

Teach to reach!

# Content Unit 1



SAY:  
„BYE, POLARITY“



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# 1 Polarisation in everyday life

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## 1.1 Introduction (building knowledge) - 10min

### What does "polarisation" mean?

Our world is a diverse place. People have different ideas, needs and desires, they pursue different goals and see meaning in different things. They have changing concepts of good and evil, they have not all had the same upbringing and education, they have not grown up in the same circumstances and have had very diverse life experiences.

This diversity can be a significant enrichment if we learn to deal with it. This is an excellent mission, especially in a rapidly changing world that is becoming ever closer through modern technologies. However, if we do not learn to do this, different life models can also lead to multiple conflicts and disputes. The emergence of these conflicts is called *polarisation*. This means that rigid *poles* develop among people, which, just like the north and south poles of the earth, are far away from each other and can even be opposite to each other. Polarisation can occur wherever different ideas, habits, circumstances, attitudes or expectations clash and are not mediated with each other. If, on top of that, polarisation between people remains unaddressed, many difficulties can develop: Ignorance, exclusion, arguments or even violence.

Recognising, addressing, and overcoming polarisation is therefore part of shaping a peaceful, communal and respectful world in which all people can find their home, on both a small and a large scale.

### What is "polarisation in everyday life"?

Polarisation already occurs in our immediate everyday life. You have probably already had the experience that people behave like north and south poles to each other because of many little things. This can be because of their appearance, the way they speak, their hobbies and passions or their character. Therefore, it is very important to recognise the ground for polarisation already in these everyday life trifles and to learn to deal with it. Let's do this with the following examples and exercises.

## 1.2 The first impression (building knowledge) - 45min

Imagine the following situation: you are going for a walk or making yourself comfortable on a bench somewhere. Suddenly a person walks past you. You don't know this person and have never seen him or her before in your life. You don't know why, but you could still make up a story about this person. Not that this story has to be accurate or tell you anything factual about the person. But the way he or she moves, the way he or she looks, the way he or she is dressed - all this gives you an idea based on which you make up all kinds of things. Perhaps this person also reminds you of someone else with whom you associate him or her.

You've probably experienced something like this before. It has a name: *First impression effect*. Based on first impressions, we make up all kinds of things about other people that contribute to the image we have of them. When a first impression tends to be *positive*, it's called the *halo effect*; when it tends to be *negative*, it's called the *horn effect*.

### Practical Relevance

Now get together in pairs or small groups. Exchange your experiences on the following tasks and write down your results in keywords:

- Describe 2-3 situations in which you once had first impressions of people and formed a picture of them.
- Think about which perceptions (clothing, movement, voice, etc.) have influenced your image of the person and how.
- Lastly, talk about whether and how you have experienced that another person gained an image of you through first impressions that were not or only partially true.

Then compare your results together in class.

