

# The Homeless Men, Dancing!: A Report on the Dance Program in the Homeless Shelter

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## I. Introduction

This is a report on the dance program called “Let’s Dance!” that I arranged and taught at the St. John’s Hospice in Philadelphia, USA. In the fall of 2005, I volunteered in the St. John’s Hospice, a shelter for homeless adult men organized by the Catholic Archdiocese in Philadelphia. The shelter provides dormitory where forty men can stay up to a year while being rehabilitated with case management. According to Ruth Bresnan, the volunteer manager of the shelter, the residents are not provided any physical activity due to the cramped space, while physical contact among them is discouraged for fear of possible violence—simply speaking, they don’t dance.

The absence of dance in the shelter aroused me to two sub-questions: ‘why don’t they dance?’, and ‘do they need to dance?’ In fact, it seems easy to draw the answers from conventional notions of dance. First, homeless men do not

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dance, because ‘dance is inclined to be a feminine, juvenile, and leisure activity.’ Second, homeless men need to dance, because ‘dance is beneficial for physical, social, and mental health of human.’ These two notions are, however, incompatible; the former emphasizes the particular value, while the latter does the universal value of dance. Although those notions seem to convince that homeless men need dancing most, those men are, in reality, farthest from dancing. More fundamental, although those conventional notions of dance have been thoroughly criticized in the realm of sociology or anthropology,<sup>1)</sup> they are still effective in the contemporary society. Then, how can we understand this situation? Considering that research concerns with the encounter between people, I think that the great contribution of research is to care those who are marginalized in the society. In this sense, it is imperative to research on the homeless men because of, rather than despite of, the absence of dance activity.

The précis of the whole program is as follows: I offered ten dance sessions from March 1st to May 1st, 2006, on every Wednesday night 7 to 8 pm in the cafeteria of the facility of the St. John’s Hospice. In each session, I taught popular dances such as line dance and folk dance to the shelter’s residents who voluntarily participated in the program, and two guest instructors from the Temple University taught Latin dance and Hip hop. In addition to teaching, I observed the participants, and interviewed social workers, officers, and collaborators.

This study can be categorized as a fieldwork, but it is unique due to the following aspects:

First, I was engaged more actively than usual researchers, since I designed

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1) Dance anthropologists such as Adrienne Kaepler, Drid Williams, and Theresa Buckland have criticized ungrounded universalist Perspective on dance. Theresa J. Buckland(1999). *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc.), pp. 4-5.

and lead the whole program. Although I sometimes passively observed the participants' behaviors, my thought and behavior heavily influenced them. Also, I clearly acknowledge that I, as a foreign former-ballet dancer, have a limited view and experience to teach the Americans American popular dance. Indeed, as the "researcher is grounded as an actual person in a concrete setting," I emphasized the particular interaction between them and me.

Second, this is a qualitative research requiring considerable flexibility. In this challenged situation, I could not guarantee whether the program would proceed without major accidents, no matter how good intention it bore. Also, everything was adjusted not to hurt the participants' emotion, self-respect, and even security. Therefore, qualitative research model focusing on the specific venue and milieu suits to my study than scientific approach entailing hypothesis, testimony and statistic evidence.

Third, what I look at is not the dance per se, but its meaning created in the particular context. Therefore, I do not analyze their movement, but describe what they talk, behave, and interact with others in detail. In doing so, I will look at how individual participants construct meaning of dance and of their lives through the dance experience that they share with others within a particular environment.

Since I am neither an expert in dance education nor a qualified dance therapist, I obviously did not intend to 'teach' or 'cure' the subjects. Moreover, my limited experience in American culture and language often became obstacles to share with them. Methodologically, this open and resilient approach bears a possible danger to be excessively subjective and ambiguous. Despite all the limitations, however, I believe that this study can lead closer to the reality where individuals' agency heavily matters, and that any hasty generalization will go beyond the purpose of this concrete and frank report.

## II. Theoretical Ground: Homeless Men, Marginalized in Dance Study

Although “the homeless” may simply indicate “people without home,” its meaning has fluctuated in history. According to Amir B. Marvasti, the common notion of the homeless in North America changed from “the poor (1640s-1840s)” to “the mentally-ill (1840s-1940s)” to “the drug/alcohol addict (1950s-present),” while the related social policy accordingly changed from the “Poor Laws” to institutionalization to disinstitutionalization.<sup>2)</sup> As Michel Foucault argued in *Madness and Civilization*<sup>3)</sup> that the meaning of ‘madness’ had been changed according to social power, this brief summary indicates that homelessness is not a fixed boundary but an open arena shaped within its social discourse.

Moreover, the contrary images of the homeless coexist: failures or victims. On one hand, they seem alcoholic, drug-addict, dangerous, and dirty as a result of failure in managing their own lives sound; on the other hand, they seem helpless victims of the social injustice and structural inequality such as “shortage of low income housing, unemployment...reductions in disability benefits, [and] hunger.” These two opposite perspectives on the homeless are directly related to our understanding of the relation between agency and structure. Believing in free and independent agencies over structure, one regards homelessness as the individual’s failure; believing the dominant social structure over passive individuals, one regards homelessness as the society’s fault.

