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BETWEEN AFFIRMATION AND PREJUDICE – PEDAGOGICAL READING OF AMBIVALENT ATTITUDES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PHENOMENON OF DISABILITY*

Introduction: Ambivalent attitudes towards disability and people with disabilities constitute a complex area of tension between declared affirmation and entrenched prejudices. The coexistence of positive and negative social attitudes is revealed in public discourses and in everyday interpersonal interactions, influencing the way we perceive and treat the Other. Recognizing ambivalence and understanding the significance of its mechanisms is crucial for identifying exclusion processes and, importantly, designing educational activities that foster social sensitivity that leads to inclusion.

Research Aim: The aim of the article is to identify and systematize the mechanisms that condition ambivalent attitudes toward the phenomenon of disability, based on an analysis of theoretical approaches and previous empirical research findings. The aim of the study is to analyze and explain the ways in which ambivalence toward disability and persons with disabilities manifests itself in educational practice.

Evidence-based Facts: The state of the art regarding ambivalent attitudes indicates that the coexistence of affirmation and prejudice is a common phenomenon, documented in psychological, sociological, and pedagogical literature. Research shows that declared positive attitudes often coexist with hidden or unconscious beliefs that devalue people with disabilities. This phenomenon is driven by such theories as that of ambivalent attitudes, social differentiation, as well as mechanisms of stereotyping, ableism, and infrahumanization. Numerous analyses also confirm that ambivalence is reinforced by cultural narratives, a lack of reliable knowledge, and entrenched models of social differentiation.

Summary: Ambivalent attitudes toward disability mask the gap between declared acceptance and entrenched prejudices that influence the upbringing and education processes. Research findings indicate that such attitudes perpetuate stereotypes and hinder creation of an inclusive environment. Understanding and reflecting on these perspectives is crucial for designing

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pedagogical practices that support the equality and empowerment of students with disabilities, particularly in the context of inclusive educational practices.

Keywords: social attitudes, disability, affirmation, prejudice, ambivalence, social differentiation

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, writers, philosophers, and scholars have addressed the issues of inequality, otherness, and foreignness in social life. One of the significant problems concerns human functioning in a world of intensifying differentiation among people, along with the resulting divisions within societies and growing disparities. These phenomena occur in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres alike. It can be argued that the experience of diversity and otherness largely shapes the postmodern world and constitutes an inseparable element of contemporary human existence (Bauman, 2006; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 2008; Melosik & Szkudlarek, 2010).

Today's world seems to contradict the idea of a uniform, unitary, and coherent social order. The functioning of communities is determined by a framework based on diversity, distinctiveness, and multidimensional differentiation, including the pluralism of ideas, concepts, beliefs, attitudes, and views (Bauman, 2006; Giddens, 2008). Fewer phenomena can be unequivocally classified within such simple oppositions as good–evil, truth–falsehood, or positive–negative. Between these poles lies a vast “in-between” space, often unrecognized and difficult to define clearly. It is precisely within this space that, since the dawn of humanity, Otherness has been forming – a phenomenon that has stimulated imagination, evoked emotions, and shaped attitudes toward Others (Waldenfels, 2002).

The use of the “phenomenon of disability” category in the title of this article signals adoption of a broad interpretative perspective, in which human ability and disability are understood as a multidimensional phenomenon of an individual, social, and cultural nature. Adopting such a perspective makes it possible to situate the issue of disability within the context of otherness and the processes of social differentiation, which today constitute one of the key challenges for education and educational practice (Florian, 2014; Głodkowska, 2020, 2025; Sakowicz-Boboryko & Otapowicz, 2024).

For a long time, only the extreme manifestations of attitudes toward difference were recognized, described in clearly positive or negative terms. Meanwhile, the “in-between” space – encompassing ambiguous and ambivalent attitudes – remained unnamed and unnoticed, despite its significant importance from a pedagogical perspective (Aronson et al., 2012). Over time, this area began to be identified and defined as “ambivalence,” opening new possibilities for interpreting processes of social learning and for developing sensitivity to diversity (Bauman, 1991; Merton, 1976).

In light of the differences that exist among people, disability appears as a particular dimension of otherness; one that requires a conscious and responsible educational approach (Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2014). In this context, tolerance and belief in equal rights for persons with disabilities exists on the one hand; yet on the other, their difference is being stigmatized (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Goffman, 2005). Negative attitudes, if not subjected to pedagogical reflection and consciously transformed, may be reproduced or even reinforced within educational environments (Charitaki et al., 2022; Florian, 2014).

