in research question one about ambiguous student agency in national, state, and district policy guidance documents; denying students agency in the FBA process because their perceptions of their own experiences are not shared by staff (and are therefore not considered objective) is a way of invalidating student experiences. In contrast, staff have the autonomy to choose how to textually represent student experiences and support their articulation of student experiences with the authority of evidence-based practices and advanced degrees.

Furthermore, objectivity also links to the rhetoric of behavior management through the ideology of behaviorism, which emphasizes observable processes and the subsequent manipulation of behaviors to achieve change. The use of operational definitions of observable behaviors may seem to confer consistency among observers. However, the objectivity of behavioral observations is a myth, given that the way that individuals perceive behaviors varies (Taylor et al., 2024). Rather, this theme can be understood as an educator influencing a student to comply with (subjective) written and unwritten social norms in response to the educator’s (subjective) perceptions of the student’s behavior.

Both behaviorism and behavior management center on observable behaviors that are

changed through patterns of conditioning (Staddon, 2021). Language in the FBAs linked to these principles includes ordering a student to complete an action (direct, instruction, demand, reminder, prompt, cue, correction), manipulating behavior through reinforcement (motivator, incentive, reinforce, reward), compliance to school norms (non-compliant, off-task, on-task, rules, problem behavior, refusal, expectations), choice (preferred or non-preferred, want, desired), power and dominance (control, restraint, authority, consequence), and motivations underlying a behavior (gain, get, escape, attention, obtain, ignore). Repetition of these words serves to emphasize the importance of behavioral management in the process of conducting and writing FBAs.

Note that the principles of behavior management are related to the manipulation of student behavior that is perceived to be undesirable in the school environment. Many of the words are meant to direct or otherwise control student behavior through items or behaviors that the student would find reinforcing. Depending on the motivation for this behavior management, it is debatable whether manipulating student behavior serves the interests of students more than staff (Toshalis, 2015). Rather, behavior management appears to be a tool utilized in schools to achieve conformity and compliance to rules in the classroom for the benefit of school staff in achieving an "orderly" school environment (Bleakley & Bleakley, 2018; Voulgarides et al., 2021).

The subjectivity of the words invoking compliance to school norms is notable. For example, what does it mean to be non-compliant, what makes something a problem behavior, how are on-task vs. off-task behaviors defined, and what does refusal look like? Any of these words might be defined differently across people and situations. The only objectively-defined

word on this list is rules, if it's referring to written, codified school rules. However, the existence of unwritten rules and expectations about student behavior lends subjectivity to the concept of rules, as well as considerations that the way that an individual person may interpret rules varies. Overall, the existence of subjectivity in words related to compliance lends evidence to the point that "behavior management" is a tool rooted in the subjectivity of staff and may not indicate a "problem" within the student or the behavior but rather a staff member's internalization of White, middle-class norms.

Taken together, evidence related to conventionality, individualism, productivity, and objectivity indicates substantial repetition of language about different aspects of White, middle-class norms in the student FBAs. Inclusion of this language, particularly language about objectivity that links to behavior management, serves to legitimize the domination of the educational system as a tool of compliance to White supremacist notions of acceptable and appropriate behavior. School staff are the "objective" arbiters of White neutrality and educational power, in direct opposition to students who deviate from norms of conventionality and productivity - for example, students who are disabled or from minoritized backgrounds. In turn, this legitimation of White, middle-class norms can be understood in conversation with additional themes found in the documents about disability portrayed as a deficit; race, gender, and language implying criminality; and the authority of school staff & student culpability.

Disability as a Within-Person Deficit. The theme *disability as a within-person deficit* can be understood as indicative of social context through discourse-as-social-practice. It is informed by discourse-as-text evidence and identity evidence from discourse-as-social-practice. This theme is linked to the medical model of disability, which conceptualizes disability as a

within-person phenomenon that is a deviation from normality; in other words, disability is a disease to be diagnosed and treated (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). The medical model uses deficit framing by focusing on the disability as a problem to be solved within the individual. Rather than seeing disability as a potential source of strength, the medical model portrays disability as a limitation to overcome.

This theme can also be understood vis-à-vis a historicized lens as drapetomania. Drapetomania was a socially-constructed slave "disease" created by the medical community in the 1850s pathologizing enslaved people as "crazy" (Tripathi et al., 2019). Enslaved people would receive "treatments" to cure their drapetomania that included corporal punishment; in other words, the medical construction of drapetomania served as an excuse to punish slaves and exert control. Similarly, the medical model of disability functions in a deficit manner to pathologize individuals from being different from perceived White, middle-class norms. This pathologization serves to separate students as different and label them as "special education" students who need intervention, which consists of pulling students out of classes or placing them in separate classes where they receive additional or alternate instruction and school services. While these services have the capacity to help students, racial disproportionality in special education identification and placement (e.g., Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Hosp & Reschly, 2002) implies a similar theme that special education can serve as a form of punishment for racially minoritized students.

One way this theme is evoked in the student FBAs is through the repetition of words such as "capable" or "able," "needs," "problem," "diagnosis," "treatment," "intervention," "reduce" or "reduction," and "corrective" or "correction." "Able" can be defined as "having a quality or nature that makes something possible" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As such, ability is located

within the person (i.e., in their *nature*); as its opposite, disability is also located within the person, consistent with the medical model of disability. "Needs" also evokes the medical model of disability by framing qualities of disability as a biological or within-person necessity rather than as influenced by systemic factors. "Problem" and "diagnosis" both link to the idea of disability as a problem to be fixed (or "reduced") through "treatment," "correction," or "intervention." These words lend a deficit interpretation to disability as defined by its limitations and need to be cured.

The principle of adequation and distinction is implicated in identity formation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Adequation and distinction are about conditions of sameness and difference related to identity, or in other words, claiming an identity based on its similarity or discrepancy from another. The idea of disability is defined in opposition with ability as the "other" to the assumption of unmarkedness, of normality, that is associated with able-bodiedness. With discourses such as the medical model of disability that focus on the limitations of disability rather than potential strengths, this sense of "othering" becomes naturalized as it relates to disability. Disability becomes a deficiency, something that needs to be treated and cured within the individual. Therefore, the focus of FBAs as a means to make progress towards remediating behaviors associated with disability are by definition associated with the deficit focus of the medical model of disability, especially when associated with vocabulary that implies a need to be fixed.

Race, Gender, & Language Implying Criminality. Lastly, the theme *race, gender, and language implying criminality* is evident in the student FBAs and reflects social context evidence from discourse-as-social-practice. Given ideologies of color-blind racism, coded language is

utilized as a way to evade direct confrontation with race (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Although race was only incidentally mentioned (i.e., mentioned one time in four of six FBAs) and racism was never explicitly mentioned, each of the six FBAs utilized coded language that has been identified in the research literature as indicative of potential racial biases about student behavior. Gender was more explicitly mentioned in the FBAs, with four of the six FBAs coded as male and two of the six coded as female based on pronouns. Similar to how words can be racially coded, certain words are implicitly associated with gender stereotypes. For example, words such as aggressive, competitive, forceful, decisive, assertive, and confident are typically associated with stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy (Gaucher et al., 2011).

