



A Candid Discussion on DIVERSITY

Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going

Roundtable moderated by Kathleen Boyd, CFP®

*Participants: Delia Fernandez, CFP®; Ajamu Loving, Ph.D.; Monica Singhania, CFP®, CFA;
and Jeffrey N. Tomaneng, CFP®, CIMA®, CLU®*

LESS THAN 4 PERCENT of the more than 83,000 CFP® professionals are Black or Latino, according to CFP Board. There aren't yet updated public statistics on the number of Asians in the financial planning profession. Clearly, there is work to do on diversity.

The *Journal* brought together four planning professionals to have an honest discussion about diversity in a panel moderated by 2017 FPA Diversity Scholarship winner Kathleen Boyd, CFP®.

Where We've Been

Kathleen Boyd: *Why do you think financial planning is so behind compared to other professions in terms of diversity?*

Ajamu Loving: It's such a personal industry. For a lot of people starting in the business, the first thing they told you to do is make a list of all your friends and family, and people who you think might

have money—individuals who would be your clients, right?

When that's how you have developed the business and grown it over time, it's difficult to start to think about new ways to be more inclusive in your approach.

Companies need to work more hand-in-hand with advisers who are out there running practices to incorporate things that could make them more effective at attracting diverse clients and colleagues. Much of that can be accomplished by partnering with university programs—which are far more diverse than companies. You can go to those universities and speak to student groups—even as a white person, and especially as a white ally—about how welcome and necessary Blacks and Latinos and women are [in the profession], and how critically important it is for them to be there.

A personal invitation gets people to

the party. The same way that you were personal about inviting your [first] clients, you can be personal about inviting additional clients different than those first clients and additional colleagues different than you. That's how we can really get the party started.

Monica Singhania: Financial services has a lot of baggage in terms of the imagery attached to the profession. It's always being viewed as a boys' club, whether it's in the movies or the people who've been highlighted as being successful in the industry. The way the financial planning profession has evolved by servicing a select audience has also contributed to a lack of diversity.

Whenever you think about financial services, you think about a hard place and you do not think about a place where soft skills would be something that are valued, so it naturally attracts

a certain personality type. Women and other diverse groups might be looking for a clear career track, and I don't think we have done a good job communicating a particular track of development, as financial planning is still relatively young and evolving.

Jeffrey Tomaneng: It's partly a systemic problem that we still have a majority of old, white males, and that's because many of them started at these firms [in financial or insurance sales] in the '80s, '90s, and even the '70s, and there's been a trickle-down effect.

Organizations that do product sales and may be sales-driven are doing a better job of involving people of color; maybe not in the financial planning profession, but in the [larger financial services] industry. If you have an insurance company that's making a big push toward hiring women, their main goal as new agents may be to sell insurance. However, it's a way to get women into the industry and then possibly help them find their way into the [financial planning] profession.

Boyd: What were the barriers you faced coming into the profession?

Loving: I was a young Black guy. Every single client in the bank looked surprised to see me. I was taking over a book [of business] from an African American gentleman who was older and had been there a while. I think it was the youth that surprised him.

But, the population of people—in terms of the wealth that that bank branch had—was older white people, and so you had to know your stuff. That wasn't too much of a problem for me, because I've always been extremely curious about the products, the techniques, how to do this in a holistic way. Even though my dad [who was also a financial planner] comes from a background where people are considered commission-based, the fact is, he always talked about financial planning in a holistic manner. That's how he approached

Roundtable Participants



Kathleen Boyd, CFP®, is an instructor at Kansas State University. She began her financial services career at JPMorgan Chase & Co. Upon completion of graduate school, she participated in Wells Fargo Private Bank's elite Investment Management Development Program. She was recognized in *InvestmentNews'* Top 40 Under 40 and is the 2017 recipient of the FPA Diversity Scholarship.



Delia Fernandez, CFP®, is a financial planner with more than 20 years of experience in the financial services industry. She serves on the advisory board for the University of California—Irvine's personal financial planning certificate program where she teaches the survey of financial planning course.



Ajamu Loving, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of finance at the University of North Texas at Dallas, where he teaches courses on investments, fundamentals of finance, financial liquidity, and financial markets and institutions. He earned his Ph.D. in personal financial planning from Texas Tech University where he was an AT&T Chancellor's fellow.