The phenomenon of ambivalence becomes particularly visible and subject of diagnosis in the era of postmodernity – a time defined by changeability, unpredictability, contradiction, and instability (Bauman & Tester, 2024). Ambivalence in relation to disability permeates areas characterized by otherness: able-bodied-disabled, us-others, insiders-outsiders. Within these dualisms, the essence of social relations is revealed, as “others” and “strangers” are placed in opposition to “us” and “our own,” thereby creating symbolic boundaries of difference (Głodkowska, 2023; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These polarizations become a source of diverse social attitudes that range from affirmation and approval to distance and prejudice toward disability and those who experience it (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

It is precisely this “in-between” space – the area of ambivalence – that requires particular pedagogical reflection. In the educational process, recognizing this space is crucial, as it is where attitudes of acceptance and prejudice coexist and remain in tension (Cafek, 2023; Charitaki et al., 2022; Mucherah et al., 2023; Selisko et al., 2024). Such an approach enables teachers and educators to gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of social relations shaped by the experience of otherness that results from disability. In doing so, it makes a significant contribution to pedagogical practice, guiding it toward conscious formation of attitudes that foster empathy, sensitivity, and inclusion.

Interest in the issue of attitudes toward disability and persons with disabilities, as well as in the process of their education, is growing. Yet, attempts to provide a comprehensive account of the mechanisms of ambivalence and their significance for educational practice are relatively rare (Chodkowska & Kazanowski, 2007; Mucherah et al., 2023). Existing studies more often focus on clearly positive or negative attitudes, while the coexistence of contradictory evaluations and emotions remains less thoroughly explored (Allport, 1979; Ajzen, 2005; Aronson, 2010).

This identified research gap justifies the need to undertake analyses aimed at identifying and systematizing the mechanisms that underlie ambivalent attitudes in the context of the phenomenon of disability. It is also important to explain their determinants and the ways in which they manifest themselves in educational practice. The aim of the study is to recognize and explain the ways in which ambivalence toward disability and persons with disabilities is expressed in educational practice.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

In accordance with the adopted research intention, the main research problem was formulated as follows: What mechanisms and determinants shape ambivalent attitudes toward disability and persons with disabilities – combining affirmation and prejudice – and what consequences do they entail for educational practice? The following research questions stem from this main problem:

1. What social, cultural, and educational mechanisms operate within the perspective of social differentiation based on an individual's level of ability?
2. In what ways does ambivalence, understood as bipolar intentionality, manifest itself in social relations and educational practice?
3. What consequences for inclusion processes, school relationships, and the educational climate may result from consolidating ambivalent attitudes in the context of the phenomenon of disability?

The response to these questions will analyze pedagogical, psychological, and sociological literature. The goal is to systematize ambivalent attitudes and identify the cultural, educational, and socio-economic factors that foster the coexistence of positive and prejudiced attitudes. This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of disability within its multidimensional social context.

The aim of the article is to analyze, based on the literature, the determinants and mechanisms of ambivalence manifested in social attitudes revealed in the context of the phenomenon of disability, interpreted as a complex issue concerning both individual life and the functioning of society. The objective of the study is to identify and explain the ways in which ambivalence toward disability and persons with disabilities is expressed in educational practice. It is crucial to demonstrate how ambivalent attitudes permeate educational environments and influence relationships, inclusion processes, and the school climate. Ambivalence may contribute both to the emergence of mental and institutional barriers and to the shaping of expectations toward students and the quality of their participation in the educational environment. Reflection on this phenomenon provides a foundation for designing actions that strengthen equality, develop social sensitivity, and build a culture of inclusion.

METHODOLOGY

The review has a narrative-systematizing character and involves searching through and analyzing literature that concerns attitudes toward disability, processes of social differentiation, ambivalence, affirmation, prejudice, and educational and social inclusion. The selection of publications was purposive, ensuring adequacy of interpretation in relation to the research problem. Primarily, theoretical works and

empirical studies from the last twenty years were included, focusing on the mechanisms that shape attitudes toward disability and persons with disabilities.

The analysis also encompassed studies that address ambivalence in social relations and educational practice, as well as issues related to ableism and inclusive education. The review incorporated articles, monographs, and research reports from the fields of pedagogy, social psychology, sociology, and Disability Studies, obtained from such databases as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, BASE, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Polish academic repositories. Additionally, supplementary searching was conducted through the analysis of publication bibliographies and the identification of works cited within the subject literature.

The research procedure involved a staged search and selection of publications using specific keywords. Searches were conducted within the titles, abstracts, and keywords of publications. The phrases used included: *disability, people with disabilities, attitudes toward disability, social attitudes, ambivalence, ambivalent attitudes, ableism, stigma, prejudice, inclusive education, teachers' attitudes*, as well as their Polish equivalents, such as *niepełnosprawność, osoby z niepełnosprawnościami, postawy społeczne, ambiwalencja, ableizm, and edukacja włączająca*.

The literature analysis was qualitative in nature and involved critical reading of texts, identification of conceptual categories, and their organization in accordance with the adopted research framework. The results made it possible to systematize and interpret selected theoretical and empirical analytical categories and, in conclusion, to develop a model that synthesizes the phenomenon of ambivalence in the context of the phenomenon of disability.

EVIDENCE-BASED FACTS

Based on the available literature, the study discusses key areas related to the adopted research problem, presenting: (1) social, cultural, and educational mechanisms of the process of social differentiation; (2) ambivalence as bipolar intentionality; and (3) concepts and research findings on ambivalent attitudes in the context of the phenomenon of disability.