The intersectionality of racial and gendered oppression is implicated based on language in the student FBAs. Language that implies criminality or the potential for violence from students includes words such as "aggressive/aggression," "angry," "power struggle," "intimidating/intimidate," "confrontational," "forceful," and "threat/threatening." All of these words are associated with racially coded language and stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity (Gaucher et al., 2011; Little & Tolbert, 2018; Robinson-Perez, 2021). Social repercussions for performing hegemonic masculinity vary depending on positionality, with the presence of hegemonic masculinity potentially associated with leadership for White men (Gaucher et al., 2011; Wesley, 2015). However, when these adjectives are applied to Black men and boys, they evoke stereotypes of the bestial Black man, which have been used to justify anything from disproportionate exclusionary discipline to violence against minoritized groups (Dumas, 2016; Duru, 2004). Further, the presence of these coded words associated with racism and sexism in student FBAs is consistent with findings in study one that a Black race and male gender

predicted more restrictive placements – implicating intersectional oppression based on race, gender, and ability.

Examining these words on a sentence-level provides additional insights about how these words are tied to ideation about race and gender. In one FBA in which a male student is racialized as Black, staff write that "[the student] approached them repeatedly in an apparent attempt to start a power struggle. [The student] hid under tables and became aggressive towards staff when he did not get his way." While behavioral observations are meant to describe only what can be seen, the intent to start a power struggle - an internal process - is ascribed to this student. Since this is not observable, it is something that has been "filled in" by the staff with seemingly negative bias to assume the student wants to start a power struggle. Further, the next sentence–in which the staff member describes the "aggressive" student–is highly subjective. What does the staff member mean by aggressive? This is a racially-charged term that may not accurately describe the student's behavior. The staff member also details how the student is upset that "he did not get his way," which again is providing a negative interpretation of an internal process which is not observable, implicating the potential for staff bias.

It is also crucial to address the stereotype of the angry Black woman and how that might be present in the student FBAs (Jones & Norwood, 2017). While Black girls and women are not subject to stereotypes about hegemonic masculinity, they are instead subject to stereotypes of femininity such as nurturance and submission that align with White, middle-class norms (Annamma et al., 2019; Gaucher et al., 2011). Black girls experience over-surveillance from educational staff, making them likely to experience punishment for deviating from White, middle-class norms (Annamma et al., 2019). This is exemplified in a student FBA in which a girl

who is racialized as mixed race by staff is represented as a "forceful" and "aggressive" student who "intimidates to obtain or maintain adult attention." She is complimented for sometimes being able to communicate what she wants in a "positive" way (i.e., consistent with White, middle-class norms). Thus, different stereotypes of gender inform the experiences of Black girls in schools but still entail intersectional oppression based on racism and sexism that is linked to notions of aggression and criminality.

In short, the inclusion of language that is racially coded is a way of conferring an identity of criminality upon students based on race and gender. This is consistent with research about the adultification of Black students in which students from minoritized backgrounds are over-surveilled and punished for perceived behavioral infractions by staff who are looking for these behaviors to occur (Gilliam et al., 2016). This ascription of criminality can also be linked to Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) processes of adequation and distinction. In adequation and distinction, identity is created through the perceived differences between a group considered the norm and a group considered "other" that is typically a false equivalency. For example, in this case, the group considered normative–White students–is defined as moral and law-abiding because of the racist ascription of traits of criminality upon Black students. Defining students from minoritized backgrounds through their ascribed criminality is a way of "othering" them and conferring an aura of unknowability that they are "not like us" and therefore not worthy of the same empathy and care school staff might show other students. This links to the White, middle-class norms as a way to achieve compliance from students with overly punitive practices for those who deviate from what is considered acceptable or appropriate behavior.

Authority of School Staff and Student Culpability. Evidence for the theme *authority of*

school staff and student culpability is based on CDA findings from discourse-as-text (i.e., lexical cohesion) and discourse-as-social-practice (i.e., identity). This theme can be defined as the elevation of staff voices as the authority about student experiences and the primary voice interpreting these experiences. While caregiver perspectives are sometimes included, their interviews are portrayed through the author's perspective. Student voice is only included in one of the FBAs, and again, consists of words paraphrased from interviews. Language involved in identity formation, as understood vis-à-vis Bucholtz and Hall (2004), helps staff establish an identity of authority through the FBAs. Identity formation can include a process of authorization and illegitimation in which the author claims an expert identity by utilizing language of the state.

The process of authorization and illegitimation is exemplified in the six student FBAs through language of the state such as jargon and formal language. Jargon profilterates the documents, with words such as "function," "antecedent," "setting event," "target behavior," "reinforcement," "maintaining behavior," and even "functional behavioral assessment" lacking definition or defined using more jargon. While this language may be familiar to staff who know the language of behavioral management, it is not accessible to caregivers or students viewing the document, highlighting the power differential between the author and potential readers. In addition, the language included in the FBAs is at times overly formal and legalistic. One FBA notes that intervention was "not sufficient to mitigate a referral" and proposes an "evaluation of proposed restrictive procedures and contraindications." Additional formalized language such as "summative," "scholars," "stimuli" and "variables" also appear in the documents.

In using this formalized language, the author is invoking expert authority as an educated professional in schools. Identity categories imposed on others are often related to the author's

identity; through the author, the reader is understood by the author as a passive recipient of the author's expert knowledge (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). By establishing expert knowledge over the FBA, the author is also manifesting authority over the student and parent experiences contained in the text. As such, the staff author is perceived to have more power over student experiences than student and caregiver readers, which has the potential to establish an inequitable power differential at meetings where staff, caregivers, and potentially the student discuss the student's evaluation.

This theme is bolstered by transitivity evidence gathered by examining the process types of verbs associated with different groups of people (i.e., student of concern, staff, other students) and the subject/object position of these groups. For all six FBAs, the majority of verbs are material processes types (i.e., action verbs: "leaves," "started," "help") for students; the second-most prevalent process types are relational process types (i.e., verbs of being or attributing a quality to something: "is," "has," "was"). Five of the six FBAs also had a majority of material process types for staff, with mental process types (i.e., verbs of thinking, perceiving, or feeling: "needs," "want," "feels") as the second-most utilized.

Given that observations of students focus on behavior that is observable (i.e., actions), the prevalence of material processes for students is not surprising, nor is the prevalence of material processes for staff that are observed in the narrative. Crucially, the next-most prevalent process type is relational for students (i.e., in 4 out of 6 FBAs) and mental for staff (i.e., in 3 out of 6 FBAs). This could indicate that students have more of a tendency to have qualities or emotions ascribed to them (e.g., "he is social," "he is funny," "she is regulated," "he is upset,"), whereas staff are in charge of the narrative by directly having thoughts, feelings, and emotions (e.g.,

"we'd like," "staff identified," "the teacher ascertained"). In other words, staff control their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions; at the same time, they ascribe their own interpretations of students' emotional experiences onto students without student verification. This might reflect the power differential between staff and students in how students are represented by staff commonly as containing certain qualities or experiencing emotions which staff define for them.

In addition, it is worth exploring the subject/object positions of students and staff in the FBAs. Students are in the subject position (i.e., person doing the action) for the majority of sentences for all six FBAs. Staff are primarily in the subject position for five out of six FBAs and in the object position (i.e., person receiving the action) in one out of six FBAs. The primacy of subject positions for staff and students might reflect that staff writers of FBAs consider both parties responsible for controlling student behavior: Students as the individual arbiters of decisions about their own behavior and staff as guides that direct students towards what they consider compliant behavior.

