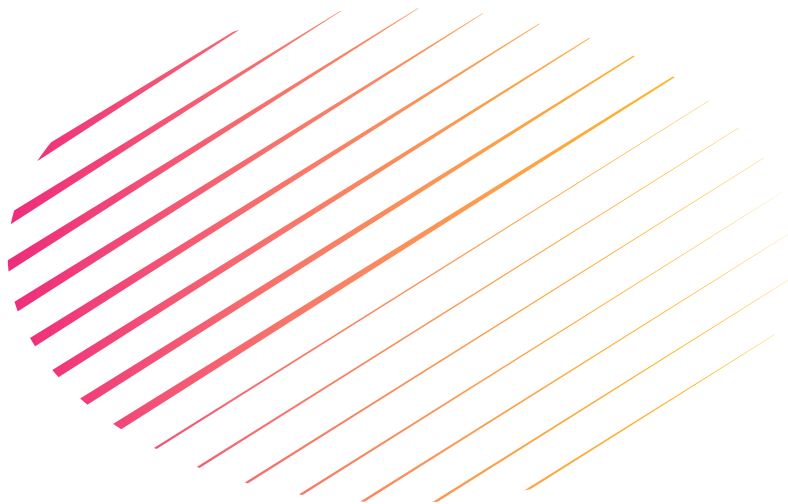**BBISB**

BECAUSE BLACK IS STILL BEAUTIFUL

THE ARAMINTA APPROACH

The Araminta Approach™, a social-emotional, culturally affirming model for criminal justice involved Black women created in love by Dr. Marilyn Jones

This effort is dedicated to all of the Black women we lost during the crack epidemic and the subsequent war on drugs, as well as all of the Black community members who were disproportionately impacted as a result. It is an acknowledgment of the long suffering.   It is also a celebration of those of us who were able to make it out.

I am grateful for every single Black woman who offered their time to share with me their most challenging issues around reengaging in society or being impacted by incarceration. Many of them survived insurmountable odds and traumatic lives. Therefore, I want to take the time to honor their willingness to get vulnerable and step forward with their truth.

I want to also acknowledge the **230 years, 11 months, and 9 days** of incarceration life experience that is being honored as expertise on this effort. That is not including the amount of time I spent in captivity. My goodness, one can only imagine the damage that was done to our communities based upon our absence.

The strength and tenacity that is represented in this effort helped to validate what I created, and I do not take for granted anything that was shared with me. Therefore, this cannot not be your average report that is designed around being published or career-building. This effort has been completed as a roadmap in order to take action.

It is a movement to draw upon criminal justice impacted Black women's expertise and life experiences to address what is going on in our own community. *This is for us and by us.* It is my hope that this effort will serve as a piggyback ride for those that come behind me and that it lives beyond my natural life. I took a lot from my community, so this is my official contribution.

Sincerely written,

Dr. Marilyn Denise Jones

Problem Statement

San Francisco, California, was severely impacted by the crack epidemic, which led to the extreme incarceration disparities affecting the Black community. Reverend Cecil Williams, the Founder of Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, described the impact that the Black community faced during these traumatic times:

> Black crack dealers have told me that their primary targets are black women. If you get to them, you get to children and you get to them, you get to the children and you get to men. Addicted women and mothers, crack babies doomed to a severely limited existence, a large percentage of a race exposed to courts, probation and jail time: if nothing is done soon, this will be the future of the black community (Williams, 1990).

Unfortunately, nothing was done, and Reverend Williams' prediction came to fruition. We, Black San Franciscans, were funneled and continue to be funneled through the criminal justice system.

Thirty years later, despite gentrification efforts that have dwindled the Black population in San Francisco, the incarceration disparity affecting Black San Franciscans is still at a crisis level. Crack dealers were able to recognize that Black women are the gatekeepers of the Black community to some degree, as Reverend Williams implied in his statement above. It is time for the criminal justice system to gain a better understanding of Black women's importance to the Black community in the fight to end mass incarceration.

Prior to COVID-19, in San Francisco, Black women accounted for 5.8% of the general female population while representing close to 45.5% of the women arrested (Males, 2015) and over 44% of the incarcerated female population housed in the San Francisco County Jails (Burns Institute, 2015). Furthermore, a Black woman is close to 11 times more likely to be arrested in San Francisco than a White woman (Burns Institute, 2015). These stats are horrific, particularly in a resource-rich city that is known for being diverse and progressive. If this is the case, why are incarcerating systems like the justice system, the child welfare system, the mental health and drug and alcohol systems failing Black women?

Gender responsiveness, a theoretical perspective that has been embraced to address the needs of criminal justice involved women, calls for efforts to be culturally responsive. To date, there are no clear recommendations on what being culturally responsive actually entails in regard to criminal justice involved Black women (CJIBW). This paper serves as an attempt to move beyond the surface to facilitate a deeper understanding of what cultural responsiveness means on behalf of CJIBW in order to create much-needed, long overdue transformational change.

In order for change to truly happen, the uniqueness, plights, and desires of the hardest hit female population in the criminal justice system in the San Francisco Bay Area must be valued. The same can be said for urban areas all around the country. Recently, many of the inmates across the country have been released due to COVID-19, so now is the optimal time for a formal attempt at creating a model that Black women will respond to.

Developing a Model for Us

This policy brief presents the Araminta Approach, a practical model that has been created for service providers and key stakeholders in the criminal justice field to better serve CJIBW, and most importantly, its purpose is to assist CJIBW with creating optimal change among and within ourselves. The Araminta Approach was named after the ancestor Araminta Ross, who later changed her name to Harriet Tubman upon securing her freedom (Bradford, 1993); she was the epitome of a strong Black woman (SBW).