### 1.3 How Halo and Horn Effects Affect Us (Apply Knowledge) - 50min

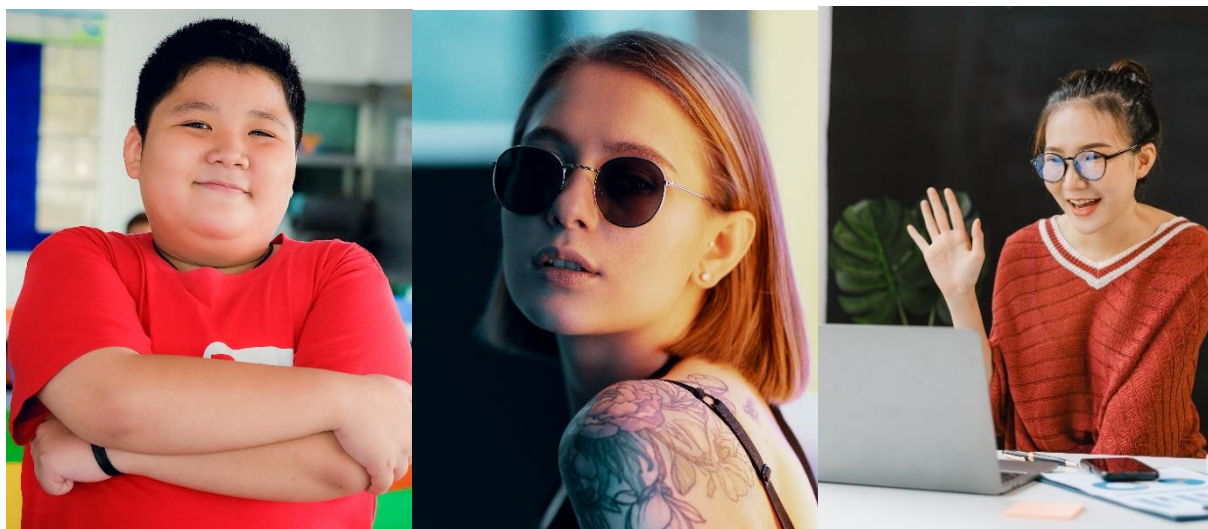
We now want to let first impression's effects directly impact us. For this purpose, you will find six pictures here, for which you will receive a small task:

- Look at the picture for about 10 seconds.
- Then silently write down answers to the following questions for yourself:
  - What likes or dislikes does this person have?
  - What are their hobbies? What is their profession?
  - What has the person already experienced in their life?
  - What about family and friends?
  - How do you rate the character of the person?
- Then move on to the next picture and do the same again.
- When you have gone through all six pictures, compare your notes in class. For each picture, ask each other how you came up with the answers you gave.

Here are the pictures:







#### 1.4 Self-revelation (building knowledge) - 30min

When we have first impressions of people, we invent numerous notions, ideas, and whole stories about them on their basis. Sometimes they may be true, but most of the time they are completely wrong.

##### Important

Two things are crucial regarding first impressions: First, we cannot really rely on first impressions. Secondly, if we do not reflect on them and are critical of them, they can even become grounds for prejudice, discrimination and unequal treatment.

Hence the question arises: Where do all the ideas we take from our first impressions come from? How do we come up with precisely *these* ideas and not others? Why do people trigger one feeling and not the opposite? The answer is as simple as it is far-reaching: first impressions are based on our own experiences, imprints and preconceptions about the world. - We know next to nothing about the other person we have an impression of. Therefore, our thinking and feeling have no choice but to rely on our information and preconceptions and compare the new impressions with this information. We do this incessantly.

In short: my first impressions tell me much more *about myself*, my imprints, previous experiences, priorities, prejudices and all the influences that affect my thinking and feeling than they tell me about the other person. Maybe my upbringing or experiences I had with other people influence me. Perhaps media or the contents of my areas of interest are mixed in. Maybe my wishes, desires and needs also significantly affect my first impression of others. Perhaps clichés in my head, learned prejudices or general opinions also make a big impression on me.

### Important

First impressions are more so-called *self-revelations* about myself and my imprints than actual impressions of another person.

### Practical Relevance

Based on this insight, either look again at your keywords for the six pictures from the previous exercise. Ask yourself what your first impressions say about you, your imprints, experiences, preconceptions and prejudices and record them in a message to yourself. You can write this down or audio record it. The important thing is that you don't have to show your findings to anyone and that you record them alone and unobserved. Only in this way can you allow yourself to be honest with yourself.

You can keep the result of your reflection with you and later compare it again and again with new first impressions about people. You may discover that something has changed.

## 1.5 First impression and polarisation (apply knowledge) - 30min

Anyone who realises that Halo and Horn Effects have great significance for us on the one hand and are based more on our own imprints, prejudices or desires rather than on the truth on the other, quickly realises the importance of first impressions for polarisation.