However, this is reductive of outside influences on student behavior and does not consider that the way that students are represented through FBA, albeit through material clauses showing subjectivity, is defined and codified by the staff completing the FBA. In short, staff may be completing FBA to indicate that students are culpable for their own behavior without including student voice about whether this is the case. This indicates a lack of control and agency for students in how they are represented despite them being represented as agentic through grammatical devices, which links to findings in research question one about how student agency is represented as either culpable or passive in guidance documents. Findings from both research question one and two indicate that depictions of student agency in student FBA and FBA

guidance documents might invoke deficit judgments about student behaviors from staff. These judgments are particularly salient in relation to White, middle-class norms about objectivity and appropriateness, with staff defining what they consider to be the behavioral norm through their own "objective" senses, perceptions, and attitudes.

Discussion

Major findings differed for research questions one and two but were complementary to one another. For research question one, major themes identified included: Institutionalized power; inconsistent guidance for staff; ambiguous student agency in FBA; intersection of race and class; and color-blind racism. The themes derived for research question two were: FBA as assimilation to White, middle-class norms; disability as a within-person deficit; race, gender, and language implying criminality; and authority of school staff and student culpability. Together, these themes establish the narratives present within national-, state-, and district-level policy documents as well as student FBAs. By illuminating ideologies informing and being informed by the relationship among texts, processes, and social conditions, these narratives are reflective of discourse-as-social-practice (Fairclough, 2001).

Themes for Research Questions One & Two

A common theme between research question one and two is the prevalence of White, middle-class norms in policy guidance documents and student FBAs. This is shown in language in the FBAs and policy documents that is reflective of White, middle-class norms such as individualism, objectivity, conventionality, and productivity (Gray, 2019; Jones & Okun, 2001; Reay, 2008). These norms inform the way that educational staff use behavior management as a method of compliance. Behavior management is a tool of control for children who have

behaviors that are perceived as inappropriate or disruptive by staff, which penalizes students who do not act in ways that are considered conventional by staff. A discourse of objectivity is also associated with behavior management in the assumption that staff positionality does not impact how staff perceive student behaviors. In this way, behavior management can be considered a tool that supports White, middle-class ideologies.

Another common theme between research question one and two involves color-blind racism and the presence of coded language implying student deficits. An absence of discussion of race in educational policy and practice for research question one is consistent with previous findings in the literature. For example, a critical discourse analysis of the speech-language educational sciences Standards of Practice found color-blind ideologies about professionalism within these documents (Yu et al., 2022). Similarly, color-blind or color-evasive ideologies may be implicated in organizational bodies such as MDE, OSEP, and school districts, given hegemonies existing in power structures that privilege Whiteness. Discussions of race and racism are also largely absent from the student FBAs for research question two but are linguistically coded in combination with gender stereotypes to imply student criminality. Findings are in alignment with words identified in the literature as associated with racial and gender stereotypes such as: *Aggressive* (Gaucher et al., 2011; Robinson-Perez, 2021), *angry* (Becker et al., 2010; Jones & Norwood, 2017), *threatening* (Jones & Norwood, 2017; Little & Tolbert, 2018), *confrontational* (Little & Tolbert, 2018), *intimidating* (Morales, 2014), *disrespectful* (Skiba et al., 2002), *disruptive* (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Little & Tolbert, 2018), *defiant* (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), and *non-compliant* (Annamma et al., 2016).

Additional themes in research question one were about institutional authority and

inconsistent guidance for staff. Linguistic choices in the documents bolster the authority of institutions such as OSEP, MDE, and school districts, which aligns with critical discourse analyses of how authority is constructed in policy and other governmental documents through linguistic markers of expertise (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Findings about the authoritative discourses contained in these documents also mirror a finding in the student FBAs that the documents serve to center the authority and power of school staff, though in this case the authority is linked with institutions rather than staff. The theme of inconsistent guidance for staff obfuscates responsibility for who is conducting the FBA. There is no consensus about which staff members have the qualifications and duty to complete FBAs, which potentially diffuses responsibility for staff within the FBA process. Further, the lack of content cohesion among state, district, and national documents is notable because guidance is meant to provide clarity about special education policy, and when it does not, the potential for staff errors in special education processes and decision-making may increase. For research question two, the FBAs contain language that reflects the deficit discourses of the medical model of disability, such as repeated vocabulary about disability as a problem to solve through interventions or treatments. This is consistent with other findings from critical discourse analyses of similar documents. For example, one study found that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - 5th Edition (DSM-V) contains a deficit focus on disability by representing mental disorders as faulty individual functioning (Crowe, 2000). Another study focused on discourses in the *2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability Codes of Practice: 0-25 years* related to healthy self-regulation and a functioning body as necessary for good citizenship, which may also signify a deficit interpretation of disabled bodies (Burch, 2018).

In conversation between research questions one and two, themes such as ambiguous student agency in FBA (research question one) and themes such as the authority of school staff (research question two) establish a pattern in which families and students are disempowered while staff are in a position of power and authority defining and codifying student behavior. In other words, staff determine how student behaviors are conceptualized, which influences how students experience their own behavior in the school setting and impacts how staff interact with students. Meanwhile, students are not given input in the FBA process but instead are given all of the blame and culpability for the behaviors that staff define as belonging to them in the FBA. Given the absence or minimization of student voice in the student FBAs reviewed, these depictions of behavior may not be accurate to the student's experience.

Limitations

As part of the research process, it is necessary to acknowledge that all research has limitations. One limitation to discuss is related to the district-level data. I asked districts for any available guidance documents about conducting FBAs, and multiple districts sent me powerpoint presentations. Given the multimodal nature of powerpoint presentations (e.g., usage of both image and text), conducting a multimodal analysis of the slides might have gleaned additional information. However, multimodal analysis was not part of the original codebook and was out of scope of this dissertation. An additional limitation related to the district-level data was the nature of policy guidance documentation that I received from districts. Several of the districts gave me templates even though I indicated that they were outside the scope of my study, reducing the amount of usable district data documents available to code. This prevented me from being able to reach saturation for district documents. Additional studies might look at a wider breadth of

district documents or choose to focus solely on district documents. Future research might also focus on multimodal analysis of FBA guidance documents or specifically explore discourses contained in templates for FBA in addition to guidance documents.

A further limitation is that I received less FBAs from the district than originally planned. While saturation was achieved from four documents for both state and national documents, I did not achieve saturation for the student data. More examples are needed to truly speak to themes within student FBAs vis-à-vis critical discourse analysis, given that documents varied widely. While the conclusions gleaned from the analysis of student FBAs are credible, future studies might examine a larger corpus of student FBAs. This larger corpus of student FBAs might allow for analysis of themes surrounding sexuality that were not present in the six student FBAs which I received. Another limitation is that since saturation was achieved for national-level documents after four documents, the four documents analyzed were all OSEP letters rather than additional sources of OSEP guidance (e.g., reports). Crucially, a final limitation of this study is that one author and therefore one perspective was utilized to conduct critical discourse analysis. While I engaged in processes of reflexivity within the research process and peer debriefing to add credibility to my findings, I bring my specific theoretical lens to these findings that is informed by my positionality and experiences. I speak from my own perspective and not for anyone else. While all research, including both quantitative and qualitative research, is subjective, it is important to acknowledge my subjectivity and positionality as a limitation of this study for the purpose of transparency.

