**Assignment 1: The Social Heuristics**

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The textbook refers to heuristics as a way humans are able to reduce the amount of effort they put into social situations. Heuristics are simple rules for making complex decisions in a quick and effortless way. In other words, they are techniques that allow humans to quickly deal with large amounts of information, especially under conditions where the correct answer would be difficult to find. There are four types of heuristics covered in Chapter 2 of the textbook; the representativeness heuristic, the availability heuristic, anchoring and adjustment, and the status quo heuristic.

The representativeness heuristic is when someone makes a judgment on the basis that the more an individual seems to resemble or match a given group, the more likely she or he is to belong to that group. When using the representativeness heuristic, people tend to use their personal prototypes which are average representations of the “typical” member of a category. The availability heuristic, on the other hand, suggests that the easier it is to bring information to the mind, the greater its impact will be on following judgments. The use of this heuristic makes sense most of the time, however, it can also lead to judgment errors.

Anchoring and adjustment is the third type of heuristic brought up in this chapter. The anchoring and adjustment heuristic includes the tendency to deal with uncertainty by using something one already knows as the starting point, or the anchor. Once the anchor is in place, one makes adjustments to it in order to reach certainty. In addition to the anchoring and adjustment heuristic, there is the status quo heuristic. When people make judgments, they act as though they believe that the status quo is good. This is similar to the availability heuristic in that options that are more readily available to be retrieved from memory are perceived as good, while new, rarely encountered ideas that differ from the status quo are not.

To further give an example of the Representativeness Heuristic, consider the following scenario. Imagine a crime has been committed in a rich, predominately white neighborhood and the police have been called. There are two suspects; the first one is thin, weak, wears glasses, and a white man while the other suspect is strong, tough, has tattoos, and is a black man. The police may be inclined to assume that the stronger man is the one who committed the crime because that man fits in with their personal prototype of a criminal, and therefore they arrest the second suspect. This kind of thinking is very dangerous because it tends to ignore the frequency with which certain events occur in the total population, also known as base rates. In this neighborhood, in particular, it is typical for crimes to be committed by men who fit the demographic of the first suspect, not the second suspect. So, the police have made an erroneous judgment and arrested the wrong man.

Availability heuristics are a different story. Imagine there was a critical plane crash that cost many lives and the story went viral. A lot of people, because this viral news story is so fresh in their minds, may begin to think that traveling on a plane is extremely dangerous and life-threatening and that they should begin traveling by car. It is less likely that one would hear about all of the car crashes that happen in their area, but if they were to hear of a plane crash then it may seem as if plane crashes are more dangerous. The availability heuristic can lead to erroneous decisions because it brings to mind very dramatic, yet rare, events that we perceive as more likely to occur.

The next heuristic that is covered in the textbook is anchoring and adjustment. This social heuristic is used very commonly in settings where the customer is to bargain a price with the seller. The customer is presented with an asking price and from that starting point, the customer adjusts the price to meet one they deem acceptable. When comparing the original asking price to the new lowered price, the customer feels as though they have walked away with a bargain. Whether or not the customer has actually walked away with a bargain is debatable, which is why it is important to be cautious when making decisions through anchoring and adjustment.

The last heuristic that is brought up in the textbook is the status quo heuristic. Imagine you are visiting your favorite restaurant. Every time you go there you order the same thing, a number 5 with extra pickles and a Coke on the side. The restaurant you visit has tons of options and all are as good as the next. Because you have been getting the same thing for so long, it seems like the best choice is to get your regular order. This is a prime example of the status quo heuristic in which certain options that one’s memory is easily able to retrieve are deemed as good over options that are new or different from what the ‘status quo’ is.

All of the above heuristics, while they are extremely prevalent in everyone’s daily life, have a tendency to lead to erroneous judgments. The conclusion that one makes from using the representativeness heuristic, while it may often be accurate, is often wrong because those judgments tend to ignore base rates. When people ignore the consistencies of base rates and make their own decisions based solely on personal prototypes, they are almost destined to come to an erroneous conclusion.

The availability heuristic, like the status quo heuristic, also leads to erroneous conclusions because it leads people to believe that information that is easily accessed and readily available is correct over newer information. Specifically, the availability heuristic causes people to overestimate the likelihood of certain disastrous events because they believe that easily accessible information is true. Both heuristics are dangerous to use in social situations because they lead people to genuinely believe completely inaccurate thoughts.

Anchoring and adjustment are different from the other mentioned heuristics and so is the reason why it’s so powerful. When someone is presented with an original offer or an anchor, they will then give adjustments to that anchor. No matter what happens next, the impact of that initial offer will overpower any adjustments you begin to make. This is why every adjustment to an anchor is somewhat close to what the anchor originally offered. Research has shown that this phenomenon continues to occur because when we are presented with an option that we deem sufficient, we tend to stop because we think we have gotten what we deserve. While these heuristics are simple and easy to utilize, they may lead to erroneous judgments so it is best to be cautious and consider the social heuristics.

**Reference Page**

Branscombe, N. R., & Baron, R. A. (2016). *Social Psychology (14th Edition)* (14th ed.). Pearson.