The Dichotomy “Able-Disabled” as a Category That Divides the Social World

The multidimensional meanings of concepts such as otherness, strangeness, or familiarity become evident in the oppositional division of worlds: able-disabled. This dualism results from age-old overlapping determinants. One may point to personal factors related to the type and degree of disability, as well as hereditary, developmental, and personality-related conditions. Socio-cultural factors, in turn, shape the ways in which a person with a disability is perceived within their living environment.

This phenomenon directs researchers' attention to the process of *othering*, which involves attributing characteristics of difference to an individual or group. Through the act of differentiation, it becomes possible to construct one's own identity in opposition to the Other (Dervin, 2016; Jacob et al., 2021; Järvinen, 2020; Mik-Meyer et al., 2024; Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). Within this process, difference becomes a category that describes how society functions, its stratification, and its dynamics of change. Recognizing difference leads to specific interpersonal relations and reactions that emerge when an individual is distinguished or set apart within a given community.

Luhmann (1982, 1992, 2012) viewed social differentiation as an element of societal and structural development. The author analyzed social systems through communication, which he regarded as the basic unit of social life. Society is a network of differentiated subsystems whose differences – especially in education – require recognition and respect. The ways in which school communities communicate and interpret differences influence whether they build relationships based on respect or allow discrimination and stigmatization to occur. Conscious shaping of communication practices may reduce negative attitudes toward otherness, which can in turn lead either to stigma and exclusion or to integration. In the perspective of Link and Phelan (2001), stigma and stigmatization arise from the dominance of majority groups and lead to humiliating reactions toward Others, which include ableism and infrahumanization.

Ableism reduces persons with disabilities to their alleged deficits, ignoring their real achievements and participation in social life (Campbell, 2008, 2009; Dirth & Branscombe, 2019). Despite social changes, people with disabilities continue to experience multiple forms of discrimination manifested in language and social practices that marginalize them (Hehir, 2007; Wolbring, 2008). The psychological and social consequences of ableism are severe (Brown, 2021; Keller & Galgay, 2010; Loja et al., 2013).

Friedman (2019) attempted to “map ableism” by developing a two-dimensional model that incorporates both explicit and implicit prejudice toward persons with disabilities. The author identified the phenomenon of *aversive ableism*. It combines fear and discomfort with declaratively positive, yet superficial views on equality.

Research also demonstrates stereotypical and negative portrayals of persons with disabilities in media. They tend to depict them as socially maladjusted and prone to self-pity. They are also frequently shown as embittered because of their impairments (Schwartz et al., 2010).

In the context of ableism, it is also important to mention infrahumanization – a milder form of dehumanization. This process divides society into accepted and rejected groups. “We” and “ours” belong to the in-group, attributed full humanity, whereas “they” and “others” form the out-group, perceived as inferior, less human, and sometimes endowed with traits considered “more animal-like than human”

(Leyens et al., 2007, p. 140). Both ableism and infrahumanization stem from stereotypes embedded in social consciousness, often perpetuated unconsciously.

The Stereotype Content Model and Ambivalent Perceptions

Cuddy et al. (2007) proposed a Stereotype Content Model (SCM). It assumes that social groups – especially minority groups – are evaluated along two fundamental dimensions: warmth (e.g., friendliness, sincerity) and competence (e.g., effectiveness, capability). These universal dimensions differentiate stereotypes across societies.

Cross-cultural research has shown that many groups are perceived ambivalently (high on one dimension and low on the other). Collectivist cultures more frequently attribute negative traits to groups. On the contrary, individualistic cultures more often emphasize positive traits (Cuddy et al., 2011).

The SCM allows for predicting and comparing stereotypes across societies. In pedagogy, it serves as a tool for identifying implicit beliefs. High warmth combined with low competence may foster paternalistic attitudes, while low scores on both dimensions may lead to stigmatization. Awareness of these mechanisms supports the development of educational practices that strengthen students' autonomy and agency.

The effort of the educational environment to understand the Other and to appreciate the value of being together fosters the development of interpersonal competences, empathy, and social responsibility. Conversely, denying the value of difference reinforces prejudice, hostility, and discrimination – including ableism and infrahumanization – hence leading to exclusion within schools. Reflection on the space “in between” affirmation and prejudice, as well as inclusion and exclusion, enables educators to recognize the ambivalence of attitudes and to consciously design actions that promote understanding, equality, and the full participation of all students.

The Bipolar Nature of Intentionality: Between the Need for Closeness and the Tendency to Avoid

There are many reasons why an individual may experience conflicting feelings – attraction expressed in the desire to establish a relationship as well as repulsion, which results in avoidance. This contradiction is referred to as ambivalence. It may manifest itself in various contexts and take different forms, often creating an impression of inconsistency, disharmony, or internal contradiction. Frequently polarity of attitudes, duality of evaluations, or dualism of beliefs lie at its source and lead to interpreting value judgments (Akert, 2012; Aronson et al., 2011; Melosik & Szkudlarek, 2010).

