



# A Critique of Colonialism and Modern Aid in Africa: What Would Skinner Say?

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## Abstract

In Skinner's chapter titled *The Ethics of Helping People*, he stated, "By giving too much help, we postpone the acquisition of effective behavior and perpetuate the need for help" (Skinner, 1996, p. 63). Through years of living cross-culturally in various African countries, the first author has seen this demonstrated not only in organizations but also as part of the very fabric of society. The detrimental effects of helping, as described by Skinner, are especially evident in African countries that were formerly colonized and continue through the delivery of modern aid by western nations. Robust reinforcement contingencies surround the helper and the helped, which creates and maintains a reciprocal dominating/dependent relationship that has stifled growth in the past and continues to do so in the present. Considering that behavior analysis was born in the western world, any dissemination efforts to formerly colonized African countries will perpetuate the power dynamic conceived from colonial "helping" practices. In this paper, suggestions will be outlined for behavior analysts interested in international dissemination, specifically looking at the role of participatory community development in alleviating colonial relations between these regions.

**Keywords** applied behavior analysis · western colonialism · postcolonialism · neocolonialism · foreign aid · community development

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## Introduction

...the most generous help may fail as ignominiously as the most aggressive despoliation (Skinner, 1996, p. 72).

It may surprise readers to hear that three seemingly disparate individuals, King Leopold II of Belgium, a Kenyan ballet teacher, and Bono, share one important commonality. Arguments proposed in this paper will not just lead readers to this finding, but will also demonstrate the importance for cross-cultural behavior analysts to consider both current and past contingencies of reinforcement and punishment and how they have shaped the world in which we live today.

A quick literature search of APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles, and SocINDEX databases using the terms: (“foreign aid” AND [“behavior analysis” OR “ABA” OR “applied behavior analysis”]) produced one article (Goodman, 1983), while the terms: (colon\* OR colonialism OR colonization OR imperialism AND [“behavior analysis” OR “ABA” OR “applied behavior analysis”]) produced one relevant article (Baia et al., 2017).

Additionally, separate searches of the journal *Behavior and Social Issues* using colon\*, “foreign aid,” “international aid,” or “modern aid” produced ten relevant articles. Four dealt with coercive/colonial systems from an abstract point of view (Ardila Sánchez et al., 2020; Lowery & Mattaini, 1999; Mattaini, 2002; Miller et al., 2019;), six (including two of the four mentioned above) explicitly mentioned historical colonization (Borba, 2019; Lowery & Mattaini, 1999; Mattaini, 2002; Mattaini, 2003; Nevin, 2003; Saini & Vance, 2020), and two articles discussed foreign aid (Pennypacker, 2004; Ward, 2009).

While behavior analytic contributions to current colonial systems have been vital to the field, behavior analysts could benefit from an in-depth investigation of the effects and repercussions of western colonialism in particular; more specifically, how individuals’ diverse interpretations of helping have affected the underlying fabric of society. This paper will agree with Skinner’s analysis (Skinner, 1996) that the traditional definition for help has not led to effective behavior and instead argue that to influence society, it would be prudent to rethink our definition of the term and apply it to our practice as behavior analysts. An understanding of “helping” as displayed throughout history during colonialism and currently with neocolonialism and modern aid is fundamental to understanding what it truly means to do no harm as a behavior analyst in whichever country one practices (Behavior Analyst Certification Board, 2020).

## Western Colonialism

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, colonization can be defined as “the act of taking control of an area or a country that is not your own, especially using force, and sending people from your own country to live there” (Oxford, 2021). Different forms of colonization have occurred since the beginning

of written history, which is shown in many ancient societies worldwide. People have often justified colonization by stating that it would benefit indigenous peoples through educational, economic, and infrastructure development.

Most scholars consider modern colonization to have begun in the 1400s with Portugal's search for new trade routes (Bandeira Jerónimo, 2018; Blakemore, 2019; Kohn & Reddy, 2017; Nowell et al., 2020). Soon after Portugal's forays, Spain followed suit with Christopher Columbus' exploits at the end of the same century. The English, French, Dutch, and Germans (among other European powers) soon also started vying for lands conquered by Spain and Portugal, as well as new, previously untouched lands. European colonial focus shifted to the African continent in the late 1800s and continued mainly through the 1950s. The Berlin Conference (1884–1885) played a key role in overpowering and dividing the African continent (Gathara, 2019). Almost 100 years later, the last country on the African continent gained independence from a European power (Zimbabwe), achieving independence from Britain in 1980 (Ingham et al., n.d.).