All too quickly we are ready with a judgement about the other person and overlook the fact that we form this judgement based on our previous experiences and not on the other person. In principle, this is not a problem, because such previous experiences help us to filter the world quickly in order to be able to deal with it. However, this circumstance often becomes a problem when we no longer question, criticise or redefine our filters, imprints, and presuppositions about the world. This is because attitudes can then develop in all of us contributing to polarisation.

Enter into a general discussion with each other in class. Each of you can reveal what and how much you want. Discuss the following questions and brainstorm together:

- In what different ways can first impressions create, foster or reinforce polarisation between people?
- In which areas of life do you perceive such polarisation through first impressions or where do you suspect it?
- To what extent have you ever contributed to the polarisation between yourself and others through first impressions? With whom have you allied yourself? Against whom have you allied yourself?
- What do you think could be done about polarisation through first impression effects? How can it be prevented? How should it be dealt with when it happens? Think about both the inner attitude of people and how they treat each other.

You can make your result available to your whole class for further viewing and editing.

## 1.6 Polarisation through names (building knowledge) - 5min

We now want to work on specific fields where polarisation can occur in everyday life. These fields are taken directly from life and sometimes one might not even suspect they influence our pole thinking.

The first example is *names*. It is not only a person's appearance that makes a first impression on us, but also their name. Social psychologists have coined the saying for this: "A name is worth a thousand words." Think about what this saying could mean.

## 1.7 What a name can do (Apply knowledge) - 25min

Now ask yourself for a few minutes where and how you may have come into contact with the subject of a person's *name in* such a way that this name has caused certain images, prejudices or classifications of the person. Try to recognise which different characteristics of a person you associate with their name.

Also consider that this person may have a title (*Dr.* or *Prof.*) or ask yourself about the effect of nicknames.

Write down your thoughts and share them with your class in a short discussion.

## 1.8 Images of people through names (apply knowledge) - 30min

Now read the following text message:

*This can't be true! Why didn't you say so earlier? I'm really disappointed, I have to say. I would never have thought of you like that and now you have to explain things to me!*

Together with someone else from the class, ask yourself how your assessment of this message and its context changes if the sender has different names. Give the person different names from your language or another language and discuss how your image of the person changes.

Together, compare the images and stories that arise in your minds with these different names. Next, choose two names each and tell each other the age of that person. You can choose any age you like. As you talk, notice again how a different age affects your perception of the message.

Finally, think together about the polarisation that could arise if we let ourselves be very influenced by a person's name. Think of other examples of names.

## 1.9 The influence of age (building knowledge) - 30min

All over the world, people's age plays a central role in how they are classified in groups and societies. Often, people with a higher age also enjoy more advantages or greater prestige than younger people. This is called the *seniority principle* (= principle of the dignity of ageing).

The seniority principle can be reflected in different ways. Those who work longer in a company usually get more money than younger colleagues. Older people often have more to say within the

family than younger people. With increasing age one has permission to engage in more activities and usually our image of wisdom and experience is also linked to ageing.

### Practical Relevance

Collect other areas where age makes a difference within the class. You can ask yourself the following question: What advantages and disadvantages or freedoms and restrictions do I have as a young person, and which ones as an older person? Additionally, ask yourselves where you would suggest changes, e.g., abolishing or introducing other age limits. Give reasons for your opinions.

After completing your collection, you also consider how polarisation (e.g., between age groups) might arise from age and what should be done about it.

## 1.10 Appearance (Apply Knowledge) - 20min

Another key factor that contributes to the polarisation of people is their appearance. Look at the two pictures below and record your thoughts on the following question: Why do most people tend to buy the lower carrots instead of the upper ones?



Of course, the carrots in both pictures do not differ at all in terms of their ingredients or effect. So what drives people to judge the world with a view to certain ideas of a *correct appearance*?

Think about all the aspects that, in your opinion, characterise a so-called *correct appearance* in people. Ask yourself where such assumptions might come from and summarise your view in a few sentences. You could then discuss your findings in class.