Manifestations of ambivalence can easily be found in educational practice. For example, a student recognizes the benefits of technology and the Internet but si-

multaneously fears addiction; values freedom of speech yet fears online hate; wishes to act ecologically but does not want to give up everyday comforts; respects family traditions while being attracted to new peer lifestyles and patterns. These examples illustrate that ambivalence constitutes an important element of social and educational experience. It also shapes the way individuals define otherness and respond to it in everyday life.

Ambivalence manifests itself as bipolar intentionality (Latin *ambo* – both; *valens*, *valentis* – strong, effective). It involves simultaneous coexistence of affirmation and negation, or positive and negative attitudes toward the same object (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2018). Awareness of this bipolarity makes it possible to recognize the simultaneous emergence of emotional pairs such as fear and curiosity, love and hate, joy and sadness, attachment and rejection, fascination and anxiety.

Although the concept of ambivalent attitudes appeared as early as the 1970s, it gained greater interest only toward the end of the twentieth century. Ambivalence was defined as the simultaneous experience of contradictory – positive and negative – evaluations toward the same object (Emmons, 1996; Gardner, 1987). Research innovations led to new measurement tools, such as the formula proposed by Thompson and colleagues (1995), which allows the intensity of ambivalence to be determined.

Nevertheless, its determinants remain insufficiently recognized. It is assumed that ambivalence increases when an object evokes strong and relatively balanced positive and negative reactions. It has also been established that events concerning the near future are more likely to elicit ambivalence than distant ones (Ortony et al., 1988).

Conner and Sparks (2002) demonstrated that ambivalence affects the stability of attitudes, their susceptibility to change, and the relationships between attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. Thus, ambivalence constitutes an important dimension of social attitudes, which carries significant pedagogical implications. It requires careful diagnosis of students' attitudes, considering the coexistence of positive and negative evaluations. Educational interventions should aim either at reducing ambivalence or at constructively utilizing it to support the development of coherent and stable attitudes.

Numerous studies conducted within the framework of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) have shown that most stereotypes are mixed in nature and involve ambivalent configurations of traits related to warmth and competence. As demonstrated by Cuddy et al. (2007), stereotypes grounded in the warmth dimension determine active behavioral tendencies and foster a willingness to provide help (*active facilitation*). In contrast, stereotypes based on the competence dimension influence passive behavioral tendencies and lead either to passive assistance or to the intensification of negative associations (*negative associating*).

Researchers have also sought explanations concerning the role of personality traits and specific dimensions of social functioning in shaping ambivalence toward

social issues (Thompson et al., 1995). This line of inquiry attempts to answer why individuals' attitudes manifest as clearly positive, mixed, or contradictory with regard to a particular person, issue or object. It thus highlights the complex interplay between cognitive evaluations and emotional responses underlying ambivalent attitudes.

Research findings indicate that the degree of experienced ambivalence depends on characteristics of the attitude holder (e.g., personality traits) and on features of the attitude object. Ambivalence has also been examined in experimental studies that make it possible to identify its key consequences, particularly in the context of attitude change (Jonas et al., 1997). Despite the substantial empirical and theoretical achievements in this field, there are still no definitive answers regarding which objects most frequently evoke ambivalence, how varied its intensity may be, and which factors foster emergence of bipolar intentionality – that is, the simultaneous tendency to approach and avoid.

Understanding the mechanism of ambivalence enables better planning of educational interventions. It also supports students in coping with conflicting motives and fosters the development of more coherent and stable attitudes. Given the still limited knowledge about the factors that trigger ambivalence, careful observation, dialogue, and individualization in pedagogical practice gain particular importance.

It should also be emphasized that ambivalence may function as a transitional mechanism, opening the opportunity for critical reflection on one's own beliefs and facilitating changes in both social and individual ways of thinking. Its positive aspect is revealed, among other things, in its capacity to initiate reflection and critical analysis, to facilitate the revision of beliefs, simplifications, and stereotypes through experience and dialogue, to support social learning, and to promote inclusive attitudes. Ambivalence also develops cognitive flexibility, may serve a motivational function, and can strengthen creation of environments conducive to social inclusion processes.

Already in the classic theory of cognitive dissonance, Festinger (1957) pointed out that contradictory elements within an attitude stimulate reflection and motivate belief change. Similarly, such scholars of attitude ambivalence as Petty and Brinol (2009), Eagly and Chaiken (1993), as well as Haddock and Maio (2004), emphasize that ambivalence increases cognitive attentiveness. Those scholars also claim that it intensifies information seeking and promotes the reconstruction of attitudes.

In the context of disability, particular importance is attributed to the analyses of Goffman (2005), Shakespeare (2014), Goodley (2016), and Garland-Thomson (2009). They describe ambivalent social reactions as a space for reconfiguring norms, breaking stereotypes, and searching for new ways of understanding diversity. From this perspective, ambivalence may function as a transitional stage: from stereotype-based reactions toward more inclusive ways of perceiving disability.