However, the extreme picture of the homeless as either failures or victims can be criticized from the recent academic discourse that considers both agency

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2) Marvasti, Amir B.(2003). *Being Homeless: Textual and Narrative Constructions* (Maryland: Lexington Books), pp. 9-19.

3) Foucault, Michel(1988). *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, New York:Vintage.

and structure correlated. In other words, we should acknowledge the given structure within which individuals act, but should not neglect the individuals' will and power to decide their action. In this sense, balanced perspectives on agency and structure are prerequisite to research for the homeless.

When it comes to dance academy, however, studies on the homeless are so rare that it is difficult to capture any discussion. In fact, the homeless, particularly homeless adult men, has been one of the most marginalized topics in dance research. Nothing was written of any dance program for homeless men in Korean journals, and only a few was found in English. Given the fact that the benefit of dance for human life is usually taken for granted, it is strange that so little has been done to explain of how and why dance is beneficial for this non-dominant group of people. The general tendency of dance studies is still occupied with artistic and theatrical performances, while homelessness is regarded of the specialized arenas of either dance education or dance/movement therapy. However, dance education tends to focus more on females and children, while dance/movement therapy focuses on psychological or physical inquiries within clinical settings. In between, the homeless adult men are left untouched.

The study most close to my dance program is written by Judith Ginzberg, a dance therapist, on the dance programs that she led in the male shelters in New York City.<sup>4)</sup> Her article was mainly filled with description of the program, emotional reaction and advices for other therapists targeting similar population. Although her personal experience is helpful to foresee many obstacles in my own program, I could not agree to her perspective. She views participants as people with a culture of “negativity, isolation···a sense of vulnerability, helplessness,” which should be transformed, revitalized and

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4) Ginzberg, Judith (1991). In Search of a Voice: Working with Homeless Men. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. 13(1), Spring/Summer, American Dance Therapy Association.

mobilized by dance therapy. Neither individual participants nor their interaction is focused, only her reaction to them is described. In doing so, she regards them of passive subjects, the victims.

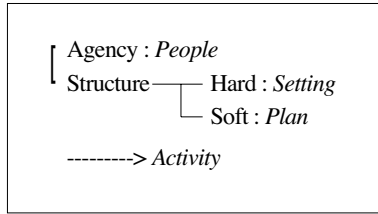
Another study by a physical therapist, Jan Bruckner, deals with the cases of elder homeless people he interviewed.<sup>5)</sup> Although not directly related to dance, it is still a valid reference written from a perspective of a physical therapist who wants to see his clients from a more socio-contextual perspective. Furthermore, Bruckner introduces the general history of homelessness in America as follows: “since the colonial times, there has been an association among poverty, physical disability and homelessness.”<sup>6)</sup> While the number of homeless people and their social status had been influenced according to the sociocultural context, the general notion of being homeless is firmly established: physical disability prevent them to get a job, so that they become poor and finally homeless. Without physical disability, then, can this notion provide any assumption more than negative assessment of being homeless? In this sense, the close link among physical issue and homelessness allegedly regards the homeless people of “failures.”

Realizing the importance of the interplay of agency and structure from these studies, I tried to collect data of my dance program from both sides of them as seen in the <Picture 1.>. In my study, agencies are the shelter’s residents, social workers and other instructors who participate, observe, or pass-by during the sessions. I casually conversed with the residents, and I conducted more formal interviews with three people that I collaborated with as follows: the program manager Joseph Pinhak; the volunteer manager Ruth Bresnan; and the accompanist Adenike Webb. Meanwhile, structure can be divided into

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5) Bruckner, Jan(2001). Walking a Mile in Their Shoes: Sociocultural Considerations in Elder Homelessness. *Top Geriatr Rehab.* 16 (4): 15-27. Aspen Publishers, Inc.

6) Ibid., p. 17.



<Picture 1> The Research Components

hard and soft structures. Hard structure is prefixed setting of the condition, from the facility to the shelter policy, while soft structure is the plan, what I envisioned as ideal realization of each session. As a result of the interplay among People, Setting and Plan, there came the actual Activity, what really happens at that particular moment. By dividing research procedure into three components, I tried to catch the real dynamic and unpredictable outcomes of the interplay among disparate aspects of a single event. Therefore, each component affects the others, but not always accordingly.

Moreover, I reckon the components interact with each other in a spiral formulation over the sessions. Each session affects the next set of components, as well as each person's assessment affects the whole program's success. What distinguishes this model from others are its reflectivity and resilience. Recognizing all components as they are, I try to accept that both continuity and disjuncture will occur within the mechanism. In this model, I acknowledge that my planning is built on the previous one, but my instruction in the activity does not always follow the very plan. Similarly, I acknowledge that the participants respond to my instruction and previous sessions, but their attitudes are not consistent to the accumulated experience.

### III. Analysis of the Research Components

Before bringing out the analysis, I need to introduce some more practical

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aspects of the program. As people might guess, it was not easy to initiate a new program in a delicate area. The program was postponed for more than a month, since the official permissions from the Catholic Archdiocese and even their insurance company were retardant. Also, as mentioned earlier, precedent studies were scant. As a result, I had to begin from scratch, mostly from my imagination and expectation. Moreover, finding collaborators were difficult. I recruited musicians from the music department of Temple University via e-mail. Although I met and corresponded with those who replied, many of them either soon lost interest or had a different understanding of the program. For example, one violinist asked \$150 honorarium per hour. Luckily, a music therapy student at Temple University, Adenike Webb, stayed, and she enthusiastically has accompanied for most sessions. Also, Augusto Dougal and Jumatatu Poe, both male graduate students in the dance department of Temple University, volunteered to teach Latin dance and Hip hop as a guest teacher.

