

Samba and Life: A Heuristic Inquiry into the Journey of Individuation

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

The Chicago School

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Clinical Psychology

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August 26, 2025

Unpublished Work

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I am grateful to the Brasil Brasil Cultural Center for permission to use their space and for mentioning the institution in this dissertation.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Tyler Baker Photography for generously allowing me to use the photographs they have taken of me since 2017. His work has captured moments that reflect both the spirit and essence of my journey, and I am deeply thankful for his continued support and artistic contribution. See letters of permission in Appendix B.

Acknowledgments

With heartfelt gratitude, I honor the extraordinary individuals whose unwavering support and profound influence shaped this journey. Overcoming my fears and insecurities to pursue higher education was a challenge made possible through their dedication and generosity. I am deeply thankful to my mentor, Evelyn Raposo, PsyD, whose steadfast encouragement has strengthened me since I first arrived in Hawaii. My gratitude also extends to Sandy Tsukiyama for her financial support and for allowing me to immigrate, which laid the foundation for this chapter of my life.

This work is lovingly dedicated to my late mentor, Pilar Leto, who nurtured my potential and believed I could be the voice of samba. Her faith and encouragement continue to guide me every step of the way.

Thanks to my niece, Jayla Laidley, for her invaluable help with the literature section, and to Amen and Nayla Santo, along with the late Conceição Damasceno, for opening the doors of Brazilian cultural centers, allowing me to reconnect with my identity through samba.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to all the mestres, teachers, artists, and professionals who contributed to and sustained the International Samba Congress, as well as to the dancers, participants, and incredible individuals I have had the pleasure of meeting. These connections have enabled me to perform in amazing locations, share unforgettable stories, and become part of a vibrant community through samba.

In academia, I am grateful to Dr. Smith and Dr. MacLeay for their trust and support on my dissertation committee and to Dr. Lesley Brown for introducing me to heuristic methods. I also thank Dr. Jens Schmidt for his guidance, Dr. Gordon Nelson for introducing me to Jung's work, and Dr. Fanny Brewster for welcoming me as her mentee.

I am profoundly thankful to the Jung Institute of Los Angeles for paving my path to self-discovery. This transformative experience revealed deep insights into myself and illuminated the life-changing influence samba has had on me.

With deep gratitude and joy, I thank the Associação dos Passistas do Samba do Brasil (APASB) for honoring my journey and crowning me as Princess of the Senior Court of Rio de Janeiro Carnaval in 2024 and Queen in 2025. This recognition is a sacred affirmation of the path I've walked—woven with rhythm, resilience, and reverence for our ancestral art. I receive this crown not only as a personal blessing, but as a collective tribute to all who dance samba as a ritual of life, healing, and resistance. May this title continue to inspire bridges of beauty across generations and geographies.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the unwavering support and love of Cecilia Ferreyra, Tyler Baker, Angela Loyd, Katia Ferreira, Teresa Marie Sanchez, Maya Chason, Lovie Cassiero, and Karen Blackwell. Their kindness and belief in me have been a true blessing.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all who contributed to this journey. Your faith and generosity fueled my confidence and helped me pursue my dreams with determination.

Dedication

I am profoundly and eternally grateful to my ancestors for their faith, spirituality, perseverance, and wisdom, which have shaped my journey. I owe my success to my beloved family's enduring sacrifices and unwavering support, which made it possible for me to pursue higher education.

To my parents, Carlos de Oliveira and Ana Maria Gomes, thank you for exposing me to life's dualities and instilling a deep respect for the transformative and healing power of Brazilian music and dance. My husband, Keith Laidley, has stood steadfastly by my side, offering unwavering support even in our most challenging times. My children—Mariana, Isabella, and Giancarlo—have given me boundless patience, love, and encouragement. I also dedicate this to my tiny but mightily inspiring grandchildren, Maria Clara, Benjamin, and Dom.

I am immensely grateful to my incredible in-laws—Pierpont, Debbi, Dorothy, and Roger—for their profound support, admiration, and understanding. To my family in Brazil, especially my cousin Eliane Santos, Uncle Jorge, and Auntie Celia, thank you for your unconditional support and encouragement, which have been a vital source of strength.

Finally, I sincerely appreciate my Acacia Sunstar District Group, whose teachings and guidance helped me discover and embrace my Buddha nature. I offer my deepest gratitude and love to all who have accompanied me on this journey.

Abstract

This qualitative study, grounded in heuristic methodology and Jungian analytic psychology, explores samba as a cultural healing system and its transformative role in the process of individuation. Conducted through the lens of a Brazilian immigrant who is also a dance teacher and psychotherapist, the research examines the embodied experience of samba as a somatic and symbolic process that integrates body, mind, and soul. It investigates challenges of immigrant acculturation and highlights samba's capacity to foster identity formation, resilience, and holistic well-being. Data were collected through interviews and dance observations of 30 Brazilian and non-Brazilian samba enthusiasts, revealing samba's power to nurture cultural identity and promote healing across diverse contexts. While participants did not engage in formal intervention, the study proposes Samba Dance Movement Therapy (SDMT) as a future therapeutic framework that bridges traditional artistic expression with modern mental health practices. SDMT is envisioned as a culturally inclusive modality that contributes to the decolonization of therapy by integrating expressive arts and ancestral wisdom. Samba emerges not only as a dance form but as a vital channel for personal growth, collective healing, and the expansion of therapeutic language. This research affirms the enduring significance of traditional cultural practices in enriching mental health approaches and offers insights into how symbolic movement can support resilience and transformation.

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Chapter 1: Nature of the Study

There is no malice that samba cannot cure. See how good my samba is and what it has to offer. It moves through your head, your waist, and your feet. Samba flows in any way we want it to. Find your groove by getting into the samba.

—Serginho Meriti and Rodrigo Leite, *Devotos do Samba*

Samba, the iconic Afro-Brazilian dance and music form, is far more than a performative art; it is a living archive of cultural memory and a vessel of holistic healing. This study is shaped by the realization that samba holds transformative potential for individuals navigating emotional challenges, fragmented identity, and ancestral dislocation. Through personal immersion in the practice and a growing scholarly curiosity, I was compelled to ask not just what samba is, but what it does, how it moves, remembers, and repairs. The questions that guided this work arose organically from embodied inquiry: from dancing and witnessing, from listening to stories inscribed in rhythm, gesture, and community gathering.

This chapter traces the path that led to this qualitative inquiry, presenting the driving purpose and conceptual framework that ground the research. Rooted in heuristic methodology and Jungian analytical psychology, the study integrates experiential knowledge with theoretical insight, aiming to explore the symbolic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of samba as a healing cultural system and its transformative influence on individuation among Brazilian immigrants and non-Brazilian samba enthusiasts. Through iterative reflection and multidimensional engagement, the foundations were laid for a deeper examination of samba's role in bridging movement, identity, and cultural resistance.

Background

Samba is more than a musical genre or a dance; it is a living cultural expression born of Afro-Brazilian resistance, ritual, and resilience (Browning, 1995; Simas, 2023). Emerging from the convergence of African, Indigenous, and Portuguese traditions during the transatlantic slave trade, samba has historically functioned as a strategy of survival, an expression of joy, and a form of political resistance (DaMatta, 1991; Margolis, 2013). For Brazilians, samba represents ancestral inheritance and communal celebration; for non-Brazilian practitioners, it offers transformative embodiment and cultural connection (Margolis, 2013; Browning, 1995).

This study stems from the researcher's own journey of encountering samba, both as a cultural outsider and an insider, drawn into its rhythm as a lifeline for healing, belonging, and individuation. Heuristic inquiry begins from the self, and here, my embodied relationship with samba provided the experiential entry point for exploration. Samba became both question and answer, calling forth a study that could honor its multidimensional impact across lives and cultures.

I was born into the vibrant rhythm of samba, quite literally. My late mother, a professional samba dancer in Brazil, sang the Mangueira Samba School's theme song while in labor with me in 1967. Between contractions and the overwhelming urge to push, her doctor instructed her to repeat the chorus several times. That pivotal moment, imbued with raw intensity and creative spontaneity, marked my entry into the world. My first breath connected me intrinsically to the essence of samba.

My earliest memories are steeped in the playful cadence of samba. Even as an infant, I was encouraged to samba. I would humorously place my index finger on my navel, spin it around, and mimic the swaying of samba dancers. Nevertheless, even amidst the playful allure of

samba, my upbringing was a study in contrast; the high-energy, colorful world of samba coexisted with its more complex, dark realities: discrimination, oppression, and the turbulence of a family marked by my parents' strained relationship and eventual separation. For a long time, I associated samba not only with exuberance and dance, but also with an unsafe and confusing environment fueled by conflict.

As adolescence unfolded, so too did my complicated relationship with samba. Determined to pursue higher education and rise above limiting stereotypes, I internalized Brazil's societal messages that devalued Afro-Brazilian culture. At age 19, I married someone who dismissed samba as trivial and unworthy of respect. This further compounded my internal struggle. Thinking back, I renounced the legacy of my ancestors and the rich tapestry of my identity as a Black Brazilian woman. The dance that had once been my birthright became a source of shame, estrangement, and inner conflict.

I faced other challenges when I immigrated to the United States in 1992. Initially captivated by the excitement of a new beginning, I was soon overwhelmed by culture shock, nostalgia, and a sense of disorientation. Akhtar (1999) described how immigrants experience a psychic rupture when they are separated from the internalized cultural structures that shape their identity. Immigration destabilizes familiar bonds, producing emotional stress and a sense of mourning for the "motherland" (Akhtar, 1999, p. 10). As Grey (2001, as cited in Bonovitz, 2005) noted, culture is fused with internalized self-object relations and cannot be easily separated—the immigrant's identity becomes decontextualized and fragmented.

Immigrants may experience a sense of mourning or nostalgia as they grapple with the challenges of adapting to a new culture: "Culture is the primary stuff of unconscious life because internalized self-object relations and culture are fused together and cannot be separated out"

(Grey, 2001, as cited in Bonovitz, 2005, p. 56). Immigration disrupts these deep psychic connections, producing in the immigrant a sense of having one's character, personality, and identity decontextualized and disconnected from one's cultural background (Akhtar, 1999). The rupture or detachment from cultural references that occurs with immigration can explain why new immigrants often struggle to form relationships or maintain existing ones (Akhtar, 2011). This disconnect can be amplified if the immigrant experienced traumatic events in the home country, a rushed or unplanned departure, or any particularly brutal losses incurred because of immigration. All these issues can contribute to mental health challenges for immigrants (Akhtar, 1999).

As noted by Gopalkrishnan (2018), "The differences in cultures have a range of implications for mental health practice, ranging from the ways that people view health and illness, to treatment seeking, the nature of the therapeutic relationship and issues of racism and discrimination" (p. 1). Thus, it is clear that culture significantly impacts mental health by shaping how individuals perceive and express their emotions, how they seek help for mental distress, and how they navigate the process of individuation (Akhtar, 1999). Given the impact that immigration can have on the mental health of the immigrant, culturally based psychological evaluations should be a part of addressing the needs of this population (Rothe & Pumariega, 2020).

Tummala-Narra (2019) explained that psychodynamic psychotherapy engages "multiple layers of intrapsychic, interpersonal, and sociocultural experiences, all of which shape identity" (p. 291), highlighting how therapy connects personal narratives with family and cultural context. Moreover, the psychotherapy process provides a "critical space ... to bridge cultural experiences and transform identity," enabling individuals to mourn losses and reweave their life story in a

way that restores a cohesive sense of self (Tummala-Narra, 2019, p. 291). In this way, the therapeutic setting serves to reactivate family, social, and cultural links and facilitate the reconstruction of identity. This process often requires reimagining the self within a new cultural landscape. As noted by Ward and Szabó (2023), intercultural adaptation frequently brings intense emotional stress and identity threats, necessitating active identity reconstruction strategies, such as developing an integrated cultural identity to maintain psychological equilibrium and stability.

Amid the disorientation of cultural displacement and identity fragmentation, an unexpected yet transformative gesture redirected the course of my life. The late Pilar Leto—a remarkable Cuban and Brazilian dance instructor of Philippine descent—entrusted me with her samba classes upon relocating to New Mexico. Her unwavering belief in my potential, encapsulated in the simple affirmation “Only you can do this,” marked the beginning of a deep self-reclamation. Having grown up in Brazil, where samba was experienced informally, often without structured pedagogy, I initially struggled to imagine samba as something that could be taught or formalized. Nevertheless, in stepping into the role of instructor, I was introduced to a new modality of engaging with the dance, one that allowed me not only to embody samba’s rhythms but also to translate its symbolic and relational dimensions to others.

This invitation into teaching opened a portal to a deeper understanding of samba, not only as a cultural healing system but also as a strategy for navigating the complexities of acculturation. Through movement, I began to reintegrate the disjointed aspects of my cultural identity, reconnect with my ancestral lineage, and cultivate emotional resilience within a diasporic framework. What had once been a practice I had distanced myself from emerged as my medicine: a rhythmic and relational process of healing, belonging, and transformation.

In stepping into the role of educator, I found myself participating in what bell hooks (1994) described as a “practice of freedom” (p. 4), a pedagogy rooted in embodied experience, mutual vulnerability, and the reclamation of voice. The samba classes became a space where marginalized identities were not only acknowledged but reawakened, forming communities of resistance and renewal through rhythm. The embodied transmission of samba thus became a catalyst for self-inquiry and scholarly curiosity, ultimately guiding the formation of this research and its central questions.

Samba did not merely help me adapt; it transformed me. This embodied experience aligns with Hoffman’s (1996) critique of multiculturalism’s hidden assumptions, which tend to reify culture as static, imagine the self as autonomous and bounded, and essentialize identity as fixed and singular. My experience with samba challenges these notions by revealing identity as fluid, relational, and constantly reimagined through rhythm and movement. This transformation also supports Lopes and Simas’s (2015) view of samba as a tool for cultural healing and resistance—an expressive form that restores a sense of belonging, memory, and ancestral knowledge within diasporic contexts.

Outside of clinical settings, samba stands as one of Brazil’s most vibrant expressions of Afro-diasporic culture, a cornerstone of national identity and a symbol of resilience (Lins, 2012; Lopes & Simas, 2015; Neto, 2017). Drawing on centuries of African heritage, samba evolved through a process of cultural syncretism that blended movement, rhythm, and ritual. Samba also fosters unity and resistance (Lins, 2012) and reinforces Brazil’s national narrative while simultaneously reflecting its social tensions (Neto, 2017).

In communities marked by political violence and forced migration, dance has often emerged as a vital response to loss and fragmentation. Callaghan (2012) conducted ethnographic

research in the Peruvian Andes, showing how carnival dances served as embodied acts of remembrance. These practices allowed displaced campesinos to reconnect with their homeland and reanimate silenced cultural histories. Far from being mere entertainment, they functioned as ritualized expressions of place, identity, and survival. The concept of a choreography of place reflects how movement can evoke a sense of belonging and restore narrative agency, even in unfamiliar or disrupted environments (Callaghan, 2012).

This study affirmed that dance holds significance beyond aesthetics: it is a modality for safeguarding memory, rebuilding cultural identity, and asserting resilience. Such context offers a compelling parallel to the use of samba within diasporic Afro-Brazilian communities, where rhythm and symbolic gesture similarly facilitate healing and reconnection (Simas, 2023). By situating samba alongside other culturally embedded dance practices, the study drew attention to the broader role of embodied movement as a reparative and transformative force within marginalized and migratory populations.

Despite an expanding body of literature on dance movement therapy, this investigation revealed a noticeable absence of references to traditional African diaspora dances, such as samba, being employed or acknowledged within therapeutic frameworks. The healing capacity inherent in these embodied cultural practices remains largely underrepresented, even as they continue to serve as vital sources of resilience and restoration within communities affected by displacement, trauma, and systemic oppression. This gap underscored the need to explore samba not merely as a performative art form, but as a living, rhythmic archive of psychological and spiritual healing.

My reconnection with samba unfolded not as a solitary experience, but through shared rhythms and gestures exchanged with students and research participants. Their movements,

reflections, and emotional openness revealed samba's capacity to awaken memories, evoke a sense of belonging, and catalyze deep healing. As these encounters unfolded, the dance emerged as a communal language, one that speaks across identities and geographies. Their stories helped expand the inquiry beyond personal transformation to encompass the psychological and spiritual dimensions of samba as a vehicle for self-realization and collective restoration. In this context, the dance became not only a medium of expression but a culturally grounded intervention, pressing for inclusion within broader conversations on embodied healing and dance movement therapy. This led to the guiding question of this study: What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?

This study was born out of an urgent personal and cultural imperative: to understand how samba, a dance deeply rooted in Afro-Brazilian tradition, can serve as a medium of psychological and spiritual transformation for those navigating trauma, immigration, and identity fragmentation. Anchored in my lived immigrant experience and informed by 33 years of teaching samba and over two decades of engagement in the mental health field, the inquiry sought to investigate samba's potential as a culturally grounded healing modality. My growing interest in Jungian psychology, particularly its insights into the collective unconscious, cultural transmission, and active imagination, further enriched the inquiry. As Jung (1989, 1990) asserted, active imagination bridges the conscious and unconscious realms, offering a pathway to self-healing and creative transformation (Shamdasani, 2003; von Franz, 1997).

Methodologically, the investigation was guided by the heuristic framework delineated by Moustakas (1990). Heuristic inquiry privileges lived experience as a source of knowledge, and its processes align naturally with the personal and relational unfolding of the study. I employed the seven core processes—identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing,

intuition, indwelling, focusing, and the internal frame of reference—alongside the six stages of inquiry: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018). These processes offered both structure and fluidity, enabling a deep investigation into how samba catalyzed personal individuation and supported broader cultural healing within immigrant and diasporic communities. Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to position samba as a psychological and spiritually generative phenomenon—one capable of fostering self-realization, restoring cultural memory, and initiating communal resilience through embodied rhythm. The unfolding of this research was shaped not only by theoretical engagement but also by a heuristic process of personal transformation and relational discovery (Moustakas, 1990). My reconnection with samba was catalyzed through lived experience, reflective practice, and sustained participation in diverse samba communities. What initially emerged as a deeply personal return to rhythm and identity gradually expanded into a shared phenomenon: I observed emotional release, spiritual resonance, and psychological integration among students and research participants grappling with immigration, trauma, and cultural fragmentation. These Themes illuminated samba's broader healing potential, leading to the articulation of three sub-questions that guide this inquiry.

The first concerned the inner landscape of transformation. Drawing from Jungian analytical psychology, I asked: In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to engage with archetypal energies, practice active imagination through movement, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self? As Jung (1964, 1990) conceptualized, individuation involves reconciling the unconscious with the conscious, often through symbolic

and embodied channels—precisely the kinds of expressions samba evokes in its rhythmic and performative dimensions.

The second addressed samba's role in the sociocultural navigation of immigration: How does samba function as a bridge for immigrants navigating the complexities of acculturation and assimilation, helping them reclaim their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal contexts? According to Kim's (1995) theory of cross-cultural adaptation, immigrants often undergo psychological disorientation before achieving intercultural competence. This process can be supported by expressive forms like samba, which foster a sense of rootedness and cultural continuity. Hall (1990) further argued that diasporic identity is shaped through ongoing negotiation, a view echoed in the way samba classes served as symbolic and relational spaces of cultural affirmation.

The third research sub-question explored the collective healing potential of the practice: What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system, and how does it address the collective wounds of oppression, discrimination, and displacement? This question is situated within a decolonial framework that recognizes the enduring impact of systemic erasure and cultural violence. As Fanon (2004) asserted, healing from colonial trauma involves reimagining agency and reclaiming memory. This study showed that samba, with its community-based, rhythm-infused structure, becomes precisely such a site of resistance and restoration. Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of the "borderland" further illuminates how hybrid cultural practices offer spaces for healing and identity synthesis. Within the Afro-Brazilian context, Nogueira et al. (2016) framed samba not only as a cultural expression but also as a political and aesthetic contribution to collective resilience.

Heuristic inquiry allowed these questions to surface organically through embodied reflection, relational engagement, and iterative meaning-making. It privileged experience as a legitimate source of knowledge and aligned methodologically with the unfolding complexity of the phenomenon itself. As Varela et al. (1991) suggested, cognition is enacted through lived bodily processes; in this study, samba functioned as both cognitive and spiritual gesture. This view was further deepened by Sheets-Johnstone's (2011) assertion that movement is not merely a means of expression but a generative source of knowledge and agency. Her phenomenological exploration of the body-in-motion affirms that "moving is a way of knowing," and that self-movement structures our perception of space, time, and selfhood (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011, p. xvii). Within the context of samba, this insight underscores how rhythmic movement becomes a gateway to psychological integration and cultural remembrance.

Outside of the therapeutic realm, as both a dance and a musical tradition, samba is among the most vibrant manifestations of Afro-Brazilian culture and a cornerstone of Brazil's national identity (Lins, 2012; Lopes & Simas, 2015; Neto, 2017), lending further credence to the importance of exploring samba's impact on individuation among Brazilian immigrants and non-Brazilian samba enthusiasts. Drawing on centuries of African heritage, samba has evolved through a complex process of cultural syncretism that intertwines expressive movement with rich musical rhythms, as illustrated in the body of literature that demonstrates samba is an art form and a living cultural healing system, reaffirming identity and community in Brazil. Lins (2012) emphasized how samba has forged a powerful medium for social unity and resistance, capturing the collective emotional landscape of Afro-Brazilian communities. Likewise, Lopes and Simas (2015) discussed the transformative role of samba, noting that its evolution mirrors Brazil's turbulent social and political history while serving as a vehicle for cultural preservation and

political advocacy. Complementing these perspectives, Neto (2017) illustrated how samba's dynamic performances and communal celebrations continuously reinforce Brazil's national narrative, symbolizing resilience and creativity in the face of ongoing social challenges.

Samba's rhythmic beats and vibrant expressions have creatively converged African, Indigenous, and European cultural elements outside of Brazil as well. Preliminary observations conducted for this dissertation indicated that these artistic dimensions might have served as potential avenues for personal growth and cultural healing, although further investigation was needed to substantiate these possibilities (Lopes & Simas, 2015). Building on these initial findings, critical analyses revealed that unexamined assumptions often underlay foundational constructs such as culture, the self, and individual identity (Hoffman, 1996).

While samba's psychological and spiritual impact has long been felt within Afro-diasporic communities, its role as a legitimate therapeutic modality remains largely absent from mainstream discourse in dance movement therapy. This scholarly silence frames the core problem addressed by the present study: the underrepresentation of traditional African diaspora practices—particularly samba—as vehicles for healing, self-reclamation, and cultural resilience. In response, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine samba as an integrative therapeutic system through psychological, cultural, and embodied lenses.

Problem Statement

While samba dance has long been celebrated as Brazil's national art form and exported globally, it remains understudied as a potential vehicle for psychological integration and cultural healing, particularly within the Jungian framework of active imagination and the process of individuation.

Despite its profound spiritual and communal significance, there is a scarcity of research investigating samba as a culturally embedded intervention for addressing acculturation stress, identity loss, and systemic marginalization experienced by immigrants and diasporic communities. The absence of scholarly and clinical resources exploring samba's therapeutic mechanisms overlooks its capacity to facilitate body-mind-spirit integration and symbolic transformation.

Research on the role of expressive arts, particularly dance, in fostering emotional and psychological resilience among immigrant communities remains scarce, especially concerning Brazilian immigrants in the United States (Pacciega, 2004). While creative arts therapies have shown promise in supporting mental health for refugees and displaced individuals (Bastos, 2021; Ssebulime, 2021), academic literature focusing on Brazilian immigrants and dance-based interventions is limited (Pacciega, 2004). This gap underscores the need for scholarly attention to how culturally specific art forms contribute to coping and resilience among diaspora populations.

The Brazilian immigrant population in the United States has grown significantly since 2010 (Bessa, 2016). As of recent estimates, approximately 450,000 Brazilian-born individuals reside in the United States (Brisola et al., 2023). This increase has been attributed to diverse factors, including economic opportunities and social networks among Brazilian transnationals. However, the rapid growth of this community has also underscored particular vulnerabilities. Many Brazilian immigrants face legal precarity, language barriers, and cultural adjustment stressors. Brazilian migrant women, for example, exhibit elevated risks of depression and anxiety linked to immigration-related stress and social isolation (Ssebulime, 2021).

Nevertheless, Brazilian immigrants in the United States face significant health disparities, particularly in mental and brain health, yet remain largely invisible in research and policy. As

Simon et al. (2023) argued, this population is underserved in studies on aging and dementia, despite elevated risks linked to undocumented status, limited healthcare access, and cultural stigma surrounding mental illness. These challenges indicate that Brazilian immigrants often navigate complex emotional landscapes, necessitating supportive interventions that resonate with their cultural context.

Experts emphasize that therapeutic approaches for immigrant communities should be culturally grounded and community-informed (Pacciega, 2004; Ssebulime, 2021). For Brazilians, incorporating Afro-Brazilian traditions, such as samba, offers a promising avenue for culturally relevant therapy. Samba is more than a dance; it is deeply rooted in Afro-Brazilian history and collective resilience (DaMatta, 1991; Simas, 2023). Originating in marginalized Afro-Brazilian communities, samba embodies joy, resistance, and communal celebration in the face of adversity (Lopes & Simas, 2015). This research aimed to demonstrate that through samba dance and music, Brazilian immigrants can reconnect with their cultural identity and social support networks, potentially mitigating feelings of dislocation or trauma.

Dance and other expressive arts provide nonverbal outlets for processing complex emotions and strengthening community bonds (Ssebulime, 2021). Studies on migrant populations have shown that creative arts activities, including culturally familiar dances, can improve participants' sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Pierce (2014) emphasized that dance/movement therapy facilitates symbolic self-expression and emotional integration, especially in the treatment of trauma, reinforcing its value within immigrant contexts. For Brazilian immigrants, community-based samba classes or dance therapy groups can serve as culturally affirming spaces to express identity, relieve stress, and build resilience to socioemotional challenges. By honoring participants' cultural heritage within therapeutic

settings, practitioners can foster trust and engagement, crucial elements for effective mental health support in immigrant communities.

Traditional therapeutic models, rooted in Eurocentric and White frameworks, are frequently not culturally proficient or sensitive to the unique needs of immigrant clients. As a result, these conventional therapies sometimes fail to validate or integrate the cultural heritage of those seeking help (Bernal et al., 2009). Mullan (2023) emphasized the necessity of decolonizing therapy to ensure that mental health services are congruent with the cultural realities of diverse populations. This cultural disconnect in therapy often compounds the psychological stressors inherent in the immigration experience, leading to increased isolation, identity fragmentation, and difficulty establishing a sense of belonging (Akhtar, 1999; Arredondo et al., 2024; Moghaddam & Hendricks, 2022). The American Psychological Association established Division 45, the Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race (n.d.), in 1986. This was driven by the need to address multicultural issues in psychology, inspired by social movements advocating for civil rights and equality. Division 45 aims to challenge traditional assumptions, promote culturally competent practices, and enhance research, education, and advocacy related to issues affecting ethnic minorities and systemic inequities in the field of psychology.

This dissertation aimed to address the literature gap by examining how samba, as an expressive ethnic dance rich in symbolic and communal meaning, may support healing, cultural adaptation, and identity renewal among both Brazilian immigrants and non-Brazilian populations. It sought to investigate samba not merely as an artistic heritage but as a transformative, culturally grounded practice that offers an embodied pathway to self-reclamation and psychological wholeness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry was to explore how samba is experienced as a multidimensional healing system in the journey of individuation. Through participant narratives, thematic synthesis, and heuristic reflection, this study examined the , spiritual, somatic, and collective dimensions of samba.

This dissertation unfolds with a threefold purpose, each thread rooted in a personal journey and supported by scholarly inquiry into the psychological, symbolic, and communal functions of samba. First, the study aims to illuminate how samba acts as a culturally embedded healing system, especially for Brazilian immigrants and diasporic communities grappling with psychological distress, cultural dislocation, and fragmented identity. As Akhtar (1999) noted, immigration often provokes profound psychic rupture, severing intrapsychic ties to homeland and heritage. Reconnecting to cultural traditions, such as samba, can restore continuity and emotional grounding, particularly within homoethnic networks that support symbolic belonging (Bekteshi & Bellamy, 2024). Building on this, Brewster (2020) emphasized the psychological value of cultural memory in countering systemic erasure and racialized trauma. Through heuristic immersion and lived experience, this study examined how samba facilitates resilient identity reconstruction by providing rhythmic structure, embodied memory, and collective affirmation.

Second, the research investigated samba's integrative healing power through the lenses of heuristic inquiry and Jungian psychology. Heuristic methodology emphasizes personal reflection and intuitive discovery (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Sultan, 2018), validating lived experience as a meaningful source of data. Samba, with its improvisational flow and symbolic gestures, mirrors Jung's (2009) concept of active imagination, a process through which unconscious

material is invited into dialogue with the conscious self. Jung regarded such symbolic engagement as essential to individuation, the journey toward psychological wholeness.

Chodorow (1991) and von Franz (1997) further illustrated how expressive movement can access archetypal energies and facilitate transformation. In this context, this study introduced the SDMT model, which integrates movement, rhythm, and symbolic expression to foster mind-body-spirit alignment. This approach is consistent with findings from dance movement therapy literature, which underscore the therapeutic efficacy of rhythmic embodiment in trauma recovery and emotional integration (Dasgupta, 2013; Hackney et al., 2024; Monteiro & Wall, 2011).

Third, the dissertation critically examined samba as a site of cultural reclamation and collective empowerment, contributing to broader efforts to decolonize mental health care. Mullan (2023) insisted that mental health services must center the cultural realities of BIPOC communities and resist epistemological models that exclude spiritual and ancestral knowledge. Conventional talk therapies often fail to address these dimensions, operating from a framework that sidelines embodied experience and cultural expression (McCabe, 2008). Samba, with its deep ancestral connections and rich symbolic language, emerged as a promising alternative in this study. Its rhythmic movements, communal energy, and vibrant history offered a medium through which individuals could reconnect with their cultural roots, release suppressed emotions, and ultimately access holistic pathways to healing processes that conventional therapy often struggles to achieve (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). Samba, rooted in resistance and resilience, emerges in this study as an alternative modality that facilitates agency, pride, and communal healing, qualities repeatedly cited in ethnographic and psychological research on Afro-Brazilian cultural practices (Bogado et al., 2023; Browning, 1995; Lopes & Simas, 2015).

These aims construct a framework for mental health practitioners seeking to integrate movement, ritual, and symbolic storytelling into culturally responsive care. The connection between movement-based therapy and the individuation process underscores the value of adopting holistic approaches within mental health practice (De Sousa & Shapiro, 2018; Goodill, 2005). By affirming samba's capacity to support individuation and collective healing, this study contributes to the expansion of therapeutic paradigms, promoting an inclusive model of wellness grounded in rhythm, ancestry, and cultural continuity.

Research Questions

The following central research question guided this heuristic qualitative study:

What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?

Building on this guiding inquiry, the study was further grounded by three sub-questions:

1. **Individuation:** In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to explore archetypal energies, engage in active imagination, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self?
2. *Acculturation and Assimilation:* How does samba function as a bridge for immigrants navigating the complexities of acculturation and assimilation, helping them reclaim their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal contexts?
3. *Cultural Healing System:* What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system, and how does it address the collective wounds of oppression, discrimination, and displacement?

Conceptual Framework

This study explored samba as an integrative cultural healing system that facilitates identity reconstruction, emotional regulation, and embodied resilience among Brazilian immigrants and other culturally diverse populations. The conceptual framework grounding this research combined heuristic inquiry, Jungian analytical psychology, embodied cognition, and phenomenological philosophy. These lenses provided a multidimensional foundation for interpreting samba not merely as a performance, but as a symbolic and therapeutic modality that bridges personal healing and collective transformation.

Heuristic inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that centers on the researcher's personal engagement with the phenomenon and an internal search to know its essence (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Douglass and Moustakas' (1985) study involved a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem-solving, wherein the investigator employs introspection and creativity to grasp the meaning of human experiences. Rather than striving for detachment, heuristic research embraces the researcher's own lived experience as the central pathway to understanding. As Douglass and Moustakas (1985) explained, heuristic inquiry affirms imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit (or implicit) dimension as valid ways of knowing. This framework was well-suited to the present study, which examines samba's psychological and spiritual functions through autobiographical reflections and immersive experience with the dance. This section now outlines the key features of the heuristic inquiry framework. Each section introduces a core concept of heuristic methodology—such as experiential immersion, introspection, and tacit knowing— and explains its relevance to this study of samba.

Experiential immersion is a cornerstone of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas's design calls for the investigator to become thoroughly absorbed in the topic at a personal level, fully embracing the subject of inquiry in daily life and consciousness. The researcher must, in his words, "live the question" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14), engaging in continuous self-dialogue, reflection, and observation, effectively becoming one with the topic. Immersion is not simply academic; it is existential. It involves opening oneself to experience, following intuitive cues, and allowing insights to emerge from "the mystery and sources of energy and knowledge within the tacit dimension" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 20). Rather than maintaining critical distance, the inquirer enters into a direct relationship with the phenomenon to gain a deep, embodied understanding.

Immersion is the first of several phases in the heuristic inquiry process, followed by incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Each stage reinforces the researcher's emotional and somatic presence as essential to the process. This methodology not only tolerates but affirms the researcher's inner life as a generative source of insight. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) underscored this view by asserting that heuristic inquiry recognizes "imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid" routes to knowledge (p. 39).

Within the context of examining samba's psychological and spiritual functions, experiential immersion required active engagement in the rhythms, movements, and cultural energies of samba. As both investigator and practitioner, I immersed myself in samba dance, attended performances and *rodas [circles]*, listened to samba music, and attuned to the emotional and intuitive responses that arose through this lived involvement. This immersion facilitated direct access to the felt sense of samba—the energetic rhythms, the communal flow, and its

capacity for spiritual uplift—and allowed the research to unfold organically through authentic connection. Living the experience of samba enabled an exploration of its impact on mood, identity formation, and symbolic meaning from the inside out, consistent with the heuristic ethos of knowing through embodied experience.

My own positionality as a Black Brazilian immigrant, professional samba dancer, clinician, and researcher deeply informed the immersion process. Samba became a symbolic and somatic language through which I could reweave the fragmented aspects of my identity that were disrupted by immigration. The methodology, therefore, did not simply accommodate subjectivity—it required it. As Rogers (1955) reflected on the paradoxical tension between clinical observation and transformational presence in therapy, he noted “the mystical subjectivity” that emerges when individuals are fully engaged in authentic, healing relationships (p. 267). This study embraces that paradox by allowing the lived experience of samba—mine and others’—to guide the inquiry into healing, resilience, and individuation. In doing so, the research honors heuristic inquiry not as a detached epistemology but as a heartfelt and embodied encounter with meaning.

Heuristic inquiry relies on introspection and self-dialogue as primary tools for uncovering meaning (Moustakas, 1990). Rather than bracketing out personal perspectives, the researcher turns inward to reflect on feelings, memories, and intuitions related to the phenomenon. Moustakas (1990) articulated several internal processes central to heuristic exploration: identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and maintaining an internal frame of reference. These concepts all involve an inward gaze and continuous reflective examination of one’s own experience in relation to the research question.

Self-dialogue. The researcher engages in a conversation with themselves about the phenomenon, journaling or meditating on questions and insights as they arise (Moustakas, 1990). This process helps surface personal meanings and previously unarticulated understandings.

Tacit knowing. Heuristic research acknowledges tacit knowledge—the subtle, unspoken truths one senses but cannot immediately put into words (Moustakas, 1990). Polanyi's (1966) idea that “we know more than we can tell” underpins this concept. By dwelling with the experience, the researcher allows tacit, implicit insights to gradually come into focus (Moustakas, 1990).

