

## FEATURED ARTICLES

# Leaders in the Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Organization Movement: An Interview with Henry “Enrique” Ortiz, Psy.D. and Shannon Magnis, Ph.D., CGP

David J. Glass, J.D., Ph.D.

**TLAP:** To start, can you each tell me about how you came to be a psychologist, because I understand it is not the first career for either of you.

**E:** Before this career, I was in business and owned a software distribution company in the Silicon Valley. But within three years of creating that company, I was feeling unfulfilled and unhappy. Having come from a working-class family, I was used to working 100-hour weeks. But once I had reached financial security, I quickly realized that what I was doing didn't meaningfully help others. Burnt out, I left my company and went backpacking through India and other parts of Asia, and returned feeling refreshed. I returned to therapy and kept getting encouraged to become a therapist myself. I entered the graduate program at the California School of Professional Psychology and I soon realized that I had found “my people” and that I loved what I was learning. My first job after graduation was in a clinic, but it eventually closed its doors. That led to two years backpacking through Central and South America. When I returned, about 15 years ago, I began my private practice. Now I treat adults in individual, couples, and group therapy, with a specialization in working with Latinx clients. I consider myself a Gestalt and EFT (Emotionally Focused Therapy) therapist, integrating psychodynamic therapy and mindfulness.

**S:** I have always been a very introspective and philosophical person. Even in early childhood, I was preoccupied with the inner life of people and contemplating the cosmos. I had a number of paranormal experiences in childhood that made me question reality in a deep way and opened my mind to the unseen mystery of life. In college, I was very interested in the mind-body connection and psychedelic research, and I also worked in an acupuncture clinic. After college, I worked at a creative agency while pursuing my Master's degree in psychology, taking courses in Traditional Chinese Medicine and running groups in a women's prison. I worked at the creative agency for seven years and eventually became the Director of Operations, which gave me valuable “real life” and business experience. In 2003, after my daughter was born, I went back to pursue my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. I did my externship at the Maple Counseling Center in



Beverly Hills and started my private practice. I have been in practice for 15 years. I see individuals, couples, and specialize in running groups. I consider myself a pretty eclectic therapist - my foundation is psychoanalytic/psychodynamic but I also draw heavily on attachment theory, somatics, dream work, and mindfulness.

**TLAP:** You are the Co-Presidents of the Group Psychotherapy Association of Los Angeles (GPALA), and as I understand it, you have focused your term on moving the organization to being an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization. First, what is an anti-racist organization?

**E&S:** The anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization supports the empowerment of people of color. The organization takes the initiative, shares in the power, and changes organizational norms and cultures. Such an organization makes sure that all of its members participate in decisions about how the organization's resources will be allocated, what work will be done, and how it will be done. Importantly, such an organization allows people of color to make the same mistakes as white people. The organization offers training and promotes conversations about racism, white privilege, power, and accountability, setting clear standards for inclusion at all levels of the organization. Such an organization also makes sure to periodically review the mission, vision, policies, procedures, Board agreements, etc. to ensure that the commitment to end racism and oppression is a consistent theme.

**TLAP:** So, what was the status of GPALA when you each joined the Board of Directors?

**E&S:** The organization was made up of almost exclusively white, psychodynamic, private practitioners. Most of the therapists practiced on the Westside. Most of the educational opportunities were focused on long-term therapy and on running process groups. In short, it was an exclusive and privileged group of people in the community. There were very few Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) members. Our Board found that BIPOC who had come to our trainings and events had often not returned, and they often reported feeling harmed and then mistreated when they expressed what they experienced. For instance, workshop presenters might act

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defensively, rather than being able to hold space for the anger that was coming up in the BIPOC members. The presenters, at times, focused on explaining their “intentions” rather than focusing on the “impact” of their actions. We needed our trainers to understand and share that marginalized people may experience certain interventions very differently than middle-to upper-class white folks. They needed to teach how to engage people who are different than the therapist, with cultural humility. BIPOC participants and marginalized people had to do the emotional labor of bringing micro- and macro-aggressions to light, which was harmful and even traumatic to them. In short, if you are not talking about differences including racial differences, socio-economic differences, and gender differences, it does not feel safe for everyone.

