Negative attitudes toward the elderly seem prevalent in the United States. According to McTavish (1971) the literature suggests a somewhat central, overall personal rejection or prejudice toward old people. Generally, the results of studies exploring attitudes toward the old and the aging process support the idea that being old in the United States is perceived of as less desirable than being young (Bennett, 1976; Harris, 1975; Storey, 1977; Thomas & Yamamoto, 1975).

Studies have attempted to clarify the types of attitudes American children hold toward the elderly. Tuckman and Lorge, (1956) studied the role concepts of a large sample of junior and senior high school students. They found that the high school students looked upon the years between 60 and 70 as a period of inactivity, lack of interest and complete loss of adult roles. Kastenbaum and Durkee (1964) concluded that young people have a pre-dominately negative appraisal of older people and tend to omit any consideration of the later years in their own lives.

American children, even those as young as three, also seem to reject aging and the elderly (Jantz, R. K., Seefeldt, C., Galper, A. & Serock, K., 1976; Seefeldt, C., Jantz, R. K., Galper, A., & Serock, K., 1977). In these studies children gave few positive responses about growing old themselves and did not perceive being old as positive. When asked what they could do with an older person, the children tended to give stereotyped responses and expressed their preference for being with and doing things with younger people.

Some believe that the demographics in current American culture have led to the development of negative attitudes toward the elderly. Accompanying a declining birth rate, our nation is faced not only with an aging population, but an increasingly age segregated population. The young live far from grandparents and frequently cannot name an older person outside of their family (Jantz, et al., 1976). Instead of children and elderly persons developing informal relations along family, church or vocational lines, today’s children and the elderly are being increasingly segregated (Kalish, 1979).

Children cut off from the elderly are less likely to understand and accept the normal aging process and more likely to believe the myths and stereotypes regarding aging and the elderly (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). The transience of our society makes it difficult for grandparents and children to come to know one another, and as a result, the young are cut off from a principal source of their heritage and the past. With little contact between young and old, there is little or no possibility of children learning to care for, to be concerned for, or to cooperate with the older generation. Others suggest that the
"Throw away" culture of the United States has led to perceiving the elderly in negative ways. When new is better, and when youth is valued over age, the elderly are simply not perceived of positively.

On the other hand, de Beauvoir (1973) describes nations and cultures throughout time and around the world that perceived the old in negative ways. "Then again, society's attitude toward the old is deeply ambivalent" (de Beauvoir, 1973, p. 9). Neugarten (1968) suggests that ambivalence toward the old and aging is natural for humans and not specific to any one culture. People, Neugarten believes, reject the elderly and hold negative feelings toward them because old people bring them face to face with their own eventual aging and subsequent death. People, the world over, faced with their own mortality, distance themselves from those who remind them of this mortality. Thus negative attitudes toward the old develop. Arnhoff (1964) found that, in fact, adults in six other nations tended to give more negative responses toward the elderly than did those of similar backgrounds from the United States. In many instances, the respondents from the United States were more favorable toward the elderly than those in the six other countries.

Whether or not children's negative attitudes toward the elderly is a particular phenomenon that is unique to the United States or is universal in all cultures is not clear. Cross cultural research exploring children's attitudes toward the elderly could lead either to a refutation of the popular hypothesis that negative attitudes toward the elderly is and American phenomena or to documentation that these attitudes are more of a universal to the human experience (Kagan, 1979).

This experience explored the attitudes Paraguayan children hold toward the elderly. The questions asked were these: (1) What attitudes do Paraguayan children hold toward the elderly and toward their own aging? and (2) How do these attitudes differ from those of children in the United States?

That attitudes toward the elderly should differ in the two countries could be hypothesized. Paraguay is a poor, land-locked nation. There is little production, insufferable poverty for the majority of the population, and few social programs. There are two distinct classes, the rich and the poor. While the poor subsist off of the land, the rich business people, professionals and government officials live splendidly, usually in the city of Asuncion.

Regardless of class, the elderly are cared for by the family. The extended family appears to be the norm, often with several generations either living in the same house, or near to one another. The prevailing attitude is that the elders are respected, loved and cared for. As one Paraguayan put it, "We know that someday we will be old, and we respect our elders and know it is our duty to care for our older parents when the time comes."

The culture of the United States differs significantly from that of Paraguay. There is a predominate middle class, neither wealthy nor poor. Children have many of the comforts of life and know little about going without. The elderly, however, are separated from the children, usually living far from them. Social programs provide most of the care for the older citizen, with the elderly living by themselves until the time they are no longer able, financially of physically, to do so.

Method

Subjects

The Paraguayan children participating in this study were all from the wealthy class in Asuncion. All of the children attend the American school there. The school