Monica Singhania CFP®, CFA, is founder of Purposeful Financial, a fee-only wealth management firm focusing on serving women in transition and educating and empowering first-generation Indian immigrants to take charge of their finances. She currently serves as the public relations chair for FPA of Orange County.



Jeffrey N. Tomaneng, CFP®, CIMA®, CLU®, is a financial planner with Lincoln Investment Planning. He is also a counselor and educator who works with individuals, families, small businesses, and non-profits. He teaches personal finance classes for corporate and government organizations and currently serves as president of FPA of Massachusetts.

Is 'White Fragility' Undermining Your Firm's Diversity and Inclusion Efforts? by Kathleen Boyd, CFP®

ARE YOU A WHITE OWNER, manager, or employee within an organization who tends to:

- Change the subject when the topic of race comes to the fore?
- Get defensive when confronted with your own racial issues?
- Say things like “not all white people” and “all lives matter?”
- Ask and/or expect your colleagues of color to educate you and to be “nice” about it?
- Talk about your “good intentions?”
- Bring up the times you were also treated badly?

If so, you could be experiencing white fragility, also known as racial discomfort—a concept that is critical in understanding diversity and inclusion, and how the enduring legacy of racism continues to affect your colleagues of color every single day.

The term “white fragility” was coined by white sociology professor, Robin DiAngelo, Ph.D., whose academic work is centered on whiteness studies (which is the study of what it is to be white in America) and critical

discourse analysis (an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse).

In her *New York Times* bestselling book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, she uses the term to describe the anger and defensiveness that white people exhibit when she challenges their ideologies about race and racism.

“The problem with white people is that they just don't listen,” DiAngelo writes. “Most white people are absolutely not receptive to finding out their impact on other people. There is a refusal to know or see, or to listen or hear, or to validate.”

She also asserts that white people lack the “racial stamina” to engage in difficult conversations, which leads to problematic behaviors like “argumentation, silence, and withdrawal.”

Some recent real-life examples of white fragility in the public sphere include:

The Charlottesville protests² involving white men chanting slogans like “white lives matter,”³ and “you will not replace us.”⁴

The public calling to “choose love

and forgiveness” immediately following the police shootings of Black men like Alton Sterling⁵ and Philando Castile.⁶

Howard Schultz, former CEO of Starbucks and potential 2020 presidential candidate, responding to a question about racism at Starbucks during a CNN town hall, and claiming that he “grew up in the projects and doesn't see color.”⁷

President Donald Trump making reference to Black women in pejorative terms,⁸ while getting defensive at any mention of racism.⁹

White fragility like this undermines diversity and inclusion efforts in the workplace because if you cannot see color for example, then you don't end up naming race in this imperative work. And if we can't name race, then we won't be able to challenge the systems and structures that perpetuate the inequitable results we continue to see today.

Part of challenging these systems starts with white people critically looking at their own white fragility and investigating it. This will start you

things with his clients, and still does.

I was able to overcome some of the objections that would naturally be raised because of my youth by knowing what I needed to know and by listening to the clients and actually responding to their issues.

Singhania: I think the biggest barrier initially was that I did not have a single role model from my own community that I could look up to. Another barrier I faced was cultural bias. When I walk into a room, I look different, I speak different—and I cannot hide that. I have had instances where people have commented on my English because I have been raised in a foreign land. But

overall, it's been a wonderful ride.

Tomaneng: Some of the places I was early in my career were places where I didn't fit into the good ole' boy network, and as a result, maybe I didn't get access to good mentorship, or maybe I wasn't handed some accounts that others [would have been handed].

At the same time, one of my regrets is not seeking out a good mentor at the time. I don't think I knew that's what I needed—although I'm sure it would have helped me—and it's one of the reasons I try to be involved, both formally and informally, in mentorship programs. I'm always willing to share a cup of coffee, or a drink, or a meal to help someone out

because I think that could have accelerated my success and career growth had I met mentors sooner in my career.

Delia Fernandez: I was a career-changer, although I started in a related field. After college, I wound up at TRW's credit reporting division where I played several roles, including director of corporate communications, so I was speaking to the public about their rights regarding credit reporting. I realized I was having the most satisfying experience when I was talking to consumers about their credit.