Intuition. Closely tied to tacit knowing, intuition is trusted as a legitimate way of knowing in heuristics (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher remains open to gut feelings or imaginative revelations about the phenomenon, considering them as data emerging from the unconscious. Moustakas (1990) emphasized that intuition can reveal connections and themes that might not be reached through linear analysis (p. 23).

Throughout the study, the investigator oscillates between immersion and reflection cycles. After deeply experiencing the phenomenon (immersion), they step back into introspection to elucidate the nature of that experience (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010). This might involve writing reflective memos, creating expressive art, or meditating on the experience to see what new insights emerge. The process is holistic, engaging feelings, memory, and imagination to yield a rich understanding.

For this study on the psychological and spiritual significance of samba, introspection was a vital source of data. I maintained a reflexive journal to record my personal experiences of dancing samba, noting my emotional states, bodily sensations, and any sense of spiritual connection I felt during the dance. Through self-dialogue, these experiences were interrogated:

Why does a certain samba rhythm evoke joy or catharsis? What personal memories are triggered by the dance? Such questions, asked inwardly, helped uncover the psychological effects (such as mood elevation and a sense of community) and spiritual meanings (including feelings of transcendence or ancestral connection) associated with samba. Tacit knowing also played a role; for example, I might have a wordless feeling of “uplift” or unity when dancing in a samba circle. By quietly indwelling in that feeling—holding it in awareness—the researcher allows its significance to emerge (perhaps recognizing it as a form of spiritual joy or collective effervescence). These introspective processes ensured that the framework honored subtle, subjective insights about samba that a purely external observation might miss (Brisola & Cury, 2016).

Unlike traditional phenomenological methods that attempt to bracket out the researcher’s biases and presuppositions, heuristic inquiry explicitly embraces the researcher’s subjective, emotional, and embodied engagement with the topic (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas distinguished heuristic research as a person-centered approach (i.e., focused on the researcher’s experience) rather than a phenomenon-centered one. In heuristic investigations, the researcher does not pretend to be an objective outsider; instead, they acknowledge and utilize personal experience as a primary data source.

This stance is well-captured by Nevine Sultan’s (2018) observation that in heuristic inquiry, “the researcher does not bracket themselves out of the study; instead, they bracket themselves into the process of inquiry” (p. 100). In other words, the goal of reflexivity in heuristics is not to eliminate one’s values or emotions but to own them transparently and integrate them as part of the research. By doing so, the researcher maintains awareness of personal influences while also leveraging them to deepen understanding.

Key Aspects of Subjectivity in Heuristic Inquiry. Several dimensions of subjectivity are integral to heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018).

Emotional Involvement. Heuristic research invites emotion into the inquiry (Sultan, 2018). The researcher's feelings—whether passion, empathy, frustration, or joy—are considered meaningful responses that can illuminate the phenomenon. Rather than seeing emotions as biases to be controlled, they are honored as informative signals of what experience means to the person (Sultan, 2018, p. 101).

Embodied Experience. The investigator's bodily awareness and somatic responses are also valued (Sultan, 2018). Sultan (2018) noted that heuristic inquiry is experiential, embodied, and holistic, engaging multiple facets of human experience (cognitive, emotional, sensory, kinesthetic, spiritual, etc.) in tandem (p. 101). For example, a researcher might notice tension or relaxation in their body during certain moments of the experience and explore what that somatic knowledge reveals.

Authenticity and Presence. Because the researcher is the primary instrument, heuristic inquiry demands authentic presence (Sultan, 2018). The researcher brings their whole self into the study—past memories, personality, and values—creating an honest, relational encounter with participants (often termed “co-researchers”) and with the data (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Sultan, 2018). This authenticity can foster trust and deeper sharing, as well as a genuine co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants.

By affirming the personal context of knowledge, heuristic methodology aligns with a constructivist view that reality is subjectively experienced and cannot be completely separated from the knower. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) argued that heuristic inquiry offers a disciplined yet inner-oriented path to scientific understanding, one that “awakens researchers to

make contact with and respect their own questions ... [affirming] intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid” routes to knowledge (p. 39).

Creative Synthesis

The culmination of heuristic inquiry is the creative synthesis, a phase where the various insights and experiences are integrated into a coherent whole (Moustakas, 1990). This process draws upon the researcher’s imaginative and intuitive faculties to express the essence of the phenomenon in a holistic manner.

Artistic or Narrative Form. The synthesis might be written as a first-person narrative, a story or metaphor, a series of poems, a visual art piece, or even a performance (Moustakas, 1990).

Wholeness and Essence. The researcher presents the phenomenon in its full complexity and richness as understood through the heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990).

Closure and Meaning. The act of creating the synthesis often brings the researcher a sense of completion or clarified meaning regarding the initial question (Moustakas, 1990).

In this dissertation on samba, the creative synthesis crystallized the psychological and spiritual essence of samba as experienced by me, the researcher (and participants).

Samba Dance Movement Therapy (SDMT). Drawing on the emotional, symbolic, and somatic dimensions uncovered through the heuristic process, I developed a therapeutic framework called Samba Dance Movement Therapy.

Reborn in Samba: The History of Aninha Malandro. As part of the creative synthesis, I also composed an original play that narrates a personal and symbolic journey of transformation through the medium of samba.

Jungian Interpretive Lens

Complementing heuristic inquiry, Jungian analytical psychology provided the symbolic framework for interpreting samba's deeper psychological functions. Jung (2009) defined active imagination as the method through which unconscious content is brought into dialogue with the conscious self. These symbolic processes manifest in samba's archetypal vocabulary, including circular movements, call-and-response songs, sacred gestures such as the umbigada, and rhythmic invocations of orixás, such as Exu (Bogado et al., 2023; Correal, 2003; Simas, 2023). Such gestures do not merely communicate emotion—they enact communal memory and ancestral wisdom. Brewster's (2018, 2020) exploration of archetypal grief and racial complexes reveals how inherited trauma may be metabolized through ritual and culturally specific movement. Samba's expressive symbolism aligns with Jungian principles by providing a structure within which unconscious content can emerge, be embodied, and transformed.

The study also drew on theories of embodied cognition, which posit that thought and emotion are not detached mental processes but are deeply rooted in bodily experience and interaction with the environment (Hiles, 2001; Maciel, 2004). Samba exemplifies this principle through its dynamic engagement with rhythm, gesture, spatial awareness, and corporeity. Research in dance movement therapy confirms that culturally embedded movement fosters emotional release, self-awareness, and social connection—qualities essential to trauma recovery and resilience (Dasgupta, 2013; Hackney et al., 2024; Stupacher et al., 2017).

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) presented a compelling challenge to longstanding Western philosophical traditions by asserting that human cognition is fundamentally embodied. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argued that mental processes arise from bodily experiences rather than disembodied reason, and that most abstract thought is metaphorically rooted in sensorimotor

interactions. This paradigm, known as embodied realism, shifts the understanding of how individuals engage with concepts, language, and emotional experiences, directly contesting dualistic models that separate the mind from the body and proposing instead that cognition is shaped by movement, perception, and lived experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

This framework provided essential groundwork for the current study's investigation into how embodied cultural practices, such as dance, facilitate psychological transformation. By affirming that bodily engagement is not peripheral but central to meaning-making, Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) work supports the exploration of symbolic movement as a legitimate mode of inquiry, healing, and identity formation. It also reinforces the study's critique of therapeutic models that privilege verbal articulation, suggesting that embodied expression offers a more inclusive and culturally resonant approach to understanding the self (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Adams (2010) provided a cautionary framework, emphasizing the need to differentiate between cognitive influence and cognitive constitution. Adams' (2010) critique invites further reflection on how embodied practices function within psychological healing, not simply as mechanistic or behavioral interventions, but as dynamic processes that intersect with memory, affect, and symbolic meaning. Through this lens, samba becomes not just an artistic expression but a modality for organizing psychological experience through embodied action.

Phenomenology, grounded in Husserl's (1970) foundational work and extended by Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) and Moustakas (1988), adds depth to this exploration by attending to lived experience and the intersubjective meaning-making process. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962, p.77) emphasized the primacy of embodied perception, asserting that the body is not a passive vessel but an expressive medium through which meaning is enacted and the world is revealed. Although classical phenomenology encourages bracketing personal bias, heuristic inquiry allows

these insights to surface and deepen the analysis. Borrett et al. (2000) emphasized the divergent interpretations of embodiment in cognitive science and phenomenology. While cognitive science focuses on physical interaction, phenomenology views embodiment as the condition for symbolic meaning. This distinction helped this study affirm samba's capacity to operate as more than sensorimotor output—it is a container for emotional, historical, and spiritual meaning.

Samba's political and communal significance further reinforces its therapeutic potential. Scholars such as Browning (1995), Lopes and Simas (2015), and Bogado et al. (2023) framed samba as a site of resistance and identity reclamation, connecting oppressed communities to ancestral power and expressive agency. These insights support the role of samba in decolonizing therapeutic practice—a movement advocated by Mullan (2023), McCabe (2008), Bernal et al. (2009), and Arredondo et al. (2024), who stressed the urgency of culturally inclusive mental health care for marginalized populations. This dissertation aimed to demonstrate how samba, with its history of transcending social and political oppression, provides a culturally congruent alternative to Western psychotherapeutic norms, fostering empowerment and spiritual recovery.

This conceptual framework engaged the study's central inquiry: What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing? It positions samba not merely as a cultural practice, but as a symbolic and embodied modality grounded in Jungian process of individuation, heuristic exploration, and ancestral reconnection. The first research sub-question: In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to explore archetypal energies, engage in active imagination, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self?—is addressed through the dynamic interplay of archetypal energy, symbolic gesture, and active imagination, highlighting the dance's role in shaping a fluid and relational self. The second sub-question—How does samba

function as a bridge for immigrants navigating the complexities of acculturation and assimilation, helping them reclaim their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal contexts?—draws from heuristic narratives and interdisciplinary literature that affirm samba’s power to sustain emotional resilience and cultural continuity within homoethnic communities (Akhtar, 1999; Bekteshi & Bellamy, 2024; Beserra, 2003). The third sub-question—What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system, and how does it address the collective wounds of oppression, discrimination, and displacement?—is explored through frameworks in dance movement therapy, embodied cognition, and decolonizing therapeutic models (Brewster, 2020; Dasgupta, 2013; Hackney et al., 2024; Mullan, 2023), revealing how samba fosters integrative healing through rhythm, ritual, and relational embodiment.

Building on this framework, the present study explored samba as a multidimensional healing practice, one that is culturally embedded, symbolically rich, and somatically expressed. Positioned at the intersection of clinical inquiry, symbolic theory, and lived experience, this research examined samba not only as a ritual of resistance against colonial and psychological fragmentation but also as a rhythm of restoration that reconnects individuals to ancestral memory, communal vitality, and inner transformation. Within this scope, the study investigated how samba facilitates processes of healing, identity reconstruction, and spiritual embodiment through heuristic immersion and creative synthesis.

Scope of the Study

As noted above, this qualitative study employed heuristic inquiry to examine samba as a cultural healing system, emphasizing the personal immersion, introspection, and embodied engagement (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Moustakas, 1990). As a methodological approach,

heuristics values subjective insight, tacit knowing, and prolonged self-reflection, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument of exploration (Moustakas, 1990). In this case, my identity as a Black Brazilian immigrant, samba dancer, and clinician shaped not only data collection but also interpretation.

To maintain clarity and manageability, delimitations were established. The study focused solely on samba, excluding comparative analyses with other dances or therapeutic modalities. Thirty participants were selected, consistent with Moustakas's (1990) guidance on a sample size sufficient to support immersive analysis without diluting depth. Participants were required to have at least three years of practice or demonstrated cultural engagement, supporting experiential richness. Crucially, individuals represented diverse cultural backgrounds beyond Brazilian identity. This inclusive selection reflected the intention to explore samba's healing potential for both Brazilian and non-Brazilian individuals. Participants were aged 18–65. This age range supported the inquiry's focus on adult experiences of migration, identity, and healing, while excluding minors for ethical reasons and elders (65+) to reduce generational variability, acknowledging this trade-off as a limitation.

The geographic scope centered on Brazilian diasporic communities, particularly urban immigrant environments in North America. No cross-country comparison was made; instead, the study concentrated on samba's contemporary role in the lives of immigrants navigating cultural preservation and adaptation. The data collection was temporally bounded within recent years, ensuring relevance to contemporary settings without historic extrapolation.

Language proficiency in Portuguese or English was required. This facilitated the collection of culturally authentic and idiomatically rich data, while also ensuring accessibility

and coherence in the analysis for an English-language dissertation. Exclusion of other languages was a practical delimitation aligned with the researcher's linguistic competence.

Each delimitation, location, cultural background, time frame, and language was chosen to sharpen focus while preserving analytic depth. In line with Moustakas (1990), this structure allowed for profound engagement with samba's healing dimensions through a culturally grounded and experientially rich lens.

Given the immersive nature of heuristic inquiry, limitations were inherent and acknowledged. The methodology's dependence on personal experience introduces potential for bias, as interpretations reflect co-constructed realities rather than detached objectivity (Moustakas, 1990). My cultural and clinical lens inevitably influenced which meanings emerged.

Subjectivity is both a strength and a limitation in design. As Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010) noted, the depth achieved through intimate engagement may constrain generalizability, offering situated insights rather than universal claims. The findings speak to contexts analogous to those of the participants, namely, individuals engaged in expressive cultural practices amid migratory and therapeutic themes.

The emotional and time-intensive nature of data collection constrained scalability. Heuristic analysis requires repeated cycles of reflection, intuitive synthesis, and creative expression (Moustakas, 1990), which limits the inclusion of more participants or extended fieldwork. While interactions risked role-blurring between researcher and participants (e.g., moments of informal counseling), these dynamics were managed with awareness and recognized as methodological challenges.

This interpretive approach naturally constrains external validity. The research aimed for transferability, providing richly textured insight that readers may find resonant in similar

contexts (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010), rather than replicability. By explicitly delineating both its delimitations and limitations, the study maintained methodological transparency and contextual integrity.

Definitions of Key Terms

Acculturation: The process of cultural and psychological adaptation that occurs when two or more cultures interact (Berry, 1997; Redfield et al., 1936).

Active Imagination: A cognitive methodology that uses the imagination as an organ of understanding (Chodorow, 1991; Jung, 2009).

Assimilation: The process by which a person or persons acquire the social and psychological characteristics of a group (Alba & Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964).

Dance/Movement Therapy: A form of treatment using dance and movement to help people express feelings, especially people affected by a psychiatric disorder (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009; Levy, 2005).

Decolonizing Therapy: A transformative movement that challenges traditional mental health paradigms rooted in colonial systems (Mullan, 2023). It involves reimagining therapy to address historical trauma, systemic oppression, and the disconnection caused by colonization. Decolonizing therapy emphasizes cultural and community healing, reclaiming ancestral knowledge, and fostering liberation, joy, and holistic well-being. It is not merely a technique but a shift in mindset, centering on the integration of political, spiritual, and emotional dimensions to create a more inclusive and equitable model of mental health care.

Emotional Refueling: A phenomenon where individuals seek reassurance and a sense of security from familiar and comforting sources (Akhtar, 1999; Winnicott, 1965). For children, this often involves frequently returning to their caregiver, whose presence provides emotional

reassurance, safety, and the confidence to explore their surroundings. Similarly, immigrants experience emotional refueling through connections to their homeland, or “motherland.” This can happen through phone calls to family, participating in cultural events, and engaging with traditions, language, and community ties from their country of origin. These connections provide cultural and emotional reassurance, enabling immigrants to draw strength and comfort as they navigate life in a new environment. In both cases, these trusted anchors enable individuals to refuel emotionally, fostering stability and courage for personal growth and exploration.

Heuristic Research: Heuristic research is a qualitative method that emphasizes personal meaning and lived experience (Moustakas, 1990). It involves deep engagement, introspection, and dialogue to uncover insights. Moustakas (1990) described it as reflective inquiry into the meaning and nature of lived experience (Brisola & Cury, 2016).

Orixás (Orishas): A branch of the Indigenous, earth-centered religion of the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria (Clarke, 2004; Kumari, 2020; Verger, 1995). It has existed for at least 4,000 years; some anthropologists believe it has been practiced for as many as 8,000 years. The tradition spread from Africa to Cuba and Brazil via the trans-Atlantic slave route of the 19th century.

Process of Individuation: The development of the individual from a unified psyche into a more complex and differentiated self. This process is often associated with the work of Jung (1969, 1991a, 1991b), who described it as the journey toward self-actualization and wholeness.

Samba Dance: The word “samba” is derived from the Angolan word “semba,” which means “naval bump” and symbolizes an invitation to invoke the favor of the gods through rhythm, song, and dance (Lopes & Simas, 2015). There are at least nine styles of samba; all of

them have a story to tell. A Brazilian dance of African origin, samba is a lively, rhythmical dance (Santos, 2007; Sherman, 2010).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this dissertation held multifaceted significance for scholarly research, public policy, and clinical practice. Grounded in a heuristic inquiry approach and informed by depth psychology and cross-cultural perspectives, the study shed light on the meaning of personal transformation within a culturally situated context. Organized into three domains — research significance, policy significance, and practice significance — this section articulates the research's contributions to academic discourse, its influence on community and educational policy development, and its relevance for therapeutic and pedagogical practice. Each section presents three concrete examples of impact, purposefully eschewing overstatement while underscoring the study's value to scholars, therapists, educators, community organizations, and policymakers.

This study expanded the methodological conversation by demonstrating how heuristic inquiry, as espoused by Douglass and Moustakas (1985), yielded profound insights into human experience. The research exemplified what Douglass and Moustakas (1985) described as a “passionate and discerning personal involvement” in investigating life's essences (p. 39). By deeply engaging with my own experiences, the work validated the notion that “the deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). This approach enriched academic discourse on qualitative methods, illustrating how disciplined self-reflection and active imagination (Chodorow, 1991) produced generalizable insights. For example, the dissertation's creative synthesis stage embodied Douglass and Moustakas's (1985) idea of generating “a new monolithic significance that embodies the essence of the heuristic

truth” (p. 52). Scholars in psychology and anthropology built upon this model to further explore phenomena where personal and cultural dimensions intersect.

The findings integrated Carl Jung’s analytical psychology with contemporary cultural analysis, marking a significant addition to Jungian scholarship. Jung’s concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes gained renewed relevance as they were examined through the lens of cultural identity formation and diaspora experiences. By referencing Jung’s seminal works (e.g., *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* [Jung, 1968], *Symbols of Transformation* [Jung, 1991a], *The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious* [Jung, 1991b]), the study demonstrated how individual psychic transformation was “embedded in cultural and historical contexts” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). For instance, Jung’s (1991a) notion of confronting one’s “shadow” (p. 93) was applied to participants grappling with ancestral trauma and cultural dislocation. This contextualization broadened Jungian theory, moving beyond Eurocentric narratives and demonstrating that archetypal psychology illuminated the experiences of marginalized and immigrant communities (Brewster, 2018, 2020). Consequently, Jungian scholars gained a richer, more inclusive framework that bridged depth psychology with cultural studies.

This dissertation addressed a noted gap in cross-cultural and transpersonal psychology research by focusing on experiences often overlooked in mainstream literature. Works by Trimble and Hesdorffer (2017) on the neurology of cultural expression and DaMatta (1991) on the anthropology of identity highlighted the need for more integrative approaches. The significance of the study lay in its synthesis, which combined Akhtar’s (1999) psychoanalytic insights on immigration and identity transformation with Murcia et al.’s (2010) work on reconstructing narrative memory in diaspora communities, thereby providing an empirically

grounded account of personal growth through cultural reconnection. By documenting how participants used storytelling, dreams, and community rituals to heal identity rifts, the research contributed a novel understanding of cultural resilience. This enriched scholarly knowledge on individuation within a cultural framework and offered evidence that supported and extended prior theoretical work (e.g., Moustakas [1990] on self-discovery; Chodorow [1998] on active imagination in cultural healing). These findings laid a foundation for future interdisciplinary scholarship, providing researchers in psychology, cultural studies, and education with valuable tools to deepen their understanding of theory and practice. As such, the work continued to inform efforts that seek to center diverse voices and culturally grounded healing approaches in academic, clinical, and pedagogical contexts.

The study's insights have direct implications for mental health policy by underscoring the importance of culturally attuned services. Moghaddam and Hendricks (2022) emphasized that contemporary immigration challenges require new solutions, and their findings concretely illustrate those challenges and solutions. Participants disclosed personal motivations and underlying reasons for choosing samba as a healing medium, often describing it as a culturally resonant practice that reconnected them with ancestral memory and embodied identity. Many emphasized that samba's rhythm, movement, and communal nature provided a therapeutic language through which emotional and spiritual expression became possible. The healing process was deepened when cultural narratives and ancestral knowledge were acknowledged and integrated, underscoring the importance of culturally grounded interventions. This evidence supports calls for multicultural counseling competencies in public mental health systems (Arredondo et al., 2024). Policymakers can use this study to advocate for training initiatives that equip therapists and counselors to recognize cultural symbolism and trauma, aligning with

Bernal et al. (2009), who argued that cultural adaptation of treatments is essential in evidence-based practice. In practice, such policy changes might lead to funding community-based healing programs or integrating traditional cultural practices into mainstream therapy, ensuring mental health services are inclusive and effective for immigrant and indigenous populations.

The research also spoke to educational policymakers by highlighting the role of cultural identity in learning and personal development. Participants' journeys showed that reconnecting with cultural roots (through language, art, or mythology) bolstered their sense of self and purpose. This aligns with Trimble and Hesdorffer's (2017) findings on how deeply ingrained cultural expressions (like music or dance) influence psychological well-being. Education policymakers may draw on these insights to incorporate multicultural and psychoeducational content into curricula, for instance, by incorporating Jungian creative techniques (e.g., guided imagery, dream journals) into school programs to help students explore their identity safely. By citing evidence from this study alongside Arredondo et al.'s (2024) emphasis on supporting immigrant youth, policymakers can justify initiatives such as heritage language courses, community mentorship programs, or student counseling strategies that validate diverse identities. These educational policies, informed by the current research, can help reduce identity-based stress and improve academic engagement among students from diverse backgrounds.

On a broader level, this dissertation informs policies related to cultural preservation and community health. Community organizations and local governments can leverage the study's findings to support cultural events and spaces that facilitate healing. The research provided evidence of the therapeutic value of cultural rituals and storytelling, resonating with DaMatta's (1991) anthropological observations on communal traditions as identity anchors. For example, local policymakers might use these insights to secure funding for cultural festivals, support

immigrant community centers, or protect Indigenous lands and practices, acknowledging their psychological importance. The work of Kaçula (2020) on urban cultural history and Brewster (2020) on racial complexes underpins the idea that recognizing and honoring cultural heritage can address collective trauma. By integrating this study's evidence with such sources, policymakers can craft forward-looking cultural policies that promote social cohesion, mental health, and inclusion at the community level, ensuring that the intangible heritage of communities is maintained as a resource for healing and identity.

In the realm of clinical practice, the present study may provide therapists and counseling psychologists with actionable insights into their work. Grounded in Jungian and depth-psychological techniques, it demonstrates how tools such as active imagination (Jung, 1969) and reflective self-dialogue (Moustakas, 1990) facilitate personal healing. Therapists can draw on this research to incorporate symbolic and creative methods into mainstream therapy, particularly for clients navigating cultural identity issues, trauma, or existential crises. For example, one participant's transformation was catalyzed by creating art that depicted ancestral symbols, supporting Chodorow's (1998) contention that expressive movement and imagination bridge the conscious and unconscious. Incorporating such practices aligns with Sills (2020), who emphasized the importance of "authenticity in the therapeutic relationship" for client growth (p. 213). By applying the findings of this study, practitioners can become more adept at "raising primary subjective experience to consciousness" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39), thereby deepening client engagement and enhancing therapeutic outcomes.

Beyond clinical settings, educators and mentors in personal development programs (e.g., life coaching, community youth programs) can leverage this study's outcomes. The research underscored that personal narrative work, such as writing life stories, exploring family history, or

engaging with myths, can significantly enhance self-understanding and resilience. Educators can incorporate structured reflection sessions or storytelling workshops in their programs, guided by evidence that these methods foster identity integration and emotional well-being. This practical significance is reinforced by Brewster (2018), who demonstrated the power of ancestral dream work in connecting African American individuals to their heritage. By integrating such culturally aware reflective practices, educators help individuals navigate modern identity challenges (like acculturation stress or intergenerational trauma) with confidence and insight, fulfilling Trimble and Hesdorffer's (2017) suggestion that bridging science and culture (e.g., through music or art) can transform personal growth. The study thus served as a resource for those designing curricula or workshops aimed at empowering individuals through cultural self-exploration.

Ultimately, the study's significance extended to community-level practitioners, including cultural healers, community counselors, and nonprofit organizations dedicated to mental health or cultural preservation. The detailed accounts of participants' healing journeys provide real-world examples of how community rituals, peer support, and cultural education can be harnessed to improve mental health. For instance, one finding illustrated how joining a traditional drumming circle not only reduced the participants' anxiety but also reconnected them to a supportive heritage community. This practical example aligned with Quiroga Murcia et al. (2010), who found that communal cultural activities facilitate neural and emotional integration in trauma survivors. Community organizations can adopt similar approaches, such as culturally tailored support groups or arts-based therapy initiatives, to serve their constituents. The results lend empirical support to Bernal et al. (2009), reinforcing the notion that successful interventions often require evidence-based practices that acknowledge cultural diversity. By following the study's insights, community practitioners can create safer, more relevant spaces for individuals

to heal, leading to strengthened communal bonds and improved psychological well-being at the grassroots level.

In summary, the significance of this dissertation extends across multiple domains. For research, it advanced qualitative methodology and enriched theoretical understandings of culture and psyche. For policy, it provides evidence to shape more inclusive mental health and education systems, ensuring culturally diverse needs are recognized. For practice, it delivers concrete strategies for therapists, educators, and community healers to foster transformation and resilience. By grounding each claim in the data and aligning with established scholarship (Arredondo et al., 2024; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Mullan, 2023), it becomes clear that the research not only fills existing gaps but also sets a path for future scholars, decision-makers, and practitioners committed to integrating cultural depth and personal meaning into their work.

Summary

This introductory chapter established the foundational context of the study by exploring samba as a culturally embedded healing system with psychological, emotional, and spiritual significance. It introduced the heuristic methodology (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018) and the Jungian framework that guided the inquiry, emphasizing how my lived experience intersects with the collective narratives of Brazilian immigrants. Drawing on Jung's (1969, 1991a, 1991b) concept of active imagination and the process of individuation, the chapter articulated how samba supports identity reconstruction, resilience, and cultural reconnection—particularly in response to the disorienting effects of immigration. Samba's rhythmic, symbolic language emerged as a form of embodied resistance, reclaiming ancestral wisdom while challenging colonial legacies (Lins, 2012; Lopes & Simas, 2015; Neto, 2017).

Though centered on Brazilian immigrant experiences, the chapter proposed SDMT as a culturally inclusive model with wider applicability across therapeutic settings.

The remainder of the dissertation is organized to deepen and extend these insights.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, starting with the methodological foundations of heuristic inquiry and its connection to phenomenology and embodied cognition. It then surveys Jungian concepts relevant to individuation and symbolic movement, before exploring the psychological impact of immigration and the sociocultural origins of samba as an Afro-Brazilian expression of resistance and spiritual vitality. The chapter concludes by positioning samba within the broader field of dance movement therapy and decolonized mental health practices.

Chapter 3 presents the study's methodology, including participant selection, data collection, and analytic process, followed by a discussion of limitations and delimitations. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings and interpretations that emerged through creative synthesis, including two artifacts born from the research: the proposal for SDMT and a 45-minute theatrical performance representing my personal rebirth into samba. Together, these elements bridge scholarly inquiry and lived experience, illuminating samba's therapeutic power and underscoring its potential to enrich clinical practice, inspire community-based interventions, and contribute to a more inclusive vision of healing justice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing scholarship related to the psychological, cultural, and therapeutic dimensions explored in this dissertation. While Chapter 1 provided personal and theoretical grounding for the inquiry, this literature review contextualizes the study within broader academic discourse, drawing on multidisciplinary research that spans psychology, anthropology, movement studies, and decolonial theory. The aim is to demonstrate how samba's integrative potential intersects with key frameworks in healing, identity formation, and cultural adaptation, while also identifying critical gaps that justify the present study.

This chapter is organized into eight thematic areas:

Qualitative Method. The foundations and applications of Moustakas's heuristic inquiry model, which privileges subjective immersion, lived experience, and transformative insight.

Phenomenology and Embodied Cognition. The review also draws on phenomenological studies and embodied cognition theory, emphasizing the role of bodily movement, sensory awareness, and rhythm in shaping perception, emotion, and meaning-making.

Jung's Concepts of Active Imagination and the Process of Individuation. Core psychological mechanisms for symbolic integration and identity reconstruction, particularly relevant to the healing of immigrants and diasporic communities.

Integration of the Mind, Body, and Spirit. Theoretical and clinical literature addressing holistic models of wellness through embodied practices.

Dance Movement Therapy. Empirical and conceptual research on the therapeutic power of dance as a form of emotional regulation, trauma recovery, and cultural expression.

The Psychological Impact of Immigration on Brazilian Immigrants. Studies examining identity fragmentation, cultural displacement, and adaptation challenges among Brazilian immigrants.

The Origin and History of Samba. Scholarly work on samba's evolution as an Afro-Brazilian tradition rooted in resistance, spirituality, and community.

Decolonizing Mental Health. Literature exploring race, cultural narratives, and the necessity of decolonized healing frameworks that affirm ancestral wisdom and relational knowledge.

Although this study focuses on the transformative impact of samba dance in promoting psychological integration during acculturation, its inquiry is grounded in a much broader conversation surrounding immigration and cultural adaptation. Foundational research on immigration—including work by Akhtar (1999), Assis (1995), Barth (1969), DeBiaggi (2022), Margolis (1992, 1994, 1998), Martes (1999a), McGoldrick et al. (2000), Ribeiro et al. (1994), and Sam and Berry (2006)—has consistently revealed the emotional, social, and cultural complexities of migration. These studies offer important frameworks for understanding acculturation stress, identity rupture, and strategies for symbolic restoration.

Further research in ethnopsychology, cross-cultural psychology, social services, and community health—such as Berry et al. (1997), hooks (1994), Merenda (1994), and Oppedal et al. (2020)—has underscored the pressing need for culturally responsive approaches that promote the well-being of immigrants. Despite this growing body of work, scholarship focused specifically on Brazilian immigrants remains scarce. Margolis (1998) observed that Brazilians are often subsumed under broad demographic categories such as “Latinos” or “Hispanics,” erasing the particularities of Brazilian culture and obscuring the unique psychosocial dynamics at

play. This absence in the literature presents a compelling rationale for research centered on cultural practices like samba, especially as contemporary studies, such as those by Andronic and Constantin (2024), have underscored the nuanced interplay between acculturation and emotional well-being in migrant populations.

In response to these gaps, this chapter reviews and synthesizes the existing literature in each thematic area, highlighting where the discourse converges and diverges across disciplines. In doing so, the review establishes the intellectual and cultural terrain necessary for investigating samba's role in healing, identity reconstruction, and holistic wellness, and for positioning SDMT as a viable, culturally grounded framework in therapeutic practice.

Research Strategy

To support a rigorous and comprehensive exploration of samba's integrative healing power, this study employed a strategic and replicable research strategy informed by heuristic inquiry and Jungian analytical psychology. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the investigation, which spanned therapeutic frameworks, cultural embodiment, and identity reconstruction, the search process emphasized sources that could illuminate samba's role in supporting psychological transformation, especially within immigrant contexts and culturally decolonized mental health care.

The literature search was conducted using multiple academic databases known for housing peer-reviewed research across psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, and health sciences. These included PsycINFO, PubMed, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. Boolean operators (e.g., "AND," "OR") were used to refine and expand search parameters. The following key terms guided the search: "samba dance therapy," "heuristic inquiry," "active imagination," "individuation process," "embodied cognition," "dance

movement therapy,” “Brazilian immigrants and identity reconstruction,” “cultural healing practices,” and “decolonizing mental health.” Terms were entered independently and in combination to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.

In addition to database searches, targeted journal scans were performed to identify publications likely to offer culturally and clinically relevant insights. These included the *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *American Journal of Dance Therapy*, *M/C Journal*, *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, *Journal of Dance Medicine & Science*, *Journal of Black Studies*, and *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*. Across all databases and archival sources, the comprehensive search generated approximately 253 scholarly works spanning multiple disciplines relevant to the study’s themes of culture, psychology, and embodiment. These included approximately 90 peer-reviewed journal articles, 80 books and edited volumes, 20 book chapters or conference proceedings, 15 doctoral and master’s dissertations, and 15 policy or organizational reports that addressed cultural and therapeutic frameworks.

After an initial screening of abstracts and relevance assessment based on methodological rigor, cultural specificity, and theoretical contribution, 170 sources were selected and synthesized in the Literature Review. These final works formed the foundation for discussions on race, identity, healing justice, decolonial therapy, and the psychological and spiritual dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system.

The research strategy intentionally prioritized sources that examined embodiment, creative process, and cross-cultural considerations in healing. Studies were included if they addressed Afro-diasporic cultural expression, therapeutic uses of dance, symbolic engagement in

psychotherapy, or the psychosocial impact of immigration. This approach ensures the literature review offers both breadth and depth while maintaining relevance to the inquiry's guiding question: What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing? Each section of the literature review frames the theoretical context for investigating samba's role as a cultural and therapeutic system, highlighting why this study is positioned to fill an important gap in the existing literature.

Qualitative Method: Moustakas's Heuristic Methodology

Heuristic inquiry is a qualitative research approach that emphasizes an intensive, first-person exploration of human experience. Developed by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) and other collaborators, heuristic research engages the researcher in a deep self-reflective process to discover the essence and meaning of a phenomenon through personal immersion and insight (Tudor, 2022). The heuristic inquiry was briefly reviewed in Chapter 1 to establish its foundations and demonstrate why it is an appropriate methodology for the present study. This chapter provides a more in-depth exploration of the methodology. The review begins by examining the origins and philosophical foundations of heuristic inquiry, including its roots in humanistic psychology and the concept of tacit knowledge. Next, it defines the approach and outlines its key characteristics and concepts as described in seminal works. The phases of the heuristic research process are then detailed to show how the heuristic unfolds in practice in this study. The section also compared heuristic inquiry with other qualitative approaches, particularly phenomenological methods, to highlight its unique features. Examples of applications of heuristic inquiry in prior research across various fields are presented to illustrate how other scholars have employed this method and the insights they have gained (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Rezai, 2013).

Additionally, the critiques and challenges identified in the literature, including questions of rigor, subjectivity, and ethical considerations, are examined. Throughout the review, connections are made to the research questions guiding the current study, underscoring how each topic informs the approach to those questions. By comparing and contrasting existing studies and viewpoints, this section not only situates the heuristic methodology in context but also identifies gaps in the existing literature.