Implications for Research

Additional research is needed about staff biases in the special education process, given

the extent that implicit biases about individuals from minoritized identities have been found within school staff (Gilliam et al., 2016; Xie, 2015). Such studies might include those investigating group decision-making processes in special education meetings, especially for high-stakes decisions such as eligibility, placement, and manifestation determination. It is crucial that bias is examined in these meetings due to the extent of the harm that decisions might cause. For example, I noted that one of the evaluations placed a student with no concerns about "aggressive" behaviors into a setting IV immediately after finding her eligible for services, implicating either the need for more information about the situation or the potential for bias in group decision-making processes about her placement.

Research about developing culturally-responsive FBAs is implicated, given that results indicate the presence of discourses that evoke harmful stereotypes about race and disability in student FBAs. It has been noted in the literature that there are considerable differences in how individuals interpret behavior, necessitating a move away from the lens of White, middle-class values towards cultural responsiveness and humility (Taylor et al., 2024). While there is a tool for assessing the technical adequacy of FBAs (e.g., Iovannone et al., 2017) and culturally-responsive data collection techniques (e.g., Taylor et al., 2024), it would also be useful for researchers to develop an evaluative tool with criteria regarding the cultural responsiveness of individual FBAs.

In addition, future research might examine some of the variables that were not codable or minimally codable in the student FBAs, such as information about staff education level, staff gender, student race, etc. This would necessitate collecting additional sources of data such as information from a student information systems database. It would also be interesting to input

some of this information into a design that allows for comparison of student FBAs. In particular, a mixed-method study potentially exploring an association between student or staff factors and the content or quality of FBAs would be instructive. CDA might still be utilized to analyze content; for example, CDA might be used to quantify the number of racially-charged words in an FBA, detect the presence of different discourses among FBAs, or conduct transitivity analyses of the proportion of subject and object positions for relevant positionalities (e.g., student, teacher).

Finally, additional research regarding discourses contained in special education policy or policy guidance documents might give researchers an opportunity to examine a wider variety of OSEP and MDE documents beyond those involved with FBA. It is possible that looking at a more expansive breadth of documents might yield different or additional discourses to be examined in more detail. It would also be interesting to note whether all OSEP and MDE documents contain the ideology of White, middle-class norms, or whether this is restricted to policy guidance documents about FBA.

Implications for Practice

There are significant implications for practice based on the results of this study. Language that is commonly used in student FBAs lacks accessibility for non-professional audiences due to jargon and formal language. In practice, student evaluations become documents made by school staff for school staff but not for caregivers or lay audiences. In order to increase accessibility, staff might reduce the linguistic complexity of words and/or explain jargon. Another concern is that FBAs are missing student and caregiver voices, interests, and perspectives. In order to include these perspectives, practitioners might consider involving students and parents more in the process of FBA. This might take the form of including students on the team, depending on

their developmental level, to provide input on how their behaviors are conceptualized and represented within the codified FBA that will be part of student records.

State-, national-, and district-level policy guidance also lacks linguistic accessibility for audiences. The OSEP letters, in particular, are formatted and written in such a way that most people will not be able to decipher the main points therein. Increasing accessibility in language and formatting might lessen confusion and mitigate the need for multiple letters and policy documents about FBA to be published within a short time of each other. OSEP and MDE might also consider whether guidance is readable by caregivers and other persons of interests who are emerging bilingual speakers. While MDE includes a notice of language assistance to request translation in more recent reports, as of May 2024, OSEP does not have similar notices in their letters. It would be of benefit to include notices of language assistance in updated MDE reports that have previously been published, as well as previous and future OSEP letters. While district-level guidance would likely not be consumed by caregivers, staff may be emerging bilinguals or not familiar with behavior management jargon; as such, more accessible language in district-level guidance would also be of benefit to readers.

In addition, there is a need for national, state, and district policy documents to provide more guidance about staff qualifications for completing FBA and staff roles for FBA. This would demystify who is responsible for FBA with clear roles and responsibilities for staff involved and the qualifications or training needed to complete FBA. This has the potential to positively impact the quality of FBA by assigning consistent roles to staff and ensuring that staff involved have been trained in the FBA process. While district guidance explicates FBA processes and procedures more than national and state guidance, national and state guidance might include

additional explanation of the steps in FBA so procedures are consistent among districts and states.

Further, language commonly used in FBAs and all levels of policy guidance has racial and gendered undertones indicative of compliance to White, middle-class norms. For example, the words "aggression" and "aggressive" were used in all six student FBAs as operationalized behaviors. In addition, I have personally experienced pushback from a White male university course instructor in response to not wanting to use loaded terms such as "aggression" and "physically inappropriate" in student FBAs. It is crucial to avoid utilizing this language regardless of the opinion of those who have more experience, because experience often bolsters an attitude of tradition in which White, middle-class norms are centered "as the way things have always been done." Another recommendation is that staff pursue continuing education about cultural responsiveness and advocate for other staff to do so as a starting point of unlearning middle-class norms that are linked to White supremacy.

In addition to removing language that evokes harmful discourses about race, gender, and ability, adding more strengths-based narratives that take into account the role of culture and intersectional identities is necessary. Trends towards humanizing language give a broader view of the individual described and avoid conflating a person's behavior with their personhood (Tran et al., 2018). While FBAs often include a section about student strengths, presumably in an attempt at humanization, this narrative is often inconsistent with the remainder of the narrative in the FBA. When possible, interweaving areas of strength or the potential for growth within the narrative would help humanize the student for the reader. However, it is important for this articulation of strengths to be meaningful and consistent with the rest of the document, rather

than placed at the beginning or end of the document and not referenced otherwise or referenced in contradiction to the rest of the document. For guidance on humanizing language when writing FBAs, please reference Appendix E.

In addition, there is a need to increase cultural responsiveness within commonly-used data collection instruments for FBA. The ABC-Diversity Iceberg framework combines self-reflection with antecedent-behavior-consequence data collection for behavior analysts and other staff completing FBA (Taylor et al., 2024). This tool could help staff consider their own biases in perceiving student behavior and reflect on outside influences that might impact student behavior. Frameworks such as the Multicultural Reflective Behavior Analytic Practice might also inform behavior data collection processes in regard to the development of cultural responsiveness for staff conducting FBAs (Taylor et al., 2024).

Finally, it might behoove writers of FBA to add a disclaimer that the behaviors described in the document are subjectively perceived and there is the potential for bias in perceptions. This could be similar to disclaimers that are written about cognitive tests that assert the strengths as well as limitations of cognitive assessments. This provides perspective that the way an FBA portrays a child's behavior is not the end-all, be-all authority in the child's experience. It might also decrease the power differential between staff and those reading the document such as caregivers and students. Rather than claiming that the staff member is the only authority on the student's behavior, a disclaimer provides assurance that this is just one view of the student and is not their destiny.