## 1.11 Appearance norms (building knowledge) - 15min

People's appearance includes various aspects: their body and its features, their clothes, their hygiene, their accessories, ... - but all the different elements have one thing in common: they follow specific ideas about how someone *should* and *should not* look. Such ideas are called *norms*. So people's appearance is *standardised* in different ways.



We find such norms everywhere in our world: a certain body size is considered "normal", particular head hair is considered "normal" or certain styles of dress are considered "normal". Such norms are not natural. They change constantly and adapt to our living conditions through various influences. *Norms* are therefore changeable and not fixed.

### Practical Relevance

Together with someone from your class, ask yourself where such ideal concepts of appearance could come from. Who determines what is "beautiful"? Collect several of these norms that you can think of. Then compare them within the class.

## 1.12 Research on body norms (build knowledge) - 100min

To start the following tasks, compare the following pictures and work out together in the class the different normative ideas about the body and its appearance that are given in these pictures.



Now form smaller groups, take an internet-enabled device and go on a search. You will do several tasks to create a clear awareness of different norms.

### Practical Relevance

#### Task 1:

Research different historical epochs and their norms regarding the appearance of people on the internet or in books. Look at different centuries and different parts of the world. On your journey, go to other continents, because people have always lived in other places and developed different norms than in Europe. Analyse 3-4 examples from different times and places. What were the norms for appearance in the past?

Collect your results and then give a short presentation as a group to the class about your findings.

### Practical Relevance

#### Task 2:

Research on the internet and in other media the norm ideas regarding the appearance of people in advertisements, *films and series or video games*. Analyse 3-4 examples each from different times and places. Which norms apply to appearance?

Collect your results and then give a short presentation as a group to the class about your findings.

### Practical Relevance

#### Task 3:

Lastly, do some research on social media (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, ...) on the norms of appearance that are common there. What norms prevail there and how are they addressed? Analyse 3-4 examples of different times and places. What are the norms of appearance there?

Collect your results and then give a short presentation as a group to the class about your findings.

## 1.13 Polarisation through body norms (apply knowledge) - 50min

What is considered "normal" is easily understood as an instruction. "You have to be like this!" is the often tacit request. This can lead to polarisation because we are unaware of most expectations we associate with norms. Now collect some terms that indicate polarising issues regarding the human body. Write each one on a piece of paper.

Here are some examples:

- Gender
- Age
- Attractiveness
- Colours (of the hair, the skin, the eyes, ...)
- Special features of the appearance
- Voice
- ways of moving (gait, body language, ...)
- Facial expressions
- etc.

You can expand on these terms or formulate them in more detail. After a few minutes there must be a collection of notes. Then form a circle of chairs and put all the pieces of paper in the middle of the circle.

Now vote one after the other: How many of you consider which topic particularly important regarding polarisation, exclusion, discrimination? In this way, choose the three most important issues for your class. Then discuss each of them for about 10 minutes.

### Practical Relevance

In this discussion in a circle of chairs, find reasons for each of the three chosen terms why polarisation could occur and consider together how polarisation could be avoided or how it can be reduced if it is already happening.

At the end of this discussion round, you do the same again. Now, however, you choose the three terms for which you think there is no or hardly any polarisation.

### Practical Relevance

Together, explain why you think polarisation does not or hardly occur in the terms you have chosen and ask each other if this is really the case. Perhaps you will discover that polarisation can also occur with them. If this is the case, discuss why and how you could deal with it in a meaningful way.

## 1.14 Polarisation through ownership (apply knowledge) - 40min

Look at the shoes in these two pictures, nothing else. What can you say about both people? What might their living conditions be like? Share ideas in class.



Then read through the following story:

Amelie has 300 euros of pocket money every month and needs new shoes. That's why she buys a new pair of her favourite brand for 250 euros. She knows that the shoes will certainly last well for some time and keep their appearance super. And indeed, Amelie's new shoes carry her around well and with pleasure for two years.