## 1. Setting

a. *The physical condition of the shelter*: the Cafeteria on the ground floor of the St. John's Hospice facility. Among many factors, the facility condition heavily influences both the content and the quality of the activity. The cafeteria is a narrow, open space with a concrete floor and folded dinner tables all around. This physical condition of the cafeteria is far from the ideal setting of any dance activities, since the space cannot create its own world. Moreover, as the session is held right after the dinner time, the open and distracted atmosphere of the cafeteria lingers on.

b. *The fixed time and space*: Wednesday 7-8pm. Before I began the program, I visited the shelter quite often to meet social workers. However, during the program, I try not to over-exist in the space. When I had difficulties

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with other volunteers who stayed there until 7:30 pm, I first thought of delaying the session in order to avoid the distractedness, but I decide not to; only by sticking to given schedule, the session could get established as steady and stable.

c. *The Rules and roles*: strict policy on the group life condition from curfew to chores. Beth Bresnan, the volunteer manager, explains as follows:

“...There are curfews. When a man applies to come into St. John’s Hospice, first of all he has to agree to be clean and sober. No drugs, no drinking while you are here. And they [the shelter] test it for that. Besides, other than drug, the thing that you can get removed from the St. John’s is fighting. You are absolutely not to put your hands on another man and they really mean that. The curfew works up to less hours. The first comer has to be in about 6 o’clock and there are 8 o’clock and 9 o’clock guys. And if you make a big mistake, they will put you back. Also, they are expected to do chores. Do lunch services, mop the floor, and so forth. And they are also assigned through the week. They have lab sessions, which is mandatory. There are 3-4 case managers and his group of people. They meet once a week, talking about everything that is going on, how it affects them. It is like a support group. And there are just rules, such as ‘you can’t come into the dining room with bare feet.’”<sup>7)</sup>

d. *Different schedules among individuals*: jobs and other schedules vary among the residents, and it is one of the major reasons that the residents do not participate in the program. According to Beth Bresnan, one third of the residents work as full time.<sup>8)</sup> As far as I know from what participants told me during the sessions, they work as hair dressers, sanitary workers, janitors, as well as shelter workers. One guy told me that although he wanted to come, he had to rest before he went to do night time work. Another participant always says that he is too tired from his job to dance. In the homeless shelter where only one third of its residents have jobs, the tiredness resulted from working

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7) Bresnan, Beth. Interviewed in 2006/4/18. At the St. John’s Hospice.

8) Ibid.

seems to have more positive meaning than usual.

Also, at 8 o'clock when the officer announces the time to take medicine, a few people go to the office to get his medication so that the whole session has to be stop. Taking medication, however, seems a somewhat routine than exceptions in the hospice so that one participant even made a joke to me and Webb, "these guys take the medicine and go crazy so that they cannot dance anymore."

## 2. Plan

While creating a plan for each session, I was conscious of three questions: What do I think they need or want? what can I provide? in what context is the activity held? what was their response in the previous sessions?

As a foreigner who used to be a professional ballet dancer, I had no idea where to start. I knew almost nothing of social dance or folk dance, as well as of American popular culture. So, I began with Electric Slide, the most famous American line dance. It is simple, symmetrical, repetitive, quadruple-time and complete-measured pattern, and these characteristics became the role model of other dances. Also, I read many instruction books and watched VHS and DVDs on tap, line, and hip hop dances, from which I got ideas of interesting dance steps. During the first five weeks I had taught mostly foot steps, because participants tended to regard dance of foot steps. Since the 6<sup>th</sup> week, I drew more attention to arm and torso movement, where the splendid arm movement and cool attitude of hip hop served well.

However, it was difficult to set the level of dance; since their identity of "the homeless adult men" had nothing with their dance ability as well as their dance ability differed from each other. An anthropology professor warned me that they might be dance experts in other words, it is precarious to assume

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from their challenged situation that I am better than them in dance, particularly when I teach the American popular dance to Americans. Luckily for me, though, it turns out that only one or two are good dancers while the rest of them are novices. Even after I found out they were not “natural-born dancers,” however, I still prepared many dances of various characteristics than needed. It was because I could not foresee their response in each situation.

In addition to dance steps, I planned some rituals such as reverence, warm-ups and introduction of schedule. Due to the condition of facility, I did exercises standing-up such as deep breathing, shoulder rolls, and toe touches. Moreover, I also put some improvisational activities, the most important but the least visible. The “adult men” with high wariness are not willing to do anything unfamiliar or childlike. Thus, it is imperative to find adequate ways to approach them without creating discomfort. However, these rituals seldom worked out. Heavily affected by the open and distracted setting, these adult men felt quite awkward to do “bow.” Although they do not refuse to do warm-ups, no one do seriously.