Although Harriet Tubman, experienced a great deal of trauma during her lifetime, she was much more powerful than her trauma, and in her case being trauma-informed required the acknowledgment of her power. Society too often deems Black women powerless, but this is not factual. Our power is not normally highlighted, but this is a dire mistake. The purpose of this policy brief is to address CJIBW's needs and desires, as well as power dynamics.

This brief is broken into three sections: Firstly, the theoretical framework for the Araminta Approach, the SBW schema, is introduced, and dominant themes retrieved from the literature are highlighted. Secondly, the respondents' narratives are explored to validate the SBW schema tenets' presence in the lives of CJIBW and to present how they describe their own intrinsic desires in a way that dovetails with the SBW schema. Lastly, the Araminta Approach model is fleshed out to determine how the desires can be addressed in a manner that promotes transformational change.

Theoretical Framework: The Strong Black Woman Schema

> She's the fearless foremother: Harriet stealing back into the pit of slavery boldly leading us to freedom; Sojourner the abolitionist refusing to be cowed…She's that Mama men love to brag about who sacrificed all for them…The do-it-all mother, always on call, raising children, sustaining households, working both outside and inside the home…the community mother…the determined sister…We've named her the "Strong Black Woman" --Marcia Gillepsie (Parks, 2010).

The SBW schema is the theoretical framework for the Araminta Approach. The SBW schema is a coping mechanism that has been adopted by Black women as a result of our ancestors being held as hostages, raped at will, separated from their families, forced to work tirelessly for hundreds of years without compensation, and going through a host of other horrible experiences, which has been passed down intergenerationally (Donovan & West, 2015). This coping mechanism can be further described as a bigger-

than-life identity that many Black women strive for. The SBW schema has been addressed under several different terminologies (Watson & Hunter, 2016), such as but not limited to "Superwoman, Modern Mammy, Black Lady and Sojourner Syndrome" (Donovan & West, 2015).

The commonality that exists among all of these titles is that there are self, familial, communal and and societal-regulated sets of adopted cognitive and behavioral expectations that exist within the minds of many Black women in America for survival in response to oppressive practices (Abrams, Maxwell & Belgrave, 2014; Beauboeuf & Lafontant, 2007; Donovan & West, 2015; Davis, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2016). The expectations involved with trying to live up to the above-mentioned titles are admirable but at the same time can be exhaustive and unrealistic. Thus, the SBW schema is associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes.

The following tenets are highlighted across the literature in regard to the SBW schema:

- An SBW strives to be an excellent caregiver (Abrams, et al., 2014; Beauboeuf & Lafontant, 2007; Donovan & West, 2015; Davis, 2015; Watson & Hunters, 2016);

- An SBW is not afraid to advocate for herself (Watson & Hunters, 2016).

- An SBW has a strong sense of ethnic pride (Abrams et al., 2014; Donovan & West, 2015; Davis, 2015);

- An SBW strives for the mastery of self-reliance (Abrams et al., 2014; Donovan & West, 2015; Davis, 2015);

- An SBW operates under a belief system that she has the ability to perform favorably and endure more than other people despite the acts of oppression that consistently work against her state of mind (Donovan & West, 2015). Henceforth, this tenet will be referred to as the Black Shero;

- The SBW identity has strong connections to spirituality and this results in an extreme desire to be spiritually connected (Walker-Barnes, 2014).

There is a directional relationship between the SBW schema and income levels among Black women, meaning the lower the income, the higher level of internalization. Due to the fact that poverty and incarceration are co-relational, the SBW schema serves as a promising theoretical framework for the Araminta approach.

The Narratives

This section of this brief explores the narratives of 40 Black women who are impacted by incarceration in order to validate the above-mentioned SBW tenets' presence in their lives. Thirty-five of the women had a personal history of incarceration. This section will not spend a great deal of time interpreting the narratives. Rather, it is woven in a manner so that the narratives can speak for themselves.

The narratives were collected through interviewing 15 community thought leaders and conducting focus groups and individual interviews with 25 women who had a history of incarceration. (Please see Appendices for the Methodology and Instrument utilized.)

The Black matriarch is of utmost importance to the Black community. She is the backbone. Therefore, in order to set the tone, I first want to bring forth a narrative obtained from one of the thought leaders interviewed in order to create an understanding of what the matriarch means to the Black community:

> The community was impacted when we as women we were not on our guard. The women as grandmothers and the other women, the old school women--they were there. They were the glue. You could always depend on Big Momma, but then everybody's Big Momma died, and then Big Momma was a crackhead. This is a whole different Big Momma, so the neighborhood declined. It was like night and day. It became very dangerous. The neighborhood began to go down. Big Momma and them used to get out and sweep in front of their house and sweep the papers and everything up. That stopped happening. Nobody had no grass anymore. People started breaking in cars and the crime rate skyrocketed (Thought Leader, Expertise: Spirituality).

Big Momma, a term of endearment for Black grandmothers, was referred to several times during this endeavor. She is often taken for granted, but she is most definitely needed. I wanted to make sure that I started the narrative section honoring her importance. One can only imagine the repercussions of her absence in the community.

There was a blanket of grief expressed by most of the women I spoke to that was associated with being exposed to a trifecta of discrimination: being a woman, who happens to be Black, and having a criminal record. There was a consensus that a criminal record further magnified their negative experiences as Black women.

The line of questioning for this effort proved to be one the respondents were not used to answering. Thus, this process turned out to be very emotional and was met with tears in some cases. Stereotypes associated with being a Black woman had an emotional impact, including the societal stigma of Black criminality that was perceived to be reinforced in their lives:

It's like I fit in a certain mode. Automatically, I am associated with drugs because of the stigma with African Americans and drugs. Uh, automatically I have a second-degree murder, so it's automatically associated with gang violence. These are some of the stigmas. And these are things that have been said to me once I have already told my story to dispel those thought processes and concepts. I guess I am profiled and racialized and stigmatized. [Speaking as if from the inside of the thought processes of members of society]: 'Black people are gangbangers, so it must be a gang-related shooting. It must be a drug-related killing.' You know, and that's not necessarily so (Thought Leader, Expertise: Healing).