## Example

### The Congo and Belgium

From 1885 to 1908, what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo was the personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium, then named the Congo Free State (Hochschild, 2010). As the only privately owned colony in the world, King Leopold II was able to make large amounts of money subjecting Congolese people to forced labor harvesting rubber while also committing countless other horrific acts of violence and subjugation (Hochschild, 2000). It is estimated that the population was cut in half during this time, starting with 20 million people and subsequently reduced to 10 million (Hochschild, 2010); almost twice as many as were killed in the Holocaust. Unfortunately, until 1990, the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium contained no mention of any of the atrocities committed in the Congo under the colonial regime. However, it did hold many beautiful “borrowed” African artifacts obtained during that despotic period of colonization (Hochschild, 2010).

Many defended colonization by stating they had a “legal and religious obligation” to the indigenous people (Blakemore, 2019), presumably thinking the atrocities they were committing were to help those people.

## Postcolonialism

The following three sections of this paper, postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and modern aid, tend to blend together because of some overlapping conceptual similarities. Consequently, the examples in each section may be categorized differently by another author. Although the lines between the terms presented in the following sections can be blurry, we will provide our definitions for the purposes of this paper.

Postcolonialism can be defined as “the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism” (Iverson, 2020). Generally speaking, postcolonialism refers to the time following countries’ independence from colonization. In this paper, postcolonialism will also focus on the current repercussions of the original western colonization of Africa. Because postcolonialism refers to everything that has happened after decolonization, neocolonialism and modern aid could technically be subsumed under this heading.

## Examples

### Disease

Disease is often considered one such repercussion of colonization. Although it cannot be definitively proven that tuberculosis was not already present in South Africa before the arrival of white European colonizers in the mid-1600s, there is considerable evidence to suggest this is how the disease was introduced (Andersson, 1990; Jackson, 2007). In 1920, 90% of native South Africans living in the Transkei and Ciskei reserves were infected with tuberculosis (Coovadia et al., 2009). Seventy years later, (Andersson, 1990; Harling et al., 2008), it was found that black South Africans were 27 times more likely to be at risk for tuberculosis than their white counterparts living in the same country.

### Ethnic Group Division

One example of division derived from colonial practices can be found within the Kalenjin people group, spread over what is now the border between Eastern Uganda and Western Kenya (Imbuye, 2016; Kakai, 2016; Médard, 2008; Were, 1971). The Kalenjin are officially recognized as an ethnic group in Kenya that contains 11 sub-ethnic groups (Imbuye, 2016). One of these 11 sub-ethnic groups, the Sabaot, is officially listed in Kenya as containing six other ethnic groups. Of these six Sabaot sub-ethnic groups, one is called the Sebei (according to the history of the Sebei Elders, the actual classification is quite different from this, but the current paper will not have space to delve into that topic). When the empirical British drew the Kenya/Uganda border, they cut through this Kalenjin people group, thus isolating one of its members: the Sebei. Because of this, many individuals within the Sebei have faced division from their fellow Kalenjins and political confusion on whether they are genuinely Ugandan or Kenyan. Chesilyong Sabila, a member of the Sebei states, “Colonialism put enmity between brothers. So, we see each other as enemies, we see each other as strangers; yet, we are one... [Colonialism] dropped our identity, disconnected us completely from our heritage, culture, and as I said, created that enmity between our tribes, the Sabaot and Sebei” (C. Sabila, personal communication, July 10, 2021).

## Corrupt Political Systems

Not only can disease and ethnic group division be traced to colonization, but also many of today's political systems. Acemoglu et al. (2001) studied historical records of 75 previously colonized nations and found a strong correlation between European settler mortality rates and current institutions in those nations. They found that in places where Europeans experienced high mortality rates because of climate or diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, the focus was predominately on resource exploitation from afar instead of developing social and economic infrastructure that supported both the settlers and indigenous people. Today, those previously colonized nations with high mortality rates are correlated with poorly developed social and economic infrastructure, while countries with low European mortality rates, such as the United States and Canada, have substantially more effective establishments. Once countries were decolonized, many of the new leaders found it personally beneficial to retain those same extractive institutions and have consequently preserved (at least to some extent) the legacy of colonization (Banerjee & Duflo, 2012). Essentially, the original colonizers' reinforcers were the same reinforcers that perpetuate the current corrupt political systems in many nations.

