

Maria León

marialeonphd.com

Education

Ph.D. Youth Development, Texas A&M University

August 2021

Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences

Dissertation: *Examining the Application of Social Justice Youth Development within the Juvenile Justice System Using a Mestiza Methodology*

M.S. Youth Development, Texas A&M University

August 2017

Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences

Thesis: *State by State Analysis of Recreation in U.S. Juvenile Justice Facilities*

B.S. Recreation & Leisure Services, Baylor University

May 2015

Department of Health, Human Performance and Recreation

Child & Family Studies Emphasis

Cum Laude

Professional Experience

Principal, Maria León, Ph.D. LLC

February 2024- present

Annie E. Casey Foundation

- Advise strategic investments of Youth Justice Policy portfolio and needs of grantees
- Develop agenda for YJP grantee convening
- Facilitate in-person YJP convening

NIJ Dual System Data and Practices Capacity Grant

- Support National Landscape Assessment of Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System and Data Systems with funding from the National Institute of Justice
- Review and provide recommendations on survey and methodology for Phase 1: System and Data Structure Landscape Assessment
- Participate in workgroup meetings

National Youth Justice Network & Coalition for Juvenile Justice

- Manage distribution of \$355,000 in 77 subgrants to local and state advocacy groups from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to recognize 50th anniversary of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act
- Develop grant scoring rubric and procedure
- Provide technical assistance to awardees
- Produce reports for OJJDP and the public

Vermont Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate

- Analyze data to monitor the development and implementation of federal, state, and local laws, regulations and policies, primarily focused on Raise the Age, Youthful Offender, Big 12, and facility planning
- Conduct exploratory interviews with relevant stakeholders
- Draft content for OCYFA reports, review and offer feedback on reports, presentations, and other materials
- Provide analysis on potential revenue maximization opportunities, fiscal implications of policy and practice decisions, and racial equity
- Conduct education sessions for OCYFA staff regarding juvenile justice and related topics

Lecturer

California State University, Los Angeles

August 2022-December 2024

Los Angeles, California

- Instructor for Introduction to Higher Education (IHE) course for all majors in Rongxiang Xu College of Health and Human Services
- Support IHE Success Coach as teaching assistant

Senior Manager, Youth Justice Initiatives and Emerging Adult Justice

The Justice Lab at Columbia University

January 2022-January 2024

New York, New York

- Produce literature review for the Public Welfare Foundation identifying principles of a community approach to youth justice
- Design evaluation methodology for Harris County reinvestment fund
- Developed event for system leaders and practitioners, co-hosted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, with over 500 attendees
- Analyze publicly available data and produce update on Raise the Age implementation in Vermont
- Present findings and provide testimony to Vermont Senate Judiciary Committee
- Analyze court proceedings to provide recommendations to Tarrant County Juvenile Board
- Design learning opportunities for Youth Justice Leaders for Justice (70+ current and formal juvenile justice system leaders), with support from the Ballmer Foundation
- Initiate the development and oversee maintenance of translational and applied research and resource database
- Produce research briefs for lobbyists, legislators, system leaders and practitioners in jurisdictions outlining alternatives to incarceration
- Educate journalists covering justice reform in the media and field media requests
- Draft evidence-based public statements
- Co-lead monthly National Partner Table of 80+ partners
- Supervise undergraduate and graduate student workers and School of Social Work graduate interns in the management of research database and development of translational research items

Facilitator, Youth Justice Leadership Institute

National Youth Justice Network

Sept. 2021-present

Washington, D.C.

- Completed multi-day in-person and virtual facilitation training on healing centered and emergent facilitation
- Member of facilitation team for YJLI fellowship for leaders of color dedicated to justice system transformation in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery, Alabama

Independent Consultant

September 2021-present

Rongxiang Xu College of HHS & the City of Los Angeles Gang Reduction & Youth Development Office

Los Angeles, California

- Lead development of curriculum for “Diversity Competency and Safe, Supportive, Healing and Respectful Environments” module as part of Promote, Raise, and Optimize Youth Development training for prevention and intervention workers
- Consult on the online creation of Promote, Raise, and Optimize Youth Development training
- Deliver intervention training for Gang Reduction and Youth Development in coordination with California State University Los Angeles and the City of Los Angeles
- Consult the development and delivery of Promote, Raise, and Optimize Youth Development Pilot training for youth prevention and intervention workers, and LA County Probation staff

- Assist in facilitation of Activating Intentional Moments Training and Activating Intentional Youth Development Training for gang prevention and intervention workers

Fellow, Youth Justice Leadership Institute

National Juvenile Justice Network

Sept. 2018-May 2019

Washington, D.C.