Heuristic inquiry has its etymological roots in the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning “to find” or “to discover” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). According to Abbagnano (1986, p. 605), the Greek verb *εὐρίσκειν* corresponds to “date,” “search,” or “the art of search.” It is said that a method is heuristic when it enables the student to discover what was intended to be learned: “The Socratic maieutics is, par excellence, a heuristic method,” asserted Japiassu and Marcondes (1990, p. 119). This reflects the approach’s fundamental aim of discovery through exploratory inquiry (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Sultan, 2018). The method emerged from the work of Moustakas (1923–2012), a humanistic psychologist often regarded as the founder of heuristic research. Moustakas’s interest in the autobiographical nature of research—the idea that one’s personal experience can be a pathway to general insights—was sparked by his own life events (Tudor, 2022). Notably, after enduring a period of intense loneliness during a family crisis, Moustakas wrote a book titled *Loneliness* (1961) in which he deeply examined that experience (Sultan, 2018; Tudor, 2022). Through reflecting on his felt experience of loneliness and how it transformed him, Moustakas began formulating heuristics as a systematic method of inquiry. Early groundwork was laid in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it was through Moustakas’s later publications (e.g., *Heuristic Research* in 1990) and the work of colleagues like Douglass that the approach was formally articulated as a research methodology (Tudor, 2022).

Humanistic and phenomenological influences are central to the foundations of heuristic inquiry. Moustakas was closely involved in the humanistic psychology movement, which emphasized subjective experience, personal growth, and the wholeness of the person (Tudor, 2022). These values carried into heuristic research, positioning it within the broader tradition of human science—an approach to knowledge that seeks to understand human experience in its richness, rather than reducing it to variables (Sultan, 2018). In contrast to positivist paradigms, heuristic inquiry embraces the interiority of experience. Sela-Smith (2002) described this inward focus as exploring a “last frontier,” the internal terrain of one’s feelings and awareness, which is often neglected by conventional science (p. 54). Traditional research has tended to resist such subjective domains, favoring controlled observation of external phenomena. Heuristic inquiry directly challenges that resistance by legitimizing the systematic study of internal, personal experience. It aligns with phenomenological philosophy in that it seeks to grasp the essence of phenomena, but it diverges by insisting that the researcher’s own experience and intuition are integral, rather than something to be bracketed out (Mihalache, 2019).

A key philosophical concept underpinning heuristic inquiry is Michael Polanyi’s (1966) idea of tacit knowledge. Polanyi (1966) argued that people “know more than they can tell” (p. 4), meaning there are dimensions of knowledge (feelings, intuitions, embodied insights) that exist beyond immediate conscious awareness. Heuristic research endeavors to tap into this tacit, implicit knowledge as a source of understanding (Sela-Smith, 2002). Through methods like prolonged self-reflection and immersion, the heuristic researcher brings hidden insights to the surface. Embracing tacit knowledge goes hand-in-hand with valuing intuition and imagination in the research process (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Douglass and Moustakas (1985) emphasized that heuristic inquiry validates subjective processes—“imagination, intuition, self-

reflection, and the tacit dimension”—as valid and essential means of seeking knowledge (p. 40). This stance is philosophically aligned with constructivist and existential perspectives, which hold that meaning is co-created by the individual and cannot always be measured objectively (Lincoln & Hoffman, 2018).

Multiple authors in the literature have defined what makes heuristic inquiry distinct as a research approach. At its core, heuristic inquiry is a form of investigation driven by intense personal curiosity and experience. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) described heuristics in its purest form as “a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self” (p. 39). In other words, the researcher does not stand apart from the question studied; instead, they fully embrace their connection to the phenomenon, using their own insight as a primary instrument of inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). This personal investment is not random, however. The process remains disciplined and rigorous in its pursuit of meaning: heuristics offers “a disciplined pursuit of essential meanings connected with everyday human experiences” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40). The literature emphasizes that while heuristic inquiry invites creative and subjective exploration, it also requires structure and self-critical awareness to yield valid insights. The researcher must continually reflect, test, and refine their intuitions against the data, including others’ experiences in a systematic way (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Thus, heuristic inquiry strikes a balance between art and science, blending imaginative reflection with empirical observation. As Hiles (2001) contended, heuristic inquiry treats the researcher’s internal responses as epistemologically productive, particularly for phenomena that are emotional, symbolic, or culturally embedded. Sultan (2018) expanded this view by positioning heuristic

inquiry as an experiential and relational methodology that weaves researcher presence with co-researcher narratives to illuminate shared meaning.

Several defining characteristics of heuristic inquiry recur across scholarly descriptions. These characteristics highlight how heuristic inquiry is conducted and what principles guide it:

Intense Personal Engagement

The researcher is intimately connected to the phenomenon of study, often having direct personal experience with it (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas noted that heuristic research typically begins with a question that the researcher “has lived” and feels deeply compelled to answer. The inquirer must identify with the focus of inquiry at a profound level, immersing themselves in the topic so that genuine understanding can unfold (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018).

Self-Dialogue

Heuristic inquiry involves an ongoing inner dialogue by the researcher about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). Rather than attempting to eliminate their biases, researchers turn inward and openly examine their own thoughts, feelings, and memories related to the question. This process of self-reflection or auto dialogue is a key tool for uncovering layers of meaning (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018; Tudor, 2022). Moustakas (1990) argued that by fully acknowledging and exploring one’s subjective experience, the researcher becomes more, rather than less, connected to the core of the phenomenon.

Tacit Knowing and Intuition

The heuristic process relies on the researcher’s tacit knowledge and intuitive insights to guide discovery. Tacit knowledge, as defined by Polanyi (1966), refers to the implicit, preverbal understanding that one possesses more knowledge than they can articulate. This dimension of knowing encompasses embodied, emotional, or imaginal qualities that resist codification but are

essential to grasping lived experience. In heuristic inquiry, intuition is viewed as a valid epistemological tool, enabling the researcher to apprehend wholes and themes that may elude linear analysis (Moustakas, 1990). Douglass and Moustakas (1985) emphasized that heuristic inquiry “affirms imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid ways in the search for knowledge and understanding” (p. 40).

The researcher pays close attention to hunches, gut feelings, images, and vague perceptions, trusting that these may carry meaning that formal analysis alone could miss. Mihalache (2019) elaborated that intuition in heuristic inquiry operates “preverbally as a whole in the depths of one’s being, in what has been labeled the tacit dimension” (p. 151), and that intuitive connecting between researcher and participants can reveal insights inaccessible through conventional methods. Over the course of the inquiry, what was initially tacit—felt but unarticulated—gradually becomes explicit knowledge through processes of indwelling, self-dialogue, and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018).

Indwelling and Focusing

These terms, identified by Moustakas (1990) as key heuristic concepts, refer to practices of deep contemplative focus. Indwelling means turning inward and patiently looking within oneself to examine the phenomenon at the core of one’s being. Focusing, a term also used by Gendlin (1978) in psychotherapy, involves quieting the mind to sense the subtle internal nuances of an experience. Both imply a meditative attentiveness, where the researcher allows the phenomenon to percolate in consciousness, observing whatever emerges without immediate judgment (Moustakas, 1990).

Internal Frame of Reference

In heuristic inquiry, understanding must ultimately come from within the researcher's own frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990). This means that all representations of the phenomenon (even those gleaned from participants) are understood through the researcher's personal lens. Rather than striving for objective detachment, the heuristic researcher acknowledges that their perspective is the medium through which meaning crystallizes (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas emphasized maintaining an internal frame of reference so that the final depiction of the experience truly resonates with the researcher's authentic encounter with the phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Mihalache, 2019; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018).

Holistic/Creative Synthesis

Heuristic inquiry values creative expression as a way of synthesizing insights (Moustakas, 1990). The culmination of a heuristic project often involves assembling what has been learned into a holistic narrative or artistic form (more on this is discussed in the process section). This could be a narrative story, a set of poems, a metaphor, a painting, or any compelling representation that captures the essence of the experience studied. This creative element underscores that heuristic knowledge is not merely analytic but also experiential and evocative (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018).

Participants as Co-Researchers

Unlike many research methods that label participants as subjects, the heuristic approach explicitly treats participants (i.e., those involved beyond the primary researcher) as co-researchers (Sultan, 2018). This stance is highlighted by Sultan (2018), who describes heuristic inquiry as an experiential and relational approach in which those sharing their stories are equal

partners in the exploration. Participants are invited to engage in reflection alongside the primary researcher, and their insights are considered not just data but integral contributions to making meaning. This principle fosters a relationship of intersubjectivity and trust, aligning with the humanistic commitment to honor each person's lived experience.

Multiple authors have elaborated on the epistemological and methodological foundations of heuristic research. Sultan (2018), for example, framed heuristic inquiry as experiential, relational, and existential, asserting that the method originates from questions the researcher has “lived” and cannot avoid. Participants in heuristic research are not subjects in a distant study but participants in a shared journey toward understanding. Their stories and contributions are viewed as essential components in a collaborative, dialogical process rooted in intersubjectivity. Similarly, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) argued that heuristic inquiry affirms “imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension” as legitimate and vital ways of knowing (p. 40).

The concept of tacit knowledge—central to heuristic methodology—is grounded in the work of Polanyi (1966), who argued that humans “know more than they can tell” (p. 4). This notion is foundational to the epistemology of heuristic inquiry, as it values inner hunches, felt impressions, and embodied insights that emerge gradually into conscious articulation. Mihalache (2019) contextualized intuition within this framework as a preverbal mode of knowing, echoing Polanyi's view and emphasizing that heuristic inquiry allows the researcher to access unconscious or symbolic dimensions of meaning.

Sela-Smith (2002) deepened this philosophical stance by advocating for an “internal heuristic inquiry” where the researcher's emotional and psychological vulnerability becomes a primary medium of discovery. Hiles (2001) concurred, describing heuristic inquiry as “poly-

dimensional,” especially suited for exploring existentially complex and emotionally charged phenomena. In contrast to methods that strive to distance the researcher from the subject, heuristic inquiry allows knowledge to emerge through the lived interplay between inner reflection and outer dialogue.

Heuristic Phases

These theoretical commitments unfold through six iterative phases first articulated by Moustakas (1990), with some scholars proposing a seventh phase of validation (Hiles, 2001). Each phase contributes uniquely to the emergence of meaning and transformation in the research process.

Initial Engagement

The first stage, Initial Engagement, focuses on the researcher’s recognition of a compelling question that is grounded in personal meaning. Moustakas (1990) described this as a search for a “passionate concern” that holds personal and social relevance (p. 27). This phase often originates from a biographical context, as noted by Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010), who found that heuristic inquiry enabled them to explore refugee identity through their own lens. Sela-Smith (2002) further observed that this stage is less about intellectual choice and more about answering a psychological or existential call.

Immersion

Immersion follows, marked by the researcher “living the question” through daily reflection, engagement with literature, participant dialogue, and embodied observation (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). Sultan (2018) and Brisola and Cury (2016) emphasized that immersion includes intuitive openness and somatic awareness. Dale (2015) and Rezai (2013) highlighted that immersion is often a relational process, where participants contribute emergent themes

through narrative sharing. Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010) noted that immersion can lead to emotional saturation, prompting ethical pauses to preserve the researcher's well-being.

Incubation

Incubation, the third phase, is characterized by intentional withdrawal (Moustakas, 1990). Here, the researcher allows the tacit dimension to percolate beneath the surface without conscious effort. Moustakas (1990) described it as a necessary pause for inner wisdom to unfold. Polanyi's (1966) theory supports this notion, suggesting that discovery often comes when attention is relaxed. Creswell (2013) affirmed the value of incubation in facilitating nonlinear synthesis and intuitive integration.

Illumination

The fourth phase, Illumination, involves spontaneous realizations or thematic clarity that arise from prior immersion and incubation (Moustakas, 1990). According to Moustakas (1990), illumination occurs when the researcher becomes open to intuitive resonance and symbolic insight. Kleining and Witt (2000) described this as a cascade of mini-revelations rather than singular epiphanies. Maciel (2004), Cabral and Nick (2017), and Brisola and Cury (2016) documented how illumination often manifests through metaphor, movement, or ritual—especially in contexts involving expressive arts and cultural meaning.

Explication

During Explication, the researcher systematically examines these insights, organizing themes, resolving contradictions, and constructing an interpretive structure (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) identified this phase as involving “focusing, indwelling, and self-disclosure” (p. 31). Dale (2015) and Creswell (2013) described it as a bridge between internal knowing and academic discourse. Sela-Smith (2002) cautioned against over-intellectualization, advocating for

continued vulnerability and depth. Kleining and Witt (2000) supported polyphonic explication, allowing layered, sometimes contradictory voices to coexist in the data.

Creative Synthesis

The sixth phase, Creative Synthesis, is the expressive culmination of the heuristic journey. Moustakas (1990) explained that creative synthesis seeks to communicate the essential meanings of the phenomenon in a way that reflects its wholeness. This synthesis may take the form of narrative, poetry, metaphor, image, or multimodal presentation, whichever best captures the emotional and symbolic truth of the experience. Sultan (2018) referred to synthesis as a “living manuscript,” while Hiles (2001) noted that it is a methodological necessity in heuristic inquiry, not a stylistic indulgence.

Brisola and Cury (2016) emphasized that synthesis transforms experience into meaning through aesthetic expression. Cabral and Nick (2017) advocated for a synthesis that reflects embodied knowledge, particularly when the phenomenon involves movement or ritual. This perspective is deeply aligned with the present dissertation, which explores samba as a multifaceted healing system, encompassing psychological, spiritual, and communal aspects. Because samba embodies rhythm, emotion, and ancestral symbolism, creative synthesis offers a mode of representation that is not only academically rigorous but culturally resonant. A synthesis might include a composite narrative of dancers’ journeys, a choreographed vignette that reflects archetypal themes, or poetic storytelling that interweaves the researcher’s and participants’ perspectives. In doing so, the heuristic inquiry reflects the expressive and transformative nature of samba itself.

Some scholars propose a final phase of Validation, in which findings are shared with participants or the broader community to confirm resonance and integrity. Hiles (2001) and Sela-

Smith (2002) asserted that this phase, though optional, is critical for establishing trustworthiness. Strauss and Corbin (1990) supported participant validation in grounded theory; in heuristic inquiry, however, the emphasis lies in ethical transparency, intersubjective dialogue, and honoring the multiplicity of lived truths.

Heuristic Inquiry and Phenomenology

Heuristic inquiry shares conceptual terrain with several qualitative methodologies, particularly phenomenology, yet it diverges in significant philosophical and procedural ways. Both approaches aim to uncover the essence of lived experience, but they differ in epistemological orientation, methodological structure, and the role of the researcher. Moustakas (1994), the originator of heuristic inquiry, was himself a scholar of phenomenology, authoring *Phenomenological Research Methods*, where he articulated a transcendental phenomenological approach grounded in Husserlian principles. However, in his earlier work, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* (1990), Moustakas made it clear that heuristic inquiry is a distinct method—one that privileges personal experience, intuitive knowing, and creative synthesis over the bracketing and reduction central to descriptive phenomenology.

Phenomenology, particularly in the Husserlian tradition, is phenomenon-centered. It seeks to describe the universal essence of an experience as reported by participants, with the researcher attempting to suspend personal biases through the practice of epoché and phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1970). The goal is to attain a purified consciousness that can apprehend the intentional structure of experience without being contaminated by the empirical ego. As Mihalache (2019) noted, this philosophical reduction is “missing from the heuristic inquiry design” (p. 140). Instead of bracketing the self, heuristic inquiry embraces it. The researcher’s internal journey becomes a primary source of data, and the inquiry is

fundamentally autobiographical. Mihalache (2019) emphasized that in heuristic inquiry, “the researcher’s personal experience is not only permitted but privileged” (p. 142), making it a person-centered approach in contrast to the phenomenon-centered orientation of classical phenomenology.

This person-centeredness aligns closely with the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers (1951), who emphasized authenticity, congruence, and the transformative potential of self-exploration. Moustakas, a colleague of Rogers and co-founder of the Center for Humanistic Studies, drew heavily on Rogers’s principles in shaping heuristic inquiry. The method reflects Rogers’s (1951) belief that “the self is the instrument of understanding” (p. 15), and that deep personal engagement is essential for meaningful insight. Heuristic inquiry thus becomes a vehicle for self-actualization, not merely a tool for data collection.

Philosophically, heuristic inquiry resonates with constructivist epistemologies. It acknowledges that knowledge is co-created through the relationship between researcher and participants, and that findings are shaped by context, emotion, and embodied presence. This stands in contrast to the more positivist leanings of some phenomenological approaches, which aim for replicable descriptions of experience independent of the researcher’s subjectivity. In heuristic inquiry, the findings are understood as emerging from a dialogical and relational process, rather than as objective truths. As Sultan (2018) explained, heuristic inquiry is “experiential, relational, and reflexive,” and treats participants as participants in a shared journey of discovery (p. 71).

Embodied Cognition

Embodied cognition further enriches the heuristic framework by emphasizing that knowing is not confined to abstract thought but arises through bodily experience, movement, and

felt sense. Gendlin's (1981) concept of the "felt sense"—a preverbal, bodily knowing—plays a central role in heuristic inquiry, particularly during phases such as immersion and illumination. Mihalache (2019) described intuition in heuristic inquiry as "symbolic, pre-verbal, and embodied" (p. 151), reinforcing the idea that cognition is grounded in the body and shaped by sensory and emotional resonance. This embodied dimension is especially relevant to studies involving dance, ritual, or expressive arts, such as this study's exploration of samba as a healing modality.

In terms of presentation, heuristic inquiry often employs literary and creative forms—such as narratives, poems, metaphors, and other expressive formats—to convey the richness of lived experience (Moustakas, 1990). While some heuristic studies utilize composite portraits to integrate descriptive and interpretive elements, others—such as the present study—opt for thematic–narrative synthesis, weaving participants' words, symbolic imagery, and contextual detail into a cohesive interpretive framework.

Moustakas (1990) described the final phase, creative synthesis, as a "culmination of the heuristic journey" that may take the form of a story, artwork, or performance (p. 32). This emphasis on creative representation is particularly relevant when considering how samba, as a cultural and therapeutic phenomenon, can be illuminated through different qualitative lenses.

Phenomenological studies, for example, typically aim to distill the universal essence of an experience through thematic analysis and structured description. A phenomenologist studying samba might identify themes such as "communal joy," "ancestral rhythm," or "embodied resistance," illustrating these through participant excerpts and organizing them into a concise model of the samba experience.

By contrast, a heuristic researcher investigating samba would likely interweave their own lived experience of dancing, feeling, and remembering with those of the participants. The presentation might include poetic language, symbolic imagery, or narrative fragments that evoke the emotional and spiritual texture of samba as it is felt in the body and soul. This approach reflects Moustakas's (1990) assertion that heuristic inquiry culminates in a creative synthesis—a form that “may be expressed through narrative, story, poem, artwork, or another creative format” to convey the wholeness of the experience (p. 32). Rather than abstracting samba into generalizable themes, the heuristic researcher seeks to illuminate its essence through personal resonance and aesthetic expression.

Transpersonal Research Methods and Autoethnography

Heuristic inquiry also shares affinities with transpersonal research methods and autoethnography. Transpersonal psychologists have embraced heuristic inquiry for its capacity to explore spiritual transformation, altered states of consciousness, and beyond-ego experiences (Hiles, 2001). While Moustakas (1990) himself labeled heuristic inquiry a personal method, not inherently transpersonal, its openness to meditation, intuition, and inner dialogue makes it compatible with transpersonal aims. Mihalache (2019) argued that heuristic inquiry can be considered a transpersonal method when the topic involves spiritual or existential dimensions.

In sum, heuristic inquiry occupies a unique position within qualitative research. It shares phenomenology's commitment to lived experience (Husserl, 1970), Rogers's (1951, 1955) humanistic ethos, and embodied cognition's attention to somatic knowing (Gendlin, 1981; Hiles, 2001; Maciel, 2004). However, it diverges in its privileging of personal transformation, its creative modes of expression, and its refusal to bracket the self. For inquiries into healing,

identity, and cultural embodiment, such as this dissertation about samba, heuristic inquiry offers a richly integrative and responsive methodology.

Jung's Concepts of Active Imagination and the Process of Individuation

Contemporary qualitative research often seeks to bridge subjective experience with theoretical insight. Heuristic inquiry is one such approach that uses the researcher's lived experience and deep introspection as primary data, exploring phenomena through self-reflection and intuition (Brisola & Cury, 2016). This introspective method aligns with analytical psychology, as founded by Jung, which also values internal experience and symbolic exploration of the psyche. Jung's (1989) concepts of active imagination and individuation provide a rich theoretical framework for understanding how rhythmic, embodied practices might engage the unconscious mind and promote psychological wholeness. This section examines how Jungian ideas can be applied to cultural dance forms, specifically samba, a Brazilian dance, to illustrate how dance movement, rooted in tradition and symbolic gesture, facilitates a dialogue between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche. Jung's intellectual development and key concepts are reviewed, as well as the nature of active imagination (especially in movement), and the symbolic-transformational potential of samba as an embodied form of active imagination.

In the context of studying dance or therapeutic movement, a heuristic inquiry may involve the researcher's direct participation in dance practice, journaling of inner images and emotions, and iterative reflection to grasp the essence of the phenomenon (Mihalache, 2019; Sultan, 2018). This subjective, in-depth exploration resonates strongly with the introspective orientation of Jungian analytical psychology, which prioritizes the exploration of unconscious processes through symbolic engagement. Jung's own post-1913 crisis, marked by visionary experiences, inner dialogues, and imaginal practices, serves as a compelling example of a self-

initiated inquiry that parallels the structure and intention of heuristic research. His meticulous documentation of interior states, as found in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, illustrates how personal immersion in unconscious material can lead to profound psychological insights (Jung, 1989). As Jung (1989) described:

It was during this period that the idea first came to me of how I could make use of the fantasies that were pressing in on me from within. I caught myself thinking in a very strange way, and I realized that I was doing active imagination. (p. 189)

This method of attending to unconscious images through intentional reflection evolved into the practice of active imagination, a core method for facilitating dialogue between the ego and the unconscious, as described by Jung (1989). He elaborated on that concept: “The patient can make himself creatively independent through this method. ... He can concretize his fantasies and inner images by drawing, painting, or dancing them” (Jung, 1989, p. 217). In this way, Jung endorsed embodied forms of expression, such as dance, as valid channels for psychological integration.

Heuristic inquiry, with its methodological emphasis on lived experience, intuition, and creative synthesis, offers a complementary framework for engaging with symbolic processes akin to Jung’s active imagination. While Moustakas (1990) and Sultan (2018) emphasized the role of introspective immersion and expressive synthesis in heuristic research, Jung (1989) described active imagination as a method of dialoguing with unconscious imagery through creative enactment. This conceptual resonance supports the present study’s integration of heuristic methodology with Jungian theory to explore samba as a psychospiritual and symbolic practice. By tracing the rhythms of movement, emotion, and ancestral gesture, samba can be

understood not merely as a cultural performance but as a psychospiritual process that activates unconscious content and fosters individuation.

To appreciate the psychological impact of samba through a Jungian lens, it is necessary to review Jung's life influences and the development of his core concepts. Jung's (1989) analytical psychology emerged from a rich intellectual background and evolved notably following his divergence from Freudian psychoanalysis. While Freud emphasized sexual drives and repressed desires as central to psychic conflict, Jung sought a more expansive understanding that included mythological, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of the psyche. In reflecting on this transition, Jung (1989) stated: "My work has changed from what it was when I was still under Freud's influence. It has become more speculative and philosophical, and at the same time more practical and empirical" (p. 207). This shift marked the genesis of analytical psychology, a framework that prioritized symbolic engagement, inner dialogue, and the individuation process as pathways to psychological wholeness (Stein, 2005; Stevens, 1994).

Carl G. Jung

Jung (1875–1961) was born in Kesswil, Switzerland, into a family with a rich heritage of strong religious and scholarly traditions (Fordham & Fordham, 2025; Hannah, 1976; Jung, 1989). His father was a Protestant pastor, and his maternal lineage included several theologians. This upbringing immersed Jung in theological discourse and fostered an early fascination with spirituality and philosophy. As a child, Jung was introverted and felt isolated from his peers, which inclined him toward an inner life of imagination. He experienced vivid dreams and fantasies and was drawn to the world of dreams and the unconscious from a young age (Fordham & Fordham, 2025). These formative experiences, solitude, sensitivity, and exposure to religious ideas, shaped Jung's view of the psyche as inherently spiritual and symbolic. Throughout his life,

Jung would emphasize the psyche's sacred dimension and the quest for meaning beyond the material, a perspective rooted in these early influences (Fordham & Fordham, 2025; Hannah, 1976; Jung, 1989).

Jung's academic path combined science and the occult (Fordham & Fordham, 2025). He studied medicine at the University of Basel and earned his MD in 1900. Even during medical school, his interests straddled clinical psychiatry and the paranormal. His doctoral dissertation, *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena*, published in 1902, analyzed the seances of a young medium (his own cousin). By investigating trance states and spirit communications, the young Jung demonstrated his commitment to exploring unconscious dynamics that fell outside the bounds of orthodox science (Fordham & Fordham, 2025; Hannah, 1976; Jung, 1989). This work foreshadowed his lifelong willingness to consider spiritual and mystical experiences as valid subjects for psychological study (Hannah, 1976; Jung, 1989; Swogger & Dillon, 2023). In essence, Jung's early environment and education instilled in him a view of the psyche as a symbolic system with spiritual roots, priming him to later integrate cultural symbols, myths, and rituals (like dance) into his theories of healing (Jung, 1989).

After receiving his MD from the University of Zurich in 1902, Jung began his clinical career at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Clinic in Zurich under the supervision of Professor Eugen Bleuler (Fordham & Fordham, 2025). At Burghölzli, a leading center for psychiatry, Jung's (1989) work further blended empirical science with investigation of the psyche's hidden depths (Escamilla, 2016). He became deeply influenced by the ideas of French psychologist Pierre Janet, particularly Janet's research on dissociation and the "subliminal self" (Bair, 2003, p. 78; Shamdasani, 2003). In 1902–1903, Jung spent a semester in Paris at the Salpêtrière hospital studying with Janet, whose physiological theories of neurosis made a strong impression on him.

Janet's notion that traumatic or emotional experiences could split off into an unconscious secondary personality informed Jung's later concept of psychic complexes (Escamilla, 2016; Shamdasani, 2003).

Word Association

One of Jung's major contributions during his time at Burghölzli was the development of the word association test as a tool to map the unconscious (Fordham & Fordham, 2025). Working with colleagues between 1904 and 1906, Jung presented patients with a list of stimulus words and asked them to respond with the first word that came to mind, while measuring their response time and physiological reactions. He found that certain words triggered stress responses, delays, mistakes, changes in breathing, or galvanic skin response, indicating the presence of emotionally charged, unconscious associations. For example, a prolonged hesitation or odd answer to "mother" might reveal a hidden complex related to one's mother. Jung coined the term "complex" to describe these knots of associations and emotions in the psyche that could autonomously influence behavior (Fordham & Fordham, 2025). This experimental approach provided early empirical evidence for the personal unconscious and its contents (Jung, 1989; Shamdasani, 2003). Notably, Freud praised Jung's word association studies as proof of Freud's own theories, because the test seemed to uncover repressed ideas similar to Freud's free associations (Bair, 2003).

Jung's word association experiments were pioneering in bridging verbal and nonverbal realms (Fordham & Fordham, 2025). By tracking physiological arousal and noting gestures and expressions in response to stimulus words, Jung demonstrated how unconscious material can manifest both somatically and symbolically. This approach foreshadowed his later therapeutic techniques and expanded clinical analysis beyond language to include imagery, movement, and

symbolic action. His observations of psychiatric patients' symptomatic gestures revealed deeper psychic content, reinforcing the importance of embodied expressions in psychological research. These innovations, influenced by Freud's dream analysis and shaped by Jung's work under Janet at Burghölzli, laid the foundation for his symbolic approach to the psyche and anticipated the concept of active imagination (Hannah, 1976; Jung, 1989; Swogger & Dillon, 2023).

Jung and Freud Rupture

The rupture between Freud and Jung was marked by escalating theoretical disagreements and emotional tension, culminating in a definitive split around 1913 (Doran, 2017; Shamdasani, 2003). Their divergence centered on Jung's rejection of Freud's insistence that sexuality is the primary driver of psychic life and his growing interest in spirituality, mythology, and the collective unconscious—domains that Freud viewed with skepticism. Freud's paternalistic stance and Jung's desire for intellectual independence further strained their relationship, leading Freud to declare that their "emotional tie ... had long been a thin thread" and urging Jung to take his "full freedom" (as cited in McGuire, 1974, p. 539). This rupture catalyzed Jung's most original contributions to depth psychology.

During this emotionally fraught period, Jung experienced a profound crisis that compelled him to investigate the internal structures of the psyche with greater rigor (Hillman, 1975; Miller, 2019). Moreover, his personal struggles and inner conflicts served as a catalyst for introspection, prompting him to rigorously explore the intricate dynamics between consciousness and the unconscious (Samuels, 2016; Stein, 1998). His introspection yielded a body of work that emphasized the dialogical relationship between the ego and unconscious material, articulated most notably through the concept of active imagination and developed within his broader theory of individuation. Active imagination is a method of engaging with the unconscious through

symbolic interaction, whether via movement, writing, visual art, or dreams (Jung, 1989, 1990). Unlike passive reflection, it invites the individual into a dynamic conversation with inner images, emotions, and archetypal figures (Friedman, 1985).

This dissertation positioned samba as a form of active imagination, an embodied ritual that facilitates psychological integration and symbolic transformation. Its rhythms, gestures, and ancestral vocabulary mirror the structure of individuation by guiding practitioners through layers of cultural meaning and unconscious resonance. As a healing system, samba not only supports emotional regulation but also enables the exploration of archetypal energies that Jung believed were essential to developing a unified and individuated self.

Active Imagination

Following the historical and theoretical background of Jung's development of active imagination, contemporary scholarship continues to illuminate the relevance of this concept—particularly through embodied creative practices. Jung's (1989, 1990) analytical psychology presents active imagination as a dialectical method that enables dynamic engagement with unconscious material, facilitating inner dialogue and psychic integration. Within this dissertation, samba functions symbolically as a ritualized enactment of active imagination, inviting exploration of how this method has evolved and how it intersects with movement, creativity, and transformation.

von Franz (1983) elaborated on active imagination as a four-phase process: first, the release from ego-driven thought; second, the emergence of fantasy images from the unconscious; third, the expression of these images through creative acts such as drawing, writing, or dancing; and finally, the moral evaluation and integration of what is revealed. As Jungian analysts have emphasized, structural or aesthetic constraints do not govern active imagination. Rather than

adhering to formal techniques such as breath control or specific postures, the practice invites intuitive engagement with emerging images from the unconscious. As Johnson (1986) explained, “There is no prescribed posture, no breath control, no aesthetic ideal. You simply sit quietly and let the images come” (p. 140). This openness to spontaneous symbolic expression aligns with embodied modalities such as movement and dance, where internal impulses can be externalized through gesture, rhythm, and improvisation.

Building on Jung and von Franz’s foundational work, Gaillard (2006) described the arts not as passive aesthetics but as potent mechanisms for engaging the unconscious. Through movement and creative expression, individuals may symbolically externalize latent feelings and integrate emerging psychological content, aligning closely with the method of active imagination. Similarly, Gjernes (2002) expanded this understanding in her dissertation, *Embodied Practices of Active Imagination: Moving Towards Wholeness*. She explored how conscious movement, particularly authentic movement and improvisation, supports the emergence of unconscious material and fosters integration. Her findings echo Jung’s emphasis on creative engagement, while contributing somatic nuance, and identifying a central concept she called the “developing witness,” or embodied consciousness capable of witnessing and navigating unconscious expression (Gjernes, 2002).

Gjernes’s (2002) use of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to explore expert experiences provided a systematic framework for validating movement-based active imagination. She noted that trust barriers often arise in the form of internal complexes, such as fear, self-judgment, and unrealistic expectations, which can inhibit psychological flow (Gjernes, 2002). These insights suggest that the path to individuation must also confront psychological resistance,

a theme echoed by Cubaynes et al. (2021), who emphasized the developmental significance of touch and embodied presence in therapeutic contexts.

These studies affirm the integrative power of movement and embodied witnessing in the process of active imagination. They also substantiate samba's role within this dissertation as a culturally embedded ritual capable of activating archetypal content, promoting emotional and symbolic expression, and catalyzing transformation. As such, samba is positioned not merely as a dance but as a psychological method, one that invites the body to become a conduit for unconscious truths and creative healing.

Dance/Movement as Active Imagination: Origins, Theory, Practice

As this dissertation positioned samba dance as both an expressive cultural ritual and a psychological pathway to integration, the work of Joan Chodorow (1998) provided critical support for this claim. Building on Mary Starks Whitehouse's (1999) pioneering development of "Authentic Movement," Chodorow (1998) emphasized the relational dynamic between mover and witness, describing it as a reciprocal process that deepens somatic access to unconscious imagery while preserving conscious awareness. This attunement, central to dance/movement therapy, illustrates how nonverbal channels, such as gesture, rhythm, and posture, facilitate the emergence of symbolic material from the unconscious, mirroring the therapeutic goals of SDMT.

Chodorow's work directly aligned with the study's guiding question regarding the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba. Her integration of Jung's (1990) concept of active imagination into movement therapy affirms that dance can become a method for interacting with unconscious content (Chodorow, 1998). She demonstrated how painting, improvisation, and movement offer somatic routes to symbolic expression, bridging the gap between inner psychic reality and outer form. This insight supported the dissertation's view of samba as a ritualized

practice where participants experience cultural memory, ancestral symbolism, and archetypal activation through embodied motion.

In a related piece, Chodorow (1991) elaborated on how movement gestures carry semiotic and phenomenological meaning, arguing that communication through the body is not simply expressive but also symbolic. Her use of phenomenological epistemology, paired with grounded research techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), underscored the value of analyzing cultural movement through lenses that prioritize lived experience and meaning-making, core features of both heuristic inquiry and this dissertation's qualitative framework.

Chodorow's (1998) contribution to the integration of psyche and soma through dance therapy offered a compelling framework for understanding movement as a vehicle for individuation and healing. Her narrative arc, documented in *Dance Therapy and Depth Psychology: The Moving Imagination*, moved from dancer to Jungian analyst, embodying the confluence of expressive embodiment and psychological insight (Chodorow, 1998). In Part One: Personal Origins, Chodorow traced her own journey into Jungian thought, grounding her clinical orientation in somatic awareness and symbolic movement. This autobiographical reflection highlighted how personal movement practices can inform theoretical understanding and therapeutic praxis.

More specifically, Chodorow's (1998) practice-oriented chapters in Part Three, "The Moving Imagination," reinforce the potential of culturally embedded dance, such as samba, as a pathway to individuation, emotional integration, and reconnection with one's ancestral lineage. She described symbolic movement as a form of active imagination, allowing unconscious material to surface through embodied gestures and improvised rhythms. By emphasizing movement as a symbolic language of the psyche, Chodorow's work provided a bridge between

Jungian theory and embodied practice, a bridge that this study further explored through the lens of samba. This provided strong conceptual support for the SDMT framework developed in Chapter 5, where movement themes derived from samba are reinterpreted as symbolic carriers of psychological integration.

Whitehouse's (1999) foundational insights into the relationship between unconscious emergence and somatic improvisation offer a valuable complement to Jung's model of active imagination. In her essay "Reflections on a Metamorphosis," Whitehouse (1999) drew a direct parallel between movement-based and imaginal forms of inner work, affirming that "following the inner sensation, allowing the impulse to take the form of physical action, is active imagination in movement, just as following the visual image is active imagination in fantasy" (p. 237).

This perspective highlighted the principle that unconscious content can emerge through spontaneous bodily expression, aligning with Jung's (1989) view that symbolic engagement, whether visual, verbal, or kinesthetic, facilitates dialogue between the ego and the unconscious. By emphasizing improvisation as a path to integration, Whitehouse (1999) advanced a somatic extension of depth psychological practice that resonates strongly with culturally grounded movement traditions such as samba.