## Neocolonialism

In *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, describes neocolonialism as a way in which more developed countries use their power to impoverish less developed countries (Nkrumah, 1970). Neocolonialism is not as blatant as colonialism, whereby western nations were clearly subjecting African people to atrocities such as slavery, corrupt political systems, and ethnic group division. It is nevertheless a way that one nation controls or attempts to control another. Once again, it is prudent to highlight that the examples below could be categorized differently. More precisely, some individuals may describe these examples as modern aid or infrastructure development as opposed to neocolonialism.

## Examples

### Francophone Africa

Taylor (2019) stated that today's most blatant form of neocolonialism is the continued implementation of the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine) currency in Francophone Africa. Not only has France had a continued presence in their former colonies through the currency, but they also heavily influence educational institutions and continue to have a significant military presence in many of those same countries. The CFA is not only controlled by France, but the countries that use this currency are also required to deposit a minimum of 65% of their international

reserves into a part of the French treasury (Taylor, 2019). If neocolonialism is defined as the indirect control of one country by another, then France's continued influence in Francophone Africa seems to be an obvious example.

### The Dark Side of Chocolate

In 2012, Órla Ryan took an in-depth look at the chocolate industry in her book, *Chocolate Nations: Living and Dying for Cocoa in West Africa* (Ryan, 2012), explaining that the chocolate market is worth \$75 billion per year. However, in Ghana in 2008 (just one of many countries that export cocoa beans), their export market was a mere \$1.2 billion. Additionally, the farmers who harvest the cocoa beans receive merely 4% of the selling price of a typical chocolate bar in the United Kingdom (Ryan, 2012).

Although the current situation appears rather dim, people are attempting to transform the chocolate industry. For example, Ghanaian sisters Kimberly and Priscilla Addison (Antwi, 2021) founded a chocolate company in 2016 that seeks to change statistics such as those mentioned above. Their company, '57 Chocolate focuses on creating development opportunities and driving self-sufficiency in Ghana. In addition to utilizing local resources and creating a chocolate without preservatives or artificial ingredients, they are also promoting Ghanaian culture around the world through local and global sales.

### Conservationism

Before Western colonialism in the late nineteenth century, much of the land now home to safari parks belonged to indigenous African pastoralist communities (Letai, 2021). Once western colonizers began taking possession of this land, much of it has never returned to its original owners. Many argue that it is now best to preserve these lands as protected areas so as to keep the wildlife safe from poachers and other threats. The problem that many individuals see with this scenario is that the people who are proponents for this brand of conservationism are typically not Africans (Ogada, 2021). Westerners maintaining and taking control of African land, even if it is for something that appears good, like conservationism, looks quite similar to colonization in the nineteenth century (Halakhe, 2017). In their book, *The Big Conservation Lie*, Mbaria and Ogada (2017) fought against this neocolonial view of conservationism and recommended moving forward in a participatory way that still preserves African wildlife but not at the cost of African people.

### Kenya and China

This example is purposefully listed last in the neocolonialism section to highlight the fact that there is currently a debate as to whether the work of China around the world is truly a type of neocolonialism. Many would consider it modern aid that will prove to substantially alleviate poverty. A specific instance of this is currently occurring in Kenya. Banks from China have been funding loans for infrastructure development in Kenya since 2010 for projects such as road development and bridge and railroad

construction (Olander, 2021). As of 2020, Kenya was \$6.5 billion in debt to China, which accounts for 21% of Kenya's total external debt (Olander, 2021).

Many individuals believe that once countries such as Kenya cannot repay the debt, China will increasingly take more control (Obura, 2021; Odhiambo, 2021). Although others argue this debt trap is a myth (Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021), it is difficult to ignore that Kenyans personally affected by this situation are saying things such as: "China's plan is simple: to loan money to poor countries to help them build things, not for their own prosperity, but for China's" (Owaahh, 2018). Additionally, according to AIDDATA, a research lab at the College of William & Mary, many of these Chinese loan contracts contain unusual confidentiality clauses in addition to further clauses that potentially allow them to influence foreign and domestic policy (Gelpert et al., 2021; Juma et al., 2021). With the differing opinions on this issue, perhaps only time will tell the outcome.