She is fitting the narrative of the welfare queen. She is fitting the narrative of the crack mother. She is fitting the narrative that society has painted for her. Even if she necessarily didn't start out that way, even if she fell for traps that were set for her, her behavior reinforces that. It puts a target on all of our backs. It dilutes our community's power. It diluted the power of the Black woman in the community. Now you have a collective narrative that statistically you have the data for. They are like, 'See, this is why we don't fuck with Black women. This is why we need to punish Black women and give them criminal records, so they will know not to do it next time,' when they weren't even doing it in the first place. That's what that did. (Thought Leader, Expertise: Adult Child of incarcerated Parents).

The stereotypes associated with being a Black woman with a criminal record exposed the respondents to a magnitude of discriminatory practices in many areas, including but not limited to being followed in stores, being deemed as too loud, being harassed, being eliminated from employment and housing opportunities, and being judged for just being themselves. As predicted, the themes that emerged from these conversations dovetail with the Strong Black Woman schema.

The following will explore the respondents' narratives, which strongly coincided with each of the six tenets of the SBW schema. It should be noted that there may be overlap among the tenets, or one may support the other.

Strives to Be an Excellent Caregiver

It is understood that the world needs caregivers; however, caregiving can be exhausting without reciprocity. The selfless nature of this tenet is admirable but may also lead to a lack of self-care and weariness.   Nevertheless, this tends to be what is expected from Black women as a requirement for being the backbones of the Black community:

I think that Black women and girls are sensitive to the issues that impact other people. Black women and girls are the first to accept trans people. Black women and girls are the first to take care of the elderly, the first to take care of the disabled, all of the other fragile groups that need extra care and help. Black women end up being the ones to take care of them, so when you have that central

person that is out of the picture to me everybody suffers. Especially those that are already prone to being messed with and not having the support that they need. It's people's mommas and grandmommas and aunties that are at the prisons for the men, that are making the phone calls, that are taking care of the kids, dealing with the baby mommas when they don't want to. All of these ways that Black women take care of the ecosystem of the Black community (Thought Leader, Expertise: Youth).

The desire and willingness to go the extra mile when providing services for other Black women was expressed by a couple of the respondents who were also thought leaders in the community with a personal history of incarceration.

I have to constantly work with them on their self-esteem and to realize that they are bigger than their past mistakes. In order to navigate these social services and in order to recreate their lives and face the discrimination that we have to face, I have to keep building them up to be resilient, so they can keep their eyes on the prize, so they cannot give up, so the women I serve, they need constant building and reassuring and support as they are facing this oppressive system that doesn't give them a second chance to reenter society in a positive manner (Thought Leader, Expertise: Family Reunification).

It is hard for them to get housing. It's always denied. I have to appeal it. I have to fight for them. A lot of them want to go to work, but they want to be housed first. If you are living on the streets or in a shelter, it is uncomfortable. It is not conducive to somebody who wants to go to work. People do do it, but it's harder for them. [Prompt: Ok, this is because of their criminal record. Do you think being Black impacts them as well?] Yeah, absolutely. Because they look at them like a Black criminal. [Imitating landlords' thinking processes]: You are a criminal already. So, you are Black too? [Laughter from both of us] For real, no we cannot have you in this building because you are Black AND a criminal. [More laughter] You cannot be both. You gotta be one or the other…But I have to go to three or four appeals. I sat up in there, and I will cry for this woman just so they will give her the place. A lot of people don't believe that people can change, so I end up telling them my story to get them in (Thought Leader, Expertise: Homelessness).

The emotional challenges of not being able to meet the requirement of being an excellent caregiver at some point in their lives weighed heavily on the minds of the respondents. In response to how their families are impacted by their histories of incarceration, some of the respondents expounded upon how their criminal histories affected their relationships with their offspring and their own emotional well-being as a result:
That goes so deep to the core that those challenges are still coming out as the years and days go by. It permeated the whole fabric of the relationship. From time to time, you will see something seep out, whether it be something that I did

not show my daughter throughout the years because I was incarcerated or whether it be something that she tries to use against me. It affects the fabric of your relationship. It affects the integrity; it affects the growth. That's the everything, and when you have children that are raised by someone else and you are in the shadows but yet you are Mom. You are a prominent figure, but yet you are in the background with no authority. Your words are not the same. They don't ring with the same magnitude as the person that is talking to the child daily and interacting. That becomes a heavy burden. Then you gotta get over the guilt (Focus group, ID# 1001).

The way my incarceration impacted my son--I can remember when my grandmother used to bring my son to visit me in prison. And he had this sad look on his face, like 'I love my momma. I miss my momma.' [In tears] We had contact visits, so I got a chance to hold him and embrace him, but when I came home I didn't know how to do that because [in tears] I was caught in the grips of the disease of my addiction. Right, and so my grandmother raised my son, and what I realized is that I damaged my kids by using and being locked up and being a slave to my addiction. I can piggyback on what she said, today I pray that God will break every generational curse in my life because my son ended up going to jail, and my Daddy went to jail and did time, so it's like it's in my DNA, but it can be broken (Focus group, ID# 1003).

The pain associated with not fully living up to the role of being an excellent caregiver is long-lasting. Both of the above-mentioned respondents who spoke on the damage done to their relationships with their offspring as a result of incarceration have been free from incarceration for over 20 years. Overall, the tenet was highly prevalent among the respondents' narratives. The barriers that are faced while attempting to be an excellent caregiver/parent upon release from incarceration can also prove to be very challenging due to the lack of adequate resources available.