Farah (2016) expanded on this intersection in her research on somatic movement therapy, illustrating how the body mediates the interplay between conscious and unconscious realms. Farah's findings reaffirmed that movement, particularly culturally grounded movement, can be deployed in both analytic and therapeutic contexts to facilitate the individuation process. Her work strengthens this study's claim that samba's improvisational structure and communal rhythm serve as embodied portals to psychological transformation.

Fay et al.'s (2009) collaborative lecture underscored the transformational power of expressive arts, particularly movement, ritual, and active imagination, within therapeutic contexts. Rooted in Jungian psychology, their framework affirmed that spontaneous, symbolic movement enables individuals to engage unconscious material, confront inner conflicts, and navigate personal transitions through embodied expression. This process is not merely cathartic; it involves deep integration of psyche and soma, allowing archetypal meaning and emotional truth to emerge (Fay et al., 2009).

These insights directly inform the research questions of this study, which investigate how samba, as a culturally embedded dance practice, facilitates healing across emotional, symbolic, and psychological domains. Fay et al. (2009) affirmed that movement is not secondary to verbal expression, but central to individuation, inner exploration, and the enactment of ancestral knowledge. By revealing how expressive movement can activate archetypal imagery, ritual structure, and emotional authenticity, Fay et al.'s (2009) work supported this dissertation's premise that dance functions as a sacred and communicative system capable of fostering personal insight and transformation.

These contributions articulated a compelling basis for integrating dance/movement therapy and Jungian psychology, providing both theoretical validation and clinical inspiration for samba as a cultural healing system. They support the dissertation's purpose of bridging academic inquiry with embodied experience, offering a model for how somatic practice rooted in cultural identity can activate symbolic material, restore emotional balance, and foster individuation within the immigrant and diasporic experience.

Jung's Active Imagination in Whitehouse's Dance: Notions of Body and Movement

In support of this dissertation's assertion that samba dance movement embodies a healing system rooted in symbolic engagement and psychological transformation, Farah (2016) offered valuable insight into Whitehouse's foundational work on authentic movement. Drawing directly from Jungian theory, Whitehouse had conceptualized the body not as separate from the psyche but as its expressive mirror. Farah (2016) argued that, for Whitehouse, the body "moved and spoke" as an outward manifestation of personality, shaped by a dynamic interaction between subconscious drive and ego regulation (p. 542). Movement, in this view, is not merely aesthetic but diagnostic; it reveals the present state of the psyche and facilitates inner change.

To substantiate this interpretation, Farah (2016) conducted a focused analysis of Mary Starks Whitehouse's writings from 1958 to 1979, which were later compiled by Pallaro (1999). Whitehouse's contributions bridged dance, analytical psychology, and therapeutic practice, demonstrating that spontaneous movement can access unconscious material and invite exploration of memory, sensation, and emotional truth through embodied expression. These insights support the use of samba in this dissertation as a therapeutic conduit—not only for emotional release and cultural resonance, but also for individuation and identity reconstruction.

Within this same theoretical lineage, Whitehouse (1999) also emphasized the significance of countertransference in movement-based therapy. She recognized that therapeutic engagement in the somatic space includes not only the client's gestures, but also the therapist's emotional, physical, and imaginative responses. Movement becomes a vehicle for unconscious projection and relational resonance. In this way, countertransference expands the analytic lens by attending to what arises within the therapist, and how those internal reactions inform the therapeutic

container. This perspective further affirmed the idea that somatic attunement and symbolic improvisation, key features in samba, can facilitate profound therapeutic dialogue.

This evolving understanding of mind-body therapy and transference phenomena sets the stage for Cwik's (2011) inquiry into associative dreaming and reverie, which builds upon active imagination in clinical settings. By linking spontaneous mental imagery with unconscious communication, Cwik extended Jung's framework into relational analysis. His work helped illuminate how embodied practices, such as samba, may evoke inner archetypal material through rhythmic and symbolic gestures, reinforcing the psychological mechanisms central to this dissertation's purpose.

Associative Dreaming: Reverie and Active Imagination

This dissertation's positioning of samba as a ritualized form of active imagination is further supported by Cwik's (2011) expanded definition of countertransference within Jungian analysis. Cwik reviewed how the concept has evolved to encompass the full spectrum of a therapist's responses, emotional, physical, and imaginative, which become vehicles for insight within the therapeutic container. He explored Jung's view of transference and introduced the idea of the "analytic third," a symbolic, co-created unconscious field shared between therapist and patient. As Ogden (2004) later described, this field becomes the focus of analysis itself, allowing for unconscious material to be processed intersubjectively.

Cwik (2011) elaborated on the concept of reverie, first introduced by Bion (1962) and extended by Ogden (2004), as a mode of accessing the unconscious dimensions of the analytic third. Reverie, situated on a spectrum between indirect association and direct associative dreaming, enables the therapist to "speak from" or "speak about" unconscious material, depending on the extent to which the patient can engage with their own inner world. Ogden

(2004) further emphasized that the analytic field itself becomes the focus of analysis, as unconscious material is processed intersubjectively within the shared space between the analyst and the analysand. This framework is built upon Bion's (1962) theory of container-contained and Winnicott's (1965) concept of transitional space, wherein emotional truth is co-created through attuned presence and symbolic play. Such perspectives converge in understanding the analytic third not as a static phenomenon, but as a dynamic field where inner life is mirrored, held, and transformed through relational embodiment.

In this framework, classical amplification—the symbolic linking of inner content to myth, dream, or archetype—guides the emergence of new insights and activates the transcendent function (Cwik, 2011; Jung, 1966). This function operates as an “analytic compass,” directing the therapeutic process toward integration and growth. These insights are particularly relevant to the development of SDMT as proposed in this dissertation. Within samba's embodied rhythm and improvisational gestures, one can observe parallels to reverie and countertransference, where unconscious material is expressed through symbolic movement, and where facilitators may experience resonant responses that help guide therapeutic engagement. Samba's dynamic interplay between internal archetypal energies and external rhythm mirrors the flow of analytic reverie, as well as the amplification and response cycle described by Cwik.

Douglas's (2007) exploration of movement as a psychologically transformative act underscores its diagnostic and expressive potential. In “Out of the Depths: Where the Dance Is,” she reframed dance not merely as aesthetic performance but as a symbolic emergence “out of the depths” of the unconscious (Douglas, 2007, p. 15). Drawing on a Jungian lens, Douglas emphasized the feminine self as chthonic, earthy, cyclical, and rooted in pre-verbal knowing and illustrated how embodied expression can restore psychic harmony. Her analysis encouraged

reflection on whether culturally embedded movement practices, such as samba, offer a symbolic counterbalance to fragmentation, displacement, and internalized oppression, particularly for marginalized identities. Additionally, she emphasized how reclaiming shadow material through movement promotes psychological reintegration, a concept that aligns with the heuristic and introspective methodology of this study. By foregrounding the potential of dance to mediate unconscious material, her work affirms samba's role as a vehicle for inner transformation.

Further extending these ideas, Schaverien (2007) conceptualized countertransference itself as a form of active imagination. Schaverien (2007) proposed that the therapist's imaginative responses can become part of the analytic dialogue and contribute to the symbolization and integration of unconscious experiences. Her formulation underscored the therapeutic potential of movement and metaphor in creating meaning, a synergy that supports the use of samba as a symbolic and somatic bridge within therapeutic practice. The convergence of Schaverien's, Douglas's, and Cwik's insights affirmed the Jungian foundation of SDMT, reinforcing its relevance for mental health practitioners seeking culturally grounded, embodied approaches to healing.

Countertransference as Active Imagination: Imaginative Experiences of the Analyst

As this dissertation positions samba as a culturally grounded and symbolic healing modality, Schaverien's (2007) reframing of countertransference as a form of active imagination offers critical support for the theoretical framework. In her article published in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Schaverien explored how symbolic imagery arising from countertransference interactions activates the analyst's symbolic function, thereby facilitating the analysand's growth in consciousness. Drawing on Jung's (1966) foundational paper, "The Psychology of the Transference," she demonstrated that countertransference is not merely a

reflection of the analyst's emotional state but a dynamic mediator of unconscious communication, capable of catalyzing therapeutic transformation (Schaverien, 2007).

This understanding is essential to SDMT, developed in Chapter 5, where practitioners' attuned responses to clients' symbolic movement mirror the reverberations of countertransference described by Schaverien (2007). Within the samba ritual, collective rhythm, gesture, and improvisation give rise to emotional and archetypal material, making the facilitator's own imaginative and somatic responses part of the therapeutic field. The samba practitioner becomes an active witness, co-navigating unconscious energies in ways that reflect Jungian analytic relationships.

Further supporting this integrative view, Stein (2005) argued that individuation unfolds through a dynamic balance of analytic and synthetic processes. The individual's journey involves a continuous negotiation between unconscious material and conscious identity, as the self is built through symbolic reflection and embodied awareness. This dual movement is mirrored in the heuristic process and in samba's improvisational form, both of which invite the practitioner into a dialectical interplay between ancestral memory and emergent selfhood.

The insights from Schaverien (2007) and Stein (2005) support the therapeutic potential of embodied practices in creatively engaging countertransference, expanding consciousness, and advancing individuation. They support this study's purpose by articulating how symbolic movement, informed by both analytic attitude and cultural ritual, can serve as a vehicle for deep healing. Within samba, these dynamics become rhythmically expressed, making movement not only a celebration but a psychologically charged method for transformation.

Process of Individuation

Individuation: Inner Work

This dissertation's central inquiry, examining the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba for self-realization, personal growth, and collective healing, is deeply rooted in Jung's concept of individuation. Stein (2005) articulated individuation as comprising two rhythmic, complementary movements: analytic and synthetic. The analytic phase emphasizes separation, distinction, and clarification of identity, while the synthetic phase supports unification through the transcendent function. These twin movements shape a psychological identity that bridges unconscious and conscious dimensions, personal values, cultural archetypes, and symbolic meaning. Stein's framing directly supports this study's first research sub-question: In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to explore archetypal energies, engage in active imagination, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self?

Through movement and ritual, samba engages these dynamics viscerally. Its expressive vocabulary evokes ancestral memory while its communal structure fosters symbolic wholeness. Just as Jungian analysis works through transference, complexes, and dreams to synthesize emerging layers of the self (Stein, 2005), samba invites participants into cyclical Themes of release and integration, an embodied enactment of individuation.

Historically, one of Jung's earliest uses of the term "individuation" appeared in *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*, a visionary text he attributed to Basilides of Alexandria, in 1916. Stein (2005) identified this as a cornerstone of Jung's personal myth, contemporaneous with *The Red Book* and central to *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1989). The text asserts the *principium individuationis* as the defining trait of creatura, distinguishing it from the formless pleroma, affirming the necessity of separation and self-definition. Within samba, individuation also begins

with rupture: migration, cultural dislocation, and identity fragmentation, followed by rhythmically mediated integration.

While he referenced the individuation conceptually in early essays, such as *Seven Sermons to the Dead* and *Adaptation, Individuation, and Collectivity*, Jung (1990) formally defined the term in 1921 in *Psychological Types* as “the process by which a person evolves into a unique, differentiated individual development of consciousness” (p. 448). This evolution, according to Jung (1990), facilitates the emergence of consciousness “out of the original state of identity” (p. 449), allowing the self to differentiate from collective norms and external conditioning. This perspective aligned with the transformative nature of samba, particularly as practiced in diaspora communities.

Jung’s (1989) theory of individuation posits that psychological maturation requires movement beyond collective norms toward the discovery of one’s inner truth. This journey is not guided by external doctrine but rather unfolds through symbolic engagement, imaginative practice, and creative embodiment. As Jung (1989) wrote in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, “If you want to go your individual way, it is the way you make for yourself, which is never prescribed ... it simply comes into being of itself when you put one foot in front of the other” (p. 125).

Stein (2005) conceptualized individuation as a rhythmic interplay between two interwoven movements: analytic differentiation from unconscious identifications, and synthetic integration of emergent aspects of the Self through symbolic reflection and embodied awareness. This dual movement reinforces Jung’s assertion that individuation is not guided by external doctrine but unfolds through inner symbolic engagement and experiential practice. Jung’s (2009)

The Red Book, in particular, affirms the transformative potential of imaginal exploration by documenting visionary encounters that arise from creative immersion beyond collective norms.

Individuation, in this sense, becomes a dynamic negotiation between inherited cultural structures and inner psychic life process, often facilitated by symbolic acts such as movement, ritual, and artistic expression. Within this framework, samba is understood not merely as a cultural performance but as a vessel for psychological integration, allowing participants to transcend imposed identities and embody emergent selfhood. The present study situated samba as a culturally embedded form of active imagination, in alignment with Jung's and Stein's shared view that inner truth is forged through symbolic and embodied practice.

Gibb's (2014) work expands the Jungian framework of individuation through a contemporary lens that intertwines spirituality, movement, and creative embodiment. Gibb framed individuation as a lifelong journey rooted in symbolic engagement and internal exploration. Her synthesis of travel memoir and analytic theory affirms that creativity, especially movement, imagination, and ritual, is central to psychological and spiritual integration. Gibb's (2014) discussion of mythic resonance, spiritual identity, and narrative embodiment reinforces the view that individuation is not solely a clinical process, but one that emerges through expressive modalities imbued with ancestral and communal significance.

These ideas resonate with Jung's call to move beyond culturally inherited teachings in pursuit of inner truth, aligning with Stein's (2005) emphasis on the rhythmic interplay between analytic differentiation and synthetic integration. Gibb's (2014) exploration of movement as a gateway to wholeness substantiates the central hypothesis of the present study: that samba, as a culturally embedded and improvisational practice, supports identity reconstruction and psychological integration by activating symbolic, embodied pathways. In this context, samba

becomes a living form of active imagination, an expressive vessel for transforming shadow material and reweaving selfhood through rhythm, ritual, and relational resonance.

Zeid (2013) emphasized the performative dimension of individuation in her inquiry into performance art as a modality for self-revelation. Zeid's (2013) study provides further support for the dissertation examination of samba as a transformational act. Zeid (2013) framed the creative process as a deliberate mechanism for revealing and reconfiguring the self, one shaped by social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics. Zeid's (2013) analysis underscores the recursive tension between outward performance and inward reflection, echoing the improvisational duality of samba and its capacity to evoke healing through rhythm and ritual.

By narrating the stages of self-revelation and their corresponding creative expressions, Zeid (2013) constructed a framework for individuation that affirms the dissertation's central hypothesis: that personal insight, when facilitated through embodied cultural practice, can lead to profound psychological integration. Zeid's (2013) use of systematic creativity to negotiate identity resonates with the structure of SDMT, where gesture, rhythm, and symbolic improvisation facilitate therapeutic breakthroughs and emotional realignment.

The works of Gibb (2014) and Zeid (2013) provide essential scaffolding for understanding how creative processes support the individuation journey across cultural, spiritual, and psychological domains. They reinforce the study's purpose by demonstrating how creative processes—inclusive of samba—serve as a symbolic container for transformation, reconnection, and the development of an integrated self. The insights of Jung (1940, 1964, 1966, 1990), Stein (1998, 2005), and Gibb (2014) further illuminate how individuation unfolds through a dynamic interplay between psyche and culture. Their works reinforce this study's proposal that samba

facilitates the integration of shadow and persona, body and spirit, making rhythm not only a tool for expression but also a sacred compass for becoming.

Integration of the Mind, Body, and Spirit

This section examines how the integration of mind, body, and spirit is fundamental to healing practices across various cultures and disciplines. Drawing on Indigenous epistemologies, somatic psychology, dance movement therapy, and clinical research, the literature supports the notion that holistic models of healing promote resilience, identity integration, and emotional well-being. These insights are critical to this dissertation's exploration of samba as a therapeutic modality, supporting the claim that samba's expressive and communal form addresses psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of healing.

Mind, Body, Emotions, and Spirit: Reaching to the Ancestors for Healing

McCabe (2008) presented a compelling framework rooted in Aboriginal understandings of wellness, emphasizing the interconnected nature of body, mind, emotions, and spirit. His analysis illustrated how traditional healing practices, such as the medicine wheel, sweat lodges, storytelling, and tobacco rituals, offer a culturally embedded form of psychotherapy. McCabe (2008) argued that these practices are not secondary to Western methods but constitute distinct mental health discourses rooted in cultural belief systems. This perspective directly supports samba's role as a cultural healing system: like traditional rituals, samba reconnects individuals to ancestral meaning and collective expression, helping to reconstruct identity amid displacement.

Furthermore, McCabe (2008) examined how Jungian and Rogerian principles align with Indigenous healing practices. He linked Jung's focus on archetypes and psychic balance with Native teachings on the "four directions," and Rogers's tenets of authenticity, empathy, and unconditional acceptance with communal practices led by elders. Jungian analysts such as

Woodman (1980, 1985, 2000) have similarly emphasized body-mind integration and symbolic engagement as essential to self-awareness and transformation. However, Aboriginal perspectives extend further, seeing everything, from animals to plants to the earth, as part of being (Angel, 2002; Peat, 1995).

Theories of Personality

Schultz and Schultz (2001) offered a multidimensional foundation for understanding key psychological theories of personality development, several of which intersect with the thematic concerns of this study. Their presentation of Jungian psychology in Chapter 3 emphasizes archetypal dynamics, symbolic expression, and the role of the unconscious elements central to exploring how embodied movement can facilitate emotional and psychic integration. Additionally, Chapter 9 discusses humanistic models, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which foreground authenticity, self-actualization, and personal transformation, directly supporting this inquiry into how culturally resonant practices, like samba, foster resilience and identity reconstruction. While the text largely reflects Eurocentric paradigms privileging verbal discourse, Chapter 1 acknowledges the influence of environmental context, lived experience, and developmental history in shaping personality. This broader view creates theoretical space for examining how embodied, symbolic practices grounded in ancestral knowledge, such as samba, can offer alternative pathways to psychological insight and healing.

These intersections affirm the dissertation's core proposition: that healing systems rooted in rhythm, ritual, and communal creativity facilitate spiritual and emotional growth through embodied participation and symbolic transformation. This understanding is not limited to samba or Brazilian contexts; rather, it reflects a broader global conversation about the resurgence of traditional healing practices among Indigenous communities. Across regions such as Australia,

Canada, and New Zealand, these revitalized modalities preserve precolonial cultural norms while being integrated into wider wellness frameworks (Csordas, 1999; Suzuki, 1993). The renewed visibility of ceremonies like sweat lodges, alongside a growing interest among non-Indigenous populations in holistic healing practices, signals a collective shift toward embodied, culturally grounded approaches to psychological and spiritual integration (McCabe, 2008; McIntyre et al., 1996; Walker et al., 1992).

Dance and Neuroscience: New Partnerships

Contemporary clinical research extends the integrative model. Reynolds et al. (2011) examined how dance-based techniques were embedded within neurorehabilitation settings to support patients with central nervous system injuries. Their Embedded Arts project demonstrated how dance enhances therapeutic engagement by stimulating neural plasticity, increasing adherence, and transforming routine movement into expressive art. Patients using motion capture technology received creative visual feedback, turning physical recovery into a dynamic and interactive experience. The authors emphasized that movement simultaneously functions as medicine and artistic expression, a duality that resonates strongly with samba's therapeutic and symbolic roles.

Tillmann et al. (2017) further affirmed samba's healing potential in their quasi-experimental study on patients with Parkinson's disease. The intervention involved a 12-week samba dance program in Florianopolis, Brazil, where participants demonstrated notable improvements in motor function, including gait, posture, and balance, as well as emotional resilience. Beyond its physical benefits, samba provided cultural enrichment and social engagement, contributing to enhanced quality of life. The study validated samba's therapeutic

efficacy and underscored its power to foster creativity, playfulness, and symbolic transformation in clinical contexts.

This study's focus on samba as a transformative dance form was reinforced by Dhawan's (2023) exploration of Bharatanatyam, a classical Indian dance that holistically engages physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Unlike fitness regimens that isolate muscle groups and lack symbolic expression, Dhawan argued that Bharatanatyam offers a spiritually rich experience that integrates body, mind, and soul. Her findings include testimonies from children and adults who practiced the dance for over 5 years, illustrating its sustained impact on identity, emotional resilience, and personal growth. Dhawan's (2023) research aligns with this dissertation's core hypothesis that culturally rooted movement practices support self-awareness and integration, especially in the context of migration, assimilation, and individuation.

By affirming the therapeutic and expressive value of non-Western dance traditions, Dhawan's (2023) work strengthened the cross-cultural foundation for SDMT. Her findings also contributed to the third research subquestion of this study: What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system? Bharatanatyam, like samba, carries historical, religious, and symbolic significance, reinforcing the view that dance can be a vehicle for spiritual reconnection and cultural pride.

Sakata et al. (2004) explored dance as a communicative and psychosocial phenomenon. Sakata et al. (2004) argued that bodily motion functions as more than aesthetic choreography; it becomes a conduit for emotional, psychological, and cultural expression. Dance is framed as an intentional dialogue involving the performer, the audience, and the surrounding environment (Sakata et al., 2004). These insights support the present study's emphasis on samba as a symbolic

language, where gestures like the umbigada transmit memory, resilience, and ancestral continuity.

Sakata et al. (2004) demonstrated how choreographed movement reveals deeply embedded psychological states. They also discussed the physiological basis of mind–body interdependence. These findings are particularly relevant to this study’s first and third research questions, illustrating how embodied movement facilitates emotional and spiritual expression, bringing unconscious material to light through rhythm, repetition, and collective enactment. In this light, samba emerges not merely as a cultural performance, but as a therapeutic medium—a rhythmic space where internal experiences are externalized, personal narratives are restructured, and identity is reclaimed. Dhawan (2023) and Sakata et al. (2004) provided international and interdisciplinary perspectives on dance as a healing practice, reinforcing samba’s relevance not only within Brazilian culture but also across global traditions that honor embodiment, symbolic expression, and holistic well-being.

Banio (2020) examined the therapeutic impact of Latin dance on aging populations in a cross-national study conducted across Italy, Germany, Greece, and Poland. The findings highlight how rhythmic and embodied movement promotes holistic well-being, with elderly participants reporting significant improvements in physical mobility, emotional vitality, and social engagement. By emphasizing the structured yet expressive nature of Latin dance, Banio (2020) demonstrated its capacity to support cognitive function, alleviate loneliness, and enhance overall quality of life. These outcomes reinforce the view that partner-oriented movement fosters emotional attunement and collective connection, elements that are deeply woven into the symbolic and communal fabric of samba practice.

In the context of SDMT, Banio (2020) affirmed the broader therapeutic potential of culturally resonant movement-based interventions. Samba shares the dynamic tempo, tactile engagement, and communal ethos observed in Latin dance, while also incorporating its own symbolic and ancestral dimensions. The evidence supports the relevance of SDMT as an accessible, nonverbal modality for psychological integration, emotional regulation, and cultural affirmation across diverse populations.

The sources reviewed in this section reinforced the idea that healing arises not from isolated treatment but from the integration of somatic expression, cultural meaning, and psychological insight (Banio, 2020; Dhawan, 2023; McCabe, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2001). Whether framed through Indigenous epistemologies or clinical practice, movement emerges as a pathway to spiritual alignment, emotional restoration, and identity coherence. Samba embodies this integrative model, supporting all three research questions and serving as both a ritual and a remedy in the process of individuation and communal healing.

Dance Movement Therapy

The therapeutic applications of dance have become increasingly recognized across clinical, educational, and cultural contexts. This study positioned samba as a viable model for Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), particularly in addressing emotional and psychological challenges related to immigration, cultural identity, and holistic healing. Findings from *The Arts in Psychotherapy* and other interdisciplinary journals helped establish the groundwork for understanding dance not only as an aesthetic performance but as a therapeutic modality capable of expanding mental health practices to include embodied, culturally specific interventions.

Eaton and Visser (2008) emphasized the importance of attitudes in shaping both habitual and intentional behavior, arguing that an individual's disposition toward dance can influence

engagement and therapeutic outcomes. This insight is particularly relevant to SDMT, where attitudes toward cultural expression and somatic movement significantly impact therapeutic effectiveness. Research continued to explore why some individuals embrace dance while others resist it, shedding light on how emotional openness, cultural familiarity, and bodily awareness affect participation.

Fink et al. (2021) explored the evolution and functions of human dance, highlighting its adaptability across populations and its value as a culturally embedded healing modality. Drawing on cross-disciplinary evidence, the authors emphasized that dance is not solely a technical skill but a rhythmic and expressive form of movement suitable for children, older adults, individuals with chronic illness, and those with physical or emotional disabilities (Fink et al., 2021). This inclusive accessibility positions dance as a community-based practice with potential for prevention and psychological support. Fink et al. (2021) further underscore the role of dance in fostering social cohesion, emotional regulation, creativity, and embodied awareness, advocating for its integration into educational and wellness frameworks. These arguments substantiate this study's portrayal of samba as a culturally resonant modality that engages mind-body connection and collective belonging, affirming its therapeutic relevance across diverse life contexts.

Hanna (1995) advanced the conversation by exploring dance as a holistic health intervention. Hanna (1995) emphasized that dance integrates body, mind, and emotional expression, contributing to overall wellness by reducing stress, enhancing immune function, and facilitating psychological release. Hanna (1995) emphasized the socially and culturally mediated nature of dance, highlighting how rhythmic movement fosters agency and personal control. Hanna's (1995) insight might confirm samba's relevance as a culturally embedded tool for

empowerment, healing, and identity affirmation, especially among marginalized or diasporic communities navigating trauma and transition.

Blacking and Hanna (1986) conceptualized dance as a universal mode of nonverbal communication that allows individuals to express complex emotional and relational experiences beyond verbal articulation. This framework directly informs the central research questions of the study, particularly how samba operates as a therapeutic modality that fosters emotional healing, identity reconstruction, and symbolic embodiment. Samba's tactile rhythm and improvisational movement invite participants to access and express suppressed emotions, unconscious content, and fragmented aspects of self, facilitating psychological integration and cultural reconnection without relying on language.

This understanding supported the development of SDMT, which positions samba as a psychocultural intervention grounded in embodied communication. Blacking and Hanna's (1986) work underscored that dance is not merely expressive; it is transformative, offering individuals and communities a means to negotiate internal states, rebuild connections, and reclaim agency through movement. Within the context of SDMT, their theory substantiated the role of samba as a healing system that activates personal insight and collective memory through nonverbal engagement.

These findings supported the proposition of this dissertation that samba functions as more than just performance; it is a healing system grounded in aesthetic, spiritual, emotional, and physical engagement. By fostering rhythmic embodiment and cultural pride, samba allows participants to reconnect with themselves and their community, making it a dynamic intervention for both individual and collective well-being.

Motor Control of Rhythmic Dance from a Dynamical Systems Perspective

As this dissertation explores samba as a culturally grounded therapeutic system, it is essential to understand the role of motor coordination, motivation, and psychological context in shaping dance's healing potential. Dance is increasingly recognized not only for its aesthetic or recreational value, but also for its ability to foster emotional regulation, self-expression, and holistic wellness. Insights from motor control theory, psychological studies, and dance motivation research support this inquiry by affirming the multilayered benefits of rhythmic movement and embodied practice.

Hackney et al. (2024) noted that while educators and dancers are often curious about the role of motor ability and control, scholarly attention to the topic remains limited. However, researchers have begun applying the dynamical systems approach (DSA) to study human movement across disciplines. Originating in the fields of physics and biology, DSA views human behavior as emerging from self-organizing systems—adaptive, nonlinear processes that evolve from internal interactions rather than external instruction (Haken et al., 1985; Turvey, 2007). Turvey (2007) highlighted DSA's relevance to motor control and dance, defining it as a mathematical model for tracking how movement Themes form, shift, and coordinate over time.

Miura et al. (2015) expanded on this application by examining rhythmic synchronization in dance, specifically, how dancers align movement with musical rhythm, their own body parts, and one another. Synchronization not only structures the dance experience but also generates emergent themes that contribute to expressive freedom and psychological attunement. This has direct relevance to samba, which engages dynamic coordination between breath, beat, and communal improvisation. The sense of flow produced by rhythmic entrainment supports emotional connection and interpersonal bonding, key elements of samba's healing power. Large

(2000), Tranchant et al. (2016), and Stupacher et al. (2017) affirmed that synchronized movement enhances social connection, cognitive focus, and emotional well-being, all crucial dimensions of mental health.

Research on dance motivation further supports the therapeutic application of samba. Maraz et al. (2015) found in a study of 447 recreational dancers that mood enhancement was the primary motivation for engaging in styles such as salsa and ballroom dancing. Maraz et al.'s (2015) findings revealed eight motivational factors, contrasting with those of elite dancers, who often prioritize physical performance, with those of recreational dancers who seek emotional regulation and identity affirmation. These insights reinforce samba's accessibility and appeal across diverse populations, especially immigrants navigating cultural loss and psychosocial stressors.

Ward (2008) synthesized these perspectives by framing dance as a transformative health-promoting activity. Ward's (2008) work emphasized how creative movement improves physical vitality, strengthens emotional resilience, and fosters community engagement. These benefits align closely with the goals of this dissertation, which advocates for integrating culturally grounded dance forms, such as samba, into mental health interventions. Ward's (2008) emphasis on the psychosocial dimensions of movement parallels samba's symbolic and communal structure, making it a viable model for healing justice and holistic care.

Atienza et al. (2020) examined the intersection of perfectionism and motivation in dance environments, revealing how motivational climate affects dancers' psychological well-being. Atienza et al. (2020) studied 271 vocational dancers and found that perfectionistic climates fostered anxiety and error aversion, whereas task-focused climates promoted growth and self-reflection. Samba's inclusive, improvisational structure counters these perfectionistic pressures

by inviting expressive variation and affirming emotional authenticity. This affirmed samba's potential to promote healing through collective rhythm and symbolic integration, central themes in this study's exploration of dance as a cultural healing system.

These sources affirmed that dance, especially in its communal, rhythmic, and culturally embedded forms, functions as a powerful modality for somatic integration, emotional resilience, and psychological growth. Samba's role as an accessible, rhythmic, and expressive system supports all three of the study's research questions, offering a model for transformative healing rooted in movement, meaning, and community.

Dance Therapy for Physical and Mental Well-Being

This section examines dance as a therapeutic modality that addresses psychological distress, fosters emotional resilience, and promotes physical development across diverse populations. As this dissertation positioned samba as a culturally embedded healing system, interdisciplinary research across music therapy, movement analysis, and emotional psychology demonstrates that dance supports holistic well-being through rhythm, coordination, and symbolic communication. These findings informed the development of SDMT and support its viability as a culturally grounded framework for mental health care.

Horowitz (2013) documented broad therapeutic applications of sound and movement, highlighting their cognitive, motor, and emotional benefits. Modalities such as melodic intonation therapy have shown promise in restoring speech for patients with aphasia, while parental singing has contributed to physiological and emotional development in premature infants. Dance therapy, particularly for individuals with Parkinson's disease, has been shown to improve motor coordination and mobility (Tillmann et al., 2017). These findings establish the physiological basis for the therapeutic impact of rhythmic movement and affirm dance's

potential to support neurological and emotional healing. Horowitz (2013) also called for deeper research into sound's mechanisms, emphasizing patient selection, dosage, and long-term efficacy as key variables in developing sustainable movement-based therapies.

Vlasic et al. (2014) assessed participant responses using a 5-point scale, revealing generally positive emotional reactions to dancing. Notably, discomfort with unrecognized choreography was tied not just to performance anxiety but to deeper self-assessments of competence and personal success. Vlasic et al. (2014) further clarified that emotional reactions in dance result from the interplay between inner self-awareness and external physical execution. Even those who struggle with choreography often report finding joy and purpose, indicating that the reflective integration of self through movement can foster emotional well-being—a concept foundational to samba's symbolic and improvisational structure.

Inal (2015) expanded upon existing research by demonstrating that therapeutic dance promotes physical, emotional, and sensory development in individuals with disabilities. Citing studies by Hokkanen, Kowalski, Nātasā, Pacchetti et al., and Wanwichai, Inal (2015) emphasized that dance enhances flexibility, coordination, balance, and overall fitness—benefits that extend beyond biomechanics to support embodied agency and expressive integration. Structured around musical guidance and grounded in body awareness, dance fosters meaningful engagement with the environment, serving as a symbolic dialogue between the self and the world. This echoes the dissertation's emphasis on samba as a culturally resonant modality for emotional and somatic healing. Complementing these insights, Goodill (2005) underscored the importance of comprehensive health screening for dancers, particularly when movement is employed as a therapeutic intervention. She highlighted the need for attuned attention to physical readiness, noting that dance/movement therapy demands sensitivity to both somatic capacity and

psychological vulnerability, an ethical imperative when inviting the body into symbolic transformation.

Anderson and Mathews (2024) provided a comprehensive review of dance and movement interventions in educational settings, with a focus on students with disabilities. Anderson and Mathews (2024) highlighted the feasibility of such interventions to promote inclusion, support motor skill development, and enhance emotional health. Anderson and Mathews' (2024) findings affirm samba's relevance to broader health and educational contexts, particularly its capacity to foster community engagement and accessibility through culturally meaningful movement.

Dasgupta (2013) examined the transcendental dimensions of dance and its role in mind-body integration through the use of DMT. In a study involving eight dance sessions, a participant with a history of abuse reported reduced anxiety, increased self-worth, and sustained improvements in emotional health. This underscores the potential of symbolic and embodied practices, such as samba, to facilitate emotional release and reconnect with oneself. Dasgupta (2013) positioned dance as a conduit for healing interactions between body, environment, and identity, reinforcing this dissertation's proposition that samba supports individuation through movement and ritual.

Sakata et al. (2004) further emphasized the psychological and social impacts of dance, showing how synchronized and expressive movement deepens self-awareness and facilitates nonverbal communication. Sakata et al. (2004) validated dance as a shared language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, promoting inclusivity and social bonding. By engaging in intentional bodily motion, dancers undergo cognitive shifts, heightened sensory awareness, and strengthened communal ties. These findings support the use of SDMT as an

intervention to enhance emotional resilience, foster cultural pride, and facilitate the symbolic reassembly of identity.

These studies affirmed that dance is a multidimensional therapeutic practice, one that engages the somatic body, emotional psyche, and symbolic imagination. Whether applied to disability, trauma, neurological recovery, or personal development, movement-based practices such as samba offer holistic tools for healing and transformation. Within the context of this dissertation, they substantiate samba's role in promoting psychological integration, spiritual renewal, and embodied cultural reconnection.

Psyche Moving: “Active Imagination” and “Focusing” in Movement-Based Performance and Psychotherapy

Bacon (2007) examined the interplay between Jungian active imagination and Gendlin's focusing technique, proposing a nuanced framework for engaging unconscious content through movement and embodied awareness. Bacon's (2007) approach, rooted in depth psychology, positions the body not simply as a vessel for expression but as a dynamic site for symbolic emergence and psychological transformation. These insights are particularly relevant to this dissertation's exploration of samba as a therapeutic modality that activates archetypal resonance, supports emotional integration, and facilitates individuation through culturally grounded movement practices.

By integrating active imagination with Gendlin's focusing approach, Bacon (2007) emphasized a somatic route to transformation. Active imagination invites symbolic imagery and gesture to surface from the unconscious, while focusing anchors those symbols in the “felt sense,” a form of bodily knowing rich with implicit meaning (Gendlin, 1979). Movement, positioned as a channel between these techniques, creates a dialogic space in which conscious

and unconscious material can meet and evolve (Bacon, 2007). This model substantiates the argument that movement traditions, such as samba, not only foster physical vitality and emotional release but also support internal dialogue and psychic reorganization through rhythm and embodied ritual.