### 3. People

Since the shelter uses public sources and money from the city of Philadelphia and also from the federal government, some of homeless men are referred to the shelter from other city shelters. Besides, some are recruited during lunch service. Joseph Pinhak, the Program manager, described how to recruit them:

“It is not uncommon one of men comes and asks, “Do you have a room?” Then, we have to talk with him first; “it is a dry and sober facility, we don’t tolerate any drug and alcohol. You can’t use any violence here.” And we want to make sure that the man will fit in it okay.”<sup>9)</sup>

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9) Pinhak, Joseph. Interviewed on 2006/4/7. At the St. John’s Hospice.

The total number of residents in the shelter facility is forty, and there is an affiliated facility called “the Shepherd Program,” which takes special care of elderly men with physical issues. According to Beth Bresnan, they usually get along well with each other, and they are respectful of others’ religious beliefs and ethnicity. Every session of my program, people participated voluntarily and somewhat spontaneously, and even the same person participated in different ways. However, these are a few regular comers:

**M:** He is always present, prepared and punctual, and who first shook hands with me. However, he is also the one who gives up dancing most easily. On any dance more simple walking, he is ready to say, “You see, I can’t do it.” However, his attitude changed over time to encourage others, “here we go, here we go!”

**R:** R is either late or absent for the session, but he participates most ardently with loud voice and a lot of sweat. He leads the whole group dance, and even helps others to master the Chacha step.

**C:** C is a good dancer who feels comfortable with improvisation as well as couple dancing. However, he does not want to do stretch because it is too easy. Webb commented that he is too “cool” to do any dance that seems easy.

**U:** U joined the activity from the 3rd session; since then, he participated with the most ardent and respectful attitude among others. Although his dance ability was quite lower than others, he became one of the most advanced dancers, being able to do improvisation as well as to absorb steps quickly.

**The White Guy:** Among many others, the most interesting figure is the White Guy, as I nicknamed him. Although he was not the only white man in the shelter, his pale and blank face and shaved head are quite recognizable at the first sight. The first day, he did not talk, look, or dance, but he was just there, either passing-by or standing at the corner; the second day, he surprisingly joined the warm-ups, but withdrew from it as soon as I tried to

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make a circle the third day, he danced a few minutes, and even talked to me with smile. At the third session I became to know his name, and he was regularly dancing and talking. However, from the 7th session, he has not come anymore.

#### **4. The Activity: *What happens in the cafeteria every Wednesday night?***

Every session has been unpredictable and peculiar. There are not only the instructor, the accompanist, and the participants, but also social workers, officers, volunteers, and other residents who either hang around or pass by. Of course, not everybody is collaborative. In the third session, several young volunteers from Villanova University played card with a few residents right in the middle of the room, and didn't want to move aside. In the fifth session, the same group came, and a few of them joined the *Electric Slide*. However, one girl accused me that I did not do the Vine step correctly, while commenting sarcastically when I led them to hold hands and walk in a circle. Since then, they have never been cooperative to the program, and not even exchanged greeting with me at all. During these frustrating sessions, I felt ironic with the fact that volunteers can be a burden to other volunteers. All the more, even the participants are not always participating they feel free to chat with observers, go out to smoke, make a phone call, and come back anytime throughout the session.

The music instruments also affect the session. The piano in the cafeteria is dirty, sticky and badly tuned, and several keys were dead and never come up when pressed. Having struggled with the piano, Webb bought an electric keyboard for the second session. Consequently, familiar songs from a fancy keyboard or a CD player surely attracted people to dance, sing, and hang

around in the cafeteria. When they identify favorite songs such as “My Girl,” they keep singing and dancing until the song finishes. The singing begins somewhat naturally at the end of the session, providing a nice finishing moment of the session. Participants paid a great attention to the keyboard, and asked many question about it.

Moreover, music empowers them by counterbalancing the self-consciousness of dance. Webb commented as follows:

“Music, it is a part of culture. Most of people have experience with musical instruments, whereas dance is not something that people do everyday. Thus, it is fun to listen to them talk about music, what they had before. Also, it validates them. Because doing dance, especially people who don’t feel themselves as dancers, makes them feel a bit unsure, aloof. But talking about music, especially when they have musical background, gives them a kind of self-confidence. It is an interesting balance. I think it allows them to really grow.”<sup>10)</sup>

Indeed, the participant A bragged of his career playing drum in famous venues, and invited us to his concert in the park. One day he brought an old keyboard to show it to Webb, and wanted to recruit her as his band member while saying “you can make money.” When he said one of his friends, whose house has 7 bedrooms, come to get drum lessons from him, he obviously enjoyed the self-esteem endowed by music. Also, another participant H once sang me a rap song that he made, while the other participant O gave me advices on selection of music to dance to. I found all the talk related to music gave them a certain power and dignity as someone experienced or native in the culture, which they could not achieve in dancing.

When it comes to dance, participants’ dance abilities and spontaneous reactions direct the activity. One participant knows more popular dances than I do, while another can do backspin on the floor; for them, the dance step is too easy. On the other hand, many of them feel difficult any thing more than

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10) Webb, Adenike. Interviewed on 2006/4/12. Center City of Philadelphia.