Ambivalence in the Perception of and Attitudes Toward Disability and Persons with Disabilities

It can be argued that as a manifestation of otherness, disability may evoke both positive and negative attitudes across different social environments. Contact with persons with disabilities is often associated with ambivalent feelings, in which neither clear rejection or prejudice, nor full acceptance or affirmation occurs. Disability may arouse curiosity, attract attention, and prompt reflection, yet at the same time it may evoke reluctance or fear – as something unfamiliar, difficult to understand, or perceived as potentially threatening. As a result, tension emerges between attraction and repulsion, triggering extreme emotions and activating such defense mechanisms as denial, rationalization, or the minimization of one's own reactions. Ambivalence thus constitutes a natural element of confronting otherness and reveals the complexity of social attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Goffman, 2005; Kirenko, 2007; Livneh & Antonak, 1997).

Theoretical concepts and empirical findings indicate that there is no simple division into positive and negative attitudes toward disability. Between these poles stretches a space of ambivalence, in which affirmation and prejudice do not function as strictly separated extremes. Researchers have examined both explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious) prejudice toward disability (Carli Friedman, 2018; Deal, 2007). These findings demonstrate that many respondents declare low levels of explicit prejudice while simultaneously exhibiting tendencies to conceal negative attitudes – consistent with the pattern described as aversive ableism or aversive disablism. This form of prejudice is characterized by the coexistence of good intentions toward persons with disabilities and simultaneous avoidance of contact, discomfort, or unconscious negative reactions.

Awareness of ambivalence in attitudes toward disability is of key importance for educational practice. Teachers and educators should reflectively analyze their own beliefs and carefully observe the dynamics of group relationships to identify situations in which declared acceptance does not translate into genuine support and inclusion of students with disabilities. Understanding this discrepancy makes it possible to design educational and pedagogical activities that reduce hidden prejudice, strengthen authentic acceptance, and foster environments conducive to the full participation of all students.

Söder (1990) challenges the assumption that social prejudice constitutes the primary basis of attitudes toward persons with disabilities. The author argues that many studies rely on an oversimplified conceptualization of attitudes, superficial methodological approaches, and reductionist interpretations. In his view, it is more appropriate to employ the concept of ambivalence as a realistic attitude that expresses complex and often contradictory reactions to disability. In the field of education, particular importance should therefore be attached to analyzing the

content of attitudes toward persons with disabilities and their connections with individual and cultural values.

Nario-Redmond (2024) indicates that ableism may manifest itself in extremely diverse attitudes – from compassion, through envy and exploitation, to brutal forms of hatred. Research conducted on an international sample of persons with disabilities confirms that they experience a wide spectrum of social reactions, ranging from seemingly benevolent to openly hostile (Nario-Redmond et al., 2019). Other authors also identified ambivalent forms of attitudes manifested in two main patterns: paternalistic and patronizing, and envious and resentful. It was found that the most widespread form of ambivalent discrimination consists of paternalistic persecution, which – although often masked as care or willingness to help – actually restricts the freedom and autonomy of persons with disabilities. Additionally, forms driven by hostility, envy, and dehumanization were identified, leading to marginalization or objectification. The least frequently expressed forms of discrimination were those rooted in fear, including anxiety about contact and “contagion” by disability. Excessive kindness was described by the researchers as benevolent ableism – a form of discrimination concealed under the guise of help and goodwill.

In such situations, seemingly supportive actions toward people with disabilities reinforce negative stereotypes that emphasize alleged helplessness, lack of creativity, or limited understanding of social situations. For this reason, it is crucial to consciously shape attitudes and educational practices that recognize the competencies of students with disabilities, affirm diversity, and counteract subtle forms of discrimination. Microaggressions, identified by Nario-Redmond and colleagues (2019) as a particularly common form of covert ableism, have been confirmed in numerous studies. The findings of these analyses indicate that experiencing such reactions from one’s environment exposes people with disabilities to a significantly higher risk of developing depression and anxiety disorders (Byer-Tyre et al., 2022; Yeo et al., 2022). Therefore, limiting microaggressions and counteracting benevolent ableism constitute an important element in building an educational environment that is genuinely inclusive, equitable, and grounded in recognizing each student as a full subject.

Rohmer and Louvet (2018) based their research on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), focusing on its two fundamental dimensions: warmth and competence. Their findings indicate that people with disabilities are consistently characterized as high in warmth but low in competence. According to the researchers, this discrepancy in evaluations may result from a tendency to overcompensate for low competence ratings by attributing high warmth to people with disabilities. The authors explain that negative attitudes toward people with disabilities may be socially unacceptable because they concern a group that is strongly normatively protected. As a result, a contradictory stereotype content emerges: declaratively positive (high warmth), yet simultaneously deprecating (low competence). The en-

trenched stereotype of high warmth and low competence underscores the need for conscious correction of hidden biases in the educational process. In this context, educators should support students in recognizing ambivalent attitudes and develop their knowledge about actual competencies of people with disabilities. This fosters building authentic acceptance and counteracts reinforcement of paternalistic or patronizing forms of ableism.