Bacon's (2007) contribution expands the theoretical foundation for SDMT by affirming that creative, somatic methods can facilitate emotional healing, symbolic clarity, and spiritual renewal. Bacon's (2007) articulation of movement as a gateway to archetypal integration reinforces the dissertation's third research question: What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system? Through this lens, embodied cultural practice becomes a potent resource for accessing profound inner knowledge and facilitating transformation that transcends language and cognition. Movement is redefined not merely as expression but as initiation into wholeness, memory, and self-discovery.

Dance Therapy for Trauma Recovery

This section explored how dance therapy supports trauma recovery, empowerment, and identity reclamation across diverse populations and cultural traditions. Studies spanning clinical, feminist, and community-based interventions highlight dance as a therapeutic pathway that fosters mind-body integration, emotional processing, and a sense of cultural belonging. As this dissertation examines samba as a healing system rooted in symbolic movement and community rhythm, these works collectively affirm its relevance for restoring agency and individuation—particularly in the aftermath of psychological and relational trauma.

Mills and Daniluk (2002) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of five women who had experienced childhood sexual abuse. Through interviews, participants described how dance therapy helped them move beyond talking about their trauma into embodied healing processes.

The abuse had fragmented their relationships with their bodies, but the intervention supported a renewed sense of bodily connection and personal growth. This research confirmed the value of movement-based therapy for addressing trauma and suggests that dance offers survivors a pathway to reclaim embodiment and identity.

Moe (2014) extended these insights through her study of belly dance as a therapeutic modality for women who had endured gender-based violence and other forms of victimization. Through interviews with U.S. practitioners, Moe (2014) highlighted the impact of belly dance on body esteem and emotional empowerment. The dance's flexible structure and emphasis on self-expression made it liberating, even in contrast to its often-misunderstood erotic associations. Participants reframed sensuality as a dimension of healing and self-acceptance, resisting external stereotypes and reclaiming control over their narratives. Moe (2014) argued that belly dance is an effective coping strategy that promotes feminist-informed healing, allowing women to define their own processes of restoration.

Ben-Asher et al. (2002) reinforced the importance of nonverbal communication in trauma recovery through dance/movement therapy. Drawing from Shahar-Levy's concept of the therapist's "inner sonar," Ben-Asher et al. (2002) proposed that clinicians can attune to clients' unconscious body memories to guide therapeutic engagement. This approach highlights how trauma frequently emerges somatically before reaching conscious awareness, and affirms the need for movement-based, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed practices across different geopolitical contexts. Ben-Asher et al.'s (2002) comparative analysis of dance therapy in Israel and the United States reveals how cultural differences shape both therapeutic ethos and practitioner training, underscoring the role of cultural competency in healing work.

Monteiro and Wall (2011) positioned traditional African dance and movement rituals as central to collective healing practices. In African diasporic and urban communities, these embodied traditions enable individuals to process trauma through communal rhythms and symbolic gestures. Movement and ritual act as vehicles for cultural preservation, adaptation, and spiritual restoration. Monteiro and Wall's (2011) study revealed that urban forms, such as hip-hop and Krumping, extend these healing traditions, especially for women seeking to assert their identity and agency within diasporic contexts. African dance serves not only as a symbolic language but also as a generative tool for community resilience and psychological realignment (Monteiro & Wall, 2011).

In therapeutic programs such as the African Women's Wellness Group, dance is actively used alongside drumming and storytelling to support refugees and asylum seekers in culturally relevant trauma recovery (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2009). These interventions emphasize healing that is embodied, social, and symbolically meaningful, mirroring the principles that animate SDMT in this dissertation. A growing body of research also reinforces the mind-body connection and the neurological and emotional benefits of dance. Stupacher et al. (2017) and Horowitz (2013) investigated how rhythmic movement enhances affect regulation and improves cognitive functioning. Moe (2014) and Maraz et al. (2015) demonstrated how dance enables trauma survivors to reclaim bodily ownership, fostering psychological resilience and emotional release. Tillmann et al. (2017) showed how samba movement enhances motor coordination and mood in individuals with Parkinson's disease, underscoring dance's therapeutic impact on neurological functioning and quality of life.

The studies by Sakata et al. (2004) and McCabe (2008) offered further insight into the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of dance. Movement serves as a nonverbal language through

which trauma can be expressed and transmuted. Dance fosters collective connection, reintegration of personal narrative, and identity reclamation, especially in contexts of displacement. These insights are particularly salient in the framework of this dissertation, which investigates samba's transformative potential within immigrant communities navigating acculturation and cultural reconstruction.

This body of research confirms that dance can be both an art and a medium of spiritual, emotional, and cultural restoration. Whether embodied through African diasporic ritual, belly dance, or samba, movement-based practices allow individuals and communities to process trauma, reclaim expression, and activate healing through rhythm and symbolic engagement. In the context of immigration, dance provides access to cultural continuity and empowerment, supporting the reintegration of selfhood and promoting personal and collective well-being.

Embodied Cognition and Movement-Based Meaning-Making

Research in embodied cognition emphasizes that human thought, emotion, and symbolic life are grounded in bodily experience and sensorimotor processes rather than existing solely in abstract cognition. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argued that conceptual metaphors emerge from embodied schemas, suggesting that movement itself is constitutive of meaning. Sheets-Johnstone (2011) similarly contended that movement is the "primordial form of thinking," underscoring how bodily rhythm and gesture carry the structures of lived experience.

Within therapeutic contexts, scholars of dance and movement have shown how embodied processes facilitate shifts in affect, perception, and self-understanding. Adams (2010) and others have highlighted how rhythmic, culturally embedded movement surfaces tacit knowledge and reorganizes psychological experience, aligning with the heuristic emphasis on indwelling and tacit knowing. In dance/movement therapy, this framework helps explain how embodied ritual

practices regulate emotions, deepen awareness, and support the integration of fragmented aspects of the self (Koch et al., 2019).

Positioned within this theoretical lens, samba's patterned gestures, cyclical rhythms, and communal synchrony can be understood as an embodied pathway for healing. The findings of the present study—particularly in the themes of Emotional Healing, Identity Reconstruction, and Somatic Reclamation—reflect the role of embodied cognition in making tacit experiences explicit, transmuting effect into symbolic form, and enabling participants to reclaim coherence through movement.

The Psychological Impact of Immigration on Brazilian Immigrants

Movement-based practices offer a meaningful pathway for expressing unspoken suffering, reclaiming fragmented personal narratives, and cultivating resilience in the face of trauma, particularly among Brazilian immigrants navigating displacement and cultural adaptation. The emotional toll of immigration includes grief, isolation, identity confusion, and chronic stress—all of which challenge psychological coherence and somatic regulation (Margolis, 1992, 1994, 1998; Martes, 1999b). This dissertation positioned samba as a rhythmic, symbolic, and communal practice capable of addressing these challenges by engaging the whole person: body, psyche, and spirit.

Margolis (1992, 1994, 1998) and Martes (1999b) examined the social and psychological strain experienced by Brazilian immigrant families, highlighting how cultural dislocation disrupts interpersonal relationships, identity formation, and emotional stability. In contexts where verbal expression may feel inaccessible or insufficient, movement-based interventions offer somatic release, symbolic reconnection, and emotional regulation. This insight reinforces

the relevance of SDMT, which draws on improvisational structure and ritual embodiment to create space for cultural continuity and psychological integration.

By incorporating movement into trauma-informed therapeutic frameworks, practitioners can support immigrant populations in navigating the psychological complexities of acculturation. Dance, in this model, becomes more than physical exercise—it becomes a language of restoration, resilience, and belonging. The therapeutic use of samba reflects this potential, bridging emotional healing with cultural pride, and affirming the dissertation’s proposition that movement-based practices are essential tools for community connection and individual transformation.

Psychological Challenges of Immigration

Research on Brazilian immigration has consistently highlighted the emotional, psychological, and cultural stressors that accompany displacement (Margolis, 1992, 1994, 1998; Martes, 1999b). These experiences often include exposure to discrimination, ruptured support systems, and cultural isolation. Scholars have emphasized the urgency of developing integrative strategies that foster healing and promote community resilience, particularly for populations navigating layered forms of vulnerability (Allen et al., 2023). Such findings affirm the importance of culturally grounded modalities that not only address individual mental health but also strengthen collective bonds and ancestral continuity.

Moretto (1991) investigated the coping mechanisms of Brazilian immigrants, revealing their willingness to seek social support and confirming that Brazil’s economic crisis and psychological stressors jointly motivated migration. Her study identified consistent demographic trends across Boston and New York, including a predominance of middle-class migrants from Minas Gerais. Despite their ambitions, these immigrants frequently experienced downward

mobility, expressing hope to return to Brazil within a decade. This research reinforced the emotional toll of migration and emphasized the importance of considering both economic and psychic consequences, validating the need for culturally rooted healing systems such as samba (Moretto, 1991).

Beserra (2003) offered a complementary regional perspective by focusing on Brazilian immigrants in California, particularly in the greater Los Angeles area. Her work explored how immigrants navigate cultural imperialism, social class, and transnational identity. Los Angeles, with its established immigrant networks and economic opportunities, provides a unique context for examining how Brazilians maintain cultural ties while adapting to systemic inequalities (Beserra, 2003). This intersection of race, class, and cultural memory informs the symbolic and therapeutic role samba can play in anchoring identity amid a shifting transnational environment.

Assmar et al. (2006) employed ethnopsychology to analyze cultural beliefs within Brazilian families, revealing persistent gender-based perceptions rooted in tradition. Using a Brazilian adaptation of the Mexican Family Structure Questionnaire, the study demonstrated that men largely upheld patriarchal norms, while women tended to endorse beliefs tied to self-sacrifice. These values remained largely unchanged across generations, suggesting their enduring influence on family dynamics and immigrant identity (Assmar et al., 2006). For Brazilian women in diaspora, dance may offer a space for confronting and reimagining these inherited roles—a theme supported by the expressive and inclusive nature of samba.

Mirkin (1998) addressed the impact of multiple contextual layers—cultural, social, and environmental—on immigrant families, noting stressors such as language barriers, underemployment, cultural dissonance, and discrimination. These dynamics often disrupt communication and parenting, impeding cultural retention. Mirkin (1998) emphasized that

therapy must be a meeting point of three cultures: the immigrant's, the therapist's, and the host society's. Effective support requires cultural empathy and systemic approaches, reinforcing the need for modalities like SDMT that offer culturally relevant engagement, emotional expression, and symbolic continuity.

Lima and Siqueira (2012) offered a comprehensive socioeconomic profile of Brazilian businesses in Allston-Brighton, revealing crucial economic indicators such as business size, industry sector, revenue, and employment levels. This detailed dataset not only reflects the current local economic landscape but also provides valuable insights into regional economic Themes, enabling the identification of trends and disparities that can inform policy decisions and comparative analyses. Lima and Siqueira (2012) established an empirical framework that is essential for understanding regional economic dynamics and supports broader discussions on economic resilience and sustainability.

Akhtar (1999) provided a comprehensive model of the psychological effects of immigration, examining how psychic space, temporality, and social affiliation are transformed by migration. He described how internal drives and affective states are intensified through immigration, producing emotional dualities—such as nostalgia and hope, and dissonance and longing. Akhtar's (1999) insights illustrate how immigrants must reconstruct their sense of self across linguistic, moral, and emotional domains. These themes resonate with this study's positioning of samba as a ritual of psychic integration, a means by which the immigrant body can process contradiction, reclaim joy, and mediate cultural loss through movement.

Messias and Hilfinger (2001) extended this perspective by examining the transnational experiences of Brazilian immigrant women in domestic labor. Participants described physical exertion, health challenges, and the psychological burden of undervalued work. Yet many also

articulated their employment as purposeful—framed by cultural values, survival strategies, and aspirations. Their ability to interpret and adapt across Brazilian and American contexts demonstrates how movement, labor, and identity intersect in transnational life (Messias & Hilfinger, 2001). This research confirms that embodied cultural practices, such as samba, can support this adaptive process, offering symbolic and emotional reconnection within contexts of marginalization and labor exploitation.

Korin and Petry (1996) emphasized that Brazilian clients are the best source of information regarding their own culture, and therapists should be cautious not to impose their value systems or those of the dominant society onto their clients. A central issue explored is the American middle-class tendency toward individualism, which can pose challenges when Brazilian clients retain strong, lifelong attachments to their families of origin. This attachment is sometimes misdiagnosed by therapists unfamiliar with Brazilian cultural norms. They also examined how therapists' misunderstandings about Brazilian women's communication styles complicate the therapeutic relationship (Korin & Petry, 1996). Brazilian women's expressive and body-oriented way of communicating is sometimes misunderstood as seductive, contributing to stereotyping and discomfort in therapeutic and professional relationships. The authors contended that practicing in a culturally attuned manner is not merely about understanding a client's culture but also about the therapist recognizing their own cultural biases and values (Korin & Petry, 1996).

Ultimately, the therapeutic process is understood as an interplay among three cultures: the client's or family's, the therapist's, and the dominant societal culture (Korin & Petry, 1996). Regardless, this two-way street requires responsibility and cultural competency from both sides, a way to validate the relationship to ensure it works and remains culturally aware. It also

encourages therapists to avoid stereotyping or pathologizing behaviors that are culturally appropriate for members of those cultures, resulting in a more inclusive and empathetic therapeutic process (Korin & Petry, 1996).

Kirmayer's (2004) examination of the cultural diversity inherent in healing practices provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interconnection between meaning, metaphor, and mechanism in therapeutic interventions. Kirmayer's (2004) analysis highlights the crucial role of cultural contexts in shaping perceptions of illness and informing treatment approaches. In particular, Kirmayer (2004) highlighted the influence of culturally embedded metaphors on both the lived experience of illness and the efficacy of healing practices. This perspective is particularly pertinent to the objectives of this dissertation, as it provides an interpretive lens for investigating how cultural symbolism facilitates therapeutic processes. Furthermore, his elucidation of the psychosocial mechanisms underlying diverse healing traditions underscores the imperative of employing culturally sensitive methodologies in health-related research and practice.

This constellation of studies offers rich insights into the lived realities of Brazilian immigrants, revealing the psychological tension, cultural negotiation, and gendered experiences that define migration. It sets the stage for this dissertation's core inquiry: How can samba, as a culturally embedded movement tradition, support emotional healing, identity integration, and resilience in the context of immigration?

The Acculturation of Brazilian Immigrants

Acculturation is a multidimensional and transformative process that encompasses both cultural adaptation and heritage preservation—elements central to the immigrant experience (Berry et al., 1997). For Brazilian immigrants in the United States, acculturation involves

navigating shifting cultural landscapes, confronting systemic discrimination, and reconciling the tension between maintaining cultural identity and embracing new social norms. This dissertation incorporates key studies on acculturation to better understand how culturally rooted practices, such as samba, may foster resilience and reconnection amid such complexity.

Schwartz et al. (2010) reconceptualized acculturation as the interaction between heritage and receiving cultures across practices, values, and identification. Schwartz et al. (2010) examined the “immigrant paradox,” noting that greater exposure to the dominant culture often corresponds with declines in mental and physical health. Ethnicity, cultural similarity, and experiences of discrimination were found to influence psychosocial outcomes significantly (Schwartz et al., 2010). Importantly, Schwartz et al. (2010) introduced the concept of the “context of reception”—the social and structural environment immigrants encounter—which shapes acculturation trajectories. This framework underscores how samba, situated within welcoming community spaces, may buffer against acculturative stress and promote psychological integration.

Geber et al. (2012) conducted a systematic review of 44 studies involving over 760,000 participants to assess the impact of acculturation on physical activity. Geber et al. (2012) showed a positive correlation between acculturation and leisure-time physical activity in over half the studies, regardless of demographic variables. However, Geber et al. (2012) noted that individuals with lower levels of acculturation tended to be more physically inactive, suggesting a gap that culturally tailored interventions—such as community-based dance practices—may help address. Samba, with its social structure and rhythmic embodiment, offers a viable strategy for enhancing physical engagement while promoting cultural affirmation.

Giosan et al. (2001) investigated mental health perceptions among Brazilian immigrants, analyzing how acculturation shaped views on *distúrbio mental*. Giosan et al. (2001) revealed that higher American acculturation broadened participants' understanding of mental disorders, emphasizing internal psychological features and the violation of normative behaviors. However, these shifts in perception did not fully align with diagnostic definitions, highlighting the complex and layered impact of cultural frameworks on mental health interpretation. Giosan et al.'s (2001) findings suggest that culturally sensitive approaches—such as dance/movement therapy rooted in samba's symbolic vocabulary—may resonate more authentically with immigrant populations than Western diagnostic paradigms alone.

Cultural displacement and identity fragmentation remain prevalent concerns among Brazilian immigrants in urban regions such as Los Angeles and Boston (Beserra, 2003; Margolis, 1992, 1994, 1998; Martes, 1999a, 1999b). Schwartz et al. (2010) and Dabeer (2025) emphasized that culturally responsive interventions are crucial to mental health support, especially those that prioritize expressive forms of healing over clinical abstraction. Samba, with its emphasis on rhythm, gesture, and community, enables immigrants to externalize emotional material, reaffirm belonging, and counter the disintegration that often accompanies acculturation.

Ferguson and Birman (2016) further complicated the discussion by examining the racialization of Latino immigrants. Although classified by the U.S. Census as an ethnic category spanning multiple racial backgrounds, Latinos are frequently treated as a racial minority—subjected to systemic prejudice and cultural invalidation. This experience of racialization intensifies acculturative stress and calls for practices that affirm identity and agency. Samba's celebratory roots and resistance-based evolution make it both a therapeutic and politically

resonant intervention, particularly among communities seeking healing and visibility within marginalized spaces.

In summary, research on acculturation indicates that movement-based, culturally informed practices, such as samba, can address the emotional, social, and somatic dimensions of immigration (Berry et al., 1997; Beserra, 2003; Margolis, 1992, 1994, 1998; Martes, 1999a, 1999b). These modalities provide a language for reconnection and resilience, bridging heritage and adaptation through embodied ritual and collective rhythm.

The Origin and History of Samba

Samba's historical development and cultural symbolism not only reflect Brazil's Afro-Indigenous legacy but also serve as a vessel for psychic and communal healing. Movement scholars, cultural anthropologists, and artists have repeatedly emphasized that samba is not merely a performance; it is a ritual of resistance, memory, and embodiment. Graeff (2024) highlighted Samba de Roda [circle] as intangible Afro-Brazilian heritage rooted in African cosmological perceptions and ancestral resilience, underscoring its role in musical healing and symbolic transformation. Dotsenko (2023) further traced the evolution of samba from Bahia's Afro-Brazilian communities to its consolidation as a national identity marker, framing it as a hybrid form of cultural resistance and memory. These insights align with broader understandings of dance's adaptive and restorative functions. As Fink et al. (2021) noted, human dance fosters social cohesion, emotional renewal, and cultural continuity through rhythmic and embodied participation, principles that are foundational to samba's role in diasporic experiences and spiritual frameworks. This subsection continues to trace how samba functions within these contexts to facilitate emotional restoration and cultural coherence.

Ligiéro (2011) situated Afro-Brazilian performance traditions within a framework of embodied cultural transmission, arguing that practices such as samba operate as living archives of ancestral memory and symbolic healing. This perspective reinforces the view that samba is not merely a choreographic form but a ritualistic one, offering participants a pathway to reconnect with their heritage, navigate their identity, and engage in communal transformation.

Moura (2005) positioned the *roda* —the circle—as samba’s foundational structure, both physically and symbolically. Within this format, participants engage in communal improvisation, call-and-response, and embodied storytelling. The *roda* [circle] serves as a site of cultural transmission and ritual repair, echoing ancestral formats of gathering and resistance. This concept reinforces Temple’s (2010) assertion that movement becomes a sacred act of remembering, linking samba to transhistorical and spiritual dimensions of Afro-Brazilian practice.

These studies deepen our understanding of samba’s resonance beyond its artistic form. Within immigrant communities, samba serves as a psychosocial anchor, allowing for emotional articulation, spiritual reconnection, and the ritualized reclamation of identity in response to the rupture caused by migration. As both dance and devotion, samba becomes a rhythmic process of individuation, resistance, and return.

Samba and Carnival

Lopes and Simas (2015) wrote a dictionary that not only defines terms based on the universe of samba but is also filled with relevant information, such as song names, original formations of samba groups, films on the subject, and explanations of what differentiates this dictionary from other books on samba. Lopes and Simas (2015) also reflected on the transformations of the musical genre and its environment over decades. Each page, each entry, is

a small lesson about the history of samba. Much of the dictionary discusses the various contexts and social aspects of samba as the national identity of Brazil. Lopes and Simas (2015) offered an overview of the samba schools, their formation, and their transformation into an increasingly commercialized industry that deviates from their origins.

Lopes and Simas (2015) defined Carnival as a period of festivals or secular celebrations with religious origins, found in various ancient cultures, including African traditions. In Brazil, stemming from the Catholic calendar, Carnival expresses a dual nature—Dionysian (festivity) and Apollonian (spectacle). Reflecting this duality, samba has been a part of Rio de Janeiro's Carnival since before the creation of the first samba school, an institution born from disadvantaged communities that, over time, became the most artistic and spectacular element of Rio's Carnival within the sociohistorical context of consumer society (Lopes & Simas, 2015). It is worth noting that Carnaval (Carnival), and especially samba school (social club) parades, are vital for the cultural representation they provide. They are much more than just 80-minute parades at Marquês de Sapucaí, the official venue where the samba schools parade happens in Rio de Janeiro; rather, they are integral to Brazil's rich national heritage.

Browning (1995) explored the subject matter of samba through ethnographic, historiographic, and musicological scholarship. As a dancer actively involved in the dance cultures of Brazil and the Brazilian exile communities in the United States, Browning (1995) wove together a lyrical, personal narrative with incisive theoretical insights into these vibrant Afro-Indigenous dance and ritual traditions. Browning (1995) argued that the dancing body is a form of political resistance transcending verbal expression. Browning's (1995) work offers a social history of samba, recognized as the Brazilian national dance, Candomblé, which is a syncretic, dance-based religion; capoeira, an acrobatic martial art; and descriptions of a range of

popular dances that thrive during Carnival in Salvador, Bahia, the epicenter of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Brazilian culture, particularly through samba and carnival celebrations, has influenced global trends in music, dance, and fashion (World Cultural Threads, 2025). Brazilian culture has fostered creativity and cultural exchange on a global scale. However, the article's limitation is that it primarily focuses on the celebratory and artistic aspects of Brazilian culture without delving deeply into the socioeconomic or historical complexities that shape these traditions. Additionally, it does not thoroughly examine the challenges of preserving cultural authenticity amid globalization. The conclusion underscores the enduring influence of Brazilian culture, particularly samba, as a vibrant and transformative force in global cultural landscapes (World Cultural Threads, 2025). It calls for continued appreciation and exploration of these cultural contributions to foster greater understanding and interconnectedness worldwide.

Beyond historical and cultural analyses, samba's vibrant presence also extends into fiction, where authors craft rich literary depictions that capture its rhythm, movement, and more profound social meanings. Fifteen years after his paradigmatic debut as the writer of *City of God* in 1997, Paulo Lins broke his literary silence and released his second fiction book in 2012, *Desde que o Samba é Samba* (Since the Samba is Samba). As in his first book, the setting of this second book is also the segregated, marginal periphery of Rio de Janeiro; in this case, however, the setting is not a *favela* (shanty town) at the end of the 20th century, but the Estácio de Sá neighborhood in the 1920s. Still, unlike his first work, this second novel does not use violence as the guiding thread of the narrative, but rather samba, specifically the birth of samba in Rio de Janeiro and the samba schools. The great novelty in this work is that the author contextualized his narrative in the effervescent cultural moment of the 1920s in Rio de Janeiro, when what

would become known as the trademark of the Rio Carnival was solidified in the samba schools and their type of carnival with parades and plots (themes that each samba school presents in the parade). The narrative key of the book is precisely the creation of this first samba school, *Deixa Falar* (Let Them Talk), and the characters in the novel, for the most part, are historical. Parallel to the creation of the samba school, Lins (2012) also described the emergence of a new religion, Umbanda. Umbanda represents a blend of African deities, known as Orisas, with elements of Catholicism, creating a unique form of spiritual syncretism.

The connection between Umbanda and samba precisely reiterates the point of this dissertation, further emphasizing that samba is not just music, but also a spiritual, cultural, and social practice. This research encompassed the rich literature on samba's significance for identity and resilience, and Umbanda exemplifies the fundamental contributions that Afro-Brazilian traditions have made to the development of samba. Tracing samba's religious, communal, and ritualistic overtones highlights how samba is not merely an entertainment form, but an expression of lived experiences and a medium for cultural resistance and expression. Additionally, samba's connection to Umbanda centers on threaded themes of spirituality, ancestry, and collective memory, which underscore samba's essence in shaping Brazilian life and heritage.

DaMatta's (1991) *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes* examines Brazilian society through the lens of dramatization and ideology, using Carnival as a symbolic stage for broader social dynamics. Rather than presenting a linear historical narrative of races, regions, or class struggles, DaMatta (1991) explored the complexities of identity, hierarchy, and resistance through Brazil's defining figures: the malandro (rogue/trickster) and the hero. Brazilian society, he argued, is shaped by an ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity, as well as between informality

and authority, and individuality and collectivism. These tensions manifest in ritualized spaces, such as Carnival, where rigid social structures momentarily dissolve, allowing for temporary inversions of power. This is when the marginalized population and those who are socially discriminated against are honored and revered. DaMatta's (1991) work is deeply important for this dissertation because he dove deep into understanding Brazil's identity in a way that goes beyond surface-level contrasts or simple explanations. Through social anthropology and comparative sociology, he captured how people navigate their roles, dreams, and contradictions in a society still figuring itself out. This perspective aligns perfectly with the focus on samba as both a cultural and therapeutic practice, illustrating how individual and collective identities are formed and negotiated within this rich and complex social fabric.

In the first volume of *Uma História do Samba: As Origens* [A Samba History: The Origins], Neto (2017) traced the origins and growth of samba between 1890 and 1913. Neto, an award-winning author, initially composed a portrait of this dancing genre. In the first volume, Neto investigated the lyrics, melodies, instruments, phonographic recording, and sociopolitical aspects of samba. Neto (2017) demonstrated that the samba trajectory corresponds to its gradual incorporation into Brazil's cultural imaginary, a space marked by a constant tension between celebration and suffering, where moments of joy and festivity are frequently interrupted or coexist with hardship and despair.

Prates (2017), interpreting Neto's work, highlighted the emergence of samba in late 19th-century Rio de Janeiro, then Brazil's capital, as a genre deeply rooted in the city's urban outskirts and hills. Neto (2017) explained that "samba" was initially not referred to as a musical genre, but rather as gatherings hosted by women, often African-descended figures from Bahia, affectionately called "tias." These vibrant events, rich in food, drink, and drumming, created

spaces for marginalized communities, including formerly enslaved individuals, dockworkers, and capoeira practitioners, to socialize and find refuge amidst systemic oppression. Neto's (2017) work highlighted the sociopolitical challenges faced during this period, including urban reforms that displaced communities to peripheral areas and deliberately suppressed African cultural traditions through laws such as the 1890 Penal Code. Despite these obstacles, samba became a unifying cultural force, with pivotal figures like Tia Ciata, João da Baiana, Sinhô, and Donga instrumental in its evolution. Prates (2017), interpreting Neto's narrative, highlighted samba's evolution from informal gatherings to professional recordings, showcasing its significance as both a cultural cornerstone and a testament to Brazilian resilience, which is integral to understanding samba's transformative impact in this dissertation.

Simas and Mussa (2010) are both writers who are passionate about samba culture. Their work, *Samba de Enredo: História e Arte* (The Samba-Theme: History and Art), presents detailed analyses of samba and its relationship with Brazil's social history. Readers gain insight into how this typically Brazilian genre has evolved from 1870 to the present day through its rhythms, lyrics, and characters. Mussa and Simas listened to approximately 1,600 recorded songs to analyze the lyrics and themes found in samba. In a newly revised and expanded edition, Simas and Mussa (2022) updated the book with an afterword that addressed the changes in the sambas de enredo (theme or plot) from 2010 to 2022. This work was essential reading for this project and is helpful for those seeking a deeper understanding of the world of Carnival or samba and carnivals. By recognizing samba's African roots, one can understand its cultural impact and the symbology of resistance, identity, and artistry. Samba is more than just a musical or dance style; it is the culmination of historical exchanges, influenced by Afro-Brazilian traditions, rituals, and

community celebrations. *Samba Enredos: História e Arte* is an indispensable resource for exploring the evolution of Carnival.

African Matrices

This section deepens the historical and sociopolitical analysis of samba by examining the formation of Afro-Brazilian identity, cultural autonomy, and the transnational dimensions of Pan-African resistance. Through regional histories, literary interventions, and Afrocentric scholarship, samba emerges as both a local expression of resilience and a global cultural force that affirms memory, agency, and empowerment.

Ickes (2013) traced the imprint of African legacies on regional identity in Salvador, Bahia, highlighting how Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions—such as samba, capoeira, and Candomblé—were central to the formation of Bahian identity. He analyzed Salvador's development between the 1930s and 1950s, comparing it to other Brazilian cities to demonstrate how African matrices influenced not only the rhythm and movement of samba but also its broader social functions. Viewing samba through Bahia's lens makes clear its power within both Carnival spectacle and everyday life.

Ickes (2013) invoked Gramsci's theory of hegemony to explore the paradox of cultural inclusion without political equity. He argued that public ritual, including Carnival, reflected complex negotiations between Afro-Brazilians and elite cultural agents under Getúlio Vargas's nationalist policies. While samba became a celebrated feature of Bahian identity, it often remained confined within unequal power structures, valued aesthetically but not politically. These findings support the assertion in this dissertation that samba is both an expression of resistance and a response to structural marginalization—holding psychic and symbolic relevance without guaranteeing systemic transformation.

Nascimento (2008) curated *Sankofa: African Matrices of Brazilian Culture*, a collective volume focused on Afro-Brazilian and Pan-Africanist thought. Contributions from Cheikh Anta Diop's intellectual lineage, as well as voices from Ghana, Angola, and Brazil, contextualized the historical relationship between Africa and its diaspora. The volume emphasized Brazil's unique position within Pan-Africanism, home to the largest African-descended population outside the continent. This work frames samba as more than national folklore; it is a diasporic language of belonging and resistance, shaped by shared transcontinental struggles.

The subsequent anthology, *Afrocentricidade: Uma Abordagem Epistemológica Inovadora* [Afrocentricity: An Innovative Epistemological Approach], expanded on these themes through interdisciplinary essays rooted in Afrocentric theory (Nascimento, 2009). Authors engaged with psychology, education, gender, and social assistance to illuminate how African-descended communities reclaim historical agency through cultural forms. This collection provides theoretical scaffolding for interpreting samba as a site of empowerment and social healing. Situated within Afro-Brazilian traditions, samba transcends music to become a political and psychological praxis—a communal rhythm that affirms identity, challenges exclusion, and fosters transformation (Nascimento, 2009).

Literary and community-based work by Tadeu Kaçula (2020) in *Casa Verde: Uma Pequena África Paulista* [Casa Verde: A Little Africa in São Paulo] positioned samba within the spatial politics of resistance in São Paulo's North Zone. Kaçula argued that Casa Verde represents more than heritage—it is a living stage of Afro-Brazilian autonomy, where storytelling, education, and cultural production are tools of self-determination. He framed resistance not as survival but as active transformation, rooted in collective knowledge and identity creation (Kaçula, 2020). This community model aligns with SDMT's therapeutic and

cultural premise, where samba becomes a localized healing practice shaped by historical consciousness and neighborhood solidarity.

Kaçula (2020) affirmed that the denial of racial equity necessitates internal organization and cultural generation within marginalized communities. Samba, as practiced in Casa Verde and other urban diasporic spaces, reflects this mode of resistance—reclaiming narratives, generating movement, and reshaping identities through participatory rhythm. The connection between communal formation and cultural healing solidifies samba's role in anchoring individual and collective restoration within postcolonial and diasporic frameworks.

The expressive power of samba lies not only in its rhythmic structure but also in its role as a vehicle for historical consciousness and resistance (Kaçula, 2020). Communities like Casa Verde embody this richness—filled with samba gatherings, ritual traditions, and neighborhood storytelling—that collectively preserve Afro-Brazilian heritage (Kaçula, 2020). Kaçula emphasized that Casa Verde's memory is layered and intergenerational, shaped by ongoing cultural exchanges and lived experience. These oral traditions and celebrations reflect the creativity, resilience, and social organizing of Afro-Brazilian communities, where samba operates as both a social glue and a historical archive.

Oliver's (2022) edited volume, *Tinha Que Ser Preto [It Had to Be Black]*, contributes directly to the discourse on racial justice by reclaiming a historically denigrating phrase and reframing it as a symbol of pride and achievement. The book's title challenges prevailing anti-Black narratives in Brazil, promoting a counternarrative that Black contributions are foundational to Brazilian society. Oliver's insistence on confronting racism and amplifying Black voices aligns with samba's historical role as a form of cultural protest and affirmation.

Within therapeutic and educational contexts, samba's performative power provides a coping mechanism for racial trauma, offering both catharsis and reconnection.

Lopes and de Oliveira's (2024) *Tia Ciata, a Grande Mãe do Samba* [Auntie Ciata, the Great Mother of Samba] offers vital insight into the cultural and historical backdrop of samba's emergence. Lopes and de Oliveira's (2024) detailed account of Tia Ciata—an Afro-Brazilian priestess, stylist, cook, and community leader—demonstrates how religious ritual, creative labor, and social gathering converged in Rio's Pequena África to form the roots of samba. Her home became a sanctuary of musical innovation and cultural exchange, eventually spawning Brazil's first commercially recorded samba song, "Pelo Telefone." The book also highlighted her influence on legendary artists such as Pixinguinha and Heitor dos Prazeres, reinforcing her role as a matriarchal figure in Afro-Brazilian history (Lopes & de Oliveira, 2024).

Despite its strengths, Lopes and de Oliveira's (2024) work leaves room for further inquiry. While it richly documents samba's emergence and key figures, it could offer more depth regarding gender dynamics, particularly the broader influence of women beyond Tia Ciata. An expanded analysis of anonymous contributors and marginalized voices would further illustrate samba's communal nature. Additionally, a longitudinal view of samba's transformation and global resonance could enhance the narrative, tracing how local rhythms evolved into international expressions of resistance and joy.

A study conducted by Vinesett et al. (2017) investigated the impact of a modified African Ngoma healing ceremony on reducing stress. The research highlights the effectiveness of incorporating cultural traditions into health interventions, particularly in promoting overall well-being. The findings underscore the significance of traditional African rituals adapted to contemporary contexts, highlighting their potential to mitigate stress and promote both

psychological and physical well-being. This study demonstrates how culturally specific practices can be integrated into modern healthcare frameworks to support holistic health outcomes.

Based on the articles studied, samba has the potency as an embodied form of identity construction, spiritual restoration, and cultural resistance. They link collective memory, gendered labor, and racial justice into the rhythms and gestures of samba, demonstrating its capacity to hold historical trauma and transform it through celebration. Rooted in Afro-Brazilian cosmology and infused with the spiritual legacies of Candomblé, samba also carries religious symbolism that sacralizes movement, invoking ancestral presence and divine connection through rhythmic embodiment. In therapeutic, diasporic, and community settings, samba continues to function as a healing modality that bridges ancestry, activism, and belonging.