Table 1. The Summary of Each Session

Session 1	Setting	It was 1st session, Program Manager Joe Pinhak came to see. The dirty Piano did not work.
	Plan	Simple Four step, Electric Slide, Expressive activity with “That’s the Way I Like it”
	People	5-6 participants, 4-5 observers
	Activity	It was quiet and respectful atmosphere. They mostly worked hard to get the step. Particularly, the participants enjoyed the expressive activity with the song “That’s the Way I Like it,” which I directed to freeze whenever they heard the title sung. After the session, one of the participants came to say, “It was a really stress reliever. You guys should come every week.”
Session 2	Setting	Webb brought a new keyboard.
	Plan	Pilates stretching, review of the Simple Four step and adding kicking to it, Chacha step and its variation, circle formation.
	People	R, M, A, K, C, and the white guy, 3-4 observers
	Activity	M helped us to park, talked to us about the reception, from a perspective of the third person. The participants enjoyed Pilates stretching, and naturally began to sing along while dancing to popular songs. But, they felt difficult with changing directions other than front/middle. At the end of session, Webb played old pop songs such as “Sitting on the Dock.” One of the observers sang with the lyric sheet, and then other participants sang, hymn and danced to the songs.
Session 3	Setting	I and Webb arrived late. Villanova volunteers set in the middle of the cafeteria playing cards.
	Plan	Warm-up, side skipping, making a train with simple steps which each of them lead one by one.
	People	10-15 participants including A, M, R, K
	Activity	It was difficult to initiate the session because of the other volunteers. People didn’t want to show that they want to dance in front of others. Thus, I began the session with singing and slowly moved to dancing. Once began, the participants enjoyed a lot in a circle formation. I followed to do what they wanted to dance ( <i>Electric Slide</i> ) rather than what I prepared. I repeated the expressive activity of “That’s the way I like it” with more difficult task, to balance on one foot whenever the title was heard.
Session 4	Setting	Volunteer Manager Beth Bresnan came to see. Webb was absent. Augusto brought a powerful boombox.
	Plan	Guest instructor Augusto Dougal will teach Latin dances, such as Salsa, Meringue, and Chacha.
	People	8-10 participants including A, K, M, C, U, R, W, N and the female worker J.

Table 1. Continue

Session 4	Activity	The session was physically demanding much more than any other previous sessions, since Augusto kept dancing without posing. Although they felt difficulties, they certainly enjoyed the different power and atmosphere that male instructor could bring in. Those who usually didn't participate joined to dance this time, while those who used to participate didn't.
Session 5	Setting	Webb was absent. Before I went there, I was quite exhausted. A group of Villanova volunteers (about 8 people) were playing cards with the residents in the cafeteria.
	Plan	Warm-up, Line dances (Raegae Cowboy, I Love you too) from the instruction book. In addition, I planed an experimental circle dance inspired from Korean traditional folk dance, Kangkangsuwollae, a circle-formed dance that people hold hands with each other and walk along.
Session 5	People	6-7 participants including N, M, J, W, C, R.
	Activity	I asked the volunteers to join the dance, and two of them joined Electric Slide. But they kept commenting on the steps, and didn't accept what I tried to do. The trial of experiential dance became disaster, since people felt uncomfortable with holding hands and with being that close to each other. The participants liked Raegae Cowboy, which has different dynamic and style, such as jump and turn, or heel touching. After the session, W brought me a cup of ice water, and walked me to the bus stop.
Session 6	Setting	Webb and her music therapy friend, a white female, joined.
	Plan	Hip hop basic steps, using arms and torso movement, from the instruction DVD. I planed to expand the body awareness from the steps to the upper body movement.
	People	7-8 participants including A, U, M, R, C, 4-5 observers, and social workers.
	Activity	It was difficult for them to stylize arm and leg movement to make "hip hop" quality. Crossing arms or legs caused excessive stiffness, but the participants enjoyed the muscular quality of dancing. Also, I let them kick each other's foot on top of simple step that they already knew. By doing it face to face in couples, this aroused a kind of competition among them. After the session, participants increasingly approach us to talk.
Session 7	Setting	Everything was usual.
	Plan	More advanced hip hop steps with kick, half turn, and scissor step.
	People	5-6 participants including M, A, U, C and the White guy. 1-2 observers

Table 1. Continue

Session 7	Activity	The step was dynamic, which was both fun and demanding for them. I repeated the kicking competition. Although they could do it with me, they could not succeed it among them, and it caused a bit strained atmosphere that people blame the failure to the partner. One participant played the keyboard, and another commented that it was “the basic of blues.”
Session 8	Setting	All Villanova volunteers; no resident was in the cafeteria.
	Plan	Macarena, Raegae Cowboy, game activity, and diagonal kick step.
	People	6-7 participants including M, R, U, C, the old man from the Shepherd program, and the female worker J.
	Activity	As no one was there, we began to play the keyboard. One old man from the Shepherd program came and talked to us, and brought the CD of Al Green. Once he and I started to dance in couple, people began to gather and dance. Teaching me the “Bob” dance, the old man told me, “you made the best day in my year.” Forgetting about all plans, I let them dance freely. The female worker J taught “Hustle” dance to me, Webb and other guys. Those who used to have difficulty in learning step danced quite expressively. As the whole atmosphere reached the new level that people enjoyed themselves without instruction, there emerged new homeless people lying down outside of the shelter building.
Session 9	Setting	Only Villanova volunteers. Webb forgot to bring the electric cord of the CD player. Thus, Jumatatu played the music from his laptop, which awed people. One man asked if it was TV.
	Plan	The second guest instructor, Jumatatu Poe, teaches Hip hop.
	People	The smallest number of participants. C, M, A and a few observers.
	Activity	Since no one was there, I let Jumatatu teach me. After 10 minutes, C and M joined as well as Webb. The first two phrases of the dance were easy, but getting difficult and fast. Challenged by the dance, the assumingly good dancer C really worked hard. Jumatatu presented more “professional” and “studio-like” dance atmosphere. Also, his dance ability and trained body awed people.
Session 10	Setting	It was also the last day of Villanova volunteers.
	Plan	Quite opened possibility. Simple steps. James Brown music.
	People	5-6 participants including M, A, U, O, and the old man.
	Activity	Beginning with James Brown’s music, I just danced freely with them. U, who used to have difficulty in learning step most, danced while mimicking every detail of my dancing. 3-4 people, who used to be too cool or too shy to dance, finally danced a few phrases. One worker sang a few songs with U to Webb’s accompaniment, while A wanted to invite us to his drum concert in June. We had a nice ending greeting with each other.