- Selected and completed 2018-2019 fellowship for leaders of color dedicated to justice system reform
- Design justice system special topics course curriculum

Graduate Assistant

Texas A&M University Youth Development

Aug. 2015- Aug. 2021

College Station, Texas

- Developed 12+ Race, Ethnicity and Social Equity resources
- Developed Youth Development Certificate, eventual online Master's program
- Publish peer review journal articles, research briefs
- Led evaluation for Texas interagency conference (3x)
- Serve on 3 faculty search committees
- Developed Youth Development & Youth Partnership Training Series (27.5 national CEUs); online (850+ participants) and face-to-face (75+ participants)
- Initiated and coordinated Youth Adult Board with funding from Department of State Health Services, State Adolescent Health (\$5.2 million grant)
- Developed, administered & validated Organizational Readiness Assessment for Youth and Adult Partnerships (675 participants)
- Mentored graduate and undergraduate research assistants

Publications

Peer Review Journal Articles

Gabriel, M. G., Brown, A., León, M., & Outley, C. (2021). Power and social control of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Leisure Sciences*, 43(1-2), 240-246.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2020.1774008>

This article is also published as a chapter in *Leisure in the Time of Coronavirus*, (2022), Brett Lashua, Corey W. Johnson, Diana C. Parry (eds.).

León, M., Rodas, K., & Greer, M. (2021). Leisure behind bars: The realities of COVID-19 for youth connected to the justice system. *Leisure sciences*, 43(1-2), 218-224.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2020.1774005>

This article is also published as a chapter in *Leisure in the Time of Coronavirus*, (2022), Brett Lashua, Corey W. Johnson, Diana C. Parry (eds.).

León, M., Outley, C., Marchbanks, M., & Kelly Pryor, B. (2019). A Review of Recreation Requirements in U.S. Juvenile Justice Facilities. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403419864415>

León, M. (2019). Immigrant youth in juvenile facilities: A state-by-state review of recreation programming. *Journal of Youth Development*, 14 (2), 183-204. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jyd.2019.712>

Reports

León, M. (forthcoming). Youth Justice Action Month Lessons Learned. Submitted on behalf of the Coalition of Juvenile Justice and National Youth Justice Network to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

León, M. (February 2025). Final Report: JJDP & YJAM Public Education and Awareness Mini-Grant Project. Submitted on behalf of the Coalition of Juvenile Justice and National Youth Justice Network to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

León, M. (February 2025). Lessons Learned: The Role of the Intermediary. Submitted on behalf of the Coalition of Juvenile Justice and National Youth Justice Network to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Chester, L., León, M. (February 2024). Update on the Implementation of Vermont's "Raise the Age" Law. *Emerging Adult Justice Project Columbia University Justice Lab*.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6458c07788975dfd586d90/t/65d3bfb8cd58f90eb3c1d3c0/1708375992332/Update+on+the+Implementation+of+VT+Raise+the+Age+Law+FEBRUARY+2024.pdf>

León, M., Maltz, A., Poonawala, R. (June 2023). Youth Justice System Transformation Through Communities. Submitted to the Public Welfare Foundation.

León, M. (June 2017). Recommendations to Texas Juvenile Justice Department: Advancing Positive Youth Development in Recreation Programming. Submitted to Texas Juvenile Justice Department.

Research Briefs

REYSE Collaboratory Short Trainings (December, 2020). Clemson University
Short-Trainings are facilitation guides for community members and youth practitioners to use for training on a range of topics related to youth, race, ethnicity, and social equity.

León, M. (April 2018). *Essentials for Youth Workers*. Sequor Foundation Youth Development Initiative.

León, M. (September 2015). *Implementing Positive Youth Development in Juvenile Correctional Recreation Programs*. Sequor Foundation Youth Development Initiative.

Other Publications

León, M. (2021). *Examining the Application of Social Justice Youth Development in Juvenile Justice Settings Using a Mestiza Methodology* (Doctoral dissertation). Oaktrust Library.
<https://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/195354>

León, M. (2020, October 29). "Research with Juvenile Justice Involved Youth as a Matter of Ethics." *Parks and Recreation Magazine*, November 2020. 20. Retrieved from
<https://www.nxtbook.com/nrpa/ParksRecreationMagazine/november-2020/index.php#/p/6>

Outley, C., Gabriel, M.G., Cavil, B., Locke, D. & León, M. (2018). Validation of the Organizational Readiness Assessment for Youth-Adult Partnerships with Community Youth Development Organizations. Texas A&M University. College Station, TX.