Religious Aspects of Samba

Samba's spiritual vitality is deeply rooted in Afro-Brazilian traditions such as Candomblé and Umbanda, where movement, music, and ritual intertwine to nurture emotional resilience and cultural coherence. This sacred lineage reinforces samba's function as a coping mechanism for racial trauma and systemic oppression, transforming rhythmic expression into spiritual invocation and social affirmation (Khumalo, 2025).

Simas (2023) explored these dimensions in *Crônica Exusíacas and Estilhaços Pelintras* [Chronicles of Exusia and Shards of Pelintras], a chronicle of metaphysical encounters and trance states linked to Afro-Brazilian spiritual rituals. His writing portrayed samba not only as cultural artistry but as a metaphysical force—an embodied practice through which faith and resistance coalesce. Through vivid depictions of ritual possession and musical invocation, Simas (2023) demonstrated how communities channel collective pain into movement and rhythm,

fostering healing and empowerment. His work affirmed that samba holds space for spiritual reparation, offering participants a symbolic framework to navigate suffering and assert presence.

Orixás—the deities of Candomblé and Umbanda—represent natural forces, emotional archetypes, and paths toward transformation (Verger, 1995). Derived from Yoruba cosmology, each Orixá carries specific associations: Iemanjá embodies oceanic motherhood and nurturing power; Oxóssi governs abundance and hunting; Xangô invokes thunder and justice. These energies find parallel expression within samba’s musical and choreographic language.

Movements echo these divine attributes, allowing dancers to ritualize joy, sorrow, and strength within communal practice (Verger, 1995). The connection between spiritual archetype and somatic gesture reinforces samba’s capacity to channel ancestral wisdom through embodied ritual.

Among these deities, Exu (or Esu) holds a particularly potent role. As the messenger between worlds and guardian of the crossroads, Exu governs transformation, transition, and language (Kumari, 2020; Simas, 2023). Misrepresented in Western thought as malevolent, Exu is, in fact, a force of dynamism, communication, and balance. Kumari (2020) described Exu as the spirit who dispels fear, inviting practitioners into liminal states where psychological and cultural reconciliation may occur. Samba, like Exu, operates at the intersection of movement and meaning, guiding participants through pathways of renewal and release.

This journey into sacred practice parallels Correal’s (2003) reflections in *Finding Soul on the Path of Orisa*. As an initiated priestess, Correal described her encounters with Orisa spirituality in Nigeria and Brazil, advocating for introspection and relational reverence over rigid dogma. Her roadmap for spiritual connection aligns with samba’s ritual dynamics—both practices center on embodiment, community, and symbolic transformation. Correal’s (2003)

emphasis on dismantling misconceptions echoes broader efforts in the literature to reclaim Afro-Brazilian traditions from racial and religious mischaracterization, reinforcing the thesis that samba is a spiritually grounded healing system.

These sacred dimensions are further illuminated by historical scholarship. Ickes (2013) and Nascimento (2008) outlined the African matrices that shape Brazilian cultural identity, emphasizing that samba's rhythms and rituals are embedded in Pan-African struggle and spiritual continuity. Lopes and Simas (2015), Simas and Mussa (2010, 2022), Neto (2017), and Simas (2023) have all positioned samba as more than performance—it is an Afro-diasporic archive of resistance, rooted in the preservation of ancestral dignity amid social and economic inequality.

Within this framework, samba becomes a portal through which historical trauma, spiritual practice, and communal healing converge. Movements are not choreographed simply for celebration; they are invoked to communicate with the divine, honor lineage, and transform suffering into rhythm. For Afro-Brazilian and diasporic communities, samba offers a sacred choreography of survival, integrating music and memory into a ritualized language of self-possession, cultural pride, and psychosocial restoration.

Decolonizing Mental Health: Race, Cultural Narratives, and Healing Practices

This subsection advocated for decolonizing mental health services by acknowledging systemic inequities and integrating culturally grounded interventions that honor heritage, autonomy, and lived experience. As this dissertation frames SDMT within a model of therapeutic liberation, emerging scholarship highlights the need to shift psychological paradigms toward inclusivity, ancestral wisdom, and embodied healing.

Fanny Brewster's body of work offers foundational insights into how racial identity, cultural trauma, and intergenerational grief shape the psyche. In *The Racial Complex: A Jungian*

Perspective on Culture and Race, Brewster (2020) introduces the concept of the “racial complex,” a construct that traces the unconscious imprint of racialized experiences and their effects on behavior and internalized oppression. Her theory resonates with samba’s symbolic function: transmuting inherited wounds into rhythmic expression and cultural pride.

In *African Americans and Jungian Psychology: Leaving the Shadows*, Brewster (2017) critiqued the Eurocentric biases in depth psychology and emphasized African contributions to psychological knowledge. This reclamation parallels samba’s historical trajectory as an African-rooted tradition that resists erasure and asserts spiritual and communal agency. Brewster’s (2018) exploration of “archetypal grief” in *Archetypal Grief: Slavery’s Legacy of Intergenerational Child Loss* underscored the psychic endurance of enslaved ancestors, reinforcing samba’s role as a rhythm of survival and renewal.

In *Race and the Unconscious*, Brewster (2023) focused on archetypal African consciousness, highlighting storytelling and dreamwork as tools for psychological repair. Samba, similarly, functions as a form of unconscious dialogue, a ceremonial rhythm through which past, present, and future intersect, activating collective memory and facilitating spiritual restoration.

The decolonial framework of this dissertation is further supported by Bogado et al. (2023), whose study “Sob a Constelação da Umbigada no Samba de Roda [circle]” [Under the Constellation of the Navel in the Samba de Roda [circle]: Decolonial Images, the Crossing of Bridges Between Us] reinterpreted samba’s gestural language as ancestral communication and resistance. Samba de roda [circle] was framed as a liberatory force that transcends colonial dichotomies, positioning movement as a mode of historical reclamation and community resilience. Their concept of “ethical love,” a relational ethic embedded in samba practice,

emphasizes solidarity, presence, and mutual care, reinforcing the emotional depth of samba as a collective healing ritual (Bogado et al., 2023).

Global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the assassination of George Floyd marked a paradigm shift in mental health discourses (Mullan, 2023). Mullan (2023) situated these ruptures as catalysts for reimagining therapy itself. Her analysis of colonial legacies within psychological systems aligns with SDMT's imperative that therapy be politicized, culturally affirming, and rooted in ancestral knowledge. Mullan emphasized therapy as activism, urging practitioners to center liberation and systemic accountability. Within this framework, samba serves not only as expressive movement but as cultural refusal and a rhythm of resistance.

Bekteshi and Bellamy (2024) offered additional insights through their study on acculturative stress in Latinx immigrant populations. Bekteshi and Bellamy's (2024) emphasis on familismo and culturally embedded values reinforced the relevance of samba's spiritual and communal dimensions. Bekteshi and Bellamy (2024) affirmed that culturally responsive approaches, especially those grounded in embodied wisdom, can buffer psychological strain and foster emotional resilience.

Nagy et al. (2024) and Psychologs Magazine (2025) extended this line of inquiry, highlighting the psychological toll of immigration, trauma, and identity fragmentation. Nagy et al.'s (2024) research emphasized behavioral activation and narrative engagement as therapeutic strategies, while Psychologs Magazine (2025) underscored the role of social support and cultural integration in mitigating stress. These studies highlight the critical role of culturally rooted interventions, such as samba, in restoring coherence and connection.

These scholars provided a robust foundation for positioning samba as a therapeutic intervention that fuses cultural pride, rhythmic embodiment, and spiritual wisdom (Brewster, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2023; Mullan, 2023). SDMT becomes more than a clinical tool. It evolves into a transformative space where emotional and ancestral realities are ritually honored, re-signified, and rhythmically healed.

Summary

This literature review was guided by a heuristic inquiry framework rooted in qualitative methodology, which supports iterative, intuitive, and reflective processes for exploring deeply personal and culturally embedded phenomena (Hiles, 2001; Kleining & Witt, 2000; Maciel, 2004). Heuristic inquiry allowed for immersive engagement with samba's healing potential—an approach well-suited to exploring symbolic, embodied, and culturally nuanced practices. Jungian concepts of active imagination and individuation were woven into this framework to explore the unconscious dimensions of movement, rhythm, and transformation (Gjernes, 2002; Jung, 1997; McCabe, 2008; Schaverien, 2007). As rituals and symbolic acts formed the heart of Jung's (1940) individuation process, they naturally aligned with the heuristic cycles of reflection, discovery, and self-integration.

Challenges arose in striking a balance between methodological precision and heuristic fluidity. Reflexivity was crucial in avoiding the overshadowing of objective analysis (Mucchielli, 1991). While heuristic inquiry privileged lived experience and spontaneous insight, the study's integration of Jungian theory demanded careful interpretation of archetypal and symbolic elements. Yet this tension ultimately enriched the analysis, providing a holistic lens through which to examine samba's transformative influence.

Insights from Brewster (2017, 2018, 2020, 2023) anchored the study's exploration of racial identity and cultural trauma. Though samba was not Brewster's subject, her conception of the racial complex and archetypal grief provided a meaningful lens through which to examine how samba reclaims ancestral wisdom and facilitates healing. Samba's communal rhythm and symbolic gestures mirror the transformative principles found in Africanist depth psychology and storytelling.

Bogado et al. (2023) expanded this perspective through a decolonial interpretation of samba de roda [circle]. Their focus on the *umbigada*, navel-to-navel gesture, highlighted ancestral reconnection and collective identity formation through embodied expression. Samba was thus framed as a practice of "ethical love," emphasizing solidarity, resilience, and renewal. These insights situate samba as not only a cultural ritual but also a counter-narrative to colonial dislocation.

The religious dimensions of samba have been traced through historical scholarship on Afro-Brazilian traditions, particularly the Orixás (Correal, 2003; Verger, 1995). Deities such as Exu, symbolizing movement, transition, and communication, inform the energetic and symbolic language of samba. Invoking these spiritual archetypes through dance offers ritual pathways to personal and communal wholeness.

Complementary findings from dance movement therapy support the therapeutic dimensions of samba. Studies highlighted movement's ability to promote emotional regulation, social connection, and trauma recovery (Dasgupta, 2013; Hackney et al., 2024; Moe, 2014; Monteiro & Wall, 2011; Stupacher et al., 2017). These findings affirmed samba's role as both physical expression and psychological restoration, reinforcing its position within the healing arts.

Mercedes Baptista's legacy (Melgaço, 2007) further contextualized samba within Brazil's modern dance movement, spotlighting how African heritage was inscribed into choreography. Baptista's work validates the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian forms within formal and therapeutic contexts, challenging the exclusion of Black cultural knowledge from Brazil's institutional landscapes.

Despite increasing recognition of somatic therapies, Afro-Brazilian healing traditions, particularly those rooted in dance and ritual, remain significantly underrepresented in mainstream psychology (Jerrentrup, 2024; Margolis, 1992). The dominance of Western paradigms in therapeutic models often neglects the symbolic, spiritual, and communal frameworks that inform practices like samba. This gap obscures the transformative power of embodied, culturally grounded interventions and perpetuates a system that fails to reflect the lived experiences of diasporic and immigrant populations.

Additionally, while dance movement therapy literature affirms the psychological benefits of rhythm and movement, few studies explicitly engage with Afro-Brazilian modalities or explore their decolonial significance. The marginalization of Black Brazilian choreographers and community healers within academic discourse further emphasizes the need for more inclusive and culturally respectful research.

Studies on Brazilian immigrant experiences highlight the profound impact of cultural displacement, acculturative stress, and discrimination on mental health (Beserra, 2003; DeBiaggi, 2022; Margolis, 1992, 1994, 1998; Martes, 1999a; Moretto, 1991; Schwartz et al., 2010). Findings from Giosan et al. (2001) and Bekteshi and Bellamy (2024) demonstrate that culturally responsive interventions, especially those that honor ancestral values, are essential to psychological resilience. Research by Nagy et al. (2024) and Psychologs Magazine (2025)

further validated the importance of tailored mental health approaches—pointing to movement-based practices like samba as promising avenues for integration, expression, and community connection.

Samba's capacity to nurture joy, regulate emotion, and rebuild communal bonds makes it relevant not only for Brazilian populations but potentially adaptable for diverse immigrant communities seeking culturally congruent care. Although further exploration is required to assess its cross-cultural applicability, initial literature suggests samba's therapeutic qualities resonate across settings. In summary, Chapter 2 synthesized literature across psychology, dance therapy, cultural studies, immigrant health, and Afro-Brazilian spirituality to present samba as a powerful cultural healing system. The heuristic inquiry model—rooted in Jungian theory and decolonial praxis—served as an ideal framework for engaging samba's depth. While literature confirms samba's therapeutic and communal significance, gaps in mainstream psychology underscore the need for continued research into Afro-diasporic practices and their relevance to mental health. Building on these insights, Chapter 3: Research Design and Method details how this heuristic inquiry was structured to explore samba's fusion of spiritual wisdom, symbolic movement, and cultural identity in its transformative potential for both Brazilian and non-Brazilian populations.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

The purpose of this study, as outlined in Chapter 1, was to explore the integrative healing power of dance—specifically Brazilian samba—as it relates to the acculturation, assimilation, and individuation processes experienced by immigrant populations. By examining samba’s therapeutic potential within the context of dance/movement therapy, this study aimed to illuminate how a culturally grounded practice could offer mental health professionals a novel, embodied pathway for emotional healing, identity reconstruction, and spiritual reconnection. Rooted in qualitative inquiry, this research aimed to explore how samba fosters deeper connections between individuals, their communities, and their inner worlds.

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review that traced the cultural, historical, spiritual, and psychological dimensions of samba. This chapter builds upon that foundation by detailing the methodological framework that guided the study. The research design centers on Moustakas’s heuristic methodology, an approach chosen for its compatibility with the study’s emphasis on lived experience, personal reflection, and symbolic resonance. Heuristic inquiry enables the researcher to engage with the phenomenon—here, samba—not only analytically, but also experientially, drawing on intuitive insight, cultural immersion, and relational attunement. As Moustakas (1990) described, heuristic research unfolds through phases that mirror the turning of pages: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. These metaphorical pages are not merely structural; they are lived, felt, and embodied, reflecting the researcher’s evolving relationship with the phenomenon.

In this study, each chapter functions as a page in the broader narrative of discovery, with Chapter 3 serving as a methodological hinge between the philosophical foundations and the emergent findings. The researcher’s bilingual fluency and cultural familiarity supported a

dialogical process that was both ethically grounded and culturally resonant, allowing participants' voices to be heard in their own symbolic and linguistic registers (Bastos, 2021; Brisola & Cury, 2016). The pages of this inquiry are thus not static containers of data, but dynamic spaces of transformation, where rhythm, ritual, and reflection converge.

To support this framework, the chapter outlines five key methodological components:

1. **Heuristic Methodology:** A structured yet flexible model that prioritizes deep engagement, iterative reflection, and organic meaning-making. It is particularly suited to capturing the complex emotional and symbolic layers inherent in samba.
2. **Jungian Active Imagination and Individuation:** These depth psychological concepts inform the exploration of unconscious material and psychic integration through symbolic movement and ritual. They illuminate how samba enables participants to navigate inner tensions and reconstruct a coherent sense of self.
3. **Embodied Cognition and Phenomenology:** These interdisciplinary perspectives provide insight into how knowledge and emotional experience emerge through the body. Phenomenology is used to describe the lived experience of dancing samba, while embodied cognition explores how movement facilitates psychological insight.
4. **Triangulation of Data Sources:** This section describes how various forms of data—such as participant reflection, researcher immersion, and literature integration—were synthesized to ensure interpretive depth and analytic rigor.
5. **Cultural and Ethical Considerations:** Recognizing the study's focus on Afro-Brazilian traditions, this section addresses the ethical framework used to honor ancestral practices, navigate positionality, and maintain cultural sensitivity.

Rather than treating research design as a linear process of data collection, Chapter 3 conceptualizes it as a structured yet dynamic framework for inquiry. This framework mirrors the rhythmic and transformative qualities of samba itself, which has been described as a cultural and therapeutic force rooted in movement, ritual, and symbolic expression (Dotsenko, 2023; Moura, 2005). The design integrates multiple methodological lenses to support a holistic understanding of samba's psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. Drawing on bilingual proficiency and deep cultural insight, the researcher conducted interviews that were both methodologically sound and relationally attuned (Bastos, 2021; Brisola & Cury, 2016).

Research Questions

This qualitative study explored the therapeutic and integrative potential of Brazilian samba, with a particular focus on how the dance facilitates psychological, spiritual, and cultural healing among immigrant populations. The central purpose was to examine samba's role in the processes of acculturation, individuation, and emotional resilience, with an emphasis on its relatively unexplored application within dance/movement therapy. This inquiry sought to illuminate how samba—through its symbolic gestures, communal rhythm, and embodied wisdom—might offer mental health professionals a culturally grounded resource for fostering connection, expression, and integration.

Guided by a heuristic methodology and informed by Jungian theory, embodied cognition, and decolonial perspectives, the research was framed by the following overarching question:

What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?

From this core inquiry, three interrelated sub-questions emerged:

1. In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to explore archetypal energies, engage in active imagination, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self?
 - a. This question draws upon Jungian psychology's notion that healing and self-development arise through the integration of unconscious content into consciousness via symbolic and embodied expression (Jung, as cited in Chodorow, 1991; Singer, 1994). Samba's expressive choreography and ritualistic qualities provided a living canvas for exploring archetypal material and relational identity.
2. How does samba function as a bridge for immigrants navigating the complexities of acculturation and assimilation, helping them reclaim their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal contexts?
 - a. Research has shown that samba fosters a bicultural identity and emotional resilience, serving as both an anchor and a bridge for those balancing cultural preservation with integration (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Fedi et al., 2009).
3. What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system, and how does it address the collective wounds of oppression, discrimination, and displacement?
 - a. Rooted in Afro-Brazilian resistance, spirituality, and community rituals, samba embodies healing through rhythmic movement and symbolic connection. Its relevance within somatic psychology and dance/movement therapy suggests an expanded model of trauma recovery and resilience (Dasgupta, 2013; Hackney et al., 2024).

These questions evolved through the heuristic process described by Moustakas (1990), which includes six iterative stages: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. This study's creative phase was deeply shaped by collaborative projects, such as *Reborn in Samba: The Story of Aninha Malandro*, which provided a living embodiment of the inquiry and allowed for the integration of insights through narrative, movement, and reflection.

Although many discoveries emerged, a particularly meaningful outcome was the development of SDMT, a proposed therapeutic framework that translates cultural insights into clinical and communal applications. While the conceptual and practical foundations of SDMT are explored in detail in Appendix A, its inclusion in this study reflects the potential for samba to shape future culturally responsive therapeutic models.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design framed by Moustakas's (1990) heuristic inquiry model. The central aim, exploring the integrative healing power of samba within the context of acculturation, individuation, and cultural resilience, necessitated a methodological approach that could engage deeply with lived experience, symbolic expression, and embodied insight. As outlined in Chapter 1, this inquiry did not seek to measure or predict outcomes through statistical analysis, but to uncover meaning, essence, and therapeutic possibility within samba's expressive form. Chapter 2 reinforced this need by establishing a theoretical foundation drawn from depth psychology, Afro-Brazilian cultural history, dance movement therapy, and embodied cognition—fields that prioritize human complexity, relational processes, and experiential depth.

Heuristic inquiry was selected over other qualitative traditions, such as grounded theory or narrative analysis, because it allows for both structured exploration and intuitive engagement (Moustakas, 1990). It honors the researcher's personal experience as both instrument and participant in the inquiry, aligning closely with this study's roots in autobiographical practice, community immersion, and reflective dance pedagogy. Moustakas's (1990) seven foundational principles emphasize that human behavior and transformation emerge not from isolated components but from holistic, meaning-rich experience. These principles include:

- Focusing on the nature and essence of human experience
- Addressing experience as a whole
- Seeking meaning rather than causal explanation
- Gathering first-person accounts through conversation and reflection
- Treating experiential data as scientifically valid
- Formulating questions grounded in researcher's commitment
- Viewing experience and behavior as interdependent phenomena

The design unfolds through six distinct phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Each phase contributes to a deepened understanding of the topic, mirroring the rhythm and flow of samba itself. *Initial engagement* involves identifying a question rooted in personal significance. *Immersion* requires sustained attention to the phenomenon, while *incubation* allows unconscious processing. *Illumination* brings sudden insights, *explication* organizes and clarifies these insights, and *creative synthesis* presents the findings in a form that reflects the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018).

Complementing heuristic inquiry, phenomenology provided additional rigor in exploring the subjective and interpersonal qualities of samba, particularly as it is practiced and experienced by immigrants navigating cultural displacement and identity reconstruction. Sultan (2018), Douglass and Moustakas (1985), and Hiles (2001) support the view that heuristic inquiry and phenomenology converge meaningfully when examining body-based, emotionally charged practices such as dance. These approaches enabled both self-inquiry and intersubjective exploration, attuned to the therapeutic rhythm of samba and the archetypal dimensions present in Jungian depth psychology (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Hiles, 2001; Sultan, 2018).

Embodied cognition offered a critical lens for understanding how physical movement contributes to meaning-making, emotional integration, and cultural reconnection (Koch & Fuchs, 2011; Varela et al., 1991). Given samba's rhythmic complexity and its roots in collective memory, this perspective was indispensable to understanding how dance functions as both expression and transformation. Samba's gestures and choreography were treated not merely as physical sequences but as embodied symbols of resilience and self-integration, a conceptual link reinforced in Chapter 2's examination of ritual, identity, and healing (Dotsenko, 2023; Moura, 2005; Nogueira et al., 2016).

Jung's concept of active imagination refers to the intentional engagement with unconscious material through symbolic forms such as images, gestures, and inner dialogue (Singer, 1994). This process enables individuals to access deeper layers of emotion, archetypal meaning, and psychological insight by engaging with spontaneous expressions that emerge from the unconscious. Samba, with its improvisational gestures, rhythmic intensity, and ritualized structure, mirrors the dynamic of active imagination by allowing unconscious material to surface through embodied expression. As dancers move through samba's expressive vocabulary, they

often enter a state where personal and collective memories, emotional tensions, and symbolic motifs emerge organically through motion. This process reflects samba's role as both a cultural archive and a therapeutic ritual, where movement becomes a vehicle for emotional integration and symbolic transformation (Dotsenko, 2023; Moura, 2005; Nogueira et al., 2016; Simas & Mussa, 2010, 2022).

Simas's work emphasizes samba's deep connection to ancestral memory, Afro-Brazilian cosmologies, and street-based philosophies of resistance and joy. His analysis of samba de enredo and ritual gesture highlights how dance functions not only as performance but as a living archive of identity, struggle, and spiritual continuity (Simas, 2023). Within this framework, samba's choreography is treated not merely as a physical sequence but as an embodied symbol—an expressive language through which resilience, self-integration, and cultural belonging are enacted (Lopes & Simas, 2015).

In this study, samba functioned as a medium for dialogue between ego and unconscious, enabling participants to embody and transform emotional and archetypal content. This therapeutic movement process resonates with the illumination and synthesis phases of heuristic inquiry, where symbolic understanding and personal insight converge to reveal the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1990). By treating samba not only as a cultural performance but as a form of active imagination, the research illuminated how dance can serve as a pathway to psychological integration and healing (Chodorow, 1997; Moura, 2005; Simas & Mussa, 2022; Singer, 1994).

Ultimately, this research design was selected not only for its compatibility with qualitative inquiry but for its capacity to integrate heuristic methodology, phenomenological insight, embodied cognition, and active imagination into a spiritually and culturally attuned

framework. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on illuminating lived experience from within, offered a lens through which participants' symbolic, emotional, and relational landscapes could be explored with depth and nuance (van Manen, 1990). Heuristic inquiry, as articulated by Moustakas (1990), emphasizes the researcher's internal search and relational engagement, and supports triangulation through the integration of personal reflection, participant narratives, and creative synthesis. This convergence of data sources, field notes, ritual documentation, classroom experiences, and spontaneous movement allowed for a multifaceted understanding of samba as both subject and method. Embodied cognition further enriched this process by situating knowledge within lived, sensorimotor experience, affirming that meaning arises through bodily engagement with the world (Varela et al., 1991). This constellation of methodological lenses reflects the intentions articulated in Chapters 1 and 2: to explore samba's rhythmic language of healing, belonging, and symbolic reintegration through a research process that honors both analytical rigor and soulful resonance.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of a multicultural group of 30 individuals (4 Brazilians and 26 non-Brazilians) actively involved in samba communities across diverse geographic and cultural contexts. This sample size was guided by principles of theoretical sufficiency and information power, which suggest that the adequacy of a qualitative sample is determined not by numerical thresholds but by the richness, relevance, and diversity of the data it yields (Malterud et al., 2016). In heuristic and phenomenological traditions, the goal is not statistical generalization but the elicitation of deep, textured insights into lived experience (Moustakas, 1990; van Manen, 1990).

The inclusion of both Brazilian and non-Brazilian participants reflects a deliberate effort to explore samba as a transnational and culturally adaptive healing system. Multicultural qualitative research, particularly when anchored in constructivist and critical paradigms, benefits from diverse participant perspectives that illuminate how cultural practices are interpreted, embodied, and transformed across contexts (Ponterotto, 2010). This approach aligns with the American Psychological Association's Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality (APA, 2017), which advocates for methodological pluralism, cultural responsiveness, and contextual sensitivity in psychological research and practice. These guidelines emphasize the importance of recognizing identity as fluid and intersectional, and encourage researchers to engage with diverse communities through frameworks that honor lived experiences, cultural nuances, and systemic complexity.

Moreover, the sample size was sufficient to achieve thematic saturation, the point at which additional data no longer yield novel insights but instead reinforce emergent patterns (Guest et al., 2006). The diversity within the sample—spanning nationality, race, gender, and geographic location—enhanced the study's capacity to trace symbolic, relational, and rhythmic dimensions of samba across diasporic and local expressions.

Purposive sampling was selected as the most appropriate strategy for this heuristic inquiry. This deliberate, criterion-based method enabled the recruitment of participants whose lived engagement with samba reflected its healing, expressive, and identity-affirming dimensions. In contrast to probability-based sampling, purposive sampling aligns with qualitative traditions by privileging depth, relevance, and experiential richness over statistical generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Patton, 2015). Its use reinforced the core intention of heuristic research: to uncover layered insights through dialogical engagement and reflective

immersion (Moustakas, 1990). Phenomenological principles further supported this approach by emphasizing the need to access and describe lived experiences as they are subjectively and relationally encountered (van Manen, 1990). Triangulation of data sources, including participant narratives, field notes, personal reflections, and symbolic artifacts, enhanced the credibility and complexity of the findings, allowing for convergence across multiple experiential registers (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Denzin, 1978).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the study's thematic focus. Inclusion criteria required individuals to:

- Be between 18 and 65 years old
- Have experience or interest in samba dancing
- Speak Portuguese or English fluently
- Provide verbal informed consent

Exclusion criteria included:

- Being under 18 or over 65
- Lacking samba experience
- Inability to communicate in Portuguese or English

Thirty participants were recruited, ensuring a balance between idiographic depth and thematic saturation. Heuristic inquiry permits flexible sample sizes; Moustakas (1990) noted that even a single participant may suffice when internal reflection is central. Later scholars, such as Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010), affirmed that larger samples remain valid when the focus is on rich personal narratives and meaning-making.

This sample size supported relational depth and symbolic diversity, enabling the emergence of shared motifs while preserving individual nuance. The inclusion of Portuguese-

speaking participants added cultural authenticity, capturing samba's metaphorical language, spiritual lexicon, and Afro-Brazilian roots. Bilingual engagement facilitated trust, enriched expression, and deepened the psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of the data.

As Douglass and Moustakas (1985) emphasized, the heuristic researcher is a co-participant in the discovery process. My dual role as practitioner and researcher fostered embodied dialogue and relational immersion, consistent with Sultan's (2018) emphasis on collaborative meaning-making. This sampling approach upheld the core values of heuristic methodology, empathy, immersion, and creative synthesis, while honoring samba's multidimensional healing potential across diverse cultural contexts.

Procedures

This inquiry unfolded within the framework of heuristic methodology (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990), an approach grounded in the researcher's direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon. Heuristic research is an internal search to know, requiring total immersion, self-dialogue, and openness to discovery (Mihalache, 2019; Sela-Smith, 2002). In this tradition, the researcher is both witness and participant, allowing meaning to emerge through lived engagement. As Sultan (2018) affirms, heuristic inquiry is not a rigid sequence but a responsive, evolving process, where personal and cultural resonance are integral to the research act. The following description presents the movement of this study through the six interrelated phases of heuristic research.

Initial Engagement

The study began with a question that had been pulsing in my body long before it took academic form: What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing? My relationship with samba, as a cultural

inheritance, a site of ancestral memory, and a living embodied practice, was the ground from which the question emerged. This early phase reflected Moustakas's (1990) insistence on starting with a personally compelling and persistently lived question, one that calls the researcher into sustained inquiry. Journaling, self-dialogue, and moments of deep reflection clarified the contours of the question, as Maciel (2004) describes in the Brazilian application of the heuristic method. I entered the roda [circle] of research with reverence for its unpredictability and transformative potential (Moura, 2005).

Immersion

Immersion was a full-bodied living with the question, consistent with the methodological emphasis on sustained contact and openness to the phenomenon (Brisola & Cury, 2016; Moustakas, 1990). I moved through samba communities, rehearsals, carnival preparations, and intimate rodas [circle], paying attention to every gesture, rhythm, and exchange. My own dance practice became an extension of the inquiry, as the beat of the surdo and the sway of the hips worked like a drumbeat of knowing. Field notes, fragments of conversation, dreams, and symbolic images were preserved in a reflexive journal. I also engaged with scholarly and cultural literature on samba, embodiment, and depth psychology, weaving together the cultural and theoretical strands that would later inform analysis.

Incubation

Although the research journey spanned a long and complex arc, my passion and curiosity never waned. Even as life shifted dramatically—marked most profoundly by the death of my mother midway through the inquiry—I stayed tethered to the work by an inner rhythm that refused to quiet. The loss reshaped my world, yet the question at the heart of the research continued to pulse within me, insistent and alive.

Rather than disengage entirely, I entered a phase of incubation—not as withdrawal, but as a deepening. As Moustakas (1990) and Mihalache (2019) describe, incubation allows the inquiry to rest and evolve beneath the surface of awareness, like the pause before the next beat. During this time, I turned toward practices that honored both my grief and my enduring connection to samba. I journaled extensively, engaged in active imagination through drawing and painting, and continued to analyze symbolic material that emerged through dreams, movement, and music. I walked along the ocean, meditated, and began developing the concept for a samba congress—an embodied extension of the research itself.

These activities were not distractions; they were expressions of the same inquiry, refracted through different modalities. As Sela-Smith (2002) notes, incubation requires faith in the organic unfolding of meaning, without forcing premature closure. I trusted that insight would arrive in its own time, and that the rhythms of samba, its cycles of tension and release, rupture and return, would guide me back into the work with greater depth and clarity.

Illumination

Throughout the incubation phase, my engagement with samba remained active and deeply embodied. I continued to participate in rehearsals, observe performances, and immerse myself in the communal rhythms that had long animated my inquiry. My attention became increasingly attuned to the subtleties of bodily expression—how people moved, reacted, engaged, and held themselves in posture and gesture. I found myself growing more curious with each encounter, drawn to the affective textures and symbolic resonances embedded in movement.

This heightened sensitivity gave rise to moments of illumination—sudden flashes of clarity in which previously latent meanings surfaced into conscious awareness. As Moustakas

(1990) describes, illumination is often accompanied by a felt sense of recognition, a knowing that transcends rational analysis. One such moment came with visceral force: my fall from a float during Carnival. The impact was both literal and symbolic—a rupture that shook me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In the days that followed, I dreamed of standing in a circle of drummers whose rhythms matched the beat of my own heart. These experiences brought into focus thematic patterns that had been quietly forming throughout the immersion and incubation process.

I responded by capturing these insights through immediate notes, sketches, and audio reflections, preserving their rawness and vitality. Illumination, in this context, was not a singular event but a rhythmic unfolding, shaped by my sustained curiosity, creative engagement, and embodied presence within the samba community.

The accident marked a threshold. In its aftermath, I experienced a profound shift: a sharpened sense of urgency and a visceral awareness that time was finite, and the work needed to be completed. What had once been a quiet pulse became a call to action. I knew, with clarity and conviction, that it was time to return to the research with full energy. The rhythms that had been incubating within me now demanded articulation.

Explication

Explication was the phase of careful and sustained examination, gathering the rhythms, words, and silences into coherent patterns. I revisited transcripts, journals, and field notes, moving back and forth between the individual narratives and the collective whole, as one might step in and out of the roda [circle] to shift perspective. Thematic coding served as a flexible guide, supporting both structured analysis and openness to nuance (Moustakas, 1990; Tudor,

2022). This process required attentiveness to subtle qualities of meaning, ensuring that the embodied texture of experience remained intact.

Creative Synthesis

The creative synthesis wove together the thematic understandings into a narrative-textual expression that sought to evoke—not merely summarize—the phenomenon. Voices of participants, my own embodied reflections, and symbolic interpretations flowed together like instruments in a bateria. This integrative form, in line with Sultan's (2018) and Djuraskovic and Arthur's (2010) approaches, aimed to honor both individuality and collective resonance, preserving the living quality of samba as a cultural healing system where rhythm becomes medicine, movement becomes memory, and the roda becomes a space of restoration.

It was within this integrative phase that *Reborn in Samba: The Story of Aninha Malandro* emerged, a creative work born from the convergence of personal rupture, communal rhythm, and symbolic insight. Conceived in the wake of my accident and deepened through my ongoing involvement with samba, the piece became a vessel for transformation. Through narrative, movement, and poetic embodiment, it gave form to the archetypal journey I had been living: descent, illumination, and rebirth.

Reborn in Samba is not merely autobiographical; it is a homage to the healing pulse of samba itself. The character of Aninha Malandro carries the echoes of many voices, mine, my participants', and the ancestral rhythms that shaped us. Her story unfolds in the roda, where vulnerability meets vitality, and where the beat of the surdo becomes a heartbeat of resilience. In this way, the synthesis became not only a methodological culmination but a ritual offering, an act of reverence for samba as a multidimensional healing system.

Participant Engagement

Participants were invited through direct outreach to individuals with substantial, long-term engagement in samba, representing varied cultural and geographical backgrounds. Each participant was interviewed in one or more semi-structured interviews, conducted either in person or online. The nine open-ended interview questions were designed to invite reflection, memory, and sensory detail, while leaving room for improvisation, just as samba itself allows space for personal expression within shared rhythm.

To maintain ethical integrity, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, a common practice in qualitative inquiry (Brisola & Cury, 2016). In Chapter 4, participants' accounts are integrated into a thematic–narrative presentation drawn from interview data, field notes, and contextual observations, crafted to preserve individuality while maintaining confidentiality. As Sultan (2018) notes, rich narrative descriptions can function as a holistic depiction, integrating descriptive details with interpretive insights. Direct excerpts from interviews are woven throughout the findings, allowing participants' own words to illuminate the essence of their experiences while situating them within the broader thematic synthesis.

Researcher Self-Involvement and Reflexivity

Heuristic inquiry positions the researcher's own experience as a primary source of knowledge (Brisola & Cury, 2016; Moustakas, 1990). My reflexive practice included ongoing journaling, self-dialogue, and consultation with mentors, enabling me to recognize when my perspective enriched the inquiry and when it risked narrowing the interpretive field. This discipline aligns with Sela-Smith's (2002) and Tudor's (2022) emphasis on self-awareness as a safeguard for methodological integrity.