simple four steps, and are ready to give up. In addition, their participation spontaneously reacts to how “fun” the dance is. If the dance looks fun, they flock to it; if the dance gets a bit repetitious, they fly away. In this situation, it is quite demanding to find a fine balance.

The disparity in dance ability and interest became clear when guest instructors came. Both guest instructors, who were professional and high-level dancers, offered much more advanced level of dance with less explanation. This made the participants compare it to my teaching, and they made the opposite responses: those who are relatively advanced dancers liked the change and challenge that new instructors brought with; those who are relatively basic dancers did not like the complicated steps.

## **V. Further Discussion**

As the sessions go by, the most intriguing characteristic of the whole process is the power relationship. Since the program targets homeless population, it is easy to assume the one-way flow of power from me to them: from the instructor/researcher to subjects; from the middle class person to the homeless; and, from the professional dancer to non-dancers. However, each element has revealed its flipside or counterbalance. Although I am the researcher/instructor, I am a female-foreigner-individual, while they are male-American-group; although I am middle class, I am alien to their shelter, while they are its residents; and, although I am a professional ballet dancer, my experience of American popular music and dance is less than theirs.

The participants are well conscious of this two-folded power relationship, and play around with it. They understand I would be helpless if no one is participating; and they used the fact both for me and against me. For example,

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one day the participant M announced that he would not dance when I turned down his asking of my phone number; meanwhile the participant A told me that he joined the first few sessions not for him but for me, because I would feel bad if no one would like to participate. Thus, their understanding of the power affects how they build the dance experience as well as how they interact with me.

## **Understanding of official authority and practical power**

In this respect, it is imperative to ask the question of who is actually helping who. Officially, they recognize and respect my authority as an instructor who teaches them. When people were late to show up for the second session, the participant A brought me to the office and said, “Ask the officer to make an announcement call to the dormitory. You are the instructor, and you have the authority.” Moreover, they help me to manage the whole session. When my voice is unheard in the crowd, some of them volume up their voice and transfer my words to others. At the same time, however, they know I can’t control the whole scene without their help. They laughed when I could not understand their English, tried to teach me the songs that I didn’t know, and even mimicked my dance. However, again, their victorious empowerment and controllability over me is, in fact, part of what I pursued in this program.

## **The sense of belonging They see them “them,” not “us”**

Individual’s feeling to other residents is ambivalent: on one hand, they are quite close to each other, yet on the other hand, they try to differentiate themselves from the rest of the group. Some have more self-consciousness than others. Talking to me in person, K, W, or R told me about “how guys talked about dance,” or “how they had different life stories,” using neither “us”

nor “I.” Moreover, the participant W said to me clearly that he didn’t want to be a part of the shelter, although he was satisfied with the fact that he didn’t have to spend a penny in the shelter that provided him everything.

### **The delicate balance of sexuality**

Among the participants, a few showed more respect and attachment to me than others do, and even wanted to get in touch with me. In a casual conversation, I made a mistake to tell the participant M that he could call me if needed, but the next moment I realized that I should not have said that. When I told him again that I should not, he was so disappointed and upset that he did not join the dance that night. Similarly, Webb had also difficulty with another participant C who has shown his interest in her. The last session, he told her that he would go out soon; and he wanted to reach her, which Webb turned down.

Being a woman in the man’s shelter, I did not feel unsafe; Giving a physical cues such as grabbing their hands, I did not feel uncomfortable. However, on this delicate issues involving human emotion, I feel quite embarrassed. In the last session, the old man from the Shepherd program wanted to know my phone number, which I could turn it down without hurting his emotion. And when we were about to leave, the participant O jokingly said that, “so, I will see you in the club in the downtown soon!” which ended the delicate issues nicely without hurting anybody.

### **Racial Stereotype and its Culture**

According to Beth Bresnan, residents of the shelter are males between their 20s and 50s, and their race consists of African Americans, Caucasian, Latinos, and Asian in order. In the dance program, however, participants were mostly African Americans in their 30s or 40s. When I asked her why Caucasian’s

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rate in the dance program was lower than the actual population, Bresnan simply said, “they (African Americans) are people who enjoy music and dance more than others.” Like this, participants also revealed ideas of racial stereotypes in different ways during the program. In the first encounter, the first question they asked me was “where are you from?” My look of Asian estranged me from their culture and language. Webb, the female accompanist from Trinidad, was no exception from the question since her name sounded different from those of usual African Americans.

