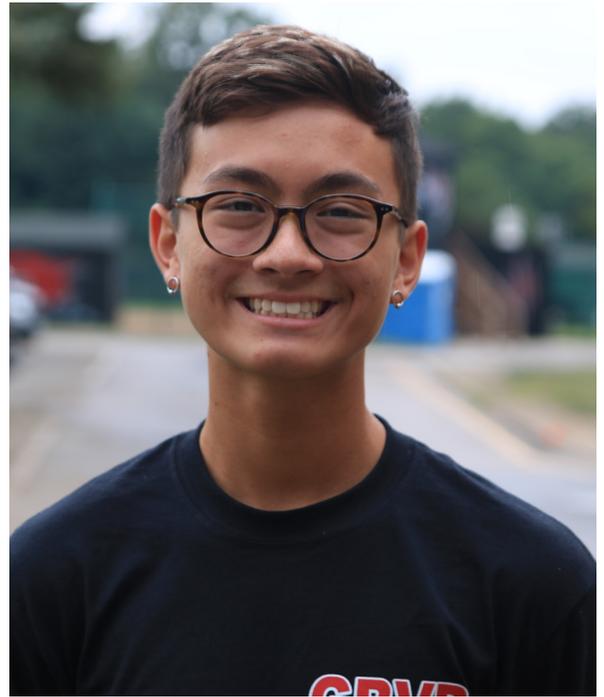# Julian McKenzie

5, 6, 7, 8. These numbers that seem so simple have become something I hear countless times daily. Counting to eight in my head head is one of the many things dance has taught me. I watched my older sister dance my whole life and thought I could never be on that stage because I was a boy. So after trying basketball, karate, gymnastics, I finally decided to buy a pair of dance shoes.

Being a male dance has brought a lot of pressure in my life. There is a stereotype that all of the men in the dance world are flawless. At dance competitions, the male dancers are expected to win because simply, they are the guy and get "boy points". So every time I step out on the stage all of these thoughts come in my head and I immediately feel the pressure on me.

"And in third place is Julian with Haze!" The announcer calls out. My heart sank. It was my best performance yet I didn't get first place. Doubts of my talent overcame me. Then I went home, watched my routine and saw countless things I could do better. In the end, moments where I don't place first, or even when I do place first, make me work harder. I spend countless hours practicing my routines, watching and overanalyzing videos of my dancing in bed at 2 A.M., and thinking about how I can grow as a dancer constantly.

When I first started dancing, people made comments about it asking why I don't play football, or that it's "gay" to dance and be a guy. It affected me, I didn't know why people cared about a life that wasn't theirs. But every practice, performance and anything in between reassures my love for what I do, so I learned through dance if I love what I'm doing, then other people's opinions should not matter.

A lot of people ask if I would ever quit dance. When times come where I'm unsure of my talent I have thought about it. But every time I step out on the stage I come back to reality and find my love for dance again. "In the end, I can't see myself not dance," I said. "It's A part of who I am."

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