A person with a disability is often positioned as the “Other,” as extensively described in the literature (Barreto & Ellemers, 2010; Carew & Shakespeare, 2024; Goffman, 2005; Grue, 2016; Link & Phelan, 2001; Oliver & Barnes, 2013; Tyler & Slater, 2018). In contemporary culture, publicly expressing negative attitudes toward people with disabilities is generally unacceptable and regarded as a violation of social norms. Katz et al. (1986) developed the theory of ambivalence in intergroup attitudes, indicating that extreme attitudes toward stigmatized groups – including people with disabilities – may coexist, manifesting themselves simultaneously as aversion and pity. The researchers emphasize that neither of these attitudes, when expressed in an extreme form, supports genuine creation of an inclusive society. Therefore, from an educational perspective, it is important to manage ambivalent attitudes characterized by contradiction and ambiguity.

Katz et al. (1986) note that ambivalence may increase openness to change and promote deeper processing of knowledge about otherness, which represents developmental potential in shaping more adequate social attitudes. Research by Lautenbach and Antoniewicz (2018) shows that teachers often declare positive beliefs about inclusion while simultaneously revealing contradictory reactions in implicit tests, highlighting the need for reflection on one’s own attitudes and their conscious development. The authors emphasize that such ambivalence affects the process of student integration and their well-being in the school environment.

Similar results were obtained by Parey (2019), demonstrating that although teachers more frequently declare support for inclusion, their attitudes remain ambivalent – particularly in areas concerning resource availability, professional preparation, and institutional support. Parey’s (2019) study identified that access to support staff, appropriate teaching materials, and training is crucial for teachers’ ambivalence to translate into inclusive practice. Likewise, the findings of Lindner et al. (2023) show that ambivalence toward inclusive education is a common phenomenon among teaching staff. The collected research results thus indicate that ambivalence in teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion is widespread and significantly influences educational practices, classroom relationships, and students’ well-being. This underscores the need to consciously strengthen pedagogical competencies, reflect on one’s own beliefs, and provide systemic support for teachers in implementing inclusive education.

Zola (1993, 2005) argues that disability should not be treated as a category of otherness, but rather as an element of the universal human condition and a nat-

ural variation of human life. The author emphasizes that societies struggle – and will continue to struggle – with chronic illnesses and disabilities. In this context, Zola (2005) maintains that an approach to human limitations based solely on “special needs” is inherently short-term and will inevitably require change. Therefore, spaces across various areas of life should be designed to be accessible and accommodating for everyone.

According to Zola (2005), a universal approach to human functional diversity requires transforming social policy and departing from systems of accommodation focused exclusively on particular or special needs. Zola thus advocates for the “demystification of the specialness of disability” (p. 20), meaning a move away from treating it as an exceptional, separate phenomenon that requires special solutions. Adopting a universal perspective can create the conditions necessary to counteract segregation that limits participation of those perceived as “Other,” and to genuinely realize social inclusion – also as reflected in attitudes toward disability.

SUMMARY

The review of literature published mainly over the past two decades made it possible to formulate answers to the research questions concerning the mechanisms and determinants of ambivalent attitudes in the context of the phenomenon of disability, as well as their consequences for pedagogical practice. In response to the question about the mechanisms of social differentiation in the context of disability, one can point to the initiating and sustaining role of such processes as stereotyping and stigmatization, reproduction of cultural norms based on the model of ability as a standard, as well as institutional forms of categorizing students within the education system. Consequently, disability functions not only as a medical category, but also as a social construct embedded in a network of institutional dependencies, normative expectations, and the organizational structure of the school.

Regarding the question of ambivalence of attitudes, understood as dual intentionality, the literature analysis indicates the simultaneous coexistence of the attitudes of support and distance, acceptance and paternalism, declared inclusivity, and entrenched exclusionary practices. In social relations, ambivalence may take the form of overprotectiveness, lowered educational expectations, or symbolic inclusion accompanied by an actual limitation of the agency of persons with disabilities. In the functioning of the educational environment, ambivalence is revealed in the discrepancy between the formal assumptions of inclusion and everyday pedagogical practices, which do not always foster genuine participation and agency of students.