Teaching Experience

University Courses

California State University, Los Angeles Fall 2022, 2023, 2024
Introduction to Higher Education, Rongxiang Xu College of Health and Human Services

Texas A&M University
RPTS 478 Youth Development Practice 2018-2019
RPTS 370 Recreation and Youth Development 2017

Guest Lectures

Serving Latiné Youth and Communities April 2023
Cross Cultural and Gender Issues in Therapy and Recovery Model, Cal Poly Pomona

Intersection of Race, SES, and Juvenile Justice April, October 2016
Recreation and Youth Development, Texas A&M University

Training and Workshop Facilitations

Activating Intentional Moments to Promote Thriving for Young People May 2025
OJJDP Continuums of Care

Youth Justice Leadership Institute Spring Retreat April 2025
National Youth Justice Network, Montgomery, AL

Youth Justice Leadership Institute Fall Retreat September 2024
National Youth Justice Network, Washington, D.C.

The PRO Certificate Program Spring 2024-present
Cal State LA College of Professional and Global Education

Youth Justice Leadership Institute Spring Retreat April 2023
National Youth Justice Network, Montgomery, AL

Logic Models in Youth Justice Transformation January 2023
Youth Justice Leadership Institute, National Juvenile Justice Network

Promote, Raise and Optimize Youth Development Spring 2022-2023
City of Los Angeles Gang Reduction & Youth Development

Youth Justice Leadership Institute Fall Retreat September 2022
National Youth Justice Network, Washington, D.C.

Logic Models in Youth Justice Transformation April 2022
Youth Justice Leadership Institute, National Juvenile Justice Network

Activating Intentionality in Intervention Fall 2021-Spring 2023
City of Los Angeles Gang Reduction & Youth Development

Positive Youth Development & Youth Engagement Department of Family and Protective Services Regional Training, El Paso, TX	December 2019
Parent Engagement in Out of School Time Programs Partners in Prevention Conference; Austin, TX	November 2019
Positive Youth Development & Youth Engagement Department of Family & Protective Services Regional Training; Arlington, TX	October 2019
Youth Adult Partnership Training, Youth Summit; College Station, TX	June 2018

Presentations

Conference Presentations

** indicates submission was accepted but ultimately cancelled due to Covid-19*

Creating the Core Environment to Activate Positive Youth Development The Corps Network 2025 National Conference	March 2025
Opening Plenary Session: National Youth Justice Conference Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Washington, D.C.	November 2024
Activating Intentional Skill Building SoCal Crossroads Student Safety Conference Los Angeles, CA	July 2024
The PRO Approach Wisconsin Youth Services Conference Wisconsin Dells, WI	May 2024
Opening Keynote: Healing Justice: Community Liberation through Radical Healing National Juvenile Justice Network Annual Forum Los Angeles, CA	July 2023
Utilizing a Youth Equity Assessment for Youth-Serving Organizations California Mental Health Advocates for Children & Youth Virtual Conference	April 2021
Results & Future Directions of the Organizational Readiness Assessment for Youth-Adult Partnerships California Mental Health Advocates for Children & Youth Virtual Conference	April 2021
Playing While Black Society for Research in Child Development Special Topics Meeting: Construction of the "Other": Development, Consequence, and Applied Implications of Prejudice and Discrimination San Juan, Puerto Rico	May 2020*
The Importance of Youth Voice and How to Facilitate It in Your Organization	April 2020*

Texas Campaign 9th Annual Symposium
San Antonio, Texas

State-by-State Review of Recreation Guidelines in Juvenile Justice Facilities March 2020*
33rd Annual Research & Policy Conference on Child, Adolescent & Young Adult Behavioral Health
Tampa, FL

Working with Youth to Create Measurement Tools for Youth-Adult Partnerships March 2020*
33rd Annual Research & Policy Conference on Child, Adolescent & Young Adult Behavioral Health
Tampa, FL

Minimum Recreation Guidelines in Juvenile Justice Facilities March 2019
Social Justice through Sport & Exercise Psychology Symposium
Portland, OR

Organizational Readiness Assessments for Youth Adult Partnerships March 2019
32nd Annual Research & Policy Conference on Child, Adolescent & Young Adult Behavioral Health
Tampa, FL

Theories and Frameworks Used in Youth Prevention and Early Intervention Programs November 2017
American Public Health Association
Atlanta, GA

Invited Speaking Engagements

Youth Justice Leadership Institute, National Juvenile Justice Network October 2022
Washington, D.C.

Project Flex Podcast April 2022
Project Flex, Northern Illinois University

Leisure Behind Bars, Power & Social Control of Youth April 2021
COVID-19 Special Issue Roundtable
Journal of Leisure Sciences, The Public Space/ Public Sphere Podcast

Adolescent Development & Youth Development October 2020
Youth Justice Leadership Institute Fellowship

Healing History: School-to-Prison Pipeline October 2020
Hogg Foundation, Bastrop County, Texas

Strength for Tomorrow: Using Recreation to Reach Youth October 2019
Resiliency Conference, Houston, TX

Recreation & Juvenile Justice Research Talk June 2019
Clemson Race Symposium, Clemson, SC

Other Professional-Related Projects

Promote, Raise and Optimize Youth Development Online Training Sept. 2022- present

California State University, Los Angeles

The PRO Online Training is a virtual course for community prevention and intervention youth workers.