## Modern Aid

Skinner (1996), in his chapter *The Ethics of Helping People*, said, "'Aid' is a synonym of 'help,' and foreign aid raises many ethical, moral, and legal problems... Thus, we begin again to ask to what extent the world's wealthy nations are to help the poor" (pp. 71–72).

The line between colonialism, postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and aid is relatively blurred because many individuals in all of those periods would say that what they were doing was helping people. The means they used to "help" has perhaps varied over the years, but nevertheless, help seems to be a common theme.

Most historians consider the birth of modern foreign aid to have begun with the rebuilding of Europe after World War II with the Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program (O'Hare, 2017; Phillips, 2013; Williams, 2021). This plan was fundamentally a success, and for the USA, subsequently grew into other programs such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Peace Corps, US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Millennium Challenge Corporation, and US Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development, among others (O'Hare, 2017). These initiatives often involved not only economic and resource provision but also military and political assistance. Additionally, modern foreign aid has included many well-known celebrities through events such as the Live Aid concert, the song "Do They Know It's Christmas," and Bono's ONE campaign.

In combination with celebrities and religious/humanitarian organizations, American foreign aid policies have arguably perpetuated a culture of aid that stemmed from Western colonialism and has subsequently produced a domineering/dependent symbiotic relationship with many African countries and individuals.

## Examples

### Aversive Consequences of Aid: International Data

A study conducted between the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University and Google found that “Less than one-third of overall charitable giving ends up helping the truly needy” (Rooney et al., 2007). In 2015, US charities earned \$1.5 trillion in revenues per year and employed 13 million people (Kristof & WuDunn, 2015). In addition, it is estimated that Western nations have distributed \$2.3 trillion in foreign aid since World War II (Easterly, 2006). In contrast, a press release from the World Bank in 2018 stated that almost half of the world lives on less than \$5.50 per day (Howton, 2018), while 90% of investments on the continent of Africa in 2015 were dispensed to startup companies that had at least one North American or European founder (Strachan Matranga et al., 2017).

In April of 2021, the Financial Transparency Coalition (FTC) released a report from nine countries (South Africa, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Kenya, India, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Bangladesh) concerning the local distribution of recovery funds related to COVID-19 (Akibo-Betts et al., 2021). They found that, on average, approximately 63% of recovery funds went to large corporations instead of contributing to social welfare or small businesses (arguably the majority of business in developing countries). Furthermore, they reported that the average was as high as 92% in Kenya, and the \$50 million given by the World Bank for emergency response efforts is similarly largely unaccounted for (Akibo-Betts et al., 2021; Mwita, 2021).

### Aversive Consequences of Aid: Evidence in Individuals

The detrimental effects of international aid are perhaps no better portrayed than in the testimonies of affected individuals. The following examples show how data and statistics translate into the personal lives of those directly and indirectly affected by aid.

After an earthquake hit Haiti on January 12, 2010, thousands of people flocked to help those most affected by the crisis, donating things such as food, medicine, and money, among other goods and services. However, while aid in the face of crises is critical, continued aid can have detrimental effects long after a particular crisis. For example, Alex Georges, Co-Founder of ENERSA, a Haitian streetlight solar panel manufacturer, struggled to keep his business afloat once generous donors from the US began donating solar panels in an attempt to help restore electricity in Port-au-Prince. While ENERSA had previously installed an average of 50 streetlights a month, once donations began, the number was reduced to 5 streetlights in a total of 6 months (Miller, 2014). Although ENERSA struggled during this time, they were still a thriving business seven years after the earthquake (Waddell, 2017).

Clothing donations from Western countries to African nations have consequentially produced tables of clothing piled feet high in open markets that advertise apparel for sale at \$0.30 apiece. This relatively inexpensive way of buying clothes has created a booming market for donated clothing. In many instances, it has put traditional seamstresses out of business because the price for a custom-made dress

is much higher than \$0.30. According to Frazer (2008), used-clothing imports have produced a 50% decline in African employment from 1981–2000. Fortunately, African nations are not standing idly by. In 2016, the East African Committee pledged to phase out foreign used clothing imports. Although Kenya and Uganda have since rescinded their pledge, Rwanda has successfully implemented the ban (Wolff, 2020).