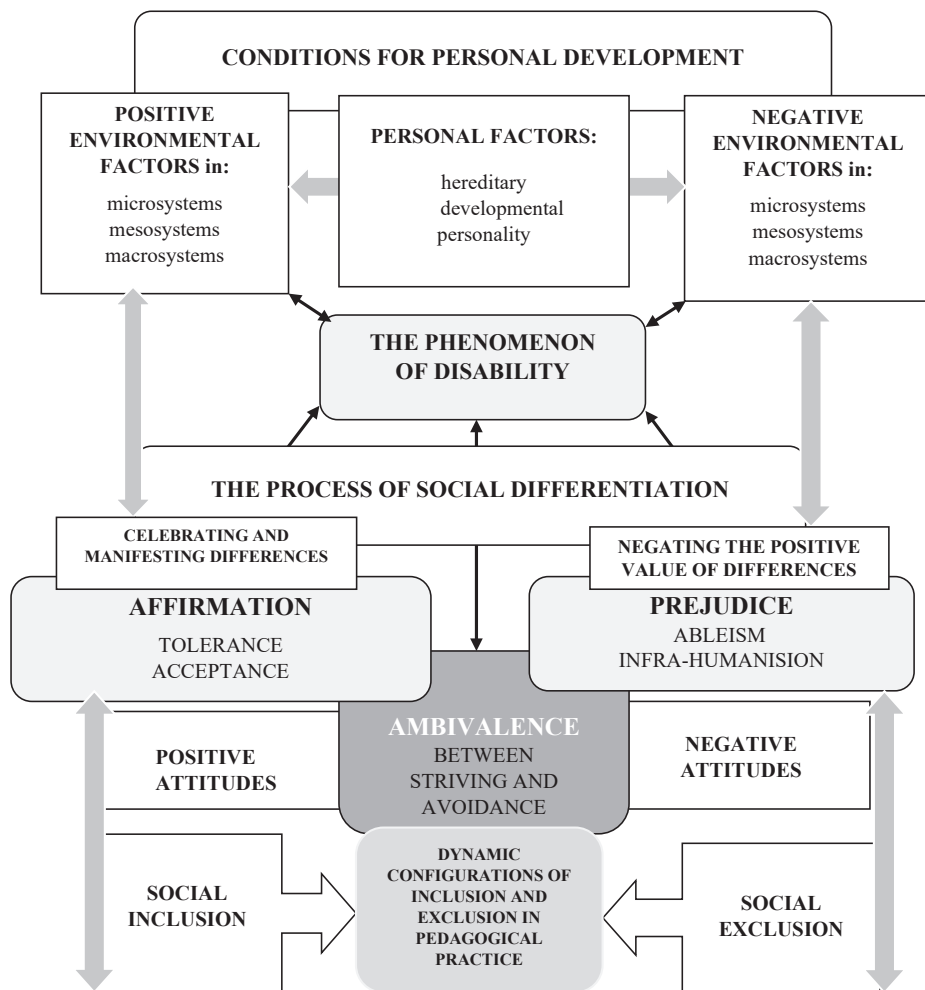
Analysis of literature concerning consequences of maintaining ambivalent attitudes in educational environments shows they may lead to emergence of subtle

barriers to participation, weakening of peer relationships, and shaping of an ambivalent school climate in which inclusion is declarative rather than real and intentional. In the long run, this fosters reproduction of educational inequalities, lowers aspirations toward students with disabilities, and reinforces inequalities in school relationships. At the same time, reflective identification of ambivalence creates the possibility of transforming it toward more conscious, egalitarian, and agency-oriented educational practices.

The literature analysis indicates that ambivalence of attitudes is a common phenomenon that results from simultaneous influence of social, cultural, psychological, and educational factors. Ambivalence appears as a natural stance; however, its long-term persistence may lead to decision-making difficulties, emotional tension, decreased motivation, inconsistent behaviors, and increased susceptibility to pressure and manipulation. Therefore, in the school environment, it is particularly important to support students in coping with the complexity of their own attitudes. In the context of disability, ambivalence occurring among students and teachers often stems from culturally embedded stereotypes and prejudices. Awareness of this condition is crucial for shaping inclusive attitudes.

The conducted literature review provides a basis for undertaking actions aimed at organizing and systematizing the issues of social differentiation, affirmation, prejudice, and ambivalence in the context of the phenomenon of disability. The results indicate close links between the category of otherness, processes of social differentiation, and attitudes toward disability and persons with disabilities. They make it possible to approach the phenomenon of disability from the perspective of dynamic social processes that encompass both affirmation and inclusion, as well as prejudice and ambivalence, understood as a state of coexistence of tendencies toward approach and avoidance, along with contradictory emotions, beliefs, and actions.

In order to organize and integrate the results of the conducted literature review, a model of the determinants, types, and consequences of attitudes in the context of the phenomenon of disability was developed. It is presented in Figure 1 below. The graphic presentation synthetically illustrates the relationships between the factors that shape attitudes and their social and educational consequences.

Figure 1*Ambivalence in the context of disabilities and the process of social differentiation*

Note. the Author's own work.

Determinants of social differentiation, which encompass both personal and environmental factors, significantly influence the functioning of persons with disabilities. These factors may lead either to a positive appreciation of differences or to their negation, fostering prejudice and exclusion. Affirmation, expressed through tolerance and acceptance, is crucial for building an inclusive environment, where-

as prejudice – especially that in the form of ableism and infracumanization – limits students' educational and social opportunities. The space between affirmation and prejudice is filled by ambivalence, understood as an area of dual intentionality that combines approach and avoidance. Recognizing it enables educators to better understand the complexity of attitudes and to plan actions that strengthen empathy, sensitivity, and social integration.

The model explains how daily life with a disability relates to social status and its consequences. Ambivalence plays a central role, combining positive as well as negative social reactions. It constitutes both an outcome of social differentiation and a factor reinforcing it: direct contact may foster empathy and inclusion, but it may also unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes. Social attitudes are dynamic and shaped by external factors as well as individual experiences. Ambivalence, balancing between approach and avoidance, influences configurations of inclusion and exclusion and creates space for pedagogical intervention. Therefore, it is essential to systematically diagnose attitudes, develop reliable research tools, and conduct analyses in diverse socio-educational contexts. The presented model indicates that ambivalence of attitudes in the context of the phenomenon of disability is shaped by the interaction of social, cultural, psychological, and educational determinants, and its consequences manifest themselves both in social relationships and in pedagogical practice. The proposed framework represents an attempt to integrate dispersed research findings and may serve as a starting point for further analyses of the role of ambivalence in teaching and educational practice.