When I was in FOTEP, there was about 45-60 of us in the houses over there on Treasure Island, and it was kinda hard cuz no one knew what to do. They would offer support groups like parenting classes, but they weren't teaching you shit. They weren't teaching you how to reintegrate with your families and develop relationships and how to work through the mistrust that the kids have with you. Everyone got shipped off somewhere else, and there wasn't a lot of housing resources. You had to go out and find your own. When my oldest daughter was about to get put back in foster care after I had already got my young one back, they said no one over 12 can come to this program, so I had to go to find other housing, so I could get my other daughter. There needs to be places available for families to reunify, especially if they have the opportunity or the chance to do that, and there isn't a lot of those places (Individual Interview, 1024).

The desire to be an excellent caregiver was represented in the narratives in a very strong manner, ranging from providing optimal services to community members and

meeting parental responsibilities. The inability to meet the communal, societal and self-expectations of this tenet can cause great anxiety, and culturally affirming support is of great need in this area.

A Courageous Self-Advocate

Speaking up for themselves as Black women presented problems for the majority of the respondents. The respondents expressed not being able to access services and resources due to their communication styles and being stereotyped as problematic.

> What I find most challenging about being a Black woman is a lot of times we are misunderstood. [Probe: In what ways?] From our strength because we speak our mind. We have been through so much as Black people. I think a lot of times we are misread or misunderstood when we say what we feel and be as a matter of fact (Thought Leader, Expertise: Employment).
> Instead of 'I understand that you are passionate. I understand you are passionate about what you are talking about' and meeting her where she is at, she is asked to stifle her passion because she is too loud. Because she doesn't get the services she needs, it doesn't go back to the family, which means it doesn't go back to the community, which means the community stays stuck with no healing. Just like the drugs trickle down to the community, healing and hope trickle down to the community, so if you stop the healing because of the person's deliverance, then everybody in the community is stopped. (Thought Leader, Expertise: Healing).

There was a consensus of strife around this tenet. As a matter of fact, the complications and tensions surrounding this tenet elicited the most conversation in the focus groups as well as individual interviews. The following conversation was an example of the participants mocking societal figures' unwillingness to help them get their needs met due to their communication styles.

> I'm sorry, I'm sorry, but after years of being home you still want to stereotype me because I come in and you want me to be like you want me to be. Cuz Imma move with my hand person, and then when I come in to try to talk to you I still get that 'Okay, ma'am, calm down' (Focus Group, ID#1006).

> They try to act like all Black women is crazy (Focus Group, ID# 1012).

> They try to act like we crazy, when all the time they crazy (Focus Group, ID# 1010).

> Yeah, cuz we know what we talking about (Focus Group, ID# 1012).
> That's a way of them putting it all on us and saying, 'I'm trying to help her, but she's all upset' [mimicking a service provider's voice] (Focus Group, ID# 1006).

'She don't want any help' [mimicking a service provider's voice] (Focus Group, ID#1010).

[Big laughter by everyone, including me]

Although this conversation led to laughter, not being able to truly express oneself is difficult, particularly in times of crises. What should be looked upon as a strength in regard to our ability to utilize agency is met with a lack of empathy and/or unwillingness to gain a better understanding. Thus, it is of utmost importance that our Gift of Advocacy, a term that is henceforth created to battle the negative perceptions of Black women's communication styles and honor our abilities to speak up for ourselves, should be uplifted instead of shunned.

Strives to Master Self-Reliance

The desire to master self-reliance is a heavy quest to fulfill while dealing with a trifecta of discrimination. The barriers the trifecta created towards this mastery were of great concern. There are two domains of concern for the respondents in regard to being able to master self-reliance: employment and housing.

> When you are looking for employment opportunities, no matter what race you are, it [a criminal record] is always a factor regarding background and getting decent employment in San Francisco, but as a Black woman I think it heightens it. It creates fear. It creates doubt. It creates fear that you're not going to get the job opportunity due to your background. It creates an insecurity. Not wanting to be judged by your past. For the most part, if an individual has done their time and rectified that and made necessary changes to their behavior and stepped up to the plate for employment, that shouldn't be all a person sees (Thought Leader: Employment).

> I had a charge from selling the police a bag of weed, which got me a felony and some other charges. But anyway, fast forward, it was a barrier just to get a certification and a license, and it was 20 years ago. And then right here, what are the challenges of Black women held back by systems of employment or financially? We just don't have as much access to wealth. We don't get taught what they get taught...Here I am trying to better myself and get different licenses, so I can have access, and it becomes a financial barrier. The layers. (Thought Leader, Expertise: Finances).

This tenet is extremely important because it is based upon the respondents' desire to be in a position to take care of themselves and their families. A lack of this ability can lead to depression, substance abuse, and the reengagement of criminal behavior.

A Strong Sense of Cultural Pride

The SBW schema is associated with a strong sense of cultural pride. This tenet can be found in the responses throughout the narratives collected. However, societal messages tend to be oppositional, which creates tension. This needs to be further understood. In light of all of the environmental stressors funneled to the respondents' lives by way of racism, being a proud Black woman can be viewed as a stubborn act.

> Being a Black woman has its positive and its negative attributes. On the positive side, we're smart, we're strong, we're beautiful, we hold our families down. You know, a lot of people wanna be like us, but on the flip side, when I go into the store, they follow me around, thinking I'm going to steal something. When I go to an interview, 'Oh, she not educated enough', so they think until they see my paperwork and see that I got a degree. Just the judgment that we not good enough (Focus Group, ID# 1005).