I went back to school. I consulted a career coach and told her I wanted to go into financial planning. She told me that

Is 'White Fragility' Undermining Your Firm's Diversity and Inclusion Efforts? (Continued)

on the path to building your own “racial stamina.” When your colleagues of color inform you about their experiences with racism, validate their truth and acknowledge that you, as a white person, are complicit and have benefited from racism your entire life, DiAngelo said in an address at the University of Sydney’s Australian Business School.¹⁰

Understand that when you stop listening, get defensive, invalidate, attempt to change the subject, or simply ignore, these critical conversations about race and diversity grind to a screeching halt. Understanding stops. Feelings are repressed. Tension builds. Nothing is resolved. No meaningful change is made.

As a white ally, make a commitment to doing the hard, painful, and uncomfortable work to help dismantle racist systems that continue to perpetuate inequality. Our opportunity for an equitable workplace and society depends on it.

“The racial status quo is comfortable for white people, and we will not move forward in race relations if we

remain comfortable,” DiAngelo writes. “The key to moving forward is what we do with our discomfort.” ■

Endnotes

1. See Robin DiAngelo’s article “White Fragility” published in the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* available at libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/view/249/116.
2. See the *Washington Post* article, “Recounting a Day of Rage, Hate, Violence and Death,” by Joe Heim at washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-timeline/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.109fef6e9d2f.
3. See *The New York Times* article, “Rally by White Nationalists Was Over Almost Before It Began,” by Richard Fausset at nytimes.com/2018/08/12/us/politics/charlottesville-va-protest-unite-the-right.html.
4. See the BBC video, “White U.S. Nationalists Chant, ‘You Will Not Replace Us,’” at bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-40911744/white-us-nationalists-chant-you-will-not-replace-us.
5. See the CNN article, “Body Camera Shows Officer Threatened to Shoot Alton Sterling Within Seconds,” by Nicole Chavez at cnn.com/2018/03/31/us/alton-sterling-police-videos-hearings/index.html.
6. See *The New York Times* video, “Dash Camera Shows Moment Philando Castile Is Shot,” at nytimes.com/video/us/100000005176538/dash-camera-shows-moment-philando-castile-is-killed.html.
7. See the *New York Magazine* article, “Howard Schultz Doesn’t ‘See Color.’ History Doesn’t Care,” by Zak Cheney-Rice at nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/02/nobody-cares-howard-schultz.html.
8. See *The Telegraph* article, “Donald Trump Calls Former Aide Who Accused Him of Being Racist ‘That Dog’ in Angry Tweet,” by Rozina Sabur, at telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/14/donald-trump-calls-former-aide-accused-racist-dog-angry-tweet.
9. See the *Variety* article, “President Trump Takes Aim at Spike Lee Over Oscars Speech,” by Stewart Clarke at variety.com/2019/film/news/donald-trump-takes-aim-at-spike-lee-over-oscars-speech-1203148398.
10. See the *Australian Financial Review* article, “White Fragility: Are White People Inherently Racist?” by Matt Teffer at afr.com/lifestyle/arts-and-entertainment/books/white-fragility-are-white-people-inherently-racist-20190102-h19mh9.

was a very bad idea. I think she saw it as mostly a commissioned-product business. She said, “I really don’t recommend it.”

One of my instructors in the UC Irvine extension program encouraged me. He said, “You don’t have to do this as a commission person if you don’t want to. You can do this as a fee-only person.” That was really intriguing because it was the kind of financial planner I would want to hire.

The difficulty I faced was that I couldn’t find a full-time position in a fee-only shop, which is one of those entry-level issues we find in the profession. So, I went out on my own, which is difficult. I was doing some freelance

PR and marketing on the side while I got myself established.

Where We Are

Boyd: *What are your thoughts on the current state of diversity in financial planning, and what do we need to do to get the needle moving?*

Loving: Financial planning really tracks with and follows wealth, and for most of this country’s history, wealth has been controlled by white men. So what we see is a reflection of the individuals who have wealth. Now, that is changing. We see lots of change in terms of strides among women, among African Americans, Latinos, and the Asian com-

munity, and nontraditional families as well. But the profession itself is having trouble moving toward representative employees in terms of matching what the population looks like because things are changing so quickly.