Meanwhile, a young teacher in Kenya seeks to make money doing one of the things she does best, teaching dance. She approaches various organizations in town to inquire if they would be interested in receiving ballet lessons for the young people in their programs. Although some agree, the organizational leaders mention they are accustomed to receiving dance lessons for free from a generous donor. Consequently, the price they are willing to pay is much lower than what the dance lessons are worth (B. Akinyi Opiyo, personal communication, June 1, 2021). Thankfully, by instead targeting individuals and organizations unaffected by previous donations, this ballet instructor now has a thriving business that substantially supplements her income.

We acknowledge there are differing views surrounding the effectiveness of aid and that this review has only touched on one side of the argument. In *The end of poverty: How we can make it happen in our lifetime*, the reader is given a thorough explanation of the importance of aid in alleviating individuals from poverty traps (Sachs, 2017).

This review intended to give both historical and modern evidence to demonstrate a consistent theme running from the dawn of western colonialism to modern aid practices today. Mainly, people's attempts to "help," in whatever way they think they are doing so have consistently harmed the recipients. It is time for Skinner's behavior analytic approach to be applied to this situation, so we as behavior analysts do not continue these practices in the future.

## Skinner's Ethics of Helping

Skinner's analysis of helping in his chapter titled, *The Ethics of Helping People* (Skinner, 1996) contributes some incredibly insightful inferences about "helping" that are particularly relevant to the concepts discussed in this paper thus far. Skinner split his analysis of helping into two large sections: the reasons that an individual helps another person and the consequences for that help.

### Reasons People Help

Skinner (1996) articulated that behavior is shaped by the environment, antecedents, and consequences, and that even helping behaviors are subject to this basic principle of behavior. He specifically pointed out that the reasons people help are for the survival of the species, the immediate consequences, and the survival of one's group (culture). It is perhaps imperative to mention that future consequences cannot control current behavior, but reinforcers do increase the probability of future behavior that has produced similar consequences in the past.

## Survival of the Species

Skinner (1996) said we act to help others because of the literal survival of our species. Giving an example of a mother caring for her infant, he pointed out that people may be genetically susceptible to reinforcement for these helping behaviors, or it may simply be part of their genetic makeup. If there were not some immediate reinforcer available for helping babies, then the human race would end. In this case, the consequence for helping infants is that our species can continue its existence.

## Immediate Consequences

Skinner continued by describing how people not only seem to help others for consequences that are far in the future, but they also help people because of more immediate consequences. Specifically, they help either because they find the helplessness of other people aversive, or they help people who help them in return. Finding the helplessness of another person aversive is the same as negative reinforcement: you help someone so that you no longer have to be in contact with an aversive condition. Because that aversive condition ends with your help, you are more likely in the future to help someone in a similar situation. For example, someone might provide free solar panels because they find the fact that people do not seem to have the means to provide them for themselves aversive. To end the aversive condition, they provide solar panels for them.

Additionally, Skinner mentioned that people may help others because they are likely to repay their kind deeds by helping in return. Essentially, if there is no reinforcer in the form of that person also reciprocating the help, then their helping behavior will be extinguished in the future. He pointed out that many of the gross injustices in society are committed toward those who do not have this capacity to reciprocate help, such as the disabled, the elderly, or the young.

## Survival of a Culture

Finally, Skinner described the survival of a culture or group as the last reason in which individuals may help others. People generally are interested in the survival of the ideals of their cultural group and seek to spread those ideals through helping practices. For instance, someone may spread their religion by going to a new country and helping people in the hopes that those people will adopt their religion and contribute to the survival of those ideals. Additionally, as per the example with China and Kenya, it could be argued that China is interested in building roads because through that, they can promote an economic system or infrastructure that is similar to their own, thus contributing to the survival of their culture in other parts of the world.