Another focus group participant spoke on her oppositional experiences while being a proud Black woman:

> We're good mothers. We're good women to our spouses and we work really hard and we have good minds and we're very smart. We're intelligent. We have a lot, but we get looked at different. People don't look at us on that side. They like, 'Oh, she's on probation; she's a felon.' They don't know the good things that we have coming out of us. They just look at, 'Oh, she's a number; she's a criminal.' Cuz we've been to jail, we don't show that stuff, but other than being a criminal, we have a lot of stuff that we're very good at. [Prompt: So where do you think that comes from, the good things we have?] Um, I think it comes from our ancestors. The strength that we have been through. Just us in general. You know, we are strong Black women. (Individual Interview, ID# 1020).

A strong level of Black pride was clearly present among the respondents, but it's as if this level of pride strongly goes against societal messages. The terminologies "culturally responsive" and "culturally competent" have been utilized for decades, but where can these notions truly be found after all of this time? In the words of one of the respondents, "Cultural competency is like charity work. It's not uplifting" (Thought Leader, Expertise: Healing). Our willingness to be proud of our heritage doesn't need to be serviced in a culturally competent manner; it needs to be affirmed.

The Black Shero

This tenet is associated with a belief system that many Black women have, which is that we are created in a manner that has better equipped us to weather life's injustices than others. To some degree, it's an assumption of innate superpowers combined with a notion of favor. It's a notion of innate abilities to persevere. It's an ideological perception of being the strongest of the strong. This tenet is closely related to the Strong Sense of

Cultural Pride tenet, but it is based upon the belief of having a higher level of capabilities, understanding, and endurance than others.

> Black women are very, very powerful, and this is something I think is God-given. I really believe that our culture receives something abundant in that way. I think that God permeates through our bone marrow; we walk and we talk with Him, and it gives us grace that nobody else has, and that's my true belief (Focus Group, ID# 1001).

> I think it's in us, not on us… We have a determination to not give up like no other. It's been forced upon us. It's embedded in us. For me, it's like I've been through so much I try to read positive affirmations to set my tone and my heart right, so I don't let the devil get into my head when I go out. Triggers are everywhere. In my situation, let me speak, not everyone is happy for you. As I continue to grow, I've done it very unselfishly. I get up to give back. I don't let nothing stop that or detour me. That makes me a beast. I have that type of personality. A Black strong woman, and unapologetically about who I am as a person or what I've been through. I don't hide who I am. Matter of fact, I lead off of that, so I can let the next woman know if I can do it, you can do it too. (Thought Leader, Expertise: Employment).

> We are born warriors, and first with your spirituality being a Black woman, you are already an overcomer. If you have achieved things in the secondary world like a degree or anything that can make you be effective in who you is. I think if we release that more without validation, we'll be unstoppable. I just feel if more African American women use their purpose without validation, we would be more strengthened, we would be more stronger, and we would be able to rise our next nation. We can really rise the next nation of African Americans up (Focus Group, ID# 1021).

> We have the willingness to love like no other (Individual Interview, ID# 1023).

The belief that one is powerful and blessed with a level of strength or favor beyond what others have been blessed with, even under oppressive circumstances, is possibly rooted in the way our ancestors were able to survive under such hard conditions. Nevertheless, our ancestors are hard acts to follow. In many ways, the Black Shero identity can eliminate opportunities to be vulnerable. It is understandable how this tenet can lead to turmoil. Although this tenet cannot be eradicated, a balance should be introduced because at the end of the day we are mere humans.

However, as a Black woman who has gone from a habitually offending drug addict to a doctor, I cannot truly critique nor reject this notion of being stronger than most. What I can say is that there needs to be a balance, so we can live longer. Some days, it is too much to live up to.

Spiritual Connectedness

Stanton-Tindall et. al. (2013) provided an excellent definition of what spirituality entails: "[It is] a private, individual-level concept that is characterized by perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about a sacred or divine power, universal spirit or ultimate purpose," and it is a "sense of existential well-being which has been referred to as an understanding or belief in the meaningfulness of one's life." This definition of spirituality has been adapted for the Araminta Approach.

The notion of having a higher purpose and a Higher Power that assists with accomplishments and getting past tribulations was extremely applicable among the respondents.

> I want to thank God for another day. Incarceration affected my family in a major way because I spent a lot of time away from my kids, and my kids look at me with a reputation of being a thug. You know, 'My mom been to jail a whole bunch of times,' but now that I am sober and have a change of mind and living my life different, I don't want that to be my legacy. Cuz I'm doing something different today. You know, I ain't a drug dealer, I ain't a prostitute. I ain't on drugs and drinking. You know, I ain't trying to hustle and get over today. I thank and praise God how He changed me. That *today* I want to leave a legacy doing better than what I came from. That generational curses have been broken of the dopefiends and drug addicts and alcoholics in my family through me (Focus Group, ID# 1007).

In addition to the existential and religious aspect of this tenet, it was found that the ancestors served as spiritual sources to receive aspiration and draw strength from. Due to the fact that the ancestors are not here in the flesh, and their strong spirits made their way through the data collection process time and time again, the ancestors have been included in the Spiritually Connected tenet domain.

> We always have to go back and think about our great, great grandmother or some historical figure. Like myself, I like to use Harriet Tubman because I think about how strong she had to be to escape slavery and go back in to free others at a time when they was killing people. I think of her story, and it gives me strength (Thought Leader: Expertise: Reunification).

> There is an ancestral lineage to Black women that is something you cannot explain. It is something that I think is embedded in me. [In tears] I want to be different. I wanted to make sure that I broke the chain of my whole family line. It's that strength. If didn't nobody didn't have the strength to know how to navigate this white ass world, I was going to turn it on its head (Thought Leader, Expertise: Adult Child of Incarcerated Parents).