Chronological Flow of the Inquiry

Although presented here in phases, the actual research moved in overlapping rhythms. Immersion and incubation often interwove; illumination arrived in multiple waves; and explication was revisited whenever new insights emerged. The process, like samba itself, was responsive to the moment—alive, improvisational, and shaped by the interplay of structure and spontaneity (Sultan, 2018).

Validity

Validity in Heuristic Methodology

In heuristic inquiry, validity is understood as trustworthiness that emerges from disciplined self-reflection, sustained engagement with the phenomenon, and transparent articulation of the research process (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002; Sultan, 2018). Rather than striving for objectivity through detachment, heuristic research achieves integrity by demonstrating openness, rigor, and congruence between method and lived experience (Mihalache, 2019). This section outlines how credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were upheld in the present study while honoring the subjectivity and cultural depth of embodied inquiry.

Credibility

Credibility was cultivated through prolonged and immersive engagement with samba, both as a practitioner and as a researcher. This dual role positioned me as what Sela-Smith (2002) describes as a living instrument, attuned to verbal accounts as well as emotional, symbolic, and somatic expressions. My teaching, performance, and ritual practice in samba created an authentic connection to the cultural and embodied contexts of participants' experiences. In alignment with Moustakas's (1990) emphasis on preserving the integrity of

participants' meanings, member checking was employed: interview transcripts and thematic interpretations were shared with participants to confirm accuracy and respectful representation.

Dependability

Dependability was reinforced through systematic documentation of each stage of the research process, including recruitment, interviews, thematic analysis, and interpretive synthesis (Sultan, 2018). The study followed Moustakas's (1990) six phases—initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis—while remaining responsive to the emergent nature of heuristic work. A reflexive journal provided an ongoing record of methodological decisions, evolving insights, and emotional responses, echoing Brisola and Cury's (2016) assertion that the researcher's evolving perspective is itself a valuable research instrument.

Confirmability

Confirmability was supported through methodological triangulation and sustained reflexivity. Data were drawn from participant interviews, my own embodied practice of samba, and cultural-historical literature, creating multiple avenues for convergence and thematic resonance (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010). Interpretations were informed by Jungian psychology and embodied cognition, allowing personal experiences to be situated within collective cultural processes.

Reflexivity, central to heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002), was maintained through self-dialogue, journaling, and periodic consultation with mentors. Active imagination techniques further deepened analysis, illuminating archetypal patterns and symbolic meaning within both participant narratives and my own lived experience.

Transferability

While heuristic inquiry emphasizes idiographic depth over generalization, transferability was addressed through rich, thick description (Sultan, 2018) of participant narratives and cultural contexts. These accounts highlight the nuanced intersections of samba, spirituality, immigration, and identity, enabling readers to determine relevance to other contexts. Including both Brazilian and non-Brazilian participants revealed samba's resonance across diverse cultural and geographical settings. Although rooted in personal and cultural specificity, the themes of healing, resilience, and symbolic self-expression may inform practice in dance/movement therapy, cultural studies, and community healing initiatives.

Balancing Immersion and Critical Distance

One challenge to validity in heuristic work is the potential for overidentification with participants. Sela-Smith (2002) cautions that deep resonance, while central to the method, can blur distinctions between the researcher's inner experience and the voices of participants. To address this, I engaged in iterative self-inquiry, noting when my interpretations might overshadow participant perspectives, and used structured thematic analysis to ensure findings emerged authentically from the interplay of subjective immersion and disciplined analysis.

Overall Trustworthiness

Throughout all phases, trustworthiness was reinforced through rigorous reflexivity, collaborative validation, and cultural sensitivity. The heuristic framework, enriched by active imagination, embodied practice, and cultural-historical engagement, offered a robust structure for exploring samba as a form of personal transformation and cultural healing. These measures upheld methodological integrity while honoring the complexity, symbolism, and emotional richness of each participant's journey.

Instrumentation

In this qualitative heuristic study, the primary data collection instrument was a researcher-developed, semi-structured interview protocol composed of nine open-ended questions. This tool was designed specifically to align with the study's purpose, as outlined in Chapter 1, and the conceptual foundations discussed in Chapter 2. It invited participants into a reflective dialogue about their lived experiences with samba, with questions centering on themes of personal transformation, cultural identity, emotional well-being, and spiritual connection. The open-ended format promoted narrative depth while remaining flexible enough to honor the relational and emergent nature of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990).

The structure and progression of the interview questions allowed participants to engage organically with their stories, supporting the study's overarching inquiry into samba as a cultural healing system. The questions included:

1. A developmental anchor: "How old are you?"
2. Personal origin story: "Can you tell me how and when samba came into your life?"
3. Transformative significance: "What is the significance of samba in your life?"
4. Personal growth: "How do you think samba has contributed to your personal growth?"
5. Mind-body-spirit integration: "Have you ever resorted to samba to balance your mind-body and spirit? When and how?"
6. Cultural identity: "Is samba connected to your identity?"
7. Life integration: "Do you believe that samba has any important role in your life? If so, what is that role?"
8. Healing narrative: "Do you believe in the healing power of samba? Why?"

9. Ethical consent: “Do you give permission to use your story in my research?”

These questions were designed to foster nuanced and emotionally resonant dialogue, allowing participants to make sense of their experiences in relation to the study’s core themes: individuation, acculturation, and cultural healing. They also supported iterative discovery—allowing themes to emerge naturally through embodied memory and personal insight, central to heuristic research.

As the researcher, I engaged with the participants not as a neutral observer but as a co-participant in the heuristic journey. My lived experience with samba and shared cultural background provided critical resonance throughout the data collection process. This relational stance supported trust-building and deepened participant reflections.

To mitigate potential bias and preserve integrity, several strategies were employed:

- **Reflexivity:** I maintained a reflexive journal to document my emotional responses, evolving interpretations, and potential influences on the data.

- **Participant Validation:** Member checking was used to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and thematic synthesis.

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Interview language and cultural framing were adapted to meet participants’ linguistic and experiential backgrounds, particularly for Portuguese-speaking individuals.

- **Heuristic Transparency:** Personal disclosures and analytical notes were recorded to ensure that the findings reflected both individual and collective meaning-making processes.

The semi-structured interview protocol proved to be a flexible and culturally responsive tool, facilitating depth, connection, and authenticity in the data collection process. Anchored in

heuristic and phenomenological principles, it supported both individual insight and collective exploration of samba's transformative dimensions.

Data Processing

The analysis of qualitative data in this study followed the heuristic methodology articulated by Moustakas (1990), which unfolds through six interrelated phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. These stages provided an iterative framework for investigating samba as a cultural healing system and a vehicle for personal transformation. This approach was chosen for its compatibility with embodied practices, symbolic exploration, and psychological depth—all of which are essential to the aims and conceptual grounding outlined in Chapters 1 and 2.

Consistent with the relational and reflexive stance described in the Procedures and Instrumentation sections, data processing was conducted as an active interplay between participant narratives, my own embodied engagement with samba, and theoretical reflection. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was employed to manage and organize the diverse sources of data, including interview transcripts, field notes, observation summaries, and reflexive journal entries. All data were uploaded, cataloged by participant, and coded according to both emergent and theoretically informed categories. This system facilitated the systematic tracking of recurring patterns, such as identity reconstruction, emotional release, spiritual alignment, and cultural reconnection, across cases.

NVivo's capacity to integrate textual and visual materials also proved essential. Alongside interview transcripts, I uploaded notes from samba classes, event observations, and symbolic reflections drawn from active imagination work. Research memos captured interpretive

developments throughout the heuristic phases, serving as a bridge between raw data and conceptual synthesis.

Initial engagement began with framing the central research question through both scholarly and personal lenses. My positionality as a dancer, immigrant, and psychotherapist informed early reflections, anchoring samba within broader contexts of healing, cultural belonging, and archetypal movement. These initial self-inquiries were recorded in my reflexive journal and later used to sensitize the coding process to the study's psychological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.

During the Immersion phase, I maintained sustained contact with the phenomenon through semi-structured interviews, participant observations at samba events, and daily heuristic journaling. This multilayered engagement deepened participants' attunement to the rhythms, gestures, and symbolic language of samba. NVivo supported the immersion process by enabling line-by-line coding of transcripts and immediate linkage to relevant journal entries or field notes, thereby maintaining an integrated analytic record.

The Incubation phase required intentional distance from the data to allow unconscious processing to contribute to meaning-making. This was complemented by the Illumination phase, in which new insights emerged—often during movement practice, meditative reflection, or review of visual documentation. During this period, patterns began to coalesce around samba's capacity to integrate mind, body, and spirit, as well as its role in reclaiming fragmented aspects of identity. NVivo's visualization tools facilitated thematic mapping, helping to reveal intersections between participant experiences and symbolic motifs.

During Explication, themes were refined into coherent categories grounded in both participant accounts and theoretical constructs from depth psychology, embodied cognition, and

cultural studies. Categories such as individuation through movement, emotional regulation through rhythm, and ritualized cultural reconnection were supported by representative quotes and reflexive memos, ensuring analytic transparency.

The Creative Synthesis phase wove together these findings into a holistic narrative that honored the complexity, cultural depth, and emotional resonance of samba. Informed by the Reborn in Samba project and the emergent framework of SMDT, outlined in Appendix A, this synthesis positioned samba not merely as a dance form but as a living, healing system rooted in rhythm, ritual, and relationality. Textual, symbolic, and visual elements were integrated to reflect both individual and communal dimensions of transformation. The resulting interpretations preserved the uniqueness of participant voices while illuminating shared patterns across experiences. Photographic documentation of samba classes and symbolic imagery from active imagination sessions, included in Appendix B, further support this synthesis and evoke the embodied essence of the phenomenon.

Through these interconnected phases, data processing in this study maintained fidelity to heuristic principles, upheld the trustworthiness strategies outlined in the Validity section, and preserved the cultural and ethical commitments described earlier. The process was not linear, but somewhat cyclical and integrative, ensuring that each analytic movement deepened understanding while remaining anchored in both participant narratives and the lived reality of samba as a cultural healing practice.

Assumptions

Several foundational assumptions guided the implementation and interpretation of this qualitative heuristic study. These assumptions reflect elements that could not be directly verified

but were necessary for proceeding with the inquiry, particularly given the study's reliance on narrative, symbolic, and embodied data (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002).

Participant Honesty and Authenticity

It was assumed that all participants responded to interview questions truthfully and with emotional authenticity. Because the thematic findings were grounded in first-person reflections on samba's psychological, cultural, and spiritual impact, the accuracy and richness of the analysis depended on participants' openness and willingness to share their lived experiences. Without the possibility of external verification of subjective accounts, this assumption was essential to the credibility and interpretive value of the study (Sultan, 2018).

Suitability of Heuristic Inquiry as Methodology

It was assumed that heuristic inquiry provided the most appropriate methodological framework for this investigation. Heuristic methodology emphasizes reflexivity, intuitive engagement, and immersion—qualities well-suited to exploring the personal, symbolic, and cultural dimensions of samba as a healing practice (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Moustakas, 1990). As outlined in Chapter 1 and supported by the literature review in Chapter 2, the method's capacity to integrate the researcher's lived experience with participants' narratives was considered essential for addressing the research questions.

Samba as a Therapeutic and Integrative Practice

It was assumed that samba, regardless of regional variation or stylistic interpretation, possesses qualities conducive to psychological integration, spiritual connection, and emotional well-being. While participants' experiences varied, this assumption framed samba as a culturally embedded ritual capable of fostering self-expression, resilience, and healing. Scholarship on

samba's historical roots in resistance, identity affirmation, and communal spirituality supports this view (Browning, 1995; Sandroni, 2001).

Embodied Expression as a Source of Psychological Meaning

It was assumed that samba's gestures, rhythms, and communal interactions carry psychological and symbolic significance, even when meaning was not verbally articulated. This assumption is consistent with embodied cognition and dance/movement therapy theory, which views the body as a primary site of emotional communication, memory, and transformation (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011; Snowber, 2012). This perspective justified the inclusion of somatic interpretation and visual documentation in the analytic process.

Transferability of Emergent Themes Beyond Samba

While this study focused on samba, it was assumed that emergent themes, such as healing through movement, identity reconstruction, and ritualized community engagement, might have applicability in broader cultural and therapeutic contexts. This assumption was based on the universality of embodied practices and the shared human search for meaning, resilience, and belonging (Csordas, 1999).

These assumptions provided a conceptual foundation for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. While they acknowledge inherent methodological limitations, they also ensured that the inquiry remained holistic, culturally attuned, and reflective of samba's multifaceted role in healing and transformation.

Limitations

While this dissertation offers a rich and in-depth exploration of samba's transformative role through heuristic inquiry, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the

findings and frame their interpretation. These limitations arise from both factors outside the researcher's control and methodological features inherent to qualitative, heuristic research.

Researcher Subjectivity and Immersive Involvement

A defining characteristic of heuristic methodology is the researcher's sustained personal engagement with the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1990). My positionality as both a samba practitioner and psychotherapist was instrumental in accessing the cultural, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of samba. However, this depth of involvement carries the risk of subjective bias. Despite the systematic use of reflexive journaling, self-interrogation, and transparency in documenting analytic decisions, the possibility of over-identification with participants' narratives remains. As Sela-Smith (2002) observes, heuristic research requires an ongoing balance between empathic immersion and analytic distance—an inherently complex task in studies of embodied, relational practice.

Somatic Transference and Relational Dynamics

Heuristic inquiry is grounded in authentic relational engagement, which may evoke phenomena such as somatic transference and countertransference (Dosmantes-Beaudry, 2007). During interviews and shared samba activities, emotional and bodily responses emerged in both the researcher and participants that may have influenced thematic interpretation. While these dynamics enriched the study's depth and authenticity, they also introduced variables that cannot be fully isolated or controlled within qualitative analysis. Acknowledging these relational processes is essential to understanding the co-constructed nature of the findings.

Cultural Specificity and Limited Generalizability

The study's focus on samba as an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice situates it within a specific historical, spiritual, and social context. Although universal themes—such as healing,

resilience, and identity reconstruction—emerged across participant narratives, the transferability of these findings to other cultural settings is necessarily limited. As Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010) note, qualitative research often reflects localized realities that may not generalize across contexts without adaptation. Further comparative and cross-cultural studies would be required to extend the applicability of these findings.

Sampling Constraints and Diversity of Experience

While this study sought to include participants from varied backgrounds, the sample does not capture the full spectrum of samba practitioners and traditions. As qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, perspectives from rural samba communities, marginalized urban dancers, or practitioners entirely outside Brazil may be underrepresented. This limitation reflects the tension between achieving thematic richness and ensuring comprehensive representation (Patton, 2015).

Scope of Generalization in Heuristic Inquiry

By design, heuristic inquiry privileges idiographic depth and the uniqueness of individual meaning-making over statistical generalization (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018). The emergent themes—such as emotional healing, identity reconstruction, spiritual engagement, somatic reclamation, collective attunement, archetypal activation, and creative transformation and symbolic synthesis—are embedded in specific relational, cultural, and temporal contexts. While these findings contribute valuable insights to dance/movement therapy, cultural studies, and decolonial approaches to mental health, they should not be interpreted as universally predictive or representative.

To address these limitations, several intentional safeguards were integrated into every stage of the research process. Reflexivity was employed not merely as a methodological

requirement but as a sustained practice of self-examination, enabling me to critically monitor how my positionality, emotional responses, and embodied experiences with samba might shape the collection, interpretation, and representation of data. This reflexive stance was supported through consistent journaling, analytic memo writing, and deliberate revisiting of earlier interpretations to check for bias or over-identification. Member checking was conducted to ensure that participants could review and refine thematic interpretations, thereby safeguarding the accuracy and integrity of their narratives. Cultural specificity was approached as both a methodological strength and an ethical responsibility, grounding the findings in the authentic historical, spiritual, and social context of samba while remaining attentive to their potential cross-cultural resonances. These safeguards upheld the trustworthiness of the study while honoring the depth, complexity, and relational nature of heuristic inquiry.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework, grounded in Moustakas's heuristic inquiry and informed by Jungian depth psychology. Thirty participants contributed rich narratives through interviews, observation, and journaling. Credibility was maintained through reflexivity, cultural sensitivity, and systematic analysis. Chapter 4 now presents the findings, organized thematically to show how samba fosters individuation, cultural navigation, healing, and collective transformation.

Chapter 4: Findings

Building on the theoretical and historical foundations laid in Chapter 3, which traced samba's emergence as a multidimensional healing system rooted in Afro-Brazilian resistance, ritual, and cultural continuity, this chapter turned toward the lived experiences of participants. Here, samba was not only analyzed but felt, through narrative, movement, and memory. Chapter 4 presents the thematic synthesis of interviews, field notes, and symbolic motifs, revealing how practitioners engage with samba as a site of embodied belonging, ancestral connection, and personal transformation. The analysis followed a thematic–narrative presentation, integrating participant accounts with the emergent themes to illuminate samba's role as a multidimensional healing system. The chapter foregrounded participant voices, weaving their stories into a rhythmic tapestry that honors both individual journeys and collective resonance.

Samba is more than a musical genre or a form of dance; it is a living cultural expression born from the resilience, creativity, and spiritual traditions of Afro-Brazilian communities (Browning, 1995; Simas, 2023). Its roots stretch to West and Central African rhythms brought to Brazil through the transatlantic slave trade, where they merged with Indigenous and Portuguese influences to form a distinctly Brazilian cultural identity (DaMatta, 1991; Margolis, 2013). Samba emerged as both a survival strategy and a celebration, embodying the capacity of marginalized communities to transform oppression into art, solidarity, and joy (Browning, 1995).

For Brazilians, samba represents a layered inheritance: a link to ancestral traditions, a soundtrack to social gatherings, a unifying presence in Carnival processions, and a vehicle for political resistance (Browning, 1995; DaMatta, 1991). In its many forms, from the intimate *roda de samba* to the spectacle of the samba school parade, it carries the rhythms of history and the symbols of cultural sovereignty (Simas, 2023). These expressions are not merely performative;

they are acts of remembrance and reclamation, where music becomes a medium for asserting identity and resisting erasure (Margolis, 2013).

For non-Brazilian practitioners, samba often arrives as both an invitation and a revelation. Some encounter it through travel, music, or dance classes, drawn by its aesthetic vibrancy and rhythmic complexity (Margolis, 2013). Others discover samba as a transformative embodiment practice that connects them to deeper aspects of self, community, and cultural awareness (Browning, 1995; Simas, 2023). While the meanings vary, a consistent theme emerges: samba is experienced as a form of embodied belonging, a space where personal and collective identities meet in rhythm and movement (DaMatta, 1991).

This chapter presents the study's findings, organized directly around the central research question and its three sub-questions. Each participant was asked to respond to a nine-question interview protocol designed to capture their experiences of samba in relation to psychological, spiritual, and cultural healing. The presentation of findings builds on these foundations and prepares the ground for the interpretive discussion in Chapter 5. The data are presented by restating each question, summarizing participant responses, identifying themes, and supporting the analysis with participant excerpts.

Setting

Interviews took place individually—either in person at the Brasil Brasil Cultural Center in Los Angeles, a community hub dedicated to Afro-Brazilian arts, or via private Zoom sessions. The Center granted permission to be named in this dissertation; however, to safeguard privacy, no details of class schedules, specific performance groups, or identifiable events are disclosed.

Demographics

Of the thirty participants, only four were Brazilian, while twenty-six were non-Brazilian, representing a wide range of cultural backgrounds, including North American, European, Asian, and African diasporas. This distribution provided a unique balance of insider perspectives, rooted in lived Brazilian cultural heritage, and outsider perspectives, shaped by intercultural encounters with samba. The diversity within and across these groups enriched the thematic findings, revealing how samba resonates across boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and migration history.

Participants represented diverse cultural backgrounds, including Brazilian migrants, North American practitioners, and individuals from Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. This range provided insights into samba's role as both a cultural anchor for Brazilians and a transformative discovery for non-Brazilian participants. Ages ranged from early adulthood to late middle age, and participants included dancers, musicians, and community members who encountered samba in various settings such as classes, rodas [circles], and cultural festivals.

Results

This section presents the findings in direct response to the central research question and its sub-questions, drawing upon participant narratives, researcher reflexivity, and observational field notes. Although distinct themes emerged from the data, their recurrence across multiple prompts and analytic layers suggests a high degree of thematic interconnection. Rather than appearing in isolation, these themes resurfaced throughout the inquiry, indicating that participants' experiences were multidimensional and relationally embedded.

The repetition and overlap of key motifs, such as emotional restoration, identity reconstruction, spiritual engagement, and embodied transformation, demonstrate the complex and entangled nature of the phenomena under study. Their emergence across varied contexts

reflects the complexity of lived experience and underscores the symbolic and systemic coherence of samba as a healing modality.

The organization of this section is informed by the principles of heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990), which privileges the integrity of individual accounts while facilitating the movement toward composite depiction and creative synthesis. Each subsection integrates thematic findings with illustrative excerpts and concludes with a structured summary, thereby maintaining fidelity to both the particular and the universal dimensions of the research.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing as a pathway to personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing. Using a heuristic methodology, the research sought to illuminate how samba functions as a cultural healing system that integrates body, mind, and spirit through rhythm, memory, and relational practice.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The study was guided by the following overarching research question and three sub-questions:

Central Research Question: What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?

Sub-question One: In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to explore archetypal energies, engage in active imagination, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self?

Sub-question Two: How does samba function as a bridge for immigrants navigating the complexities of acculturation and assimilation, helping them reclaim their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal contexts?

Sub-question Three: What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system, and how does it address the collective wounds of oppression, discrimination, and displacement?

In alignment with the heuristic methodology detailed in Chapter 3, the following section presents the findings in two interrelated phases: Phase One, Individual Depictions, and Phase Two, Composite Understanding. This structure facilitates a systematic response to the central research question and its sub-questions, while honoring both the particularity of lived experience and the emergence of shared meaning.

Phase One foregrounds selected participant narratives, preserving the integrity and nuance of individual accounts. These depictions serve as textured responses to the guiding seven questions, offering insight into the symbolic, relational, and embodied dimensions of the phenomena under study. Phase Two synthesizes these accounts into thematic constellations, identifying patterns that recur across interviews, researcher reflections, and field observations. The recurrence of themes across multiple questions underscores their interconnectedness and suggests a dynamic interplay between personal and collective processes.

This movement between individual expression and thematic integration reflects the core heuristic processes of immersion and indwelling (Moustakas, 1990), enabling the researcher to engage deeply with the data while facilitating the emergence of coherent, multidimensional insights. The section begins with contextual grounding through an overview of the setting and participant demographics, then transitions into a structured presentation of findings. These

findings culminate in nine interrelated themes: emotional healing, identity reconstruction, spiritual engagement, somatic reclamation, collective attunement, archetypal activation, creative transformation and symbolic synthesis, cultural continuity for Brazilian participants, and intercultural belonging for non-Brazilian participants. Their recurrence across individual narratives and analytic layers underscores the symbolic and relational complexity of the phenomenon under study. The section concludes with a summary that establishes a conceptual bridge toward the interpretive analysis in Chapter 5.

Central Research Question

What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?

Findings

Participants agreed that samba provided psychological relief, spiritual connection, and collective renewal. Responses highlighted samba as a practice that releases stress, opens access to deeper aspects of the self, and fosters a sense of belonging within a supportive community. Several participants explicitly noted how samba shifted their mental states, describing feelings of joy, catharsis, and liberation that extended beyond the dance floor. Others connected these shifts to broader life experiences, noting that samba helped them regulate anxiety, cultivate resilience, and experience themselves as part of something greater.

Themes

Emotional Healing. Participants frequently described samba as a form of movement medicine, regulating emotions and providing a space for grief, joy, and release. One explained arriving with “my chest tight” and leaving “as if my body had exhaled years of tension.”

Spiritual Engagement. Several participants emphasized the ritual qualities of samba, reporting sensations of ancestral presence. One reflected, “In the drumming, something ancient steps into the room.”

Collective Attunement. Participants noted that the roda [circle] created a sense of safety and solidarity. “When we are in rhythm, it’s like we are one drum,” shared one participant.

Summary of the Main Research Question

Through sustained immersion in participant narratives and researcher indwelling, this study revealed samba as a multidimensional healing system that supports emotional regulation, spiritual connection, and collective renewal. Participants described samba as a rhythmic sanctuary—a space where tacit knowing could emerge through movement, and where the internal frame of reference was honored without the need for verbal articulation. The dance facilitated moments of catharsis, joy, and relational attunement, allowing individuals to experience themselves as part of a larger symbolic and cultural field. These findings reflect a process of creative synthesis, where personal transformation was woven into communal rhythm and ancestral memory.

Research Sub-question One

In what ways does samba facilitate the process of individuation by allowing individuals to explore archetypal energies, engage in active imagination, and integrate fragmented aspects of the self?

Findings

Participants widely affirmed that samba functions as a medium of individuation by awakening archetypal energies, enabling symbolic enactment, and supporting the reintegration of disowned or fragmented aspects of the self. Through costume, improvisation, and ritualized

movement, dancers accessed unconscious material and gave it form, mirroring Jung's concept of active imagination. Samba was described not only as a dance but as a psychic container—a mythic stage where identity could be explored, challenged, and reassembled. Themes:

Archetypal Activation. Archetypal activation was vividly expressed in participant accounts. One dancer explained, “When I put on the costume, I am not pretending. I become that figure.” Others spoke of embodying elemental forces, such as “I became the storm,” or channeling the presence of orixás, including Oxum, Iansã, or Ogum. These enactments were not doctrinal but affective and symbolic, offering direct access to psychic energies beyond the personal ego.

Creative Transformation and Symbolic Synthesis. Creative transformation and symbolic synthesis were also evident. Samba served as a form of active imagination in motion, where unconscious material could emerge through symbolic play. One participant described it as “a conversation with myself—my body speaks what my mind cannot.” Another reflected, “There were no words, but when I danced, I finally knew what healing felt like.” These experiences reveal samba's capacity to transform raw emotion into symbolic expression, synthesizing inner conflict into new meaning.

Identity Reconstruction. Identity reconstruction emerged as a process of reintegration. Dancers described seeing themselves “recolored” through samba—“During samba, I slowly peel away the effects of modern expectations.” Others reflected on reclaiming muted aspects of selfhood: “I felt like a woman again, not just a mother, or a worker, or a wife.” Through these enactments, participants integrated disowned aspects of identity, aligning with Jung's view that individuation requires embracing the shadow and previously fragmented parts of the psyche.

Somatic Reclamation. Somatic reclamation wove through these themes, functioning as both a catalyst and a product of individuation. As one participant noted, samba allowed them to arrive “with my chest tight” and leave “as if my body had exhaled years of tension.” By metabolizing emotional material somatically, participants gained psychological insight and renewed vitality.

Summary of Research Sub-question One

Heuristic inquiry into this subquestion revealed samba as a mythopoetic container for individuation. Participant immersion in symbolic movement and ritual enactment enabled the activation of archetypes, as dancers embodied figures, elemental forces, and orixás through gesture, costume, and rhythm. These enactments functioned as active imagination in motion, providing a symbolic dialogue with the unconscious. Within this embodied dialogue, participants experienced creative transformation and symbolic synthesis—pain and tension were transmuted into meaning, vitality, and renewed coherence. The process also supported identity reconstruction, as dancers reclaimed aspects of their selfhood that had been disowned—femininity, sensuality, cultural pride, and confidence—long suppressed by social roles or displacement. Moments of emotional healing often accompanied this reintegration, with participants describing feelings of relief, catharsis, and a sense of “exhaling years of tension.” Samba thus offered a heuristic space where tacit knowing could surface and fragmented aspects of the self could be reintegrated. The findings reflect individuation as a dynamic process of psychic integration, in which the personal and the archetypal converge through embodied metaphor, restoring authenticity, coherence, and wholeness.

Research Sub-question Two

How does samba function as a bridge for immigrants navigating the complexities of acculturation and assimilation, helping them reclaim their cultural heritage while adapting to new societal contexts?

Findings

Participant narratives revealed that samba operates as a multifaceted cultural bridge—one that supports emotional, symbolic, and spiritual navigation across borders. Across Brazilian and non-Brazilian experiences, samba emerged not merely as a dance form but as a living archive, a ritual of belonging, and a site of identity reconstruction.

For Brazilian immigrants, samba offered cultural continuity, reconnecting them with ancestral traditions and affirming dignity in contexts where cultural identity risked being silenced. For non-Brazilian participants, samba generated intercultural belonging, creating pathways of solidarity and recognition across differences. The roda became a communal space where collective attunement transcended language barriers, and symbolic gestures enacted a sense of shared humanity.

These findings align with theories of cultural resilience and immigrant identity, which emphasize the role of collective rituals and embodied practices in sustaining heritage while fostering adaptation in new environments (Berry, 1997; Falicov, 2007). Samba's healing function thus emerges in its dual capacity: to preserve continuity with ancestral roots while facilitating creative transformation in intercultural contexts. Themes:

Cultural Continuity for Brazilians. Brazilian participants described samba as a vital link to homeland traditions, offering emotional grounding and a sense of continuity. One participant shared that dancing samba abroad felt like “finding a missing organ,” a visceral

reconnection with parts of the self that had been muted by migration. Another reflected, “Samba reminds me that life is hard and also beautiful. It connects me to my ancestors and helps me ground myself.” Samba served as a living archive of cultural memory, enabling individuals to reenact ancestral rhythms and reclaim their identity in unfamiliar environments.

Intercultural Belonging for Non-Brazilians. Non-Brazilian participants emphasized samba’s role in fostering intercultural belonging and identity expansion. One participant noted, “I was falling apart—between languages, between cultures. But samba gave me something I didn’t have to translate. It was home.” Another shared, “My body remembered joy when I encountered samba outside Brazil.” These reflections suggest that samba creates a symbolic “third space” where hybrid identities can emerge without erasing heritage. Samba became a practice of mutual recognition and shared rhythm across cultural boundaries.

Identity Reconstruction. Samba supported the reintegration of suppressed or fragmented aspects of self, especially for those navigating cultural displacement. One participant described, “During samba, I slowly peel away the effects of modern expectations.” Another shared, “It gave me the confidence that even at my age, I can challenge myself.” These experiences highlight samba’s capacity to support personal transformation while honoring cultural lineage. For many, samba was not just a dance but a declaration of self-worth and authenticity.

Spiritual Engagement. Participants described samba as a ritual of connection to ancestors and higher energies, especially during periods of grief, isolation, or transition. One participant shared, “Samba teaches us to honor our roots and ancestors, and through it, I feel deeply connected to my grandmother’s spirit.” Another recounted, “Samba held my hand, hugged me, and let me know it was with me, always.” These testimonies affirm samba’s role as a

spiritual technology that supports healing and cultural remembrance, bridging past and present through embodied ritual.

Summary of Research Sub-question Two

This sub-question invited a heuristic exploration of cultural navigation, revealing samba as a dynamic bridge between rootedness and adaptation. Through immersion in diasporic narratives and indwelling with the emotional textures of migration, samba emerged as a practice of cultural continuity and intercultural belonging. Brazilian participants described samba as a visceral reconnection with ancestral rhythms—a form of tacit knowing that anchored them amidst displacement. Non-Brazilian participants experienced samba as a “third space,” where hybrid identities could be explored without erasure. The dance supported identity reconstruction by honoring the internal frame of reference and allowing suppressed aspects of self to re-emerge through symbolic movement. Samba’s communal structure fostered mutual recognition and emotional resonance, offering a rhythmically attuned space for healing across cultural boundaries. These insights reflect a creative synthesis of heritage and adaptation, where movement became both memory and possibility.

Research Sub-question Three

What are the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba as a cultural healing system, and how does it address the collective wounds of oppression, discrimination, and displacement?

Findings

Participant narratives revealed samba as a multidimensional healing system—one that engages body, psyche, and spirit in the reclamation of vitality, dignity, and ancestral connection. Across diverse backgrounds, individuals describe samba as a ritual technology that transforms

suffering into rhythm, isolation into belonging, and fragmentation into symbolic wholeness. The data suggest that samba operates as a mythopoetic response to collective trauma, offering embodied pathways for emotional regulation, spiritual attunement, and cultural remembrance.

These findings align with dance research and embodied cultural practices, which demonstrate that movement-based interventions foster emotional regulation, resilience, and collective well-being, particularly in contexts marked by trauma and displacement (Klapperski-van der Wal, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Samba's healing function thus extends beyond nervous system regulation to include the cultivation of communal synchrony, symbolic repair, and spiritual transformation. In this way, samba directly addresses wounds of oppression and cultural erasure by restoring embodied memory, reconnecting participants with ancestral traditions, and generating spaces of belonging where dignity and collective identity are reanimated. Themes:

Somatic Reclamation. Participants consistently described samba as a practice that restored bodily trust and reconnected them with their physical selves after trauma, illness, or emotional rupture. One participant recovering from surgery shared, "Samba gave me back my hips, my spine, my balance." Another recounted, "After samba, my body is tired, my mind is open, my energy is highest, and my emotions are balanced. My ego is quiet—I love him when he is quiet." These reflections highlight samba's capacity to regulate the nervous system and facilitate embodied healing.

For those navigating grief or physical limitation, samba offered a pathway to reclaim movement and vitality. A participant recovering from a car accident said, "Samba healed my body when it couldn't move." Another, emerging from a nervous breakdown, shared, "I decided that if I were going to die, I would do it on my terms: samba dancing. It was the first thing I could do that didn't make me feel like I was dying."

Collective Attunement. The communal structure of samba—especially the roda [circle]—was described as a sanctuary where social hierarchies dissolved and rhythm unified participants across difference. One percussionist noted, “There’s no nationality, no politics—only rhythm.” Another participant reflected, “Samba is like church... You leave feeling fulfilled and positive.” The roda [circle] became a migratory altar of mutual witnessing, emotional safety, and cultural continuity.

Participants emphasized the healing power of synchrony and shared movement. One dancer said, “When we are in rhythm, it’s like we are one drum.” Another described samba gatherings as “places where I could cry, laugh, be silent, and still be understood.” These experiences affirm samba’s role in fostering resilience through collective rhythm and relational presence.

Creative Transformation and Symbolic Synthesis. Samba was frequently described as a medium for transmuting suffering into art. Participants turned grief, displacement, and oppression into choreography, song, and ritual. One participant described composing a samba piece as “a conversation between ancestors.” Another shared, “Samba held my hand, hugged me, and let me know it was with me, always.”

For many, samba became a symbolic language through which historical wounds could be expressed and reimagined. One participant stated, “When I dance samba, I am undoing every time someone told me I was too much, too loud, too Black. I become sacred.” Another reflected, “Samba teaches us to honor our roots and ancestors, and through it, I feel deeply connected to my grandmother’s spirit.”

These testimonies illustrate how samba functions as a mythopoetic response to intergenerational trauma, offering a ritual space for emotional alchemy and cultural remembrance.

Spiritual Engagement. Participants described samba as a spiritual technology capable of symbolic repair and soul-level healing. One dancer shared, “It’s not just my body dancing—it’s the bodies of those who couldn’t.” Another reflected, “Samba is a source of strength and stability, helping me navigate life’s highs and lows.”

The presence of ancestral energy was frequently invoked. One participant said, “Every beat of the drum is like my grandmother’s heartbeat calling me back to myself.” Another described samba as “a prayer in motion,” emphasizing its ritual intentionality and transcendent power.

