# Maria León

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#### **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
- Conduct landscape assessment of youth justice organizations, priorities, and needs of grantees
- Review funding ecosystem within youth justice and identify potential avenues for grantees to access additional funding
- 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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 <u>Leisure in the Time of Coronavirus</u>, (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 <u>Leisure in the Time of Coronavirus</u>, (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*. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403419864415">https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403419864415</a>

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

#### **Reports**

León, M. (forthcoming). <u>Youth Justice Action Month Lessons Learned</u>. 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). <u>Final Report: JJDPA & YJAM Public Education and Awareness Mini-Grant Project</u>. 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). <u>Lessons Learned: The Role of the Intermediary.</u> 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*. <a href="https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6458c07788975dfd586d90/t/65d3bfb8cd58f90eb3c1d3c0/1708375992332/Update+on+the+Implementation+of+VT+Raise+the+Age+Law+FEBRUARY+2024.pdf">https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6458c07788975dfd586d90/t/65d3bfb8cd58f90eb3c1d3c0/1708375992332/Update+on+the+Implementation+of+VT+Raise+the+Age+Law+FEBRUARY+2024.pdf</a>

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

León, M. (June 2017). <u>Recommendations to Texas Juvenile Justice Department: Advancing Positive Youth Development in Recreation Programming</u>. 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. <a href="https://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/195354">https://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/195354</a>

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

OJJDP Continuums of Care

May 2025

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

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

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

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

Logic Models in Youth Justice Transformation

January 2023
Youth Justice Leadership Institute, National Juvenile Justice Network

Promote, Raise and Optimize Youth Development

City of Los Angeles Gang Reduction & Youth Development

Spring 2022-2023

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

September 2022

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 A | angeles Ga | ng Reduction & | & Youth | Development |
|---------------|------------|----------------|---------|-------------|
|               |            |                |         |             |

| Positive Youth Development & Youth Engagement<br>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<br>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 Activating Intentional Positive Youth Development – Even in Brief Interactions! September 2025 2025 California Alliance Child and Family Services Conference Creating the Core Environment to Activate Positive Youth Development March 2025 The Corps Network 2025 National Conference Opening Plenary Session: National Youth Justice Conference November 2024 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Washington, D.C. Activating Intentional Skill Building July 2024 SoCal Crossroads Student Safety Conference Los Angeles, CA The PRO Approach May 2024 Wisconsin Youth Services Conference Wisconsin Dells, WI Opening Keynote: Healing Justice: Community Liberation through Radical Healing July 2023 National Juvenile Justice Network Annual Forum Los Angeles, CA Utilizing a Youth Equity Assessment for Youth-Serving Organizations April 2021 California Mental Health Advocates for Children & Youth Virtual Conference Results & Future Directions of the Organizational Readiness Assessment April 2021 for Youth-Adult Partnerships California Mental Health Advocates for Children & Youth Virtual Conference May 2020\* 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

The Importance of Youth Voice and How to Facilitate It in Your Organization

April 2020\*
Texas Campaign 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium
San Antonio, Texas

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

March 2019

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

Organizational Readiness Assessments for Youth Adult Partnerships March 2019 32<sup>nd</sup> 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
Washington, D.C.

Project Flex Podcast
Project Flex, Northern Illinois University

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

Adolescent Development & Youth Development

Youth Justice Leadership Institute Fellowship

October 2020

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

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

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

June 2019

## **Other Professional-Related Projects**

Promote, Raise and Optimize Youth Development Online Training California State University, Los Angeles

Sept. 2022- present

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 Sequor Foundation Youth Development Initiative Summit; College Station, TX A compilation of the tools and resources from the BAM Summit.

September 2015

"They Call Us Monsters" Community Screening and Panel Texas A&M University, Dept. of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences April 2017

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

# **Professional Service**

| Subcommittee Member, State Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention | October 2025-present |  |  |  |
|--|----------------------|--|--|--|
| 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**

<u>Using Qualitative Inquiry to Contribute to Social Justice</u> 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

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

<u>Decolonial & Qualitative Research Methods</u> 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       |