Mark gets 50 euros in pocket money every month, that's all he can afford. He also needs new shoes. So, he buys a pair for 40 euros in a shop. The shoes are of inferior quality and therefore only last two months. Then he needs some more. The whole year the shoe issue goes on and he has to buy new

shoes every few months, which fortunately pays off halfway in addition to his other pocket money expenses.

Amelie and Mark compare their spending on shoes after two years. Amelie spent 250 euros. Mark, on the other hand, had to buy pairs of shoes for a total of 300 euros in the 24 months because they kept breaking. So, he spent more money overall with less pocket money.

### Practical Relevance

Write down in keywords what this story is trying to say and think about what this might have to do with polarisation. To what extent could conflict arise between Amelie and Mark?

Then, based on this input, start a joint debate in the class. Interpret the statement: "Wealth polarises!" - What can this sentence mean? What does all this have to do with Amelie and Mark? Furthermore, where does a possible polarisation between people through possessions and wealth occur in life?

Collect your results together on the board and ask yourselves afterwards what could be done to reduce possible polarisation through ownership.

## ***1.15 Polarisation through behaviour (Apply knowledge) - 90min***

Besides the potential for conflict regarding language, body, or wealth, it can also have a polarising effect if they are expected to behave in a certain way. Especially when this behaviour is rewarded and other behaviour is punished, problems often arise among people. One can think of many areas of life where people have to fulfil certain expectations.

### Practical Relevance

In class, spend a few minutes collecting the areas of life where it is essential to meet certain expectations by behaving in a certain way. List them.

We now look at the school. In school, different expectations can contribute to polarisation. Look at the following two pictures. Then, in teams of two, discuss how these situations might have arisen.





Then each of you makes your own mind map. Write "Expectations at school" in the middle. The question is: what expectations of my behaviour am I confronted with at school? Write down as many ideas as you can. Think about the expectations of your teachers, parents, classmates, friends and so on.

Examples: Performing, getting certain grades, reporting to class, being quiet, keeping my school things tidy, showing interest, staying friendly, going to bed at a certain time, studying enough, ....

### Practical Relevance

Then discuss together: which of your ideas could lead to polarisation in the classroom? For example, can grades create polarisation among you students? How and why? What about other ideas you have?

After discussing a few points, you move on to the question of how to prevent such polarisation. What could the school and the school system contribute? What could teachers and students contribute? What could parents do? How can we reduce polarisation that is already taking place in schools?

We will then transfer your results to other areas of life.

### Practical Relevance

Forms groups. Each group takes on a different area of life where expectations create a certain behavioural pressure that can lead to polarisation between people. Think of the world of work, sport, social media and the internet, the family, ...

Each group makes a poster consisting of two parts: firstly, you work out how expectations of a certain behaviour are built up in your area of life. Secondly, you ask how this could lead to polarisation and conflict among the people involved. For example, in a family where all family members are expected to eat a vegetarian diet, what could cause conflict?

Afterwards, each group presents its poster to the class and the whole class discusses what could be done to reduce polarisation in the respective area of life and contribute to more community and mutual understanding.

## ***1.16 Overall discussion (secure knowledge) - minimum 30min***

You have gained an insight in the individual exercises you have completed that polarisation already begins in everyday life. It is not only a question of the larger areas of life, but starts in the here and now, with you and me. It has to do with first impressions, age, gender, professions, appearance, wealth, right down to the name someone carries. Therefore, we must be aware of these things in our minds. They are constantly present.

### Practical Relevance

Each of you now reflects on three critical insights you have gained from the individual exercises regarding the prevention of polarisation.

Then form a circle of chairs in the class. Then tell the others in a few sentences why you think your chosen topics are important and what you think could be done.

Then discuss your issues and try to formulate 5-10 sentences together that reflect what you could do to minimise polarisation in everyday life. Write these sentences down for yourselves.

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