Summary of Research Sub-question Three

Through heuristic immersion in embodied testimony and communal ritual, samba was revealed as a cultural healing system that integrates mind, body, and spirit. Participants described somatic reclamation as a return to bodily trust, a form of tacit knowing that emerged through rhythm and repetition. The roda [circle] functioned as a sanctuary of collective attunement, dissolving social hierarchies and fostering emotional safety. Within this symbolic field, samba facilitated spiritual engagement and ancestral connection, enabling participants to experience healing on both personal and transpersonal levels. The dance became a vessel for creative transformation, where suffering was transmuted into aesthetic expression and symbolic synthesis. Through indwelling with grief, joy, and resistance, participants accessed a rhythm of resilience that affirmed their place within a shared cultural lineage. These findings reflect a

process of healing that is relational, ritualized, and grounded in embodied wisdom—a creative synthesis of historical wounds and present vitality.

Summary

Drawing from the nine-question interview protocol and guided by heuristic methodology, Chapter 4 illuminated samba as a multidimensional healing system accessed through immersion, indwelling, and creative synthesis. Participant narratives consistently described samba as a rhythmic sanctuary where healing unfolded through tacit knowing, symbolic movement, and communal ritual. The analysis revealed nine interrelated themes: emotional healing, identity reconstruction, spiritual engagement, somatic reclamation, collective attunement, archetypal activation, creative transformation and symbolic synthesis, cultural continuity for Brazilian participants, and intercultural belonging for non-Brazilian participants.

Across both individual depictions and thematic constellations, samba was revealed as a mythopoetic container for transformation—bridging personal wounds with collective memory while honoring the internal frame of reference of each participant. Through ritual enactment and active imagination, the dance facilitated individuation, allowing archetypal energies and symbolic material to be expressed, witnessed, and integrated. At the same time, samba functioned as a cultural bridge, enabling Brazilian participants to sustain continuity with ancestral traditions and non-Brazilian participants to experience intercultural belonging and solidarity.

The communal structure of samba fostered collective attunement, creating a space where suffering could be transmuted into aesthetic expression, resilience, and ancestral connection. Taken together, the nine themes affirmed the central research question and its three sub-

questions, demonstrating that samba is not merely a dance form but a living system of psychological, spiritual, and somatic healing.

In heuristic terms, Chapter 4 embodied the process of illumination, where meaning surfaced through embodied resonance, symbolic enactment, and shared rhythm. The interplay of heuristic processes—immersion, indwelling, internal referencing, and creative synthesis—culminated in a layered understanding of samba’s cultural and psychological significance. Whereas this chapter emphasized description and synthesis, the next chapter turns to interpretation and meaning-making, situating the findings within Jungian psychology, embodied cognition, and decolonial frameworks.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter 4 presented the study's findings through nine interrelated themes: emotional healing, identity reconstruction, spiritual engagement, somatic reclamation, collective attunement, archetypal activation, creative transformation and symbolic synthesis, cultural continuity for Brazilian participants, and intercultural belonging for non-Brazilian participants. Together, these themes illustrated how samba functions as a multidimensional cultural healing system, supporting emotional regulation, reclaiming identity, fostering spiritual connection, restoring embodied presence, deepening collective bonds, activating archetypal energies, integrating personal and ancestral narratives, and facilitating both cultural rootedness and cross-cultural resonance.

These findings were grounded in the central research question, *What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?* and its three sub-questions. They illuminate how participants experience samba as a pathway to individuation, a bridge for navigating cultural adaptation, and a vehicle for collective transformation. The inclusion of cultural continuity and intercultural belonging further underscores samba's capacity to hold both specificity and universality, offering healing through rooted tradition and inclusive participation.

Building on this thematic foundation, the present chapter interprets the findings through the broader theoretical lenses of depth psychology, embodied cognition, and decolonial frameworks. This interpretive synthesis deepens understanding of samba's therapeutic potential while also considering its practical application through the development of SDMT, a framework presented in Appendix A that translates samba's principles into a structured, culturally grounded, and replicable therapeutic format.

In the sections that follow, each of the nine themes is revisited and re-examined in light of these theoretical frameworks, transforming the descriptive narratives of Chapter 4 into an interpretive account that situates samba within both scholarly discourse and clinical innovation.

Interpretation of Findings

Building on the thematic architecture outlined in Chapter 4, this chapter engages in a deeper interpretive dialogue with the data, exploring how participants' experiences of samba illuminate psychological, spiritual, somatic, and cultural processes of healing and transformation. Rather than restating the nine themes, the focus here is on their symbolic resonance and theoretical implications, particularly in relation to individuation, cultural adaptation, and collective belonging (Berry, 1997; Bhabha, 1994; Brewster, 2020; hooks, 1994). Through a synthesis of depth psychological, embodied, and decolonial frameworks, the discussion traces how samba operates as a living archive of memory, resistance, and renewal, bridging ancestral wisdom with contemporary relational needs.

These findings extend and deepen the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 2, offering a multidimensional interpretation of participants' experiences through the intersecting lenses of depth psychology, embodied cognition, and decolonial theory. From a Jungian perspective, the emergent themes reflect core processes of individuation, wherein symbolic expression and archetypal activation facilitate integration of unconscious material into conscious awareness (Jung, 1968; Stein, 1998; von Franz, 1997). Samba, as described by participants, functioned as a ritualized container for this psychic movement, enabling encounters with mythic patterns and facilitating the reconfiguration of personal and ancestral narratives.

Embodied cognition theory further elucidates the somatic and relational dimensions of healing articulated in the data. Participants' accounts of tension release, rhythmic attunement,

and emotional healing underscore the role of movement, posture, and synchrony in shaping affective states and interpersonal resonance (Adams, 2010; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011; Varela et al., 1991). One participant noted arriving “with my chest tight” and leaving “as if my body had exhaled years of tension,” while another remarked, “The beat finds the knot inside you and unties it.” These descriptions align with Temple’s (2010) conceptualization of Afro-Brazilian dance as a vessel for cultural memory and trauma processing, wherein embodied rhythm serves as a medium for expressive release and symbolic repair.

Importantly, the healing described was not experienced in isolation. The communal structure of samba amplified emotional regulation through co-presence and shared rhythm. As one participant observed, “When others see me dance, they’re not just watching, they’re remembering with me.” This relational dynamic resonates with findings from dance/movement therapy literature, which emphasize the therapeutic potential of co-regulation and collective embodiment (Chaiklin & Wengrower, 2009; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Moe, 2014). Embodied cognition further helps explain this process: shared rhythm and synchronized movement generate physiological alignment, producing collective attunement and mutual regulation (Fuchs & Koch, 2014; Stupacher et al., 2017).

Decolonial theory provides an additional interpretive framework, positioning samba as a counter-hegemonic archive—a living ritual that resists cultural erasure and reclaims ancestral knowledge (Bogado et al., 2023; Graeff, 2024; Mullan, 2023). The themes of Cultural Continuity and Intercultural Belonging illustrate samba’s capacity to hold both specificity and universality, offering participants a culturally grounded yet inclusive space for healing. In this context, samba operates as a heuristic system of transformation, one that enables movement not only through physical space but through layered terrains of memory, identity, and meaning.

Samba also emerged as a dynamic site of identity reconstruction, particularly for participants navigating migration, cultural displacement, or racialized marginalization. These experiences reflect the psychological complexity of diasporic embodiment and the search for coherence across fragmented cultural terrains. A Latin American participant described samba as “recoloring the black-and-white version of myself I had become abroad,” while another, from East Asia, noted, “It was like unlocking a language my body already knew.” Such narratives evoke Jung’s (1968) conception of individuation as a symbolic process of self-integration and align with Bhabha’s (1994) articulation of the “third space,” where hybrid identities are negotiated and reimagined. Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework and Akhtar’s (1999, 2011) psychoanalytic contributions on immigration underscore how cultural integration fosters psychological resilience and adaptive identity formation. In this context, samba’s Afro-Brazilian gestures and rhythms served as embodied tools for reconstructing a fuller, more expansive sense of self, one that was simultaneously personal, ancestral, and culturally plural.

Beyond identity reconstruction, samba was experienced by many participants as ritual, a sacred enactment rather than mere performance. A Brazilian participant described feeling “guided by the hands of my grandmother” while dancing in a *roda* [circle], while another, from Europe, recounted entering a “trance of joy” during Carnival rehearsals. These accounts resonate with Jung’s notion of numinous experience and Csordas’s (1994, 1999) theory of somatic modes of attention, wherein ritual movement becomes a conduit for spiritual presence and embodied transformation. Samba’s ritual potency is rooted in Afro-Brazilian cosmologies, where music, dance, and spirituality are inseparable (Nascimento, 2008; Prandi, 1991; Verger, 1995). The drumbeat—often referred to as the “heartbeat of the ancestors”—functioned as both communal rhythm and spiritual medium, facilitating transpersonal connection and ancestral remembrance.

This echoes the work of de Oliveira (2025), who emphasized the role of Afro-diasporic performance in sustaining cultural memory and spiritual continuity across generations.

Participants also described samba as a vehicle for somatic reclamation, a return to embodied presence following experiences of trauma, illness, or dissociation. One participant shared, “After my surgery, I didn’t trust my body. Samba gave me back my hips, my spine, my balance.” Others recounted reclaiming bodily agency after prolonged periods of numbness or disconnection. These narratives reflect Chodorow’s (1991, 1998) view of dance as a medium for integrating dissociated aspects of the self, and are further supported by embodied cognition theory, which posits that movement patterns shape emotional states, self-perception, and interpersonal attunement (Adams, 2010; Koch & Fuchs, 2011; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011). For some, somatic reclamation was also a political act, an embodied resistance against dominant norms that marginalize gendered, racialized, and diasporic bodies (Bogado et al., 2023; Brewster, 2018; Graeff, 2024; Woodman, 1980). In this sense, samba functioned not only as a therapeutic modality but as a site of embodied sovereignty and cultural affirmation.

Extending the symbolic and embodied dimensions explored in previous chapters, the roda [circle] emerged as a sacred container for relational healing, a spatial and rhythmic field where individual and collective energies converged. Participants described entering the roda as stepping into a “collective heartbeat,” a phrase that evokes both physiological synchrony and shared emotional resonance. One participant noted, “Even if I don’t know the people, I feel like we’re moving to the same heartbeat,” while another described the sensation as “a communal drum inside my chest.” These accounts reflect the enactment of the collective unconscious in motion, as theorized by Jung (1968), and illustrate how archetypal dynamics are activated through shared ritual space. Embodied cognition theory further frames the roda as a site of intersubjective

regulation, where alignment of breath, rhythm, and gesture fosters mutual attunement and co-regulation (Fuchs & Koch, 2014; Stupacher et al., 2017). Brewster's (2018) concept of communal performance as a reparative act is particularly salient here, as the roda provided a symbolic and literal site of repair for those fractured by systemic oppression, displacement, or cultural fragmentation.

Within this relational field, participants also described moments of symbolic intensification, experiences in which mythic energies, ancestral figures, or archetypal images moved through them. One participant shared, "When I dance, I feel her moving through me; I'm not just me, I'm part of something bigger." Another recounted a trance-like state that "pulled something ancient from inside." These experiences reflect archetypal constellations, autonomous psychic energies that become integrated through symbolic enactment and embodied ritual (Bonovitz, 2005; Jung, 1968; von Franz, 1983). Within Afro-descendant cosmologies such as Candomblé and Umbanda, movement is understood as a ritual technology, a conduit for spiritual presence, ancestral continuity, and cultural transmission (Nogueira et al., 2016; Prandi, 1991). The roda amplified these encounters, allowing participants to embody both personal myths and shared cultural lineage, and to engage in healing that was simultaneously psychological, spiritual, and communal.

For many, the culmination of samba's healing process was the transformation of suffering into symbolic, aesthetic form. This process mirrors Jung's alchemical model of psychic transmutation—*nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*—where raw emotional material is metabolized into higher consciousness through symbolic engagement (Jung, 1968; von Franz, 1980). One participant reflected, "I danced my divorce, my miscarriages, my heartbreak—and I turned them into art." Another described a performance as "a conversation between ancestors." These

expressions align with Moustakas's (1990) notion of creative synthesis, wherein deep immersion in lived experience yields original, expressive articulations of the phenomenon. Samba, in this sense, functioned as a counter-hegemonic archive—preserving histories, reclaiming agency, and generating new symbolic orders that resist erasure and affirm cultural vitality (Browning, 1995; Graeff, 2024; Santos, 2007).

For Brazilian participants, samba offered cultural continuity, a means of remaining rooted in ancestral traditions despite the pressures of modernity, globalization, and sociopolitical rupture. Many described samba as a “living inheritance,” a practice that preserved family memory, regional identity, and spiritual lineage. One participant noted that dancing was “a way to speak my grandmother’s language without words.” This theme resonates with decolonial frameworks that emphasize embodied practice as a mode of cultural survival and resistance (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bogado et al., 2023; Nascimento, 2008). Samba’s rhythmic and gestural vocabulary served as a mnemonic device, linking present-day embodiment with ancestral knowledge and intergenerational transmission.

For non-Brazilian participants, samba facilitated intercultural belonging—a way to connect across difference through rhythm, gesture, and shared intention. Participants described feeling “invited into something sacred” and “welcomed by the music itself.” These experiences reflect Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the “third space” and hooks’s (1994) concept of radical openness, wherein cultural exchange becomes a site of healing rather than appropriation. Samba’s inclusive structure allowed participants to experience belonging without erasure—to participate in a tradition while honoring its roots and relational ethics. As one dancer expressed, “Samba didn’t ask me to be Brazilian—it asked me to be present.”

The nine emergent themes converge to portray samba as a living cultural healing system—one that interweaves body and psyche, self and community, memory, and possibility. This synthesis directly engages the central research question and its subcomponents, revealing how samba facilitates individuation through symbolic movement, supports cultural navigation through embodied continuity, and addresses collective wounds through ritualized expression. Viewed through the lenses of depth psychology, embodied cognition, and decolonial thought, samba unfolds not merely as dance, but as ritual, archive, and medicine.

Participants' narratives affirm samba as a system of care that enables engagement with archetypal energies, reclamation of disowned identities, and healing through rhythm, gesture, and communal presence. For diasporic and immigrant participants, samba became a bridge between cultural heritage and adaptation, allowing hybrid identities to emerge without erasure. For those navigating trauma or marginalization, samba offered a somatic and symbolic pathway to restoration, transforming suffering into aesthetic form and embodied meaning.

This interpretive synthesis reflects the heuristic process of creative transformation, where immersion, indwelling, and tacit knowing reveal the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). Samba, as experienced and interpreted through this inquiry, is not only a cultural expression; it is a sanctuary of belonging, a rhythm of resistance, and a vessel for psychological and spiritual renewal. In every beat, samba holds the possibility of transformation.

Recommendations

This study illuminated samba as a multidimensional healing system that fosters emotional regulation, identity integration, spiritual engagement, and collective resilience. Through nine interrelated themes: *emotional healing, identity reconstruction, spiritual engagement, somatic reclamation, collective attunement, archetypal activation, creative transformation, and symbolic*

synthesis, cultural continuity for Brazilian participants, and intercultural belonging for non-Brazilian participants, samba emerged not merely as a dance form, but as a culturally rooted modality of psychological and spiritual transformation.

The following recommendations are organized into four domains—Clinical Application, Community-Based Practice, Research and Scholarship, and Education and Training—to guide future work that honors samba’s symbolic, relational, and embodied dimensions.

Clinical Application

Samba’s therapeutic potential invites the development of culturally grounded clinical models that integrate symbolic literacy, somatic attunement, and rhythmic relationality.

- Develop and pilot therapeutic models such as SDMT that explicitly incorporate the nine themes into structured interventions. These models should support trauma recovery, identity integration, and relational healing through shared rhythm, mirrored gestures, and archetypal embodiment.

- Train clinicians in Afro-Brazilian movement traditions, emphasizing cultural sensitivity, symbolic fluency, and embodied ethics. Training should include experiential learning in samba’s choreographic and musical dimensions, fostering attunement to ancestral memory and collective regulation.

- Incorporate samba-based practices into group therapy formats, especially in settings where verbal processing is constrained by trauma, language barriers, or systemic marginalization. Group samba sessions can foster collective attunement, emotional healing, and interpersonal resonance, offering a nonverbal pathway to attachment repair and communal resilience.

Community-Based Practice

Samba's roots in community ritual and resistance position it as a powerful tool for public health, cultural preservation, and intergenerational healing.

- Support samba rodas [circle] and dance gatherings as public health interventions, particularly in diasporic and marginalized communities. These spaces foster cultural continuity, intercultural belonging, and somatic reclamation, offering accessible pathways to joy, regulation, and collective care.

- Collaborate with cultural leaders, samba schools, and tradition holders to preserve ritual integrity while expanding access to healing spaces. Co-creation ensures that interventions remain grounded in lived expertise and symbolic fidelity.

- Use samba as a tool for intergenerational dialogue and cultural education, bridging ancestral knowledge with contemporary needs. Programs should center relational processes—such as shared rhythm and embodied storytelling—that support creative transformation, spiritual engagement, and community resilience.

Research and Scholarship

Future scholarship should deepen understanding of samba's psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions through inclusive, decolonial, and interdisciplinary inquiry.

- Expand qualitative and mixed-methods research to assess samba's impact across diverse populations. Longitudinal designs and psychometric tools can complement thematic analysis, clarifying how samba supports identity reconstruction, emotional resilience, and self-realization over time.

- Investigate intersections with other Afro-diasporic practices—such as capoeira, candomblé, and maracatu—to explore shared healing mechanisms and symbolic frameworks.

Comparative studies can illuminate how rhythm, ritual, and relational embodiment function across cultural modalities.

- Contribute to decolonial scholarship by framing samba as a living archive of resistance, mythic re-narration, and embodied sovereignty. Research should situate samba within pluralistic paradigms that honor its Afro-Brazilian origins, spiritual depth, and historical struggles, affirming its epistemological autonomy and symbolic integrity.

Education and Training

To ensure ethical and effective practice, samba should be integrated into educational programs that cultivate embodied knowledge, cultural humility, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

- Integrate samba into expressive arts curricula, depth psychology programs, and somatic studies, emphasizing its symbolic, rhythmic, and relational dimensions. Coursework should include experiential modules, cultural history, and reflective practice.

- Offer workshops and certifications that honor samba's cultural roots while equipping practitioners with ethical, embodied tools. Training should be co-designed with cultural bearers and include modules on symbolic literacy, trauma-informed movement, and community engagement.

- Encourage interdisciplinary dialogue between clinicians, dancers, scholars, and spiritual leaders. Conferences, symposia, and collaborative publications can foster cross-sector learning and innovation, advancing samba's role in healing, scholarship, and cultural sustainability.

Conclusion

These recommendations affirm that samba's psychological and spiritual benefits are inseparable from its cultural, symbolic, and relational dimensions. By advancing clinical models, supporting community practice, deepening scholarship, and expanding education, future work

can honor samba as a multidimensional healing system—one that fosters personal growth, collective resilience, and embodied transformation through rhythm, ritual, and relational attunement.

Implications

The implications of this study extend across clinical practice, community health, cultural policy, and academic research. By illuminating the psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions of samba, the findings challenge dominant healing paradigms that privilege verbal, individualistic, and Eurocentric models. Samba's collective, rhythmic, and embodied nature offers a compelling alternative, one that situates healing within relational, symbolic, and culturally embedded practices. The nine interpretive themes identified in this study affirm samba's capacity to foster emotional regulation, identity integration, spiritual engagement, and collective resilience, inviting a reimagining of how care is conceptualized and enacted.

Clinical Practice and Mental Health

In therapeutic contexts, this study underscores the need for movement-based, culturally grounded modalities that honor the body, community, and symbolic expression. Samba's structure, rooted in communal synchrony, expressive freedom, and ritual engagement, offers a model for fostering emotional regulation, identity reconstruction, and embodied resilience. For individuals navigating trauma, displacement, or systemic marginalization, samba provides a nonverbal, relational pathway to healing that transcends the limitations of conventional talk therapy. Its emphasis on rhythm, archetypal activation, and somatic reclamation invites clinicians to expand their frameworks of care, integrating practices that are both culturally resonant and therapeutically potent.

Community Development and Cultural Education

Within community and educational settings, samba functions as a vehicle for cultural affirmation, intergenerational dialogue, and collective agency. Embedding samba programs in schools, cultural centers, and public spaces supports mental health while strengthening cultural literacy and social cohesion. The roda [circle] becomes a site of belonging and transformation, where ancestral memory and creative expression converge. Samba's capacity to evoke intercultural belonging and foster symbolic synthesis positions it as a vital resource for community resilience, especially in diasporic and historically marginalized populations.

Cultural Policy and Sovereignty

From a policy perspective, recognizing samba as an autonomous healing system affirms the need for sustained support, protection, and cultural sovereignty. Policies must safeguard the intellectual property, historical narratives, and community rights of samba practitioners, ensuring that the benefits of samba remain rooted in the communities that created and continue to sustain it. This includes funding for grassroots initiatives, infrastructure for cultural transmission, and ethical collaboration with tradition holders. Affirming samba's epistemological integrity requires a shift away from extractive models toward reciprocal, community-led engagement.

Academic Research and Methodological Innovation

This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that values interdisciplinary, decolonial, and embodied approaches to healing. The use of heuristic methodology proved especially effective, allowing the researcher's own lived and somatic engagement to inform and deepen the interpretive process. Future inquiries can build on this model to explore other culturally embedded healing practices, particularly those that integrate movement, ritual, and relational attunement. Research that centers on symbolic meaning, cultural specificity, and

participant voice will continue to expand the field's understanding of healing as a multidimensional, culturally situated phenomenon.

Toward a Paradigm Shift in Healing

Ultimately, the implications of this study point toward a paradigm shift in how healing is conceptualized, one that values rhythm as medicine, movement as memory, and culture as a living system of care. Samba invites practitioners, scholars, and communities to reimagine healing not as an isolated event, but as a relational, symbolic, and embodied process rooted in collective rhythm and ancestral wisdom. By honoring samba's multidimensional nature, future work can contribute to more inclusive, transformative, and culturally grounded models of care.

Conclusions

At the heart of this inquiry lies a question that continues to shape both my clinical orientation and scholarly vision: *What are the psychological and spiritual benefits of samba dancing for personal growth, self-realization, and collective healing?* This question guided not only the design of the study but also my own embodied engagement with samba as a living archive of transformation.

Through immersion in the rhythms, gestures, and narratives of samba, I came to understand that its healing potential is not metaphorical; it is experiential, relational, and symbolically saturated. Samba invites participants into a process of self-discovery that is simultaneously intimate and communal. The movement itself becomes a language of the unconscious, capable of expressing grief, joy, resistance, and belonging in ways that transcend verbal articulation. Within the roda [circle], I witnessed individuals reclaim agency over their bodies, reconnect with ancestral memory, and cultivate a sense of coherence that bridges fragmentation and wholeness.

Samba facilitates individuation by activating archetypal energies and engaging the imagination through symbolic movement. Dancers inhabit roles that mirror inner psychic material—the trickster, the warrior, the exile—not as performance, but as ritual enactment. Its cyclical rhythms and improvisational structure mirror the nonlinear path of integration, offering a container where the personal meets the archetypal and the body becomes a vessel for healing.

For immigrants and diasporic participants, samba functioned as a cultural bridge, preserving heritage while allowing space for adaptation. It offered a way to remain rooted while navigating the complexities of acculturation, enabling individuals to hold cultural multiplicity without erasure. Through rhythm and ritual, samba affirmed identity, belonging, and continuity across borders.

As a cultural healing system, samba addresses collective wounds through embodied joy, ritualized resistance, and shared movement. It dissolves boundaries between individual and communal healing, offering space for mourning and celebration, remembrance and reimagining. The drumbeat becomes an invocation, the circle becomes a sanctuary, and the dance itself becomes a form of prayer.

This study affirms samba as a multidimensional system of care, one that integrates psychological, spiritual, and somatic dimensions. It facilitates individuation, supports cultural navigation, and responds to historical and ongoing trauma with dignity and vitality. I carry these insights with reverence. Samba taught me that healing is rhythmic, relational, and rooted in culture. It reminded me that movement can be memory, ritual can be resistance, and joy itself is a form of survival.

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Appendix A

Samba Dance Movement Therapy Proposal

(Creative Synthesis)

Introduction

Samba Dance Movement Therapy (SDMT) is proposed as an innovative therapeutic modality that integrates the rich cultural practice of samba dance with established principles of dance movement therapy. Grounded in the transformative power of rhythmic movement and cultural expression, Samba Dance Movement Therapy seeks to alleviate psychological distress, foster identity reclamation, and promote holistic well-being. This proposal outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the method, its key components, and the practical implementation steps.

Theoretical Rationale

With its deep historical and cultural significance, samba has long been recognized as a catalyst for personal and communal transformation. By engaging in samba's expressive movements and rhythms, participants can access embodied memories and emotions, thereby bridging the gap between the unconscious and conscious realms—a process reminiscent of Jungian active imagination. This method capitalizes on the healing potential inherent in cultural and movement-based practices, aligning with contemporary approaches that integrate mind, body, and spirit into therapeutic work. As Zittoun and Gillespie (2015) asserted, imagination plays a central role in navigating and transforming personal and collective experiences, highlighting how cultural practices, such as samba, can foster new ways of thinking and being. These ideas affirm samba's value as a traditional art form and as a profound therapeutic modality that enables holistic growth and healing in diverse contexts.

Key Components of Samba Dance Movement Therapy

1. Cultural Engagement and Identity Reconstruction

- o Objective: To harness the cultural significance of samba as a medium for reclaiming and strengthening cultural identity.
- o Method: Participants will explore samba's heritage through music, costumes, and storytelling. By connecting with traditions inherent in the dance, individuals can gain insights into their own cultural narratives and histories, thereby promoting self-acceptance and a sense of belonging.

2. Embodied Movement and Emotional Expression

- o Objective: To use the physicality of samba to facilitate emotional release and psychological integration.
- o Method: Each session will include a warm-up phase focused on body awareness and rhythmic entrainment. Guided movement exercises and improvisational dance activities will encourage participants to express and process emotions nonverbally. Emphasis will be placed on synchronizing movement with music, allowing the body to articulate experiences that may be difficult to verbalize.

3. Reflective Integration and Therapeutic Processing

- o Objective: To provide a structured framework that connects movement experiences with personal insights and emotions.
- o Method: Following the movement activities, sessions will include a reflection phase where participants engage in group sharing, journaling, or creative art-making. This process will facilitate the integration of emotional and cognitive insights gleaned from the movement work, supporting a deeper understanding of personal and cultural transformation.

Implementation Strategy

- **Session Structure:**

Each Samba Dance Movement Therapy session will be structured into three main stages:

1. **Opening Ritual:**

- Initiated with culturally resonant music and a brief meditative introduction to set the tone.
- Participants connect with samba's historical context and share initial feelings about their personal or cultural experiences.

2. **Movement Engagement:**

- Warm-up exercises to enhance body awareness and loosen physical tension.
- A guided movement segment where participants learn basic samba steps, followed by an improvisational exploration that encourages free expression.
- Use of both solo and group dance elements to foster interpersonal connection and community support.

3. **Reflective Integration:**

- A cool-down period incorporating relaxation techniques.
- Group discussions or individual reflective exercises that help translate embodied experiences into therapeutic insights.
- Facilitated discussions to link movement insights with broader themes of cultural healing and identity construction.

- **Therapist Training:**

Therapists and facilitators will undergo specialized training that combines dance therapy techniques with an in-depth understanding of samba's cultural dimensions. Training will

emphasize sensitivity to diverse cultural backgrounds, trauma-informed care, and the integration of creative expression into psychological practice.

- **Evaluation and Outcomes:**

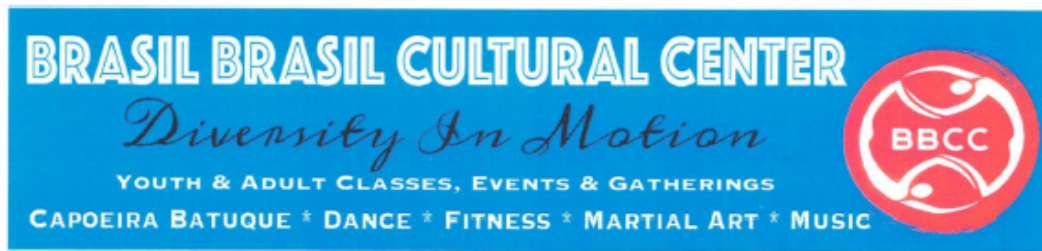
The efficacy of Samba Dance Movement Therapy will be evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Outcomes will include measures of psychological well-being, reduced stress levels, improved body awareness, and enhanced cultural identity. Feedback from participants will guide iterative refinements of the therapeutic model.

Conclusion

Samba Dance Movement Therapy offers a promising avenue for integrating traditional cultural practices with modern therapeutic interventions. By engaging the body, mind, and spirit through samba's dynamic movement and cultural richness, Samba Dance Movement Therapy seeks to empower individuals on their journey toward personal healing and cultural integration. This proposal lays the groundwork for pilot studies and further empirical research that could expand the scope and application of culturally anchored dance therapies in clinical settings. Explorations into similar culturally embedded movement therapies and their impacts on minority and immigrant communities could further inform and enhance the development of Samba Dance Movement Therapy in broader therapeutic contexts.

Appendix B

Brasil Brasil Cultural Center Permission Letter



September 29, 2024

Nayla Santo
Brasil Brasil Cultural Center

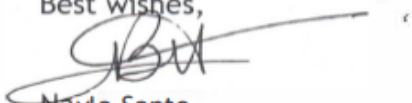
To Whom It May Concern,
My name is Nayla and I am the director and curator of Brasil Brasil Cultural Center as well as the lead teacher and coordinator of Capoeira Batuque's youth program which reaches over 50,000 children yearly through our classes, workshops, residencies and educational programs in the greater Los Angeles and at Brasil Brasil Cultural Center.

I am writing regarding our partnership with Ana Carla G Laidley which has been ongoing since 2002, and is the longest standing partnership with the Brasil Brasil Cultural Center to date. Ana is not just a teacher at Brasil Brasil Cultural Center, she is key to the foundation of our organization and is involved in all our programs, research projects, events and International performances, residencies, and workshops.

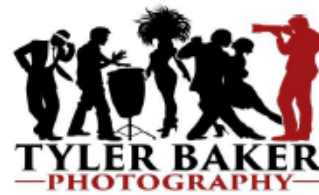
Ana's is a walking encyclopedia in the roots of the Afro Brazilian traditions and the history of Samba. She is a top world renowned professor and brings elements of history as well as social and emotional learning to all her students and community. We are honored to have Ana Carla G Laidley on our team as she elevates all our programs. We support Ana's research and she has our permission to post research questionnaires, recruit participants, conduct research at Brasil Brasil Cultural Center, and mention the institution in the final dissertation.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. I can be reached via email at nayla@brasilbrasil.org or via phone at [REDACTED]

Best wishes,


Nayla Santo
Director/Curator
Brasil Brasil Cultural Center

Tyler Baker Photography Permission Letter



13 July 2025

To Whom it may concern,

Tyler Baker Photography is a Non-profit/cultural social enterprise registered in Alberta, Canada, under the Alberta Companies Act.

With respect to images taken by me of Ana Laidley, which she intends to use for her dissertation, I can confirm that all such images are subject to our non-profit model release, allowing Ana to use them in any form or for any purpose she deems appropriate, in part or intact or in combination with other images or graphic elements in perpetuity. They are not subject to licensing fees or any other commercial or time encumbrance. The model release requires proper crediting of the work which in this case will of course be taken care of through proper academic referencing methods.

I trust this provides clarity,

Best,

Tyler Baker
Photography
Digitally signed by Tyler
Baker Photography
Date: 2025.07.13
11:11:23 -06'00'

Tyler Baker

Appendix C

Artwork and Photographs

Active Imagination

Figure C1

Oxum



Figure C2

Tree of Life

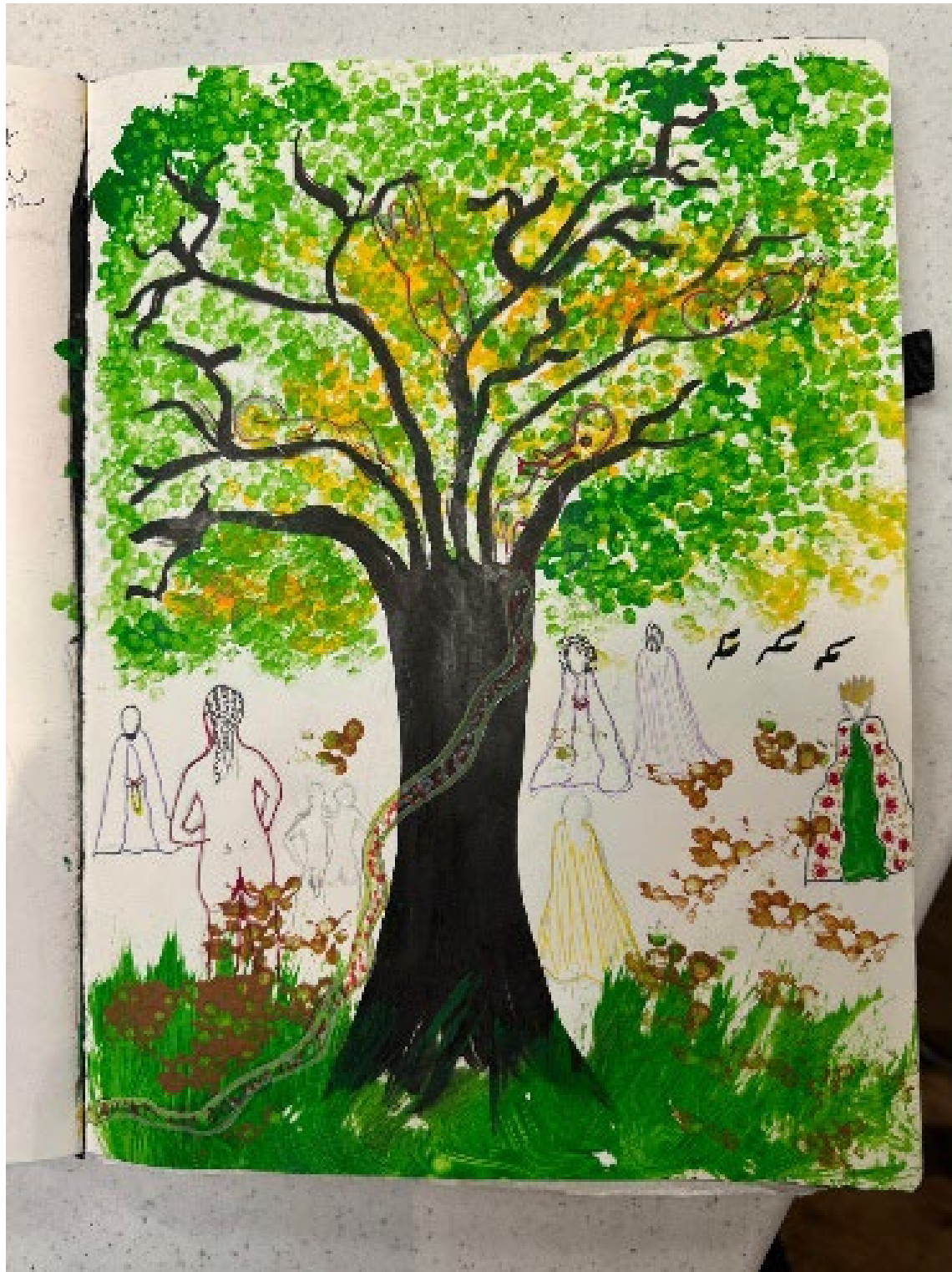


Figure C3

Orisas Mandala



Figure C4

Ana Laidley Utah 2018



Figure C5

Ana Laidley ISC 2019



Figure C6

Malandro Performance ISC 2019



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