The program itself shows the racial stereotype on cultural properties, which was mostly related to the selection of music and dance. On one hand, Kariamu Welsh, dance professor of the Temple University, recommended me a list of old pops which elder African American might enjoy; and, participants proved it. On the other hand, when a white female accompanist who once visited to see played a famous song of Beatles, participants strangely did not show any interest. Although I played many old pops to accompany dance steps, one old man brought his CD of Al Green, African American Jazz musician, who I did not recognize. This cultural preference and gap among us made me wonder whether I should follow what they know, or whether I should try to introduce something different.

Dance was also related to racial stereotypes. Usually, participants ‘learned’ dance steps, and felt challenged to copy my movement. Although steps of Line dance, a variation of country dance, did not require physical ability, the ‘rational’ formation and structure seemed to confuse them. In contrary, they ‘taught’ me ‘Bob’ dance and ‘Hustle’ dance, which were improvisational using rhythmic characteristic. I think this disparity comes not from their dance ability but from the culture each dance encompasses. Moreover, two guest instructors strengthened the racially associated cultures: the Latino taught Latin dance, and the African American taught Hip hop. Although it was an inevitable choice in

that situation, it anyhow adopted the prevailing ideas of dance culture. It would have been better if I could bring an Asian dancer to teach Hip hop.

## **Building a relationship/Finishing it**

During the first few sessions, I have worried of how to build a relationship and trust with them. From the 7<sup>th</sup> session, I realized that it was also difficult to finish this newly-established relationship without hurting their hearts and mine. From the first session, people asked me if I would come the next week, or how long I would come; from the 6<sup>th</sup> session, people asked me what would happen when the program finishes. Since they also will go out of the shelter soon, they and I are conscious of the relationship that is doomed to terminate. While saying that this emotional relationship meant that the program had been successful, Beth Bresnan advised me of this emotional relationship:

“People sometimes say that “I am going to miss her.” But it is mostly okay. Because people’s mind is occupied with getting out of here, not with that ‘I will live here for the rest of my life.’ And they think those people (volunteers and other workers) as lovely ships and beautiful nights in order to get to their real future. It (the emotional relationship) is something that everybody who deals with those populations struggles with. I also get very attached to some of them. And they move on, and they do well. If they don’t do well, your heart becomes broken. In my opinion, in my job, I have to put some emotional investment into them. It’s what I do to be their friend. There is a young man I will miss so much when he moves out soon. I will be so sad because we become friends and he helped me with everything. And everybody here feels about him. But yet, when he moves, we will be all cheering about him, because he is going to his own place, and his own life.”<sup>11)</sup>

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11) Bresnan, Beth. Interviewed on 2006/4/18. At the St. John’s Hospice.

## V. Conclusion: The Homeless Men, Dancing!

When I first proposed dance program to the shelter, the officers had diverse responses. The program manager, Joseph Pinhak, was quite open to it, while his administration was a bit more doubtful the volunteer manager, Beth Bresnan, thought, “Oh, boy! Something new for the guys,”<sup>12)</sup> and her boss loved the idea. However, all of them thought in common that “you would be lucky if you have two or three men during the whole session,” because “we had no idea how the guys would react to that.” All the more, there is “a kind of assumptions that they won’t be interested in something like that [dancing],”<sup>13)</sup> because “it is not just something to think of for bunch of men doing. In America, except for people who are naturally talented, people who go to dance lessons are those their wives drag.”<sup>14)</sup>

However, it turned out that the residents were really interested in the dance program. They liked it for different reasons: because it was ‘something new, something special’ because new faces came regularly; and maybe because they liked dancing. Joseph Pinhak described the first few days of settlement as follows:

“They were curious about it. We talked about it to them a lot, and I was emphasizing that ‘you will do line dancing, more popular and contemporary type of dance.’ And they seemed interested in that. Of course, at first time, we had to say, ‘Come on down, check it out, you don’t need to dance!’ However, they really enjoyed it, wanted to come each week, and told their friends here, and the other guys came, too. I have a few men used to come to me and say, “I really enjoyed it, she is going to be back again, we will have another session.” And they say it is a good idea that you brought her in to do it, and I say ‘no, no, she approached here.’ Then, they really appreciated it...I think it is very important that you have a core group all the time. Once you established it, then the program gets pretty solid. Some guys are working at night, and so on,

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12) Ibid.

13) Ibid.

14) Ibid.

there are good reasons that they are not there. And they are shy to get up dance. [If they don't dance,] it is not because they don't like it, more because they are self-conscious of dancing. And some of physical problems, too.”<sup>15)</sup>

After every session, I felt satisfied in spite of its unpredictable nature. On the down side, the ideal picture of dance session has never accomplished in reality, as seen in the fact that I have never succeeded in making a full circle. However, over the sessions, people definitely enjoyed themselves in their own way. They have conversed about the program since the first session, and showed interest in whatever I brought to them. Although nobody wants to be the first to begin the dance, a few walked me to the bus stop or bring the ice water. They even gave me advices on my future plan or commented on my fancy sneakers.

The most important thing for me to maintain the whole program was flexibility. From their observations, Pinhak, Bresnan and Webb described the atmosphere as follows:

“Because you are insecure as an instructor so that they responded well. You are low key, but make them keep moving, which is very important. Also, you are very flexible with different dance styles. I've seen guys' different interests here.” (Pinhak);

“You don't push them, you don't threaten them. You just laid back, letting them participate in it as their desire, and I think that goes out...I was surprised because I expected them to be shy about getting up and doing it. And they weren't” (Bresnan)

“Especially you encourage them to do whatever they do, they don't feel judged, such as ‘ok, I'm not a dancer, so I screwed up and everybody would laugh at me.’ There is no pressure on them. Because they feel comfortable, dance makes them less protective and to be freer to communicate with people. Maybe they are, at this point, not highly encouraged enough to tell their life story or whatever, but I think it definitely made them relaxed with their spirit.” (Webb)

Ironically, the success of the program came true in the moment when I did

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15) Pinhak, Joseph. Interviewed on 2006/4/7. At the St. John's Hospice.

not persuade plans. From the 8<sup>th</sup> session, they taught me their dance, or freely danced with each other and with me. It seemed that dance became a kind of shared culture among them. Those who were too cool to dance slowly began to show a few dance phrases, and people cheered up for it. However, the sessions since the 8<sup>th</sup> week also made me realize the limitation of the program. While I achieved the level of autonomous dance scene inside the shelter, the number of people who lying outside of the shelter has grown to ten or fifteen. Whenever I and Webb passed by with a huge keyboard and a boom box, those on the street joked, “Why didn’t you call us to the music?”

As I explained in the introduction, two stereotypical assumption of dance are engaged with the homeless adult men. One is that the homeless adult men are far from dance, since dance is juvenile, feminine or leisure the other is that homeless adult men need to dance, since dance is good for body and soul. In my program, the first assumption was not validated although it was not steady, they obviously enjoyed dance and the whole experience for different reasons. However, the second assumption still worked well. Even the participants used to tell me that “dance is good for physical and mental health,” or “you look young because you dance, dance keeps you healthy and spiritual.” These phrases worked as good excuses that made sense of their dancing. It seemed that dance exercised a magic power, not because it was a given truth but because people utilized it as their own will and worked toward to realize it. Overall, as all the participants, observers, and even officers flocked into the cafeteria, they created a positive environment where they build bridges towards each other, towards me, and towards the society.

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## 노숙자와 춤: 노숙자 보호시설에서의 무용프로그램 사례연구

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본 연구는 2006년 3월 1일부터 5월 1일까지 10주 동안 미국 필라델피아의 세인트 존스 호스피스(St. John's Hospice)에 임시 거주하는 성인 남성 홈리스(homeless adult men)를 대상으로 본 연구자가 진행한 실험적인 춤 프로그램 "Let's Dance!"에 대한 보고서이다. 흔히 '노숙자'라고 번역되는 홈리스는 사회적 문맥에 따라 개인의지가 부족한 실패자 혹은 사회구조에 의한 희생양이라는 대조적인 개념으로 그 정의범주가 변해왔다. 이는 바로 구조(structure)와 개인의지(agency) 중에서 무엇을 중점으로 보느냐에 따라 같은 상황에 대한 해석이 다를 수 있음을 증명하는 예이기도 하다. 기존의 많은 연구가 홈리스를 소극적인 피험자로 설정하는 것에 비해, 본 연구는 보호시설 내에 개설된 춤 프로그램이라는 특정한 상황 속에서 연구자와 참여자를 비롯한 수많은 개인들이 어떻게 상호작용하면서 춤, 그리고 자신과 타인에 대한 의미를 끌어내는가를 보고자 했다. 특히 자유롭고도 주관적인 시각을 허용하는 질적 연구방식을 도입하고 무용연구에서 관심의 사각지대에 놓인 성인 남성 홈리스를 대상으로 함으로써 프로그램 진행과정에서 실제로 발생하는 섬세한 매커니즘을 생생하게 포착하는데 의의를 두었다.

10주간 프로그램이 진행되는 동안 다양한 측면의 인간관계가 형성되고 해제되었는데, 특히 객관적인 인간관계와 내면적인 권력관계가 미묘하게 균형을 이루었다는 점은 특기할 만하다. 객관적으로는 무력해 보이는 참가자들도 숫자(다수), 공간(그들의 시설), 그리고 문화적 권력(미국문화) 등 참가자들이 지닌 상대적인 힘이 강조되는 상황에서 보다 자발적인 역할과 의지를 발휘했다. 연구자가 미국문화 및 대중춤에 대한 경험이 부족한 아시아 여성으로서 미국 성인남성 홈리스를 대상으로 춤을 진행했다는 점에서 프로그램의 성과에 대한 성급한 일반화는 불가능하다. 다만 이처럼 불확실하고도 조심스러운 상황에서 진행된 춤 프로그램이 나름의 성과를 거두었다는 점에서 앞으로 보다 다양한 상황 속에서의 춤이 연구되어야 함을 강조하는데 힘을 실어주길 바란다.

주제어: 성인남성 홈리스(homeless adult men), 춤 프로그램(dance program), 질적 연구(qualitative research), 구조(structure), 개인의지(agency)

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