

Username: Sean Smith **Book:** Understanding and Managing Organizational Behavior, Sixth Edition. No part of any book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means without the publisher's prior written permission. Use (other than pursuant to the qualified fair use privilege) in violation of the law or these Terms of Service is prohibited. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Individuals who stand out in a group are often stereotyped by what it is that makes them stand out. This woman may be perceived by her male colleagues as representative of all females simply because she is female in an all-male group, or is salient.



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them in the morning when business was slow. Each person handled only two customers, but one salesperson provided significantly more service than the other. She observed the other two salespeople in the late afternoon—the busiest time of day for the department. Both had a continual stream of customers. One salesperson handled more customers than the other, but the slower salesperson gave each customer more personal attention. Clearly, Sloan could not rely solely on the behavior of the salespeople in forming her impression of the customer service they were providing. She also had to consider all the additional information provided by the situation.

Standing Out in the Crowd: The Effects of Salience in a Situation

SALIENCE

The extent to which a target of perception stands out in a group of people or things.

In considering how the situation affects perception, we need to focus on one factor that is particularly important: the **salience** of the target in the situation—that is, the extent to which the target stands out in a group of people or things. We have all experienced the effects of salience. Have you ever been the only student in a room full of professors, the only man in a group of women, or the only African American in a room full of white people? A salient individual is very conspicuous and often feels self-conscious. He or she believes that everyone is watching his or her every move. That assessment is pretty accurate, too. The other people in the group or room do pay more attention to the salient person, for he or she indeed does stand out. Salience, in and of itself, *should not affect* how a target is perceived. After all, a man is the same person regardless of whether he is in a room full of men or women. But remember that perception is a subjective process and, because of that subjectivity, salience *does affect* how a target is perceived. Exhibit 4.5 lists some situational factors that cause a target to stand out.

What are the consequences of salience for perception in organizations? Consider the experiences Mary Schwartz has had as the only female partner in a small consulting firm. Her male colleagues treat her as their equal, and she gets along well with each of them, but she still feels the effects of her salience. These effects take the form of extreme evaluations and stereotyping.

EXTREME EVALUATIONS Schwartz noticed that her male colleagues' reactions to her various accomplishments and mishaps on the job seemed extreme. She recently landed a major new account for the firm and received such lavish praise that she became embarrassed. Likewise, when she was unable to attend an important meeting because of a family problem, it was made clear to her that she had lost favor in everyone's eyes.

Schwartz's experience is not unique. Individuals who are salient are often perceived in more extreme terms (positive or negative) than inconspicuous members of a group. They are also seen as especially influential or responsible for what happens to them and to the groups they belong to.⁵⁰

STEREOTYPING On several occasions, Schwartz felt that her male colleagues were unintentionally stereotyping her as a "typical woman." They frequently called on her to enlighten them about the "woman's point of view" on various matters such as how to deal with a female client or subordinate. On several occasions, Schwartz was tempted to tell her male colleagues that