Social Psychology Applied To Life Homework Assignment
An interesting way to demonstrate the relevancy of social psychology is to relate its terms to events in the real world. In this homework assignment, you will become a practicing social psychologist and use social concepts and theories to explain some of the usual, unusual, and terrible things that people do to each other. All examples are based on real life incidents reported in the media.

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Article #1 White Girls Harassed  Adapted from: USA Today, Dec. 14, 1993, p.3A

In a small, rural, mostly white town in northern Indiana, about 15 local teenage girls were accused of "acting black" when they began wearing hip-hop clothes to high school. In rural Indiana, hip-hop clothes were considered "black" clothes because they were popularized by black rappers on MTV. Several of the hip-hop girls dropped out of school because other students verbally threatened and continually harassed them about wearing black clothes and braiding their hair. One student said, "These girls are acting like blacks. But, they're not black, so why should they act like it? It's not right."

1. Can you explain the concept that is demonstrated in the behaviors of the other students toward the hip-hop girls?

2. Why isn't prejudice the correct answer?

Article #2 How To Stop Hate Crimes
Adapted from: San Diego Union Tribune, Jan 1, 1994, p. A-3

A group of teenage skinheads boasted how they hated Jews, blacks, and other ethnic minorities. Because they were allegedly involved in a hate crime - bombing a synagogue - they were given a three-day counseling program. For three days, they participated in discussions of prejudice, racism, hate crimes, and Nazi Germany. For three days, the skinheads were forced to interact with Jews, blacks, and Hispanics - the very minorities
they boasted of hating. After three days of discussions, one skinhead said, "I don't want to be a skinhead anymore. I don't want to be associated with people who kill for no reason." After three days of interactions with Jews, blacks, and Hispanics, many skinheads changed their attitudes from one of hating to one of accepting.

3. What theory explains why the skinheads changed their attitudes toward minorities?

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**Article #3 How To Explain Bad Behavior**  
Adapted from: Newsweek, Nov, 1, 1993, p. 57

Since 1978, researchers have studied a particular family whose members have one thing in common. They share a marked inability to control their impulses, although they all have normal IQ’s. For example, one brother raped his sister and later, in a mental institution, he stabbed a warden in the chest with a pitchfork. Another relative tried to run his boss down with a car. Two other relatives were firebugs and still another had a habit of creeping into his sisters' bedroom and forcing them, at knifepoint, to undress. According to one of the researchers, "This is the first example showing a specific gene that changes the behavior of individuals."

4. Can you explain which factors contributing to aggression are supported by this finding?

5. Suppose we replaced the defective gene in these particular family members and they still couldn't control their impulses. What other factors would explain their inability to control their impulses?

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**Article #4 Why Do Americans Fear Gays?**  
Adapted from: Los Angeles Times, Jan. 4, 1993, p.A1

About half of the American population has learned a set of negative beliefs that result in a dislike and fear of gays. In fact, in 1994, the most frequently committed hate crime in the U.S. was directed toward gays. Some of the strongest antigay beliefs remain fixed in religion, especially among conservative Christian and Jewish denominations. Examples of antigay
beliefs include: gays are immoral, gays are mentally ill, gays are child molesters, and gays destroy family values. For the past 25 years, the American Mental Health profession has maintained that, based on their research, homosexuality is a normal variation of sexual behavior.

6. What concept describes the widely held negative beliefs toward gays?

7. How do schemas explain why half of the American population believes that homosexuality is abnormal?

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Article #5 Can A Label Fool A Beer Drinker?
Adapted from: Los Angeles Times, Dec. 30, 1988, p.IV-4

Last summer, the Coors brewery added only two new words - *Original Draft* - to the label of its best-selling beer. Regular Coors drinkers saw the new label and they believed it was a new beer. They complained about the new taste and said they preferred the taste of their old Coors. Suddenly, sales slowed as drinkers refused to buy cans of beer with the two new words. But, Coors had not changed the beer! They had only changed the two words on the label. Coors removed the two new words from the label. Within weeks, sales rose and the drinkers were happy.

8. Can you define one component of attitudes and illustrate it with an example from the beer drinkers?

9. Can you define a second component of attitudes and illustrate it with an example from the beer drinkers?

10. Can you define a third component of attitudes and illustrate it with an example from the beer drinkers?
Article #6 Outrage Over Lynching Of Young Lovers
Adapted from: Los Angeles Times, April 12, 1991, p. A-1
Several years ago, in a small Indian village, two young lovers - a high caste woman and a low caste man - eloped to be married. When the couple returned three days later, they faced the anger of the high caste elders. The elders decided that the low cast man had contaminated they high caste woman and made her an Untouchable. In India, Untouchables are believed to be detestable, socially inferior, and fit only for jobs no one else will do. The elders decided that the penalty for violating the sacred rule against inter-caste marriage was death by hanging. The next day, the young lovers were hanged in the village courtyard.

11. Can you define the concept that is illustrated by the beliefs of the high caste villagers toward the Untouchables?

12. Can you define the concept that is illustrated by the attitudes of the high caste elders toward the inter-caste marriage of the couple.