Conclusion of Study Two

National-, state-, and district-level policy guidance documents about FBA, as well as

student FBAs, contain coded discourses about race, class, disability, and gender. I have utilized critical discourse analysis vis-à-vis Fairclough (1992) and other theorists (e.g., Halliday, 1994) to reveal the presence of these latent discourses. Crucially, student FBAs contain discourses related to White, middle-class norms that dictate the behavior of students who do not fit the norm, implicating education as a system of compliance and White supremacy. Coded discourses in student FBAs also indicate the presence of implicit racism and deficit views about disability related to how staff conceptualize student behavior and conduct FBAs. Meanwhile, national-, state-, and district-level policy guidance documents reflect a colorblind or color-evasive ideology by avoiding the topic of race and racism even though it is relevant to staff perceptions of student behaviors. Together, these results signify the need for critical examination of how staff in schools conduct FBAs, including recommendations for using humanizing language, culturally-responsive data collection techniques, and including disclaimers that perceptions of behavior are subjective. These are the first steps in a process of disentangling FBA processes from discourses related to White supremacy and reconceptualizing the role of schools as places of learning rather than assimilation to White, middle-class norms.

Chapter 4: Conclusion of Studies One and Two

The purpose of this multi-study dissertation was to examine how systems of oppression impact research, practice, and policy about students identified with EBD escalated to restrictive placements. Study one accomplished this by utilizing a QuantCrit lens to systematically review predictors of students identified as EBD being placed in restrictive settings. With the understanding that it is legally required to complete FBAs for students identified as EBD in Minnesota, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of student FBAs for students identified as EBD in restrictive placements in study two. This critical discourse analysis examined discourses about race, gender, and sexuality present in FBAs; as an addendum, I also examined national, state, and district policy guidance for the social contexts and institutional bodies of power and privilege implicated in FBA processes. This was meant to give a more thorough understanding of discourses in guidance from institutional bodies of power regulating FBA.

Results from Studies One and Two

Results from the systematic review conducted in study one indicated that students with a Black or Latinx race/ethnicity, older student age, and male gender were predicted to be in more restrictive placement than students who were White, of a younger age, or gendered as female. Given that demographic factors should in theory be unrelated to placement in a restrictive setting, these findings indicated that systems of oppression such as sexism and racism may be present in placement practices. Behavior rating scales inconsistently predicted placement, meaning that either these scales are not accurately measuring behavior or behavior is not the primary reason why students are placed in restrictive settings. Since behavior is typically considered the reason why students are escalated to restrictive placements, this finding is notable

(Hoge et al., 2014). Another notable finding was that a teacher's self-reported skills with classroom management predicted choice of restrictive placement, with teachers who considered themselves to have more classroom management skills recommending less restrictive placements. This may gesture at the utility of additional training on classroom management for current teachers and those preparing to enter the profession.

Since study one was framed through quantitative critical methods (QuantCrit), it is also relevant to discuss these findings. My analysis revealed that the body of literature regarding predictors of placement for students identified with EBD has considerable limitations. The authors rarely engaged in processes to lessen their own biases such as acknowledging their positionality, and the manuscripts were not informed by the experiences of persons from minoritized groups. Further, the existence and impact of systems of oppression were rarely acknowledged, nor was the intersectionality of student identities. When race was represented, it was often codified reductively as a duality (e.g., African-American or Caucasian) or with categories such as "Other." This indicates the necessity of authors to include theoretical frameworks, especially those related to critical theory, to inform their methodology and frame their results.

In study two, themes related to the critical discourse analysis of policy documents and FBA were complex. Common to both the policy guidance documents and the student FBAs was the influence of White, middle class norms, defined as discourses surrounding what is considered acceptable behavior that are linked to neo-liberal concepts of individualism and productivity (Taylor-Gooby & Leach, 2018). White, middle-class norms can potentially operate as a way for the educational system to enforce the compliance of students who differ from the norm through

behavior management techniques such as FBA. That these discourses were present in all four data sets indicates the ubiquitous nature of White, middle-class norms in educational spaces. These norms manage the behavior of students within educational spaces as a way to socialize them into productive adults who contribute their labor to society and consequently do not strain societal resources or behave in ways that are considered detrimental to society.

Further themes included findings about color-blind racism in research question one and findings about discourses about criminality in research question two. Color-blind racism explicitly states that there are no differences between races while implicitly reifying differences (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). This is seen in research question one with an absence of consideration about race and racism when both are integral to understanding the experiences of students and student behaviors given the potential for staff biases to impact understandings of behavior (Gilliam et al., 2016; Xie, 2015). In research question two, this is evident in how authors utilize racist and sexist language associated with criminality to represent students. This type of language legitimizes dominance and oppression related to intersectional identities and negatively impacts student experiences in the school setting through staff perceptions and interactions.

A theme in the policy guidance documents about the ambiguity of student agency complements a theme in the student FBAs about the authority of school staff in the FBA process. Policy documents frame students as lacking agency or having ambiguous agency in the FBA process, while student FBAs allocate power in the hands of staff and culpability in the hands of students for student behavior. This sets up a power dynamic of staff being in control of student experiences of FBA through controlling FBA processes in which students lack agency or have ambiguous agency. Students have little input over how their experiences are represented but all

of the blame in how their behaviors are perceived by others, with no consideration of outside factors that might impact behavior. Themes that were specific to the policy documents included those related to the institutionalized power of state, national, and district entities, as well as how documents provided inconsistent guidance for staff . These themes relate to the adequacy of the documents in accomplishing their named purpose (i.e., providing guidance about FBA). If FBA policy documents lack guidance about FBA for school staff, there is no protection against how staff experience, training, or bias impact the quality and equity of student FBAs. Since student FBAs are high-stakes documents due to how they affect student placement and how students are perceived by staff, it is critical to safeguard the adequacy of FBA through guidance documents. In the student FBAs, a final theme is that disability was represented as a within-person deficit. In short, student identities are represented in FBA with language that is associated with systems of oppression such as ableism. Representing disability as a within-person deficit stigmatizes students rather than considering ways in which disability might be a source of strength or growth.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Future research is needed about equity in placement for students identified as EBD, in addition to the way that student behaviors are conceptualized and framed through FBA. For both study one and study two, additional research about staff biases in special education processes is implicated, given findings about race predicting special education placement and the presence of racially-charged discourses in student FBAs. This might extend prior research looking into implicit biases that staff in schools have about individuals from minoritized backgrounds (Gilliam et al., 2016; Xie, 2015). Another avenue for research could be further critical discourse analyses of policy documents or FBAs for the presence of racial or gendered discourses, or

analyses of student or procedural records such as notes from high-stakes special education meetings. In short, the topic of staff biases in special education processes is under-researched and needs further development.

In addition, the finding in study one that, for most of the manuscripts systematically reviewed, predictors did not account for most of the variance in statistical models suggests that there are additional predictors of placement that researchers did not anticipate. Aside from one article (Frey, 2002), the studies did not examine staff-level predictors such as self-rated expertise with classroom management. As such, predictors that should be included in future models may include staff-level variables such as staff years of experience, gender, expertise with classroom management, highest degree completed, etc. School-level factors such as quantifications of racial disproportionality in discipline also haven't been examined as predictors of restrictive placement and might illuminate areas in which educational systems can make change.

There is also a tendency for quantitative studies to forego discussions of positionality and the use of critical frameworks. This gestures to an opportunity to consider incorporating discussions of reflexivity in quantitative research, potentially through the lens of a framework such as QuantCrit. The principles of QuantCrit might inform all stages of the research process to mitigate the subjectivity inherent in all forms of research and the potential for researcher bias to enter into results and interpretations. QuantCrit is also a way to incorporate an intersectional lens into research that takes into account the complexities of identity, while also considering that variables such as race are socially constructed rather than biological. These considerations can help add nuance to results and avoid overgeneralization.