**TLAP:** How did the movement toward being an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization start?

**E&S:** It started in 2020 during our previous Board term with talking through how we were impacted by the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matters movement, and how we wanted to respond as an association. Then our Board members all read the book, “White Supremacy and Me” together and met for weekly discussions. That helped us develop an informed language. From there, we spoke honestly together about how complicit we have been in oppression, and what we wanted for the organization going forward. We had a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee that was actively looking for BIPOC presenters and for topics about anti-racism and inclusion.

**TLAP:** How did developing a vision for your Board of Directors help you keep the process moving forward?

**E&S:** In order to fulfill our plan for GPALA, we knew we needed a vision for our Board of Directors. We envisioned a Board where members would have a passion for both group work and social justice. We also believed that, in our goal to create a diverse membership with an inclusive culture, we would need to start from the inside out. So, we found an organizational DEI consultant who helped our Board design a plan for how to move toward our goal of inclusivity. The first step was to ask every Board member to write their own vision statement for the Board, based on the Board’s goals. The consultant then helped the Board consolidate all of our ideas into one vision statement. (<https://www.gpala.org/mission-vision>).

**TLAP:** Did you need to make changes in how you recruited Board members?

**E&S:** We knew that we wanted our Board to be 50% BIPOC. But, we also knew that finding the right Board members was not going to be easy. In fact, it took a lot more effort than we expected. We sent out numerous emails, including a video of us describing our new direction to the membership. We received no responses. We then reached out to our contacts and friends asking BIPOC persons if they were interested in serving on the Board of GPALA. We had some responses, but few.

So, we spent the time searching online for BIPOC group therapists who aligned with our vision. We pretty much scoured the internet and began cold-calling. We asked people we met in Facebook groups and who had online profiles, and we spread the word about what we were doing and how joining our association was an opportunity to collaborate on social justice with like-minded therapists. We created a PowerPoint presentation, in which we shared GPALA’s vision, what we stood for, our organizational design, the types of roles that were needed, and the reasons that someone would want to join the Board. We described a new culture, a way to prioritize safety and expression, of growth and openness by “calling in” (as opposed to “calling out.”) We also made a promise that our Board members would get more out of being on the Board than they put into it. Everything, including the images in the presentation, was diverse and welcoming to BIPOC. And we were able to populate the Board with the people that we needed. Our board is more knowledgeable about all things social/racial justice. We are more collaborative, engaged, and thoughtful than even we could have imagined. We found Board members who impress us at every turn, who we seek guidance from at every Board meeting.

**TLAP:** Did you have any resistance to the changes to the Board?

**E&S:** We had individual meetings with all members of the prior Board who were interested in staying on. The new vision and direction were self-selecting, and those that would continue were ready for a new chapter in the organization. At times, there were difficult conversations that led to Board members stepping down, and we consistently took time and sensitivity to be non-harming. There was also a significant amount of criticism from people who did not agree with the organizational changes we were making. Some members experienced the changes as a disruption of a secure base—a community that had been relied-on. We wanted the association to remain that type of secure base; we simply wanted the association to be a secure base for *everyone*. GPALA did lose members in this change. Yet, more new members joined and overall we increased our membership by 36%.

**TLAP:** What did you have to do, if anything, about shifting the structure of the organization?

**E&S:** We had to look at every single policy of the organization, and every single job description, and every single reason for the various committees, and ensure that inclusiveness and belonging were included. We had to make sure that we had a policy that in any interaction among members, whether part of committee work, or at events, or in casual conversation, that if a member felt harmed in any way, or experienced a micro-aggression, that they could raise the issue, and it would be dealt with immediately and effectively. Part of that policy was having a “Designated Diversity Representative” (DDR) present

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**Jaz Robbins, Psy.D., BCHN®** is a trauma-informed therapist and board-certified nutritionist who specializes in health psychology. Her research interests include complex trauma as well as the intersection of nutrition and mental health. She is the founder of the non-profit, *Healing, Hope & Love*, author of two popular titles: *Still Standing* and *The Golden Penny*, and holds adjunct positions at Pepperdine University and USC. She also provides training and consultation to organizations that deliver services to trauma survivors.