## Consequences of Help

For the remainder of his chapter, Skinner discusses the consequences of help. In this section, he begins to delineate his definition of help and how that differs from the traditional interpretation of the term. He points out that help is typically

seen as giving goods or services contingent on no behavior in particular. There is essentially no causal connection between the receipt of goods and/or services by the helped person and the behavior it is contingent upon. He says that this can have a myriad of behavioral effects on the helped person. In essence, giving goods/services that are not contingent on effective behavior makes it so that effective behavior does not develop in those individuals. For example, if someone constantly provides help to a child learning to tie their shoes by performing the act for them, they will never learn to tie their shoes independently.

Skinner then argues that the definition of help should not be the provision of goods or services, but rather the arrangement of reinforcers contingent on effective behavior. If we truly want to help someone, we should look at help as teaching effective behavior whereby that person can actively *get* or *acquire* things for themselves rather than being passive *receivers* of things. If this person is in turn better able to control their own environment in the future, they will be more productive and happy members of society. In essence, they will have figured out how to get the “good life” for themselves, noting that we must also be able to tell the difference between individuals who can and cannot help themselves (Skinner, 1996, p. 68). As Skinner said, “The ‘good life’ is not a world in which people *have* what they need; it is one in which the things they need figure as reinforcers in effective contingencies” (Skinner, 1996, p. 69).

## Recommendations

### The Definition of Help

Skinner’s analysis directly leads to recommendations for behavior analysts interested in helping others, in whatever form that may take. It is worthwhile to think through our definition of help and contemplate whether we agree with the traditional definition (the noncontingent receipt of goods/services), or Skinner’s definition (the arrangement of reinforcers contingent on effective behavior).

### Free Services

Many peoples’ efforts to help, whether that be the humanitarian or the behavior analyst, adhere to the traditional definition that Skinner discusses: goods and services given without much effort on the part of the receiver. In essence, the goods or services are given for “free.” That could mean the individual is not required to pay, they are not required to participate/learn, or generally speaking, they receive the service without somehow putting their own “skin in the game.” The giving of free goods or services can lead to three outcomes: effective behavior is not learned, the services are not sustainable, and empowerment is not achieved.

## Effective Behavior

For a behavior analyst providing free services, we would recommend focusing on adjusting their definition of helping to align with Skinner's: arranging contingencies of reinforcement based on effective behavior. For instance, if the services must be given for free because of economic constraints, they could potentially add a training component. If a parent can know how to work with their own child, a teacher know how to manage their own classroom, or a human resources professional know how to change the behavior of their employees, the free service has shaped up effective behavior not only for that person, but all those with which they are connected.

## Sustainability

Not only does teaching people to apply the principles of behavior teach effective behavior, it also works toward the sustainability of behavior analysis. If a behavior analyst is giving free services using outside funding, then once they leave, the initiative dies with them. If a person is required to pay for services, however small or large that amount may be, and individuals are also trained in using the principles of behavior analysis, then a job market for behavior analysts can be created. Additionally, this job market could potentially be sustainably funded from within that country as opposed to relying on aid from western nations. Although foreign money is often useful at the beginning of many projects, there should be a long-term plan for sustainability beyond that funding.

## Empowerment

Finally, we would argue that helping in a way that reinforces effective behavior and promotes sustainability would also promote empowerment. Colonizers, neocolonizers, and traditional givers of aid tend to see themselves as the party that understands what is best for the receiver. If a person is exposed to the principles of behavior and then can decide the best way to use them in their community and culture, they are empowered to make changes for themselves. Being free to act of one's own accord creates space for individuals to personally make changes in their own lives, towns, and countries.

## Collaboration is Key

Magatte Wade, a Senegalese businessperson, once said:

“certainly, in the back of peoples’ minds, [aid is] creating this impression that the Africans are helpless people that cannot get anything done *for* themselves, *by* themselves... People who are better off, you’re wiring their brain to say, ‘You’re not my partner’ to the poor person. And they’re wiring

the brain of the poor person to think, ‘I am not good enough, I can’t do this, and these people are better than me, they’re superior to me’” (Miller, 2014).

Suppose someone wants to help, sees a problem, and produces the solution alone without much or any consultation with the people most affected. In that case, the same theme that existed during colonization is still present today. Whatever the reasons for helping, the power dynamic in which the dominating group “knows” what goods or services are best for the subservient group remains and can potentially trap the subservient group in a cycle of aid dependency. Because of this, those who want to help must be doing it as partners and equal collaborators with the individuals affected by that help.