Youth-Advisory Board, Texas Youth Action Network

Aug. 2019-May 2020

The TYAN Youth-Advisory Board was made of 12 diverse youth and 4 adults, met regularly and provided expertise and feedback on TYAN program goals, organized and facilitated a state-wide conference and presented at conferences.

Youth Partnership Training Series, Texas Youth Action Network

December 2019

The YPTS is an 18-part international training series for staff and adults that work with youth on theories, strategies and best practices for establishing and sustaining youth-adult partnerships.

Organizational Readiness Assessment for Youth-Adult Partnerships

June 2018

Texas Youth Action Network

The ORAYAP is a self-assessment for organization leaders and administrators to evaluate the readiness of the organization or program for establishing youth-adult partnerships across seven domains. The ORAYAP has been completed by over 675 individuals.

Online Youth Development Master's Program

June 2018

Texas A&M Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences

The Online Master's in Youth Development is an online version of the Master's program specifically designed for professionals and non-traditional students to be completed completely virtual. I was on the team that developed the curriculum and structure that was approved by the University.

Youth Development Training Series, Texas Youth Action Network

June 2018

The YDTS is a five part training series for staff and adults that work with youth on the theories, strategies and best practices for Positive Youth Development worth 27.5 national CEUs. The training series has been completed by >850 individuals online and >75 individuals in-person.

Evaluation, Strengthening Youth and Families Conference, Texas Juvenile Justice Department

San Marcos (2015), Georgetown (2016), Galveston, TX (2017)

Led evaluation for the multi-state agency conference was conducted for the conference overall and >40 individual workshop presentations.

Protocol Director, Rural Youth Project

Sept.2015 - Dec. 2015

PESCA Grant; Walla Walla, WA

Interviews were conducted with school administrators, teachers, and community organizations regarding the needs of rural youth.

Graduate Assistant, Building a Movement Youth Summit Toolkit

September 2015

Sequor Foundation Youth Development Initiative Summit; College Station, TX

A compilation of the tools and resources from the BAM Summit.

"They Call Us Monsters" Community Screening and Panel

April 2017

Texas A&M University, Dept. of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences

A community screening of the film and panel discussion was hosted in conjunction with the local probation department, vendors and school district.

Professional Service

Associate Editor, Journal of Youth Development	January 2023-present
Reviewer, Journal of Youth Development	June 2018- present
Reviewer, Family and Community Health Journal	April 2021
Mentor, Youth Justice Leadership Institute, NJJN	Sept. 2020-present

Community Service

Racial Justice Working Group, National Juvenile Justice Network	Sept. 2019-present
LA County Youth Justice Reimagined Research & Data Workgroup	Sept. 2021-2022
LA County Youth Development and Diversion Steering Committee	June 2021- present
J.M. Kaplan Fund Innovation Prize Reviewer	April 2021- present
Youth Justice Leadership Institute Alumni Advisory Committee, NYJN	Sept. 2018-present
Mentor, Texas A&M Mentoring Up	January-April 2020
Brazos County Juvenile Probation Department Mentor	March 2017-June 2019
Texas Juvenile Justice Department Volunteer	April 2015-2021

Specialized Skills

Using Qualitative Inquiry to Contribute to Social Justice course completion taught by Dr. Rayshawn Ray at the Qualitative Inquiry for HBCU/ MSI Researchers 2021 Symposium

Qualitative Research with Historically Oppressed Populations: Using Cultural Attunement Across the Research Lifecycle course completion taught by Dr. Kelly Jackson at the Qualitative Inquiry for HBCU/ MSI Researchers 2021 Symposium

Curriculum Development for online and in-person delivery with traditional and non-traditional students, including adults and youth

Decolonial & Qualitative Research Methods including Youth and Community Participatory Research methods, Grounded Theory and Mestiza Methodologies

Narrative Policy Analysis for equity and developmental impact on youth

Family Impact Analysis application to bills, policies and programs

Memberships & Affiliations

Race, Ethnicity, Youth and Social Equity Collaboratory Affiliated Scholar	November 2020-present
Youth & Oppression Writing Consortium	September 2020- present
NJJN Youth Justice Leadership Alumni	June 2019-present
National Juvenile Justice Network	June 2018-present
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges	Jan. 2016-2019
National Partnership of Juvenile Services	Oct. 2015-present