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Michelle Salemi/ MEDILL

Paulina Albazi (second from left) stands alongside other residents who took part in the City of Evanston's "Stand Against Racism" rally on April 27th.

Experts say parents infect their children with racial ignorance

by **MICHELLE SALEMI**

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Paulina Albazi, a 29-year old Rogers Park resident, knows firsthand what racism feels like.

"When I tell someone I'm Assyrian, they don't know who we are or automatically think because we're from the Middle East we are part of this crazy war," Albazi said. "I can see they look at me differently."

For Albazi and young people in Chicago, the issue of racism is fresh on their minds. Nationally, the case of Trayvon Martin has gained attention for alleged racial profiling. In the Chicago area, costumes worn at a recent Northwestern University student party were said to be "racially and culturally insensitive."

Those born after 1980 were not around during the Jim Crow or civil rights eras, when blatant attacks of racism were fairly distinguishable. So how does the younger generation of Americans learn how to deal with racism, when it isn't as cut and dry?

Some experts across the country suggest parents influence children's view on racism and how to react to it.

Professor Gary Bailey, of Simmons College School of Social Work in Boston, said families and communities are the first point of entry into how people see or experience much of the world, which can foster the first beliefs on racism.

"Issues of inclusion or exclusion are modeled within the confines of family," Bailey said. He describes that some parents may say one thing to their children like "all people are the same" but not model that in their behaviors or actions.

The environment parents provide can be different depending on the ethnicities of the family, Bailey said, adding that this reflects how racism is discussed in the household.

"I know that for children of color, race and racism are a subtext in their lives and that for many well-meaning white families race is often something 'out there and not about us'," Bailey said. "Or it is relegated to an affirmative action discussion and not contextualized in a historical frame work."

As part of a minority race in the United States, Albazi, said she has learned to take action against discrimination. She attended a demonstration called "Stand Against Racism" held by the City of Evanston.

"It's a great thing the city is doing just to make everyone aware that this racism needs to stop and there needs to be an end to it for good," Albazi said.

Relationship advice expert April Masini said she believes when racism or another subject is not discussed, it's because the parents themselves don't want to talk about it.

"It may be that they think if they don't see it, or they don't talk about, it will go away," said Masini, author of advice column AskApril.com.. "Avoidance is a very popular method of dealing with racism for many parents."

But Bailey said he is "hesitant to paint with a broad brush other people's experience or reality," explaining that it is not easy to pinpoint a single rationale for why people behave as they do when it comes to racism.

Bailey suggests that youth should read books that center on human rights movements, to educate themselves outside the family structure.

Whenever she encounters confrontation, Albazi said she follows Bailey's suggestion that people should take the initiative to educate themselves. She then takes it a step further by educating others about the Assyrian culture and their beliefs.

"I always like to educate them and let them know we are the minority from the Middle East," Albazi said. "I like to let people know and explain to them who we are, where we came from and where we are going."

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