**Kendy Faye, B.S.**, is completing her Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy at Pepperdine University as well as an additional certification in perinatal mental health. She is currently providing trauma-informed therapy to clients at Transgender Health and Wellness Center (Supervised by Mx. Van Ethan Levy Â LMFT 118131 & LPCC 8269).

References are available on the LACPA Website [www.lacpa.org](http://www.lacpa.org).

### Welcome New Members

#### FULL MEMBERS

Laura Adery, Ph.D.  
Luis Aguilar, Psy.D.  
Talia Banayan, Psy.D.  
Arthur Bowler, Psy.D.  
Richard A. Fierro, Ph.D.  
Mindia Gabichvadze, Psy.D.  
Brette Genzel-Derman, Psy.D., M.S.W.  
Christine Gerety Ph.D.  
Mirjam Hatton Psy.D.  
Geraldine Mapel, Ph.D.  
Adelina Matevosyan, Ph.D.  
Trina Pangelina, Psy.D.  
Lara Sando, Ph.D.  
Jomana Sweiss, Ph.D.  
Kathryn Williams, Ph.D.  
Aimee Zhang, Psy.D.

#### AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Jan M. Click, MSW, LCSW  
Jon Rizk, MSW

#### OUT OF COUNTY/STATE

Chi Rajalingam, Ph.D.

#### GRADUATE STUDENT MEMBERS

Tanya Diaz, M.A.  
Kayla Gorenstein M.A.  
Maria Kasparian, M.A.  
Delly Maria Loro, B.A.  
Grace Nowzari, M.A.  
Blake Song, M.A.  
Caitlin Williams, B.S.

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at all events and functions. The DDR is introduced as somebody who, if you feel harmed in any way, in any of our trainings, and you don’t feel like speaking up, or you choose not to, or you don’t feel safe to, you can directly reach that one person. That person’s role is to be ready to address “harm” on the spot, in real time, and in a sensitive and repairing way. That person needs to be committed to creating a safe space, on an immediate basis, that was emotionally stable (as opposed to being emotionally fragile), so that our members could have the full conversation about what had happened, how it made them feel, what the results of the micro-aggression were, and how it could be fixed. If somebody is harmed, we are going to talk about it right then.

**TLAP:** Did you have any support structure for yourselves as the Co-Presidents?

**E&S:** Leading the organization at a moment of such drastic change was stressful and it was important for us to feel that we weren’t alone. Once the visioning and Board development was underway, we immediately set up a three-person advisory committee made up of experienced Board members and group therapists who supported the vision. This turned out to be a wise decision as we turned to them many times to guide us and to provide perspective in navigating many of the bigger decisions that we encountered. And, we made sure to leave the larger decisions to the Board as a whole.

**TLAP:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

**E&S:** Making these changes when it’s all volunteer work isn’t easy. But, if we’re truly willing to take action toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive world, then we need to use our strengths as therapists to create true change. We’re proud to be doing that. Finally, you need to celebrate every win, whether it is big or small, and realize that the change that you seek in your organization is not going to happen in a year, or even two years. It will be a multi-year process. But, ultimately, our organization will be warm, inviting, respectful, and focused on our relationships with each other. That’s an organization that we think most psychotherapists would like to join. ▲

*For more information on Dr. Henry “Enrique” Ortiz, follow this link: <https://webpsych.com/about/>*

*For more information on Dr. Shannon Magnis, follow this link: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/dr-shannon-magnis-group-therapy-venice-ca/338033>*

*For more information on the Group Psychotherapy Association of Los Angeles, follow this link: <https://www.gpala.org/home>*