The graphic presentation of the discussed issue may serve as inspiration for teachers, educators, and researchers. It could encourage them to undertake educational and scientific activities aimed at identifying and modifying ambivalent attitudes toward the phenomenon of disability as a psychological, social, cultural, and educational construct. Such activities support the development of inclusive, conscious, and sensitive environments – including school settings – particularly important during the process of building an education system based on integrative and inclusive education.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the ambivalence of attitudes – both in theoretical approaches and in empirical research findings – directly aligns with the pedagogical perspective. Understanding that declared acceptance may coexist with hidden devaluation of the competencies of persons with disabilities highlights the necessity of applying pedagogical strategies aimed at consciously shaping attitudes that foster inclusion, equality, and respect for diversity. Important actions in this regard include: revealing and critically analyzing stereotypes, strengthening reliable knowledge about persons

with disabilities, creating situations that enable positive and authentic social contact, and developing reflexivity and empathy among all educational stakeholders.

Understanding the complexity of ambivalent attitudes is important. It allows for a fuller interpretation of social relationships in the educational environment and for designing actions that promote inclusion. Reflection on this phenomenon may support the development of pedagogical practices oriented toward building an educational environment based on respect for diversity, student agency, and the conscious shaping of social attitudes.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that ambivalence does not necessarily signify inconsistency or resistance toward disability – it may represent a creative transitional stage leading to more mature, sensitive, and ethical attitudes. Both pedagogy and social psychology emphasize that ambivalence may constitute not only a natural but also a necessary stage in the process of attitude change, especially in areas that are particularly complex and sensitive, such as disability. This perspective provides an important foundation for designing practices that enable a constructive use of students' ambivalent attitudes in the educational process and support genuine participation of persons with disabilities in educational and social environments.

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MIĘDZY AFIRMACJĄ A UPREDZENIEM – PEDAGOGICZNE ODCZYTYWANIE AMBIWALENTNYCH POSTAW W KONTEKŚCIE FENOMENU NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCI

Wprowadzenie: Ambiwalentne postawy wobec niepełnosprawności i osób z niepełnosprawnościami stanowią złożony obszar napięć między deklarowaną afirmacją a utrwalonymi uprzedzeniami. Współwystępowanie pozytywnych i negatywnych postaw społecznych ujawnia się w dyskursach publicznych oraz w codziennych interakcjach międzyludzkich, wpływając na sposób postrzegania i traktowania Innego. Rozpoznanie ambiwalencji i zrozumienie znaczenia jej mechanizmów jest kluczowe dla wyjaśniania procesów wykluczania i co ważne projektowania działań edukacyjnych sprzyjających kształtowaniu wrażliwości społecznej, która prowadzi do inkluzji.

Cel badań: Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja oraz usystematyzowanie mechanizmów warunkujących ambiwalentne postawy wobec fenomenowi niepełnosprawności, dokonane w oparciu o analizę ujęć teoretycznych oraz dotychczasowych wyników badań empirycznych. Celem badań jest analiza oraz wyjaśnienie sposobów przejawiania się ambiwalencji wobec niepełnosprawności i osób z niepełnosprawnościami w praktyce pedagogicznej.

Stan wiedzy: Stan wiedzy dotyczący ambiwalentnych postaw wskazuje, że współistnienie afirmacji i uprzedzeń jest zjawiskiem powszechnym i udokumentowanym w literaturze psychologicznej, socjologicznej oraz pedagogicznej. Badania pokazują, że deklarowane pozytywne nastawienie często współwystępuje z ukrytymi lub nieświadomionymi przekonaniem deprecjonującymi osoby z niepełnosprawnościami. Zjawisko to wyjaśniane jest m.in. poprzez teorię ambiwalentnych postaw, różnicowanie społeczne, mechanizmy stereotypizacji, ableizmu i infrahumanizacji. Liczne analizy potwierdzają również, że ambiwalencja jest wzmacniana przez kulturowe narracje, brak rzetelnej wiedzy oraz utrwalone modele społecznego różnicowania.

Podsumowanie: Ambiwalentne postawy wobec niepełnosprawności odsłaniają rozdźwięk między deklarowaną akceptacją a utrwalonymi uprzedzeniami, oddziałującymi na proces wychowania i edukacji. Wyniki badań wskazują, że takie postawy podtrzymują stereotypy i utrudniają tworzenie środowiska sprzyjającego inkluzji. Ich zrozumienie i podjęcie refleksji są kluczowe dla projektowania działań pedagogicznych wspierających równość i podmiotowość uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami, szczególnie w kontekście edukacyjnych praktyk włączających.

Słowa kluczowe: postawy społeczne, niepełnosprawność, afirmacja, uprzedzenie, ambiwalencja, różnicowanie społeczne