In regard to future practice, an overarching consideration between the two studies

concerns White, middle-class norms and potential staff biases about students from minoritized backgrounds. While I did not conduct critical discourse analysis research in study one about the presence of White, middle-class norms in the studies reviewed, quantitative methods are steeped in the language of empiricism and objectivity–both of which are linked to Whiteness (Prescod-Weinstein, 2020). In addition, given that race predicts placement in study one, it is likely that staff biases are present in placement decisions. Further, in study two, the presence of White, middle-class norms about conventionality mandating what is considered appropriate student behavior can also potentially be linked to staff biases. This necessitates an examination of staff bias in practice through advocacy to include processes of cultural responsiveness in staff training, as well as considerations of how to unlearn middle-class norms that are linked to White supremacy.

Another consideration for practice in regard to study one is the need for greater specificity in federal, state, and district policy documents regarding the principle of LRE. Similar to a finding in study two that policy documents were inconsistent and incohesive, a lack of specificity in guidance about LRE may lead to staff confusion and potential staff bias in placement decisions. A consistent process for placement decisions that school teams document and are held accountable for might help with the seeming murkiness of placement decisions, which often lack documentation in student records. At the very least, state and national governing bodies could make criteria for placement decisions more transparent in order to help prevent placement decisions that are not in the student's interests.

Further, there is a need to alter language that is commonly used in FBAs and replace it with more strength-based narratives. One consideration is that the jargon and formal language in

these FBAs is inaccessible for non-staff audiences. Non-staff audiences may be unable to understand the vocabulary associated with FBA, lessening or removing their understanding of the student behaviors described. FBAs, in essence, become documents made by staff for staff rather than for students and caregivers. Furthermore, language such as "physical aggression" that is often used in FBAs has racial overtones that are indicative of White supremacy. Educational staff, especially school psychologists, must remove this language from FBAs and advocate for other professionals to do so as well. This may result in considerable pushback from administration and other school staff. However, advocacy about culturally responsive FBA is essential to avoid reifying power structures that have too-often privileged Whiteness as the norm to the detriment of students considered different, including those from minoritized backgrounds.

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Table 1.1

Descriptive Features of Samples for Studies Reviewed

Characteristic of student sample	Range	Did not report
Sample Size	72-41407	0
Sample Size - EBD	72-5038	1
Gender		
Female	22 - 33%	3
Male	66.7-100%	2
Non-binary		6
Race/Ethnicity		
White	27 - 45.5%	3
Black or African American	10 - 50.3%	3
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.9%	5
Asian	2.9%	5
Hispanic or Latinx	27 - 41%	3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.9%	5
Two or More Races		6
"Other"	<1%	4
Age/Grade	6-18; grades K to 12	1
% Low Income		6
% ELL		6

Note. EBD = Emotional and Behavioral Disorder. "Other" is placed in quotes because I do not think this is an appropriate way to quantify race but rather contributes to systems of oppression that "other" identities. K = Kindergarten. ELL = English Language Learner.

Table 1.2

Overview of Factors Related to Placement as EBD

Study	*n*	Sample	Unit of Analysis	Data Source	Research Design	Analyses	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Results - Statistical Analyses
Frey (2002)	269	SpEd teachers randomly selected from 10 school districts in Denver metro area	Staff	Teacher choice on vignette	Experimental	Multinomial Logistic Regression	5 choices on restrictiveness of placement	Student SES	β = 1.69**
								Teacher Classroom Management	β =1.45*
								Teacher Beliefs - External Influences	β = 1.94**
								Ethnicity	β = 0.31
								Teaching Efficacy	β = 0.26
Lane (1999)	99	Middle/high school boys gen ed school vs. alternative school in 1 urban district in Kansas	Student	Teacher report on in 1 school district	Cross-sectional	Discriminant Function	2 Choices placement restrictiveness	DT/CEP Emotional	*F*(1,97) = 0.02
								DT/CEP Conduct	*F*(1,97) = 1.44
								CBCL Internalizing	*F*(1,97) = 0.47
								CBCL Externalizing	*F*(1,97) = 1.98
McTaggart (2005)	72	Students in 3 day treatments in schools in Denver: 2000-2001	Student	Existing clinical and school records for 3 schools	Cross-sectional	Logistic Regression	Restrictiveness of placement variable (1 = less; 0 = more)	DSMD Change Scores	β = .158***, OR = 1.17
								Family Composition	β = 2.23*, OR = 9.32
Meyer et al. (2007)	165	Kids grades 1-12 receiving services from 1 system of care for at least 6 months in 1997-2000	Student	Service coordinator notes for 1 system of care	Cross-sectional	Multiple Regression	Restrictiveness of placement variable (1-5)	Age at Entrance	β = 0.26**
								Race/Ethnicity	β = 0.15*
								Gender	β = -0.18*
								Months in Dawn Proj	β = -0.02

Study	*n*	Sample	Unit of Analysis	Data Source	Research Design	Analyses	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Results - Statistical Analyses
O'Reilly (2000)	41407	SpEd students (6-17) in NH 1984-1997	Student	Statewide data in database	Longitudinal	Discrete-Time Survival Analysis	Restrictiveness of placement variable	Age first SpEd	OR 1.42 <7 OR .25 >12
Robertson et al. (1998)	209	Youths in 1 county in CA with a mean age of 13.1 referred to a system of care by mental health & child protective services agencies as most challenging cases	Student	Existing assessment records of participants in 1 county's system of care originally gathered by MH staff at intake	Cross-sectional	ANOVA	Placement restrictiveness by 5 placement types	Age	$F(4,204) = 12.09$*
								Sex	$F(4,204) = 1.68$
								Black race/ethnicity	$F(4,204) = 1.83$
								Caucasian race/ethnicity	$F(4,204) = 6.61$*
								Latinx race/ethnicity	$F(4,204) = 3.68$*
								CBCL Internalizing	$F(4,204) = 1.47$
								CBCL Externalizing	$F(4,204) = 0.96$
								TRF Internalizing	$F(4,204) = 4.84$*
								TRF Externalizing	$F(4,204) = 2.94$*
								CAFAS Score	$F(4,204) = 4.27$*
								Juvenile Justice	$F(4,204) = 21.32$*
								Substance Use	$F(4,204) = 23.49$*
								Out-of-home Care	$F(4,204) = 1.11$
								Family Mental Illness	$F(4,204) = 6.77$*
								Abuse History	$F(4,204) = 1.2$
								Runaway History	$F(4,204) = 4.96$*
								School Performance	$F(4,204) = 0.64$
								Attendance	$F(4,204) = 5.08$*

Note. DT/CEP = The Differential Test of Conduct and Emotional Problems. CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist. DSMD = Devereux Child and Adolescent Behavior Rating Scales.. TRF = Teacher Report Form. CAFAS = Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale. * = Significant at $p < .05$. ** = Significant at $p < .01$. *** = Significant at $p < .00$.