I am optimistic about where things can go, but I make no excuses about where we are right now. It’s just reflective of who’s controlled wealth in this country since its inception.

Singhania: Women and people of color are still underrepresented in our profession. I am witnessing a lot more conversation around this topic lately. We are making our voices heard.

Going forward, we can move the

needle by creating more awareness and opportunity among minorities. For example, in my community, people still give me a puzzled look when I say I am a financial planner, and they are unaware of the CFP® designation as they have mostly dealt with product salespeople. They don't know about a career path in our field and how much value we add. Financial planning is not a typical corporate job that people just get drawn to.

Tomaneng: It has been white males who have controlled the wealth and, for the most part, controlled the profession. But I think we're moving in the correct direction here. I think because they still do control a lot of things, it's important to get the white males as allies. Educate them on the importance of diversity so

It's important to get the white males as allies. Educate them on the importance of diversity so they can use their influence to help make positive change.

—Jeffrey Tomaneng, CFP®, CIMA®, CLU®

they can use their influence to help make positive change. I was in a practice group with a couple of FPA chapters [recently], and I was the only person of color of 22 or 23 people.

We have the issue where we want to see more people of color and different ethnicities within our profession, and it's important to get those white male and white female leaders, educate them on the importance of diversity in the profession, and engage them such that they can help us make these changes we're looking for.

Where We're Going

Boyd: *In a recent Financial Planning article, author Zaneilia Harris questioned if she, as a Black woman adviser, is valued in the profession. How can the profession make Black women advisers feel more valued?*

Loving: Most of the Black women I have met in the profession are some of the most vocal people. So I would say, engage and talk to those individuals about what things they would like to do to extend and deepen their platform.

When you're talking about attracting the next generation of Black people, but specifically Black women, highlighting the opportunities that exist by highlighting Black women who are successful, who are running their own businesses—I think that's very helpful. It helps me as a university educator to be able to say, "See? Look at Zaneilia [Harris]. Look at Rianka [Dorsainvil]. These are people who are actually doing it, and if you email them, they'll email you back."

As the country becomes more diverse, you're going to need to have the right type of personal touch to reach all the different people out there. Black women are influencers—there are Nielsen studies that talk about this—and if you can have influencers who are out there, not just advocating on behalf of your company, but on behalf of your profession, then what happens is, not just other Black women see financial planning as a place to go, but other people of all backgrounds, genders, and gender identifications.

Boyd: *How can firms make diversity and inclusion a way of life versus just an initiative that has a start and stop?*

Loving: No. 1, you're going to have to have a commitment to it. Just having a diversity officer is not going to be enough. You need to have a diversity culture. That means having more than one event a year where we say, let's celebrate diversity and beat the drum. No, no, no. Let's actually talk about what it is that we want to accomplish.

We're going to have to be adaptable as a profession. We need to recognize this unseen level of diversity in terms of immigrants, in terms of nontraditional structured families, in terms of different racial makeups, and in terms of women being heads of financial households. This is not going away. You can't stick your head in a hole and think, let's just do what we do and be comfortable.

Companies need to recognize that this is in their best interest and start to line up incentives so they adequately compensate people for doing the right thing in terms of diversity in the future. That little statement at the bottom of a job application, or a job offer, or a job announcement—it's not enough. You have to be committed to what you want the future of your company to look like the same way we want our clients to commit to their own financial futures.

Singhania: We need everyone's buy-in if this is going to be a way of life.

We, as a profession, need to acknowledge that financial planning can be beneficial to a diverse group of clients and that serving these people can be a win-win situation. Having systems in place where decisions for clients are taken on by a diverse group of people with unique perspectives ultimately leads to better decision-making.

Firms need to be more intentional when hiring so as to bring diversity. Supporting and nurturing [diverse employees] on their journey will be critical.

It is a fact that we are now living in a highly visual world. As a profession, we constantly keep putting just one kind of stereotype on our websites and in our advertisements. Why can't we have visuals where everybody seems to be represented so that they feel comfortable and welcome? If you want a diverse place, you have to show that diversity.