> We come from a long line of ancestors who fought to get us where we are at. I don't know, it's like this quiet place for me that I hear 'keep going, no matter

what, just fucking keep going and don't back down. If you don't stand for something, you're gonna fall for everything. Don't let no one try to shake your spot or try and break your foundation.' I think that's where a lot of Black women come from because I see the same look of determination in my sisters' eyes when they are fighting for their lives or whatever they are fighting for. (Individual Interview, ID# 1024).

The ancestors' presence throughout this entire process was an unintended outcome. The magnitude of suffering they endured and the best effort they could give me rang strongly from their resting points and commanded acknowledgment. They put in work, which infiltrated this entire process. Actually, it seems as if the ancestors directed the initiation of this process from the very beginning, taking into consideration that the Araminta Approach was named after the strongest Black woman I've ever heard of, Harriet Tubman.

Surprisingly, the question that led to the most tears being shed had to do with Black women's sources of strength, which was most attributed to the ancestors. It should be noted that although many of these narratives are extremely powerful, the delivery often included tears, cracking in voices, and an overall look of grief and weariness in the eyes of the respondents. It was certain that their strength was valued by all of these respondents, but the burden presented upon them as a result of having to be so strong was present also.

Finally, I would like to give an honorable mention to laughter. Laughter came through during this validation process at what some would deem as the least opportune times. We laughed at issues that others couldn't fathom laughing about. Thank God for our sense of humor.

The Araminta Approach Model

The Araminta Approach is a practical model that was developed through a flowchart that was created to address the desires associated with the SBW schema in order to produce effective programs on the behalf of CJIBW. The flowchart was created prior to hearing from the respondents based upon research in regard to the SBW schema and my life experience. However, the narratives obtained from the focus groups and individual interviews enabled me to expand the flow chart. In addition, I allowed the thought leaders to add their direct input to the flowchart.

The Araminta Approach represents strategies that can begin to promote and bring about optimal outcomes in the lives of CJIBW, including but not limited to:

- creating a better understanding among service providers and key stakeholders in the criminal justice field based upon intrinsic desires, which are founded upon social/emotional needs;

- promoting balance in some instances in order to improve mental and physical health outcomes;

- developing environments that can assist with the facilitation of transformational change among CJIBW;

- and lastly and most importantly, assisting CJIBW with the development of self in order to nurture optimal results in their own lives; thus, the column to the far right serves as the metaphorical map to the North Star, the star that led to freedom.

The multi-faceted uses of the following flow chart are an attempt to address the power dynamics of the incarceration disparity affecting Black women from all angles, including the power that the most impacted hold.

Table 1: The Araminta Approach Flowchart

The Araminta Approach Flowchart is based upon the elements of the SBW schema derived from the literature review. The six tenets of the SBW schema are represented in the far-left column, and the desires associated with each tenet are identified in the middle column. The column to the far right captures the aspects that should be present in order to effectively address the desire and promote balance if necessary, the Araminta Approach. (Please see the following page for Table 1.)

Table 1.

SBW Schema Tenets	Intrinsic Desire	The Araminta Approach
Strives to be an Excellent Caregiver	1. To be able to help others 2. To be able to nurture. 3. To be trusted 4. To be valued 5. To be appreciated 6. To be loved 7. To be validated 8. To be acknowledged 9. To be connected to others 10. To sacrifice self so others will stay around 11. To leave a positive legacy	1. Respect for the matriarchal hierarchy present in the Black community and the importance of Big Momma 2. Understanding of the complexities involved with being elected as and trying to fit what is expected of a matriarch 3. Non-exploitative opportunities to take care of our loved ones and/or give back to the community 4. Reciprocity (BALANCE) 5. Assistance getting in position to be able to help others 6. Opportunities to build self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence, in order to be enough in self (BALANCE) 7. Support with mothering as a Black woman with a history of incarceration
Courageous Self-Advocate	1. To be heard and for results to follow 2. To protect herself 3. For things to be fair 4. To be respected as a human being and for her opinion and truth without judgment or retaliation 5. To feel safe 6. To not be silenced 7. To have dignity 8. To release the pain and anger	1. The elimination of the term "voiceless": Our voices are powerful; the listening efforts are weak. 2. Nonjudgmental listeners that are keen to recognize and cultivate strengths 3. Recognition that the courage to self-advocate is a strength 4. Knowledge of self, so we won't internalize the discrimination we face when we speak up (e.g., angry Black woman, loud, aggressive stereotypes) 5. Appreciation for what we have to offer/expertise 6. Change providers' mindsets about Black women's deliverance/communication style: It is not threatening; it is passion. 7. Encouraging, evoking, and valuing Black women's advocacy skills 8. A safe space to be angry 9. Intergenerational spaces where OGs with life experience are allowed to advise and work with younger generations to build advocacy skills together 10. Assistance developing skills to channel anger to avoid self-sabotage
Strong Sense of Cultural Pride	1. To be proud of being a Black woman 2. To feel whole and enough within her Blackness 3. To be able to help her people 4. To be embraced for who she is unfiltered. 5. To be celebrated by others 6. To self-celebrate	1. Culturally affirming efforts that honor Black women's strength, beauty, contributions, and uniqueness while also acknowledging the struggle. 2. Programs and resources specifically designed by and for Black women: This must be a system investment. 3. Access to real Black history (before and after the slave trade), which captures our greatness 4. Assistance working through the grief caused by racial discrimination
Strives to Master Self-Reliance	1. To be able to produce and provide 2. To have stability 3. To be supported on her own terms	1. Access to social capital that can facilitate upward mobility while exercising genuine care 2. Access to like-minded partners that match our energy 3. Appropriate compensation 4. Programs that promote financial creativity 5. Self-love and care opportunities, paying attention to our physical and mental well-being to keep us alive (BALANCE) 6. Need to create an environment where Black women are comfortable asking for help (BALANCE) 7. Opportunities to lead, opportunities to be a boss
The Black Shero (An Overreaching Ability to Endure)	1. To overextend and overachieve to make up for our past and forge a better future 2. To be stronger than most people	1. Consideration, a better understanding and acknowledgement of CJIBW's unique experiences and plights, including the burden of strength 2. Relief from oppressive perceptions, practices, and policies 3. Time to reflect and rejuvenate and support around this (BALANCE) 4. Opportunities to be vulnerable and feel safe doing so