Table 1.3

Quality Appraisal of Studies Included in Review

Study	Rating - Introduction	Rating - Method	Rating - Results	Rating - Discussion	Rating - Other	Rating - Total	Rating - Description
Frey (2002)	1	9	3	2	1	16	Above Average
Lane (1999)	1	9	3	1	0	14	Average
McTaggart (2005)	1	9	3	2	1	16	Above Average
Meyer et al. (2007)	1	7	2	2	0	12	Average
O'Reilly (2000)	1	6	2	2	0	11	Below Average
Robertson et al. (1998)	1	8	2	2	0	13	Average
Mean Rating	1	8	2.5	1.83	0.33	13.67	

Note. Average is denoted as +/- 1 standard deviation from the mean of total ratings. Below average is under 1 standard deviation under the mean. Above average is over 1 standard deviation above the mean. The standard deviation is 2.07.

Table 2.1

Background Information for National, State, and District Data Sets

Type of Guidance	National	State	District
Number of Documents	4	4	4
Name of Publication	Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)	Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)	Unpublished
Date of Publication	2007-2013	2011-2021	Unpublished
Format	All letters (i.e., header, greeting, paragraphs, signature)	3 question-and-answer documents, 1 narrative report	3 PowerPoint presentations, 1 decision chart for conducting FBAs
Full or Partial Document	All full documents	1 full document, 3 partial	2 full documents, 1 partial, 1 combined (multiple PowerPoints)
Length of Document	625-1896 words	291-736 words	467-2580 words
Content about FBA	1 purpose, 1 procedural, 2 combination of purpose/procedural/contents	2 procedural, 2 combination of purpose/procedural/contents	1 procedural, 2 contents, 1 combination of purpose/procedural/contents

Table 2.2

Demographic Information for Included FBAs (n = 6)

Characteristic of FBA	Count
Gender	
Female	2
Male	4
Race/Ethnicity	
White	1
Black or African American	1
Two or More Races	1
Did Not Report	3
Grade	
K-8	6
9-12	1
Primary Disability:	
EBD	6
Secondary Disability	
None Reported	6
Years in Special Education	
0 Years (Initial)	2
6 Years	3
Did Not Report	1
Staff Job Title	
SpEd Teacher	1
School Psychologist	1
SpEd Teacher, School Psychologist, & BCBA	1

Characteristic of FBA	Count
Did Not Report	3
Staff Gender	
Did Not Report	6
Staff Education Level	
Master's Degree	2
Did Not Report	4

Table 2.3

Technical Adequacy Tool for Evaluation (TATE) Scores

Record	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9	Total
AF01	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	8
AF02	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	13
AF03	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	6
AF04	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	16
AF05	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	7
AF06	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	5
Mean	1	1.3	1	0.8	1.3	0.5	1	1.3	0.8	9

Appendix A

Search Terms for Databases Study One

Database: ERIC

1. TI (((restrictiv* OR exclusi* OR exclud* OR alternat* OR SPED OR "special education*" OR LRE* OR handicap* OR disab*) N4 (environment* OR setting* OR placement)) OR ("self-contain*" OR "resource room" OR "federal setting")) OR AB (((restrictiv* OR exclusi* OR exclud* OR alternat* OR SPED OR "special education*" OR LRE* OR handicap* OR disab*) N4 (environment* OR setting* OR placement)) OR ("self-contain*" OR "resource room" OR "federal setting"))
2. DE "Resource Room Programs"
3. 1 OR 2
4. Limit to 1997-present

Education Source

1. TI (((restrictiv* OR exclusi* OR exclud* OR alternat* OR SPED OR "special education*" OR LRE* OR handicap* OR disab*) N4 (environment* OR setting* OR placement)) OR ("self-contain*" OR "resource room" OR "federal setting")) OR AB (((restrictiv* OR exclusi* OR exclud* OR alternat* OR SPED OR "special education*" OR LRE* OR handicap* OR disab*) N4 (environment* OR setting* OR placement)) OR ("self-contain*" OR "resource room" OR "federal setting"))
2. DE "Resource Room Programs"

3. 1 OR 2

4. Limit to 1997-present

PsycINFO

1. (((restrictiv* or exclusi* or exclud* or alternat* or SPED or "special education*" or LRE* or handicap* or disab*) adj4 (environment* or setting* or placement)) or ("self-contain*" or "resource room" or "federal setting")).ti,ab
2. "mainstreaming (educational)"/

3. (environment* or setting* or placement).ti,ab

4. 2 and 3

5. 1 OR 4

6. ("K-12" or school* or student* or elementary or secondary or education* or grade*).ti,ab

7. special education students/ OR "special education"/

8. (IEP ADJ4 student*) OR (SPED OR "special education" OR "special ed").ti, ab

9. 5 AND 6 AND (7 OR 8)

10. limit 9 to yr="1997-2021"

ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
(ti((((restrictiv* OR exclusi* OR exclud* OR alternat* OR SPED or "special education*" OR LRE* OR handicap* OR disab*)NEAR/4(environment* OR setting* OR placement)) OR ("self-contain*" OR "resource room" OR "federal setting"))) OR ab((((restrictiv* OR exclusi* OR exclud* OR alternat* OR SPED OR "special education" OR LRE* OR handicap* OR disab*)NEAR/4(environment* OR setting* OR placement)) OR ("self-contain*" OR "resource room" OR "federal setting")))) AND (ti("K-12*" OR school* OR student* OR elementary OR secondary OR education* OR grade*) OR ab("K-12*" OR school* OR student* OR elementary OR secondary OR education* OR grade*))
Limit from 1997-2021.

Appendix B

Codebook of Study One Data

Coding Category	Definition	Values
Author	Open-ended; this will have the last names of the author(s).	
Publication Year	Open-ended; this will have the year the study was published.	
Publication Type	Type of publication.	1 = Published journal article 2 = Thesis/Dissertation
Data Source	Data source used for the study. Open-ended for specificity.	
School Location	The region in the U.S. in which the study was conducted.	1= South 2= Northeast 3= West 4= Midwest 5= All U.S.
School Urbanicity	The rurality or urbanicity of the school(s) included in the sample	1 = Rural 2 = Urban 3 = Suburban
Type of School	This is the type of school included.	1= Public 2= Private 3= Charter 4= Tribal
Setting of School	This is the educational setting which is studied.	

Unit of Analysis	The unit of analysis reports the measured entity in the study.	1 = Student level 2 = Staff level 3 = School level 4 = District level 5 = State level 6 = Country level
Sample Size	The number of participants in the study.	
Sample Size - ED/EBD	The number of participants in the study who are identified as EBD/ED or synonymous terms.	
Sample Gender	Open-ended; percentage of sample identified as each gender.	
Sample Age	Open-ended; this will have the age range of participants.	
Sample Grade Range	Open-ended; this will have the grade range of participants.	
Sample Race/Ethnicity	Open-ended; this will have the percentages of federal race/ethnicity values reported in the study.	
ED/EBD Sample Race/Ethnicity	Open-ended; this will have the percentages of federal race/ethnicity values for ED/EBD students identified in the study.	
% of Sample Low-Income	Percentage of students who are identified as low-income in the sample.	
Sample ELL %	Percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) students in the sample.	

Research Design	This is the research design used in the study.	
Analyses	This denotes what types of data analyses were used in the study.	
Dependent Variable	This describes how the dependent variable was operationalized (i.e., % of time in special education, etc.)	
Independent Variables	This reports IVs (e.g., predictors) of restrictiveness of placement for EBD/ED students.	
Significance	This reports the significance level of predictors.	
Effect size	This denotes the effect size of predictors.	
Author's positionality	Does the author make a statement about their positionality as a researcher?	1 = Yes 2 = No
Systems of Oppression	Does the author identify systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, etc.?	1 = Yes 2 = No
Theoretical Framework	Does the author link their research to a theoretical framework?	1 = Yes 2 = No
Limitations of Method	Does the author note limitations of the method used to analyze data?	1 = Yes 2= No
Operationalization Race/Ethnicity	How does the author operationalize race and ethnicity?	

