Black Lives Matter

Pain and perseverance surface through personal experiences shared by members of the Black community, underscoring their aspirations for change

<u>"Put your hood down, turn your music down and drive ten and two,"</u> teacher **Matthew Shulman** said, recalling the urgent message his aunt instilled in him from a young age. "They are looking for an excuse to pull you over."

Shulman said he saw the danger his aunt warned him of demonstrated time and time again.

"As a Black male, it's just something that we feel like we have been dealing with for a long time," Shulman said in regard to the recent surge in awareness of police brutality. "The incident of Treyvon Martin, the incident of Mike Brown and others...for me personally, it's a very emotional issue."

Shulman said recent social momentum sparked by the murder of George Floyd uncovered only the tip of this pervasive problem.

"Black Lives Matter didn't start overnight," Shulman said. "After George Floyd, it brought all those same emotions back, and we felt there wasn't anything getting done. With the work of other people, everyone felt more comfortable saying change needs to happen."

While attending the University of Kansas School of Education, Shulman said he was one of the only people of color in his classes. He said this led him to want to work for increased diversity within schools.

"In my college experience, I had a few teachers of color, and I felt really comfortable in those classes," Shulman said. "I felt a stronger connection [to teachers] in those classes."

Shulman said this comfort and connection created by his teachers of color motivated him to pursue education, specifically in areas that lacked diversity.

"[When] sharing out that something has happened racially or emotionally, [students] feel a little bit better going to someone who looks like them," Shulman said. "They can say, 'Maybe they have been through this before.'"

Shulman said ultimately, he hopes more diversity within the staff will spark conversation.

"Race can be scary to talk about, but it's only scary to talk about if you have never talked about it before," Shulman said. "You can't grow. You can't change anything unless people sit down and have a conversation."

<u>"I just feel eyes on me all the time, especially in stores, like I'm going to steal something,"</u> junior **Alayna Ramzy** said. "I would never steal something. I wouldn't even hurt a fly. I would never do anything like that." Ramzy said she often felt judged because of the color of her skin, experiencing many forms of racism. She noted her frustration with white students using the N-word at school.

"They're stuck in a bubble," Ramzy said. "They don't really see what I see, what other people of color see. It saddens me because they think [the N-word] is a joke. They think it's cool to appropriate our culture."

Ramzy said frustration only fueled the surge of emotions regarding the murders of innocent Black men and women, including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arby and Breonna Taylor.

"I've been trying not to go out because I'm scared," Ramzy said. "That was my main emotion."

Ramzy said she hoped an increase in education on social tensions, both in and out of school, would lead to change for the better.

"People need to understand that they have privilege," Ramzy said. "They don't understand how hard it was to be Black in America. That's why we need... to learn about Black History. All that's taught is Black people were slaves, then they were segregated and now they're equal. We're not equal. Every day is a struggle being Black."

<u>"You walk down our halls every day and hear the N-word at least once,"</u> senior **Jadyn Underwood** said. "It's always gonna be there, and it doesn't phase a lot of people anymore because it's just so common."

Underwood said she experienced racism throughout her time in Blue Valley.

"When I was in third grade, a little kid was shouting at me some racist stuff - as a third grader - and the teacher didn't do anything about it," Underwood said, commenting on how the situation was not addressed until her white mother intervened.

"Nothing was done to address the issue because they didn't feel it was necessary," Underwood said.

A recent increase in activism brought many experiences similar to Underwood's to light. Underwood said she was extremely proud of her community's response, whether it be through protests or posting on social media. However, she remained frustrated with the unchanged school culture.

"It feels like there is a dead body on the floor and someone is holding a knife and everyone is just going about their business," Underwood said.

Underwood said despite this, she continued to fight. She said this acceleration in activism, while making progress, took a toll on black activists.

"I am proud of what a lot of [the Black community] is doing," Underwood said. "I am scared of what's out in the world. It's a hard thing to process especially when you are the target for the pain and the suffering and then also you are supposed to be looked up to for inspiration or for pride."

"I was going up for a layup, and someone called me a monkey," junior **Abraham Babalola** said. "That's the main incident [of racism] that set me off."

Babalola said Blue Valley's environment made dealing with incidents like his own difficult.

"Black people don't feel comfortable talking to a teacher about their experiences because it just feels like their experience will be ignored," Babalola said.

Babalola said this was caused by blindness toward the problems minorities face. Babalola said this prompted him to join Black Student Union.

"I wanted to learn more about what other people have experienced in school and make people more aware that there's stuff that goes on that is not okay," Babalola said.

Babalola said he hoped sharing experiences could help to combat ignorance within Blue Valley.

"A lot of people are ignorant of what is going on with minorities in the schools," Babalola said. "People feeling like they are actually being listened to, that would be a good change."