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THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL OF ATTITUDES TO OLD AGE:
AN INVESTIGATION BASED ON ATTRIBUTION THEORY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Psychology
at Massey University

Anthea Maureen Counsell

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ABSTRACT.

The multidimensional model proposes that both positive and negative attitudes toward older people exist across different dimensions. In the present study, academic and wisdom tasks were examined in an investigation of the dimension of type of task. The influence of contact with older people on attitudes toward them was also examined. In a between-subjects experimental design, university students (N = 296) read a description of an academic or wisdom task to be performed by a young or an old woman, and rated their expectancy of the woman's success. They were then told that the woman had succeeded or failed, and were asked how much her performance was due to age, and to Weiner-model causal elements. Both positive and negative attitudes toward older people were apparent. On the academic task the older woman's success was attributed to age where success was expected and to luck where success was unexpected. The younger woman's failure was attributed more to effort than was failure of the older woman while failure of the older woman was attributed more to age than was failure of the younger woman. Contact with older people had little effect on attitudes toward them. The implications of these findings for the multidimensional model and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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