	3. To draw strength from ancestors 4. To persevere beyond adversities 5. To be merely human sometimes (may not admit)	5. Opportunities to have fun (humor, music, dance, etc.) 6. Ancestral inclusivity in program practices and policies	
Spiritually Connected	1. To have unshakable faith 2. To be hopeful 3. To be encouraged 4. To be inspired 5. To be motivated 6. To be joyful 7. To honor the ancestors	1. Opportunities to establish and work towards an existential purpose 2. Opportunities to increase aspirational capital 3. Space to cultivate purpose: it does not necessarily have to be a church, but there must be a space set aside for this purpose. 4. Nonjudgmental fellowships/sisterhoods 5. Someone to check on us when we are going through something or have checked out 6. Opportunities to build a personal relationship with a higher power 7. Combatting the acceptance of an early death in the Black community, **i.e.,** prioritizing physical and mental well-being 8. Space to cultivate joy 9. Ancestral inclusivity in program practices and policies	

Implications

There are a plethora of implications for the Araminta Approach (the far right-hand column) that can impact policies and decision-making. In addition, it can be utilized as a road map for program, training and curricula development. This section will focus on the main ways that I foresee the Araminta Approach being implemented, but I welcome other ideas and recommend that as many strategies as possible be utilized to promote optimal results in the lives of CJIBW.

The need for culturally affirming spaces (spaces that celebrate Blackness every day of the year) that are specifically designed by and for CJIBW was echoed time and time again. It is time for us to take the lead. It is indicated that there is a need for environments that fully understand the unique challenges that CJIBW face, provide opportunities to express frustrations around discriminatory practices focused upon us, provide encouragement and guidance for us, allow us to be our authentic selves, and facilitate financial upward mobility in our lives.

Financial upward mobility should be explored in a culturally affirming manner not only through the acquisition of gainful employment but also through other opportunities to become financially stable. CJIBW should have access to financial knowledge that has historically been kept secret from the Black community. It should be noted that poverty is the main cause of incarceration. Being stuck in a rut of poverty can be mentally challenging, adding to hopelessness and despair, which leads to risk-taking.

In order for these implications to come to fruition, there is a need to develop and implement trainings among service providers in the community, in correctional settings, and among community supervision personnel.   The perception of a lack of understanding among the aforementioned was a theme among the CJIBW that responded. It is very important that CJIBW take the forefront in the development and implementation of programs and strategies that are specifically designed for us.

As noted, the SBW schema, the theoretical framework for the Araminta Approach, leads to poor physical and mental health outcomes. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that CJIBW receive culturally affirming opportunities to exercise genuine self-care. It is time for the healing process to purposefully begin on a larger scale. In order for this to take place, we, meaning Black women, have to take the lead because it is our demise that led to our communities falling apart.

The Araminta Approach is a long overdue attempt to place value on the thinking processes of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Black women. Without a better understanding of the social/emotional implications involved with being a CJIBW, efforts will continue to not be fruitful. Let me be perfectly clear, the Araminta Approach is not about meeting CJIBW where we are. No, it is named after an ancestor who didn't have a problem pulling pistols and making her people move forward when they lost the courage. Therefore, if I'm in a rut, don't meet me there. Please pull me somewhere else.

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Appendix A: Methodology

The Validation Process

I created the foundation for the Araminta Approach model from a plethora of experiences, including but not limited to comprehensive literature reviews, crafting and conducting research studies, over 10 years professional experience working with formerly incarcerated Black women, over 20 years life experience living in public housing in San Francisco, California (a predominantly Black setting), and over 20 years life experience engaged in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. I also have a high level of firsthand knowledge that presented an overall hunch. Despite abundant direct knowledge of this topic, I was not satisfied with basing a model that is this important to the Black community merely upon my perceptions. Thus, I set out to engage in a validation process "and took it to the streets" to ensure I was on the right track.

The validation process consisted of conducting community research, which involved collecting data through individual interviews and focus groups with Black women who were impacted by the criminal justice system. The data was analyzed based upon the SBW schema tenets to validate the tenets' presence in the lives of the respondents. In addition, the respondents who were also deemed to be thought leaders were allowed to give their direct input on the model's flow chart.

Data Collection

The Data Collection phase of this project consisted of conducting interviews among Black women who are also thought leaders in the community and conducting focus groups with CJIBW. Due to COVID-19 and the shelter-in-place requirements, some of the interviews and all of the focus groups had to be conducted remotely by phone and video (Zoom) conferences. The thought leaders received $100 Visa gift cards, and each focus group member received a $50 Visa gift card. Both the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Although each method of data collection involved uniformed questions, prompts were introduced in order to get the details and further understand the participants' responses.

Focus groups

The initial intentions and plans for this validation process were to conduct five in-person focus groups among five-eight formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated Black women in person. However, COVID-19 had other plans. Monthly jail visits that I previously engaged in were cut off. During this validation process, mandatory shelter-in-place requirements were extended to the state of California due to Governor Newsom's concerns, and Mayor London Breed, the Mayor of the City and County San Francisco, California, initiated stringent guidelines early on in the pandemic that were adopted by other counties in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As a result, I had to get creative in the outreach and data collection processes for the focus groups. Although funding was received that was allocated for assistance, the shelter-in-place restrictions made it virtually impossible for me to hire and train an individual who could meet the needs of this community action research project. Thus, I had to put on many hats myself, including but not limited to outreach, marketing, data collections transcribing, and data analysis.