Fernandez: When you see the clients who have the money and they're not a very diverse group, you either decide that you're going to selectively market to

the people who look like you and with whom you feel the most comfort, or you're going to branch out.

I'm in Southern California. We have such a diverse population. When you think about where the money is, it's coming from all aspects of the community. I'm only serving the middle class; I'm not serving the person who just sold their business for \$150 million, but those are a diverse group as well. I can't imagine a good businessperson wanting to lose out on that population.

I think the change in the population is going to eventually take you there. It's sad when you see businesses that have the ability to diversify, don't. It's really too bad if they miss out on a great population that could bring them a wonderful new business opportunity they hadn't even thought of.

Tomaneng: Yes, diversity is important. I think it's equally important to not exclude larger companies that are executing initiatives. I think it's easy when you're part of FPA, NAPFA, and you're a CFP® certificant to think, this insurance company or this broker-dealer is doing this big initiative hiring people of color, or hiring women, and dismiss that as being a negative because it's not the "preferred way" that many people within our profession want to do business.

It's important to look at that as an opportunity to bring more people of color into the profession, and to embrace that for the good that it is. If a large company throws tens of millions of dollars into an initiative that brings more Asians, more African Americans, whatever ethnic group, into the pool of potential CFP® professionals, that can only be a good thing. Allow those career-changers and those people who are coming into the profession to find their own way.

I also think it's important for those of us who have been the recipients of awards or have been put in a position where we can be influential as people

of color to make sure that we pay it forward and continue being a champion for the cause.

Boyd: *What is your advice to people of color navigating this profession?*

Loving: Allow yourself to be yourself. Don't work so hard to not be you. When you enter a profession that's 80 percent white and that is about 85 percent male, you start to think, "Well, I need to be like them." Being yourself—your talented, competent self—is important. Value the diverse perspective that you bring.

Always keep yourself sharp. Engage in the conferences, pursue additional designations, and always be reading, so you can be as good as any other planner out there.

Next, engage effectively. Invite yourself, if necessary, to some of the after-hours events that companies are having. Be active about "leaning in." It's a good thing to do, no matter which direction you're coming from.

The last thing, give yourself some time and space for safe and comfortable reflection, decompression, and meditation, because there will be conflict; there will be micro and macroaggressions; and you can't allow all that energy to sit within you without coming up with some way to comfortably expel it.

Fernandez: I really like the point Dr. Loving makes about getting involved, letting these people see that you're as good a professional and as committed to the profession as they are. I think that showing up to professional meetings, showing them that you are reading what they are reading, that you are keeping up in the profession, that you are there to support the profession, and that you care and have the passion for it is something that can at least bring some acknowledgement and respect.

I don't know if it's enough for them to go back to their office and put in a diversity initiative, but I think it shows them firsthand that we're really all very similar, we really are similar profession-

als, there's a reason why we're there, and we deserve to be respected and included.

Singhania: Proactively seek mentors who can guide you. I joined FPA right after I got my CFP® certification and got my internship through their program, which got me started. You need a circle of trusted advisers and peers—especially as a person of color—and joining professional organizations where you can find support is valuable. I wouldn't have survived alone and am thankful for belonging to an amazing chapter.

Own your story, and share your story. People may not completely identify with you as a person, but your "why" and where you're coming from is something that they may resonate with.

Come to terms with the discomfort that you may feel when you get into a room that is much different than who you are and learn to overcome that.

Tomaneng: You have to look at where you are personally in your life. Let's say that I worked at a firm and I had a chance for a promotion or a chance to take over a large book of business, but the person who held the cards had a bit of racism or anti-Semitism in him. I don't know what that line is as far as, do I suck it up, and go against my laurels, and just grin and bear it? Or, do I say something and risk not getting what's going to be good for my family and me?

While I agree with what both Delia and Dr. Loving have said, you also have to look at the risk/reward. Is that going to be worth \$50,000 of revenue to my family? Maybe I'll just shut up and take it, versus that's only worth \$500 of revenue to my family, so I'll tell him off.

It's a fine line to walk, and I don't want to say one thing is right or wrong. If there's an issue and something like that comes up, as much as we want to lean in, it's not always that easy. I think it can be hard for a lot of people to lean in when the stakes are high. ■