There is often a conflict between the “preservation of tradition” and the “advantages of modernity” (Sen, 2001, pp. 31–32). Even though it is possible that a specific type of aid or the introduction of the science of behavior could potentially improve the quality of life of many individuals, it does not mean those things should ever be forced on someone. Knowledge can be spread, and the offer of some modernity (such as the science of behavior) can be given. However, it should always be ultimately up to the people affected to decide how much they desire to preserve tradition and how much they wish to embrace modernity. This decision should never be made *for* someone.

Avoiding colonial relationships and working collaboratively is not a new concept in the field of applied behavior analysis (Fawcett, 1991; Pritchett et al., 2020). Fawcett (1991) delineated ten values that should guide research and action in the community. He emphasized the importance of collaborating as partners and that the community should be informed about every part of the research. All parties should be working toward sustainability and efficient dissemination of effective interventions. Almost 30 years later (Pritchett et al., 2020), behavior analysts are still emphasizing the importance of avoiding colonial relationships; therefore, it is valid to wonder who is taking this advice to heart and which contingencies of reinforcement may need to change to promote more equitable behavior analytic practices.

Fields outside behavior analysis can contribute much knowledge and practical guidance toward effectively avoiding colonial relationships. For example, the International Association for Community Development (IACD) defines community development as follows:

"Community Development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality, and social justice, through the organization, education, and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings" (Ross et al., 2018, p. 13).

Behavior analysts could learn from the way community development practitioners accentuate working as equal partners in problem-solving and creating effective and sustainable solutions. Community development practitioners have tackled essential issues ranging from fighting poverty in Brazil and Scotland

to organizing communities in Chicago and Hong Kong (International Association for Community Development, 2021), arguably crucial endeavors around the world.

### The Devil is in the Details

Although working collaboratively is essential to truly helping as opposed to working in a colonial mindset, it is also important to note that there are many additional variables to keep in mind. There is typically never one cookie-cutter approach that can be used in an entire country, let alone all of Africa. Instead, we must look at the various interlocking contingencies, past and current systems, cultural practices, historical events, etc. that could contribute to the success or failure of any initiative. While not behavior analytic in nature, the following studies demonstrate why it is essential to avoid one size fits all approaches in any field.

According to the Kenya Data and Health Survey conducted in 2014, 1 in 5 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 is either pregnant or already has at least one child (Muturi, 2020). More specifically, it is hypothesized that many teenage girls have sex with older men because of the higher probability of marriage and financial support if she does get pregnant. In a study conducted in Kenya, Dupas (2011) found that when teenage girls were simply informed that older men were more likely to have HIV, teenage pregnancies dropped by 28%. On the contrary, there was no difference in pregnancy rates with abstinence-only education (the predominant prevention strategy in Kenya).

Meanwhile, Shurie (2015) found that abstinence programs were one of the various interventions in Kenya that were significantly associated with reduced rates of sexual activities. He suggests that abstinence programs and religious involvement are critical factors in reducing adolescent sexual behaviors.

In another study conducted in Kenya, Lillie et al. (2009) found only 48% of students enrolled in abstinence education programs fully understood abstinence. They argue that if young people do not fully comprehend abstinence, there is little reason to believe they will have the ability to practice it.

Finally, Duflo et al. (2015) looked at data over seven years concerning the effects of educational subsidies in Kenya. They found that the *Education Subsidy* program, which provided two free school uniforms for the last three years of primary school, effectively reduced teenage pregnancy, dropout, and marriages.

The mixed results of these studies emphasize the importance of not relying on a standardized approach to community initiatives, whether those initiatives are to reduce teen pregnancy or something more familiar to behavior analysts, such as dissemination of the science. Instead, one must study every factor contributing to a specific place and people to know what could potentially work. To know those factors, the behavior analyst must be intimately involved in the community: i.e., speaking the same language, creating deep relationships, and being willing to unlearn things they previously thought to be simple black and white issues.