13. Can you define the concept that is illustrated by the behaviors of the high caste elders toward the young couple?

Article #7 Beating By Police Officers On Tape
Adapted from: Los Angeles Times, March 11, 1993, p.A-1
Los Angeles police officers chased and finally stopped a car driven by Rodney King, an African American. King was dragged from his car and brutally beated by 4 white police officers. By chance, the officers' brutal beating of King was videotaped by a neighbor. Because of the video tape evidence, the four white police officers were arrested and tried for the malicious beating of King. During the trial, King's lawyers stated that the primary reason the white officers beat King so severely was because King was an African American. The police officers' lawyers suggested that the primary reason the white officers beat King was to try to control a dangerous situation, and it was not racially motivated.
14. Can you define the theory that is used to explain causes of behavior?

15. Can you define the two types of explanations or attributions for behavior and give examples from the article?

**Article #8 Cult of Death**
*Adapted from: Time, March 15, 1993, pp.36-39*

More than 100 people had joined David Koresh, a 34-year old high school dropout and preacher. They waited for the world to end in an armed compound near Waco, Texas. Koresh's followers would do anything for him. At one point he had 18 'wives', and all the women were eager to be his wife. Koresh laid down strict rules for his followers. They were not allowed beer or meat and had to turn over all their money to him. Koresh enforced his rules with bodily beatings and punishment. Worried about Koresh's purchase of assault rifles, federal agents attacked Koresh's compound. During the attack, a fire started that quickly became a blazing inferno. Even with a fire raging, none of Koresh's followers left the compound. In the burnt rubble, federal agents found the bodies of Koresh, along with 85 adults and children.

16. Which concept describes why women were eager to be a 'wife' of Koresh?

17. Which concept describes why cult members put up with Koresh's strict rules?

18. Which concept explains why cult members did not leave the compound after the fire started?

**Article #9 Danger, Thin Ice**
*Adapted from: Los Angeles Times, January 17, 1994, p. B-1*

No sooner had they parked the car when 10-year old Daren was headed toward the lake. The last words he heard his mother shout were, "Be careful." Daren ran out on the lake, which was iced over. As he reached the middle, the thin ice gave way. He fell into the frigid water and shouted frantically for help. His mother came running but she too broke through
the thin ice. She desperately tried to stay afloat but she was pulled under by her wet clothes. Some distance away, Christian heard the frantic shouting of the drowning boy. He quickly ran onto the ice but as he neared the boy, the ice gave away. Somehow he managed to stay afloat and swim to the boy. With one had he grabbed the boy's coat and with the other he swam and pulled them both to safety.

19. Can you explain the social psychological concept that describe Christians behavior toward the young boy?

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**Article #10 Girl Raped As Crowd Looks On**  
*Adapted from: San Diego Tribune, July 29, 1983*

After spending the whole day visiting the zoo, 13 year old Diane decided to cool off in the large swimming pool with a water fountain in the middle. She rolled up her baggy jeans and waded in up to her knees. She wasn't paying much attention to the two older boys who had waded in and were approaching her. When they got close, they grabbed her and pulled her into the middle of the pool. They held her down against the concrete base of the fountain. As the fountain sprayed them with water, the two boys took turns raping Diane. About 35 people who were walking around the fountain heard Diane's screams for help. Not one of them offered to help.

20. Can you explain the concept that describes why none of the 35 people did anything to help Diane?

21. Can you explain how the diffusion of responsibility theory describes why 35 people who heard Diane's screams did nothing to help?

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**Article #11 One's A Champ and One's A Chump**  
*Adapted from: ???*

Something strange happened to two players during the National League baseball playoffs between the Atlanta Braves and the Pittsburgh Pirates. During the regular season, Atlanta Braves player Mark Lemke had batted a miserable .211 (two eleven). But, during the seven playoff games, he batted an
astronomical .565 and almost single-handedly won the series for the Braves. During the regular season, Pittsburgh Pirates player Barry Bonds *had batted a phenomenal*.350 and had been voted the teams most valuable player. But during the playoffs, *he batted a dreadful*.160 and was largely responsible for the Pirates losing the playoffs.

22. Can you explain the concept that describes Lemke's great batting performance in the playoffs?

23. Can you explain the concept that describes Bonds' terrible batting performance in the playoffs?

**Article #12 Man Versus Vending Machine**  
*Adapted from: ??*

It was 97 degrees in the shade and the air conditioner in Tony's car had stopped working about 50 miles ago. When he couldn't take another mile of the heat, he stopped at a mostly deserted gas station in a small Florida town. He walked over to the vending machine, dropped in three quarters, pushed the button and waited for an icy cold Pepsi can to drop. But nothing happened. Tony *banged and kicked* the Pepsi button about a dozen times. Nothing. Tony walked back to his truck and searched for something among the junk behind the front seat. He found an object and walked back to the vending machine. He stopped in front of the machine, raided his aluminum bat, and *began to beat the vending machine.*

24. Can you explain the theory of aggression that describes Tony's behavior?

25. Can you explain why, on many previous occasions, Tony had not beaten the vending machine when it didn't work?