

# Speaker Bios



**David Rivera, PhD**, is an associate professor of counselor education at Queens College, City University of New York. A counseling psychologist by training, his practical work in higher education includes college counseling, academic advising, multicultural affairs, and leadership development. Dr. Rivera's research focuses on cultural competency development and issues impacting the marginalization and wellbeing of low-income/first-generation college students, people of color, and oppressed sexual orientation and gender identity groups, with a focus on microaggressions. Dr. Rivera is an adviser to The Steve Fund, faculty with the Council for Opportunity in Education, board co-chair of CLAGS: The Center for LGBTQ Studies, on the executive committee of The Society for the Psychological study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues, and on the American Psychological Association's Committee for Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity. Dr. Rivera holds degrees from Teachers College, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Wyoming. He has worked and trained at a variety of institutions including the University of Pennsylvania, the New School University, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, and the Addiction Institute of New York. He has received multiple recognitions for his work from the American Psychological Association, the American College Counseling Association, and the American College Personnel Association.

## Episode 4, Expectations: What Are They? Where Do They Come From?

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

expectations, people, guess, class, parents, talking, youth advisory board, culture, life, goals, family, binder, grades, feel, conversation, comparing, good, play, develop, bit

## SPEAKERS

Kaelyn, Dr. David Rivera, Dannie, Selorna, Jay

### [Intro]

#### **Kaelyn** 00:01

Hi everyone and welcome to this Speak On It podcast. Today we will be talking about expectations, and what they mean to us and where they come from. So first, let's start with some introductions.

#### **Jay** 00:16

Hi everyone, my name is Jay. I am the current chair for the Youth Advisory Board for The Steve Fund. I am currently in sunny Houston, Texas where it's a bit humid. But hopefully I'll be able to have time to play tennis or run around later today.

#### **Selorna** 00:35

Hi, I'm Selorna. I am a junior in high school, a rising senior, and I live in Ripon, California and I'm here as a guest of Kaelyn.

#### **Dr. David Rivera** 00:51

Hi, everyone. My name is Dr. David Rivera. I'm an associate professor of counseling at Queens College in the City University of New York. I'm also a national advisor to the Steve Fund. I'm calling in from Brooklyn where it's very humid. And I'm not sure if it's very sunny because I can't see outside from my apartment right now.

#### **Dannie** 01:11

Hi, everyone. I'm Dannie and I'm a member of the Steve Fund's Youth Advisory Board. I'm currently taking a gap year in between high school and college and I am calling in from New Rochelle, New York, where I live with my family and it's pretty sunny here and humid.

#### **Kaelyn** 01:26

My name is Kaelyn Huang. I am a Steve Fund Youth Advisory Board member, and I am from Dublin, California, and I am currently a junior in high school.

#### **Jay** 01:41

So to start off our conversation about expectations, I guess like one of the first things we want to ask are, how our expectations supporting our well-being in general, like how do we utilize them to support ourselves?

**Dannie** 02:00

I think it's nice to give yourself some structure. So like whether expectations come from yourself, your parents, or the school that you're a part of, or an organization or a sports team, they basically help us live up to our standards. And I think they can be really positive because we can reach a goal and then we can set a new goal and think, "What am I going to do next?" and continue to see ourselves improve, see others improve, and improve as a group. So I think it's really good to have expectations, performance ones and otherwise. There's definitely a negative side as well, though. I think sometimes, not necessarily setting them too high, but maybe just setting expectations around the wrong things, or fixating on, like, I guess, the wrong things, that don't really matter as much. So even if you did achieve it, like that would be great. But I guess just like, when you create stress, it's like, I wonder where that comes from. So that's something I ask myself sometimes it's like, how can I reframe my goals in a way that just serves me and makes me feel better every day that I go about achieving them?

**Selorna** 03:04

I definitely agree with what Dannie was saying. I think that one way that they can help our well-being is if we set kind of daily expectation for ourselves because not only does that, maybe, help our goals get done for the day, but also if we don't maybe meet our expectations, we can kind of sit down for the day and think about why we didn't reach those expectations and also realize that it's okay, sometimes, not to reach your expectations, and that can kind of give you the foundation for the long run, where the expectations-- the long term expectations you set for yourself, they might not come true or they might turn out in a way different than what you expected. So starting with that daily foundation might help you build that kind of relationship with yourself and the expectations you have to be able to be okay with maybe not reaching them sometimes.

**Kaelyn** 03:59

Personally, for me, the expectations, they help me because they act as a motivating factor where they help me-- they give me a purpose, sort of, in life. And it makes me feel better when I accomplish like mini achievable goals in order to accomplish a much greater goal.

**Dr. David Rivera** 04:17

It's just like everyone is sharing, you know. Expectations are an important vital source of motivation that help us to accomplish whatever we set off to do in our daily lives. And they help us to establish goals for ourselves and for the work that we are hoping to accomplish. But just like everything else in life, expectations can cause us harm when we don't consciously and intentionally consider their impact on our life and where they're coming from.

**Jay** 04:51

Sometimes I use them as boundary setters, like, especially with like new individuals or just like new scenarios where I'm just kind of like, "Okay, these are my boundaries. This is how I'm going to do it." And if I step out or line or something slips out of line, we'll back out and be like, "Nope, that's not it." Um, that really kind of helps to make sure that I'm not stressing myself too much and like, "You crossed the line, so I'm done." But with that said, so on the flip side, how are

expectations, how can they kind of cause a hindrance towards your well-being, as opposed to boosting it up?