The recruitment process for the focus groups consisted of the creation and utilization of flyers, the utilization of networks established with other community-based organizations, word-of-mouth efforts, and the utilization of technology. The focus group participants were asked questions in regard to the unique challenges that CJIBW face, the impact on others as a result of these challenges, and Black women's sources of strength. Please see attached focus group instrument for further details.

It was my intention to seek the input of CJIBW between the ages of 18-24 in a focus group setting; however, this group was found to be the least likely to respond in a virtual group setting, and this may have been attributable to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, the overwhelming number of women who responded to the outreach efforts for this community action research study were middle aged, 40+, and many were seniors.

The total length of lifetime incarceration for the focus groups participants ranged from 3 days to 27.5 years. The years of lifetime incarceration for the focus group members totaled 118 years, 2 months, and 3 days. Two of the focus group participants identified as transgender women (male-to-female). The age range for the focus group participants was 24-69 years old. The following is a detailed breakdown of the age distribution of the women who participated in focus groups. Due to hardships with getting groups together under the shelter-in-place order, the last six respondents were interviewed individually, bringing the total to 25 women.

The following chart gives comprehensive information about the approximate total years of incarceration and the number of years free from incarceration for the formerly incarcerated Black women who participated but were not considered thought leaders.

Focus Group#	ID#	Age	Total # of Years In-custody	# of Years Free
1	1001	55	6	22
1	1002	69	1	26
2	1003	49	17.5	18
2	1004	55	10	13

2	1005	46	2.5	24
2	1006	59	2	13
2	1007	40	5	1
3	1008	61	15	21
3	1009	45	3	6
3	1010	63	.5	7
3	1011	57	1 month	20
3	1012	29	3	2
3	1013	40	1 month	14
3	1014	29	3 days	1.5
4	1015	46	2.5	15
4	1016	38	5	1
4	1017	46	27.5	5
4	1018	57	.5	10
4	1019	65	12	27
Ind. Interview	1020	24	5	1 month
Ind. Interview	1021	50	90 days	12
ind. Interview	1022	58	1	20
Ind. Interview	1023	53	20	6
Ind. Interview	1024	41	10	6
Ind. Interview	1025	50	6 days	25

Thought Leader Interviews

I selected 15 thought leaders who are also Black women impacted by incarceration either through having a criminal record or having a family member who was incarcerated, and they also had expertise in different areas of importance. Because I

have over 20 years of life experience in the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems, I was privy to street credibility. Therefore, the thought leaders were accessible.

After each interview, I gave each thought leader a blanket explanation of the Araminta Approach, an explanation of a Flow Chart that embraced the model in detail, and then asked them if they would like to add anything to the chart. (Note: It was imperative that the foundational components of the Araminta Approach model not be leaked to the thought leaders prior to their interviews in order to make an accurate claim of validity among their narratives.)

Sixty-six percent of the thought leaders interviewed (n=10) had a history of incarceration, and the remaining (n=5) were impacted by incarceration through family members. The total number of years of incarceration for the thought leaders who have a history of incarceration was 109 years. The age range for the thought leaders was from 24-69 years old, and the age distribution of the thought leaders was as follows: (n=2) thought leaders were in their 30's; (n=3) thought leaders were in their 40's; (n=6) thought leaders were in their 50's, and (n=4) were in their 60's.

It was not planned for two-thirds of the thought leaders to be above the age of 50, but from a logical standpoint, with age comes expertise, so the expertise of the matriarchs was summoned. This is in alignment with an African proverb, "A village without the elderly is like a well without water." By embracing this concept, I was able to utilize the wisdom of those who have the most life experience as Black women with a criminal record. Thus, the words of the seasoned and seniors proved to be invaluable.

The following is a chart that captures the demographic data deemed to be important for the thought leaders:

	Area of Expertise	Age	# of Years Free	Total Lifetime Years of Incarceration
1.	Former Lifer/Healing	51	7.5	26
2.	Education/Domestic Violence	69	23	12
3.	Finance	49	20	2
4.	Homelessness	62	20	7
5.	Employment	51	23	5.5
6.	Mental Health	51	10	6
7.	Spirituality	57	27	.5
8.	Systems Involved Youth	37	N/A	N/A
9.	Reunification	57	25	10
10.	Former Lifer/Drugs & Alcohol	56	3	35
11.	Aging	65.5	18	5
12.	Restorative Justice	44	N/A	N/A
13.	Cultural Pride	67	N/A	N/A
14.	Adult Child of Incarcerated Parents	31	N/A	N/A
15.	Reproductive Rights	48	N/A	N/A

The 15 thought leaders provided a wealth of information. I am forever grateful for their expertise and willingness to participate.

Narrative Analysis

The six tenets of the SBW schema derived from the literature review were utilized to code the data collected in order to reinforce/validate the tenet's presence in the lives of all of the respondents. These were the six categories: 1) Strives to be an excellent caregiver; 2) Courageous self-advocate; 3) Strong sense of cultural pride; 4) Strives to master self-reliance; 5) The Black Shero; and 6) Spiritually Connected. Narratives were abstracted and woven together from the interviews and focus groups that coincided with the tenets in order to move forward. The presence of the SBW schema in the lives of the respondents was validated (see narrative section).

Appendix B. Instrument

1. What is challenging about being a Black woman?

2. Is there anything specifically challenging about being a Black woman with a criminal record?

3. How have these challenges impacted your family?

4. How is the Black Community impacted by our challenges?

5. What efforts can be put in place to help Black women with these challenges?

6. What are the sources of Black women's strength?