## Use the Science of Implementation

As they help improve societies in formerly colonized nations, behavior analysts will benefit from looking toward implementation science to accelerate evidence-based practices. The science of implementation originated from one of the first system-wide applications of applied behavior analysis (Phillips, 1968). Phillips published in the first issue of the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, which demonstrated applied behavior analysis in group homes with adolescents with problem behavior entitled “Teaching Family Model.” Implemented at Boys Town in Nebraska, this model showed several socially valid outcomes. Fixsen et al. (2005) reviewed the research to find factors that predicted the effective large-scale system’s scale-up of evidence-based practices with both treatment integrity and sustainability. Fixsen and Blase (1993) examined one hundred installations of the Teaching Family Model to find those with treatment fidelity and sustainability over five years and compared these installations with those that had neither attained sustainability nor fidelity.

Fixsen et al. (2005) found several factors that predicted both treatment fidelity and sustainability. First, they suggested that the implementation of each model initiative to full implementation follows along four stages. These stages include (a) exploration, (b) installation, (c) initial implementation, and (d) full implementation. In exploration, there are suggested prerequisites such as assessing needs, which consists of assessing community and organization resources, population characteristics and needs, and their match with the program model. This stage should focus upon both population outcomes and implementation outcomes. Other variables include administrative and implementer buy-in, the latter of which emphasizes the importance of working collaboratively, not colonially.

Fixsen et al. (2005) suggested that the second stage of implementation involves installation, which includes building in structural supports necessary to initiate the program. These include “ensuring the availability of funding streams, human resource strategies, and policy development” (Fixsen et al., 2005, p. 16).

The third stage of implementation, initial implementation, involves a change in skill levels, organizational capacity, and organizational culture. The final stage, full implementation, occurs once the new learning becomes integrated into the practitioner, organizational, and community practices, policies, and procedures. At this point, there are high levels of treatment fidelity, and the program sustains over some time.

In addition, Bertram et al. (2014) suggested there are several drivers of successful implementation. Implementation drivers establish the capacity to create practice, program, and systems-level changes needed to achieve improved desired population outcomes. To support high fidelity, effective, sustainable programs, implementation drivers are the infrastructure elements required for effective implementation. There are three different types of drivers. They include competency drivers (staff selection, training, tracking performance), organization drivers (funding and policy), and leadership drivers (adaptation vs. technical difficulties) (Bertram et al., 2014).

Implementation of a new practice is the biggest challenge of all. Implementation without fidelity and sustainability will not achieve the desired outcomes our stakeholders want. Although behavior analysts are not usually taught how to use large,

population-based units of analysis, the science of implementation is key to understanding how to scale up evidence-based practices more successfully with fidelity and sustainability in previously colonized areas.

## Future Research

This was a cursory look at challenges in working in formerly colonized populations, and thus, there are several areas for future research. First, this is a ripe area for empirical research by behavior analysts, particularly concerning experimental controls that explore efficiency and effectiveness while working in formerly colonized nations. Second, it will be important that this research encompass implementation focusing on social validity, treatment fidelity, and sustainability. Finally, there is a need for much more research using collaborative behavior analytic methods to improve the quality of life of formerly colonized populations (preferably by formerly colonized people), both individually and on a societal level.

## Conclusion

Recall the three individuals mentioned at the beginning of this paper: King Leopold II, a Kenyan ballet instructor, and Bono. King Leopold II claimed to “help” the Congolese by providing jobs, the Kenyan ballet instructor could not make a living wage because of the history of free help others gave, and Bono has often promoted helping individuals in extreme poverty through his ONE campaign. All of these individuals have significantly been affected by the various ways “help” has been defined and portrayed throughout the years.

The *Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts* states that an essential factor in ethical practice is to “do no harm” (Behavior Analyst Certification Board, 2020). For behavior analysts to attempt to genuinely help as they simultaneously do no harm in a formerly colonized nation, they must develop a scope of competence that lies far beyond the basic principles of behavior, understanding cultural, historical, and contextual factors. Until this understanding is expanded, behavior analysts should collaborate with those in other fields who have a deeper grasp of these issues (Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2018). Finally, the contingencies of reinforcement surrounding the helper and the helped should be studied so that Africans can achieve increased growth, empowerment, and change without the detrimental interference of Western nations.

Behavior analysis can and should be disseminated throughout the world without repeating the mistakes made in the past. The field has a lot to offer and can maximize its impact by attending to nuanced details while practicing collaborative dissemination and using the science of implementation. Truly “doing no harm” should be our guide as the field of behavior analysis grows to affect individuals worldwide.

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## Declarations

**Conflicts of interest** We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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