**Dr. David Rivera** 05:48

As I was mentioning before, when we kind of don't interrogate and analyze the expectations that we see on ourselves, we don't analyze where they're coming from. Are they external pressures? Are they things that we internally have developed ourselves that kind of fit, you know, our worldview, our frame of reference, the goals that we have set out to do for us. We don't do that intentionally. That's when the expectations can intensify and sometimes develop into things that are unrealistic or unachievable, which will just then lead us into more of a "failure" or "consequence" to not meeting those those expectations that aren't kind of intentionally formed and and uniquely applied to our current situation and context.

**Kaelyn** 06:39

With expectations, if they aren't ours, and we're living for. For instance, my parents' expectations place a heavy burden on us. And it makes everything much more difficult, and I think you tend to lose a drive.

**Jay** 07:13

I think for me, there are times when your parents wish you the best for your future. They want to ensure that you're stable, you're happy, and that whatever form of your family unit will be, will be happy as well. Right? But there are times when they may be misinformed or not as well-informed about certain topics or areas and they kind of talk to you based off that limited knowledge, right? They talk to you. They try to career plan and future plan with you because they want to be that support network, but at times, it can kind of muddle your own future aspects, your own future ambitions, because it's like, "Is that really what I want to do?" Or is it just because we've talked about this for the past 18 years, and I've been kind of conditioned to being like, "This is my career path, I need to do this, this, this and this, and then once I'm done with it, I'm gonna be happy for the rest of my life." It doesn't drive you sometimes. If that happens, and it's not something that you personally want to do, it doesn't drive you and you kind of go through the motions of doing it and you may not be actually flourishing, both mentally and physically and then whatever the, like, outcome for it. So I guess like with your grades or whatnot, like those will not reflect as well as they should.

**Dannie** 09:03

I think a good example of expectations gone wrong is when they're set and kind of like worked towards at the expense of someone's well-being. And I think being conscious, I hear people use that word a lot, it makes a lot of sense because if you're being conscious of something, if something's not really working, or I guess in a sports example, like if you got injured a few times for doing something, like maybe you should change something. Or in school, if you might have achieved your goals and gotten some good grades and then you realize, wow, my mental health really took a dip here, like setting goals for the semester. Selorna, your sister Sedina actually said this last episode, I guess this will be the episode before that episode. She sets goals every single semester, and that's something I used to do in school, too. And outside of just reflecting

on my grades, I also reflected on how I was performing in the class, how I was feeling in the class, and things I wanted to do differently that would make it more enriching for me and, I guess, my fellow classmates. So like looking at the whole picture, too. So like a holistic approach to expectations can be really helpful too.

**Selorna** 10:03

I definitely agree. This year, I really struggled with a class in school, my physics class, and I, people had told me years before that it was super hard, that they weren't going to take it because it would affect their GPA. And my friends, we all joke, you know, yeah, we're all going to suffer. And so I kind of was like, "No, I'm sure it's not that bad. It'll be fine." I kind of set the expectation for myself to, I guess, do well, easily. Um, I didn't really think about taking what they said into account and plan for a harder class. And so I had the expectation that I would do well. And then once I noticed that I was struggling, I was still really focused on that expectation, and I wasn't really taking how I kind of felt about everything into account. So because of that kind of sense of failure with that expectation I had for myself, of getting a good grade right from the start and maintaining it. I, in the beginning, kind of lost my drive to do well, in that class. I kind of had the mindset, okay. I wasn't able to reach my goal, I didn't fulfill this expectation, and so maybe I can never do it. [or] I just kind of shut down about that class, instead of, like Dannie was saying, looking at it holistically and realizing that I need to also feel okay about this class and look at different ways that I can reach my expectation or adjust my expectation to something that fits me and how I am doing and working in this class. So that I can, [I guess] succeed to, [like], the best of my ability in that situation. I kind of had to adapt everything for that situation, instead of applying an outside application that applied to maybe all my other classes to something that was completely different.

**Kaelyn** 12:00

Yeah, I completely agree. I've had similar experiences because I've always had high expectations for myself academically, especially when it comes to schoolwork. And so in the beginning of my junior year, when I transferred schools, I was taking all AP classes and I just had the expectation of, "Oh, it should be the same. I should be able to get an A because like, I've always like done that (in a non-conceited way.) And in the beginning, I was really struggling and I was like, how is everyone else doing so well, like my grades are slipping and like my mental health wasn't like as good I guess because it was like a new school, a new situation, new people, everything. And then later into the school year, I realized, or someone brought to my attention that of course, there would be some struggles for you because you're in a new place and you don't have that support group from the people, your close friends or anything like that. And I guess the environment that you grow up in and the environment that you're in, it really does affect your expectations. And, sometimes, you may not see everything holistically, like how it would affect you and your expectations.

**Dannie** 13:07

And you're seeing only one side of the other people in the class, too. They are pretty much projecting what they want others to see. And that can be damaging if we compare, like our actual lived experience with like, our perception of like, what they're going through.

**Jay** 13:39

I think it kind of plays into expectations as well. Kaelyn was mentioning that when we're comparing ourselves to other people, we're not considerate of our circumstances. Selorna, me Dannie, Dr. Rivera, Kaelyn, we all come from different backgrounds, we all