

**THE DYNAMIC BODY IMAGE AND THE MOVING BODY:
A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any higher degree or graduate diploma in any university, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person, except where the reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Francine Hanley

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ABSTRACT

The study of the psychological experience of the personal body in the discipline of psychology, through the concept referred to as the body image, has its roots in neurology and psychoanalysis. This thesis begins with a review of body image research across three disciplines: neuroscience, psychoanalysis and psychology. The literature review places the work titled '*The image and appearance of the human body*' by neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder (1935/1978) at the intersection of these three disciplines. Schilder's text described the organization of the body image as a dynamic and tri-dimensional structuralization. Since the mid-twentieth century, psychological research has taken special interest in the body image as a topic for study. However, the paradigm guiding that research enterprise has transformed the holistic quality of Schilder's work, identified its organization as antiquated and often unsuitable for empirical research. This thesis argues that Schilder's theory is as relevant today as ever, and that psychology would benefit greatly from a re-consideration of its relevance to empirical study. To demonstrate the potential of Schilder's theory, the present study conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with women participating in three styles of movement and performance: contemporary dance, Middle-eastern dance (or belly dance) and aerobics (instructors). The investigation considered core propositions described by Schilder with respect to the role of movement and the body image, to explore structuralization from the point of view of procedural movement. The study sought also to examine the extent to which the findings might serve the development of theory on the body image. The findings established *a priori* and *a posteriori* themes, and these served to demonstrate how Schilder's theory provides a sound framework for empirical inquiry in psychology. The implications of the present study highlight the explanatory power of that theory, especially the way it illuminates a new perspective from which a fuller understanding of the role of the body image might be gleaned. Finally, the implications highlight the importance of the actual presence of the physical body in the construction of the body image, particularly the kinesthetic perceptual system, and underline the importance of re-visiting Schilder's theory in order to open up new opportunities for interdisciplinary research.