Intersectionality	Is the intersectionality of multiple identities addressed?	1 = Yes 2 = No

Appendix C

AXIS Quality Appraisal Tool

Introduction	
1	Were the aims/objectives of the study clear?
Methods	
2	Was the study design appropriate for the stated aim(s)?
3	Was the sample size justified?
4	Was the target/reference population clearly defined? (Is it clear who the research was about?)
5	Was the sample frame taken from an appropriate population base so that it closely represented the target/reference population under investigation?
6	Was the selection process likely to select subjects/participants that were representative of the target/reference population under investigation?
7	Were measures undertaken to address and categorise non-responders?
8	Were the risk factor and cutcome variables measured appropriate to the aims of the study?
9	Were the risk factor and cutcome variables measured correctly using instruments/ measurements that had been trialled, piloted or published previously?
10	Is it clear what was used to determined statistical significance and/or precision estimates? (eg, p values, CIs)
11	Were the methods (including statistical methods) sufficiently described to enable them to be repeated?
Results	
12	Were the basic data adequately described?
13	Does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias?
14	If appropriate, was information about non-responders described?
15	Were the results internally consistent?
16	Were the results for the analyses described in the methods, presented?
Discussion	
17	Were the authors' discussions and conclusions justified by the results?
18	Were the limitations of the study discussed?
Other	
19	Were there any funding sources or conflicts of interest that may affect the authors' interpretation of the results?
20	Was ethical approval or consent of participants attained?

(Downes et al., 2016)

Appendix D

Codebook of Study Two Data

Coding Category	Definition	Values (999 = missing)
STUDENT RECORDS GENERAL INFORMATION		
Age	This is the current age of the student.	Write-in response.
Grade	This is the current grade of the student.	Write-in response.
Gender	This is the gender the student is identified as in information systems.	Write-in response.
Primary Disability Category	This is the primary disability reported on the student's evaluation.	Write-in response.
Secondary Disability Category or Categories	This is the secondary disability or disabilities reported on the student's evaluation.	Write-in response.
Race/ethnicity	This is the student's race/ethnicity identified.	Write-in response.
Home District	This is the home district the student was referred from.	Write-in response.
Length of Time in Special Ed	This is the length of time the student was in special ed before being placed in a restrictive setting.	Write-in response.
Staff Job Title	This is the job title of any staff members identified as part of the FBA process.	Write-in response.
Staff Race/Ethnicity	This is the race/ethnicity of any staff members identified as part of the FBA process.	Write-in response.
Staff Gender	This is the gender of any staff members identified as part of the FBA process.	Write-in response.
Staff Education level	This is the highest degree awarded to any staff members identified as part of the FBA process.	Write-in response.
POLICY DOCUMENTS: GENERAL INFORMATION		

Author	Name of the author(s) or organization.	Write-in answer
Publication Year	Year the study was published.	Write-in answer
Publication Type	Type of publication.	Write-in answer
Level of policy guidance	Denoting whether policy guidance is published at the state, national, or district level.	1 = State-level 2 = National-level 3 = District-level
Title of Document	Description of the document's title.	Write-in answer
Content Headings	Description of content headings within document.	Write-in answer
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DISCOURSE-AS-TEXT		
Lexical cohesion (Halliday, 1994)	Record vocabulary chains - what words or phrases are repeated regarding primary topics in the text? Are repeated words linked in meaning? What are the themes (first words) at the beginning of clauses and is there repetition? Are ellipses used? What anaphoric/cataphoric references (e.g., pronouns) are used to connect text to previous or later ideas? What is omitted in the text? How are words and grammatical devices being used to build up or lessen significance for certain things and not others?	Write-in answer.
Transitivity (Halliday, 1994)	Code whether process types (verbs) are material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, or existential. Consider the agency of participants for process types (i.e., doing or receiving action). Describe voice through verb forms (i.e., active vs. passive) and nominalization (i.e., extent to which verbs are represented through nouns [nominally]). Regarding voice and nominalization, consider how responsibility and causality are indicated.	Write-in answer.
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DISCOURSE-AS-DISCURSIVE-PRACTICE		

Intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992)	List sources officially cited in the text as well as author and affiliation of those sources. Are any sources quoted in the text? If so, are they quoted in their entirety or are there ellipses or omissions? How are other texts indirectly represented in the discourse (drawn upon for style/content but not quoted)?	Write-in answer.
Interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1992)	What genre or genres (types of discourse, i.e., policy guidance) is/are in the text? How is the text similar or different from other texts in this genre? What discourses about societal constructs (i.e., race, disability, gender) does the text draw on? What are the assumptions underlying the text and genre? What needs to be filled in here to achieve clarity? What's not being said overtly but is assumed to be known or inferable? What would be strange if we didn't share the knowledge or assumptions of the author?	Write-in answer.
Policy-only codes	How was the policy guidance created? For what reason was the policy guidance created?	Write-in answer.
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DISCOURSE-AS-SOCIAL PRACTICE		
Social Context (Statham, 2022, as informed by Fairclough, 1992).	Taking codes from discourse-as-text and discourse-as-discursive practice, consider how the discourse reflects social context. What systems of belief, social relations, and social identities are reflected? What are the contexts in which the document was created? What taken-for-granted ideologies are represented? What social structures and hegemonic relations are implicated? Are master narratives related to systems of oppression represented?	Write-in answer.

Identity	What socially recognizable identity (or identities) is the author trying to enact or get others to recognize? How does the author's language treat other people's identities? How is the author positioning others? What identity (or identities) is the author inviting the listener/reader to take up?	Write-in answer.
Policy-only codes	How is the policy guidance not advancing minoritized communities? How is policy guidance being uncritically adopted? What are the social, historical, political, and structural influences of the policy guidance? Whose interests are being served in the policy guidance and what are those interests? In what ways does the policy guidance legitimize domination or oppression?	Write-in answer.

Appendix E

Guidance About Using Humanizing Language for FBA

1. Rephrase ambiguous language. Instead, write down what happened. For example, rephrase "they were aggressive" to "they hit staff with their hand."
2. Refrain from defining the student based on their behaviors, which are not who they are as people or how they should be treated by staff. For example, instead of attributing a quality to a student - "he is non-compliant" - describe the behavior that was seen and explain contextual factors that may be at play.
3. Avoid racialized and gendered language associated with stereotypes of criminality. These words include aggressive/aggression, angry, power struggle, intimidating, confrontational, forceful, and threatening.
4. Reframe language that is associated with compliance to subjective White, middle-class norms. This includes: Disrespectful, loud, disruptive, defiant, non-compliant, and "persistently breaks rules." For example, "she persistently breaks rules" could be changed to "she did not follow the teacher's rule about interrupting others four times during a given 60-minute class period."
5. Include discussions of race and racism within the narrative of FBAs to avoid centering color-blind racism. For example, "research has shown that staff biases can impact how staff perceive student behavior."
6. Explicate in the narrative how staff combat potential biases. For example: "Our staff have completed training on cultural competence and follow a process of self-reflection about biases when writing FBAs."