

SILVIA GISELA LEIJA, PhD, LMFT

Curriculum Vitae

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Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist | LMFT #4101006855

Fluent: English & Spanish

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Clinical training and research leader with over 10 years of experience designing competency-based education systems, supervision frameworks, and structured evaluation models within academic and clinical environments. PhD-trained systemic researcher and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with expertise in translating empirical research into scalable training architectures, fidelity-informed supervision systems, and defensible competency assessments. Experienced in curriculum development, cross-functional collaboration, and integrating ethical and regulatory standards into applied training programs. Brings a culturally informed perspective shaped by immersive study of plant-based healing traditions in Mexico, bridging ancestral knowledge with modern regulatory and clinical frameworks.

EDUCATION

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| 2022 | Doctor of Philosophy — Human Development & Family Studies (Couple & Family Therapy)
<i>Michigan State University</i> |
| 2015 | Master of Science — Child Development & Family Studies (Marriage & Family Therapy)
<i>Purdue University</i> |
| 2011 | Bachelor of Science — Psychology; Specialization in Chicano/Latino Studies
<i>Michigan State University</i> |
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LICENSURE & LANGUAGES

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| Licensure | Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist (LMFT) #4101006855 |
| Languages | Fluent in English and Spanish |
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ASSESSMENT RESEARCH & LEADERSHIP

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| 2022 – Present | PGR North Star Consulting Network, LLC
<i>Report Development Lead (Contract)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Partner with non-profit and higher education clients to conduct external evaluations focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).Deliver detailed reports summarizing key findings from climate assessments, providing actionable recommendations to senior leadership.Support senior consultants in the development and implementation of strategic DEI initiatives across multiple projects. |
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Key Projects:

- **DEI Climate Assessment for Non-Profit:** Conducted external review of 80+ university stakeholders including faculty, staff, students, and senior leadership; delivered comprehensive summary report with strategic recommendations for advancing DEI within the organization.
- **DEI Strategy Development:** Supported a national non-profit research institute by transcribing and analyzing think-tank sessions focused on implementing strategic priorities, identifying key themes and providing actionable recommendations.

April – June 2024

BenReese LLC

Report Development Specialist (Contract)

- Co-conducted external assessment on belonging and inclusion challenges at a private research institute, interviewing diverse stakeholders to evaluate organizational climate and belonging.
- Managed full report development process, from data collection, data transcription and analysis to final presentation, ensuring accuracy.
- Delivered detailed reports summarizing key findings from climate assessments, providing actionable recommendations to senior leadership.
- Synthesized research data, interviews, and surveys into comprehensive report tailored for senior leadership, providing key findings and insights.

2019 – 2021

Department of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs (LARA)

Michigan Board of Marriage & Family Therapy — Board Member

- Contributed to development and oversight of licensure standards, including educational and supervised clinical training requirements for MFTs.
- Reviewed and adjudicated complaints involving alleged ethical violations, unprofessional conduct, and clinical incompetence.
- Participated in establishing passing criteria for the Association of Marital and Family Therapy Regulatory Boards licensure examination.
- Collaborated on policy development to uphold ethical, legal, and professional standards for MFT practice in Michigan.
- Provided regulatory guidance to ensure public protection and professional accountability within the field.

2018 – 2019

Diversity Research Network, Michigan State University

Assistant to the Director

- Co-created inclusive spaces for faculty of color (FOC) to produce and disseminate research.
- Recorded and maintained minutes of general body meeting and executive board meetings.
- Composed letters, proposals, and other executive correspondence to support organizational initiatives.
- Organized meetings agendas and related materials, ensuring efficient communication and coordination.
- Proofread and reviewed documents for executive approval and signature.
- Facilitated interdisciplinary collaborations across the university for underrepresented faculty.
- Prepared reports and visualizations showcasing faculty research achievements and productivity.
- Advanced visibility, mentorship, and training to enhance research productivity for faculty of color.

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

2017 – 2022

Michigan State University — Doctoral Candidate

- Qualitative research study: Immigrant Latina mothers' perception of sex-communication with their adolescent daughters.
- Recruited participants and facilitated focus groups conducted in Spanish.
- Transcribed and translated focus group recordings from Spanish to English.
- Trained and supervised undergraduate research assistants in data collection protocols.
- Applied thematic analysis to examine and code data; prepared two manuscripts summarizing findings.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2017 – 2018

ROCA Lab, Michigan State University — Data Manager

NIDA Strengthening Hispanic Families Study (PI: Parra-Cardona; Grant #1K01DA036747)

- Managed large database system for K01 study; improved data entry quality by reviewing errors and language issues.
- Trained and supervised undergraduate research assistants.
- Assisted in preparing manuscripts for publication.

