

**What is Authentic Movement?** By Ande Welling © 2015

My first experience as mover in Authentic Movement was profound. My heart sent cascades of tingles through my body, little messages informing me I had fallen in love with the clarity, surrender, honesty, and intensity of this embodied practice. Similar, yet different, from my prior dance experience, I was drawn into the unfolding of inner listening, being seen, and learning to listen and see others.

**What is Authentic Movement?**

In its simplest form, *Authentic Movement is a mindful movement exploration between a mover and a witness which encourages the development of consciousness.* The mover moves, with eyes closed, from an intention of mindfulness, non-judgmentally guided by inner impulses, sensations, emotions, and/or thoughts in the presence of a witness. The witness observes, carrying the majority of work in the beginning as he or she strives to see the mover while becoming aware of any personal projections or judgments. The witness is responsible for maintaining an outer consciousness, creating safety, monitoring the time, and for maintaining his or her own psychological safety.

This intentional presence of the witness allows the mover to explore his or her unconscious impulses more deeply. This process eventually enables the mover to develop an inner witness, thus increasing conscious awareness. The outer witness simultaneously develops the ability to internally witness his or her own sensations, thoughts, and feelings in response to external witnessing. The simultaneous development of the inner witness connects mover and witness; both are increasing their awareness of self through the participation in this intentional relationship.

After moving, both mover and witness may speak. The mover uses present tense language to track the experience, using sensations, thoughts, feelings, and impulses as guideposts to mark the journey. *I step into the space and feel my heartbeat. I bring my hand to my chest, holding my heart, as waves of sadness wash over me.* The witness speaks, in service of the mover, to observed physical movement and to internal responses and sensations in relationship to watching the mover. *I see you step in the space, bringing your hand to your heart. I feel my own heartbeat as a tenderness bubbles up inside me.*



By Andrew Blight

The practice usually, though not always, begins in a dyadic relationship to allow for the creation of safety, trust, and intimacy between mover and witness. The relationship is both reciprocal and interdependent, with each person's experience being dependent upon the presence of the other. It progresses developmentally, though not linearly, moving from the exploration of individual body – often in a dyad, to the collective body and the conscious body, typically explored within a group. Authentic Movement is a therapeutic practice used by dance/movement therapists in individual, group, couple, and family sessions, as well as a practice used to increase awareness, encourage and inspire the creative process for dancers, writers, artists, and anyone curious

in exploring the underpinnings of human consciousness. As Authentic Movement involves diving into the inner depths and bringing them outward, it is only used with people who are higher functioning and free from reality disorientation.



Born from modern dance improvisation, Jungian theories, and the desire to uncover inner authenticity through non-judgmental movement, the practice of Authentic Movement is defined by its origins. Mary Starks Whitehouse, dancer and dance/movement therapist, was the first to create, practice, and outline a methodology for Authentic Movement, or as she called it, “movement-in-depth,” by integrating her own experience as a modern dancer and improviser, with her personal involvement in Jungian analysis. Her interest centered around her belief in movement as a vehicle for self-expression and communication, as a tool to dive into the unconscious realms of personality and illuminate them in the present moment (Levy, 2005). The idea of “moving and being moved,” a juxtaposition used by Whitehouse (1958, p. 43), is the heart of Authentic Movement.

Joan Chodorow, a dance/movement therapist and protege of Whitehouse, and Janet Adler, also student of Whitehouse and founder of Mary Starks Whitehouse Institute, have sculpted and expanded this practice. Adler, referring to movement-in-depth as Authentic Movement, shifted the focus from the original mover oriented perspective, to one actively including the witness’s experience, specifying the importance of the relationship between both mover and witness (Adler, 1987; 2002). Through its evolution, and as it continues to evolve, the discipline of Authentic Movement is as diverse as those who practice it.

As I practice Authentic Movement, I am continually astounded by the depth of information and wisdom stored in my body and in the collective bodies of those surrounding me. Each time I move in front of a grounded and present witness, I engage in the process of unearthing and honoring my truths, nurturing the growth of my inner witness, learning how I am seen by others in hopes that this self-knowledge will allow me to see others more clearly. My engagement in this practice has become essential in my growth as a person, therapist, dancer, choreographer, and witness.

## References

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