2015 – 2016

ROCA Lab, Michigan State University — Research Assistant

NIDA Strengthening Hispanic Families Study (PI: Parra-Cardona; Grant #1K01DA036747)

- Conducted participant phone screenings to determine eligibility for study.
- Prepared participant materials for the parenting group.
- Provided cultural adaptation of an evidence-based parenting intervention for Latino/a immigrant parents in Lansing and Detroit.
- Delivered community-based interventions in Spanish.
- Reported status of group responses to parenting intervention.
- Moderated focus groups.
- Assisted in preparing manuscripts for publication.

2015 – 2018

SAMHSA Minority Fellowship Program — Minority Fellow

- Created research proposals addressing disparities in mental health consistent with SAMHSA Strategic Initiatives.
- Conducted quantitative analysis on depression, substance abuse, and sexual coercion on Latino couples.
- Presented research findings at annual MFP Training Institute.
- Participated in statistical trainings on Moderation, Mediation, and SEM.
- Attended professional development webinars.
- Enhanced research and writing skills using APA guidelines.

2013 – 2015

Quantitative Master's Thesis - Masters Candidate at Perdue University Calumet

- Generated and conducted a quantitative research study on the impact of acculturation and Latina values on sexual and relationship satisfaction.
- Identified suitable techniques for the collection and analysis of data.
- Performed statistical data analysis using SPSS.
- Reported on research findings at annual MFP Training Institute.
- Summarized research finding in the thesis manuscript.

TEACHING & COURSE DESIGN

Designed and delivered curricula aligned with measurable learning objectives and competency benchmarks. Developed modular course structures supporting scaffolded skill acquisition. Created structured formative and summative assessment tools; managed gradebooks for courses with 100+ students. Facilitated psychologically safe learning environments for complex clinical discussions.

2015 – 2021

Michigan State University — Instructor of Record

Undergraduate courses: Human Sexuality; Family Policy

2012 – 2015

Purdue University Calumet — Instructor of Record

Undergraduate courses: Human Sexuality; Elementary Psychology

CLINICAL SKILLS & SUPERVISION

2019 – Present

Silvia G. Leija, LMFT Psychotherapy Services, PLLC

Founder & Owner

- Provide evidence-based therapy supporting mental health and well-being of individuals, couples, and families.
- Specialize in preparing psychosocial evaluations for court submission to support families seeking U.S. citizenship.

2020 – 2021

Michigan State University Counseling & Psychiatric Services

Embedded Therapist — College of Veterinary Medicine

- Provided brief therapy and crisis support for students in the College of Veterinary Medicine.
- Provided outreach on mental health topics with focus on suicide prevention.

2017 – 2018

Michigan State University Couple & Family Therapy Clinic

Graduate Student Clinical Supervisor

- Provided live weekly individual case consultation supervision with PhD students.
- Supervised PhD students in treatment plan development and diagnostic summaries.
- Established formal supervision contracts outlining ethical safeguards, performance expectations, and conflict resolution protocols.
- Designed and implemented competency-based supervision frameworks with developmental progression, structured feedback, and documentation standards.

- Delivered structured feedback cycles to enhance clinical skill acquisition and reflective practice for supervisees.

2015 – 2018

Parent Management Training–Oregon Model (PMTO)

Bilingual Group Facilitator

- Co-facilitated teachings of PMTO five core parenting skills in Spanish.
- Provided psycho-education on the importance of emotional regulation for effective parenting.

2014 – 2015

Forward, P.C. — Bilingual Family Therapist

- Conducted trauma-based therapy with low-income families referred by DCFS in Chicago.
- Provided in-home bilingual therapy to individuals, couples, and families.
- Collaborated with case managers, individual therapists, family therapists, school officials, guardians, attorneys, and other stakeholders.

2014 – 2015

Partner Abuse Intervention Program (PAIP) — Bilingual Group Facilitator

- Co-facilitated partner abuse intervention group in Spanish.
- Educated participants about causes and forms of domestic violence.

2013 – 2014

Purdue Couple and Family Therapy Center — Bilingual Family Therapist Intern

- Structured weekly individual, couple, and family therapy sessions.
- Integrated systemic theoretical approaches with children, adolescents, and adults.

PUBLICATIONS

- Welch, T., Lachmar, M.E., Leija, S.G., Easley, T., Blow, A.J., & Wittenborn, A.K. (2019). Establishing Safety in Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy: A Single-Case Process Study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*.
- Parra-Cardona, J.R., Lopez Zeron, G., Leija, S.G., Maas, M., Villa, M., Zamudio, E., Arredondo, M., Yeh, H.H., & Domenech Rodriguez, M.M. (2018). Culturally Adapted Intervention for Mexican-origin Parents of Adolescents: The Need to Overtly Address Culture and Discrimination in Evidence-Based Practice. *Family Process*.
- Maas, M.K., Bonomi, A.E., McCauley, H.L., & Leija, S.G. (2018). "I was grabbed by my pussy and its #NotOkay": A Twitter Backlash Against Donald Trump's Degrading Commentary. *Violence Against Women*.
- Hussain, K.*, Leija, S.G.*, Lewis, F.*, & Sanchez, B.* (2015). Unveiling Sexual Identity in the Face of Marianismo. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 27(2), 72–92. *Indicates Equal Authorship

NATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- Welch, T., Lachmar, E.M., Leija, S., Blow, A.J., Wittenborn, A., Easley, T. (2019). Establishing Safety in Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy. AAMFT National Conference, Austin, TX.
- Leija, S.G., Bonomi, A.E., & Maas, M.K. (2017). Jane the Virgin: A Model for Reinventing Marianismo and Latina Sexuality. Annual Meeting, Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Atlanta, GA.
- Maas, M.K., Bonomi, A.E., McCauley, H.L., & Leija, S.G. (2017). NotOkay: A Twitter Backlash Against Rape Culture Personified in a Presidential Candidate. Annual Meeting, Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Atlanta, GA.
- Lofton, H., Leija, S.G., Szczygiel, L., Ingram, J., & Adekoya, A.R. (2017). Mental Health Disparities and Personalized Normative Feedback. AAMFT Annual National Conference, Atlanta, GA.

- Lopez-Zeron, G.A., Leija, S.G., Nordquist, E., Escobar-Chew, A.R., & Parra-Cardona, J.R. (2016). The Initial Efficacy of a Parenting Intervention for Latinos. AAMFT Annual National Conference, Indianapolis, IN.
- Lopez-Zeron, G.A., Parra-Cardona, J.R., Leija, S.G., Bybee, D., & Sullivan, C. (2016). The Initial Efficacy of a Parenting Intervention for Latinos. Society for Prevention Research, San Francisco, CA.
- Leija, S.G. & Buchanan, N.T. (2012). Body Satisfaction and Televised Advertisements: The Impact of Model Size and Sexualization on Women's Body Satisfaction. Association of Women in Psychology, Palm Springs, CA.
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STATE AND LOCAL PRESENTATIONS

- Leija, S.G. (2019). Sexo, Poder y la Mujer: Discussing Sexual Health, Gender & Culture. 26th Annual Dia de la Mujer Conference, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.
- Leija, S.G. (2018). Sex 101. Annual M.A.G.I.C. Hybrid Program, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.
- Leija, S.G. (2017 & 2016). Let's Talk About Sex. Annual M.A.G.I.C. Hybrid Program, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.
- Leija, S.G. (2016). The Intersection of Depression, Substance Abuse & Sexual Control: A Three Wave Study on Latino Couples. MFP Training Institute, Arlington, VA.
- Leija, S.G., Hussain, K., Lewis, F., & Sanchez, B. (2015). Exploring Marianismo & Sexuality. Michigan Association for Marriage and Family Therapy State Conference, East Lansing, MI.
- Adekoya, A.R., Leija, S.G., & Ladson, E.R. (2015). Coming Home: A Proposed Structural Model for African American Families Reintegrating a Male Co-Parent Post-Incarceration. Michigan AMFT State Conference.
- Hussain, K., Leija, S.G., Lewis, F., & Sanchez, B. (2015). Unveiling Sexual Identity in the Face of Marianismo. Illinois AMFT Conference, Naperville, IL.
- Hussain, K., Leija, S.G., Lewis, F., & Sanchez, B. (2014). Unveiling Sexual Identity in the Face of Marianismo. Indiana AMFT Fall Conference, Indianapolis, IN.
- Adekoya, A.R., Ladson, E.R., & Leija, S.G. (2014). Coming Home. Indiana AMFT Spring Conference, Indianapolis, IN.
- Kellen, K., Leija, S.G., Lewis, F., & Yahya, E. (2014). Disrupting the Intergenerational Cycle of Abuse: Effectively Coping with Child Sexual Abuse in Adulthood. Indiana AMFT Spring Conference, Indianapolis, IN.
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SERVICE & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- September 2016 **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity in MFT Research**
Invited panelist, AAMFT National Conference, Indianapolis, IN.
- February 2016 **Sexual Violence Advisory Committee (SVAC)**
Focus group moderator, Michigan State University.
- Spring 2016 **Michigan State University Campus Climate Study**
Bilingual focus group facilitator.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2017 Charles P. and Linda A. Thompson Endowment Recipient
- 2017 SAMHSA Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) Recipient
- 2016 AAMFT Master's Thesis Award Recipient
- 2016 Poster accepted at AAMFT's Cutting Edge Research category
- 2016 SAMHSA Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) Recipient
- 2015 SAMHSA Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) Recipient
- 2014 First Place Poster Presentation — Indiana AMFT Fall Conference
- 2014 First Place Poster Presentation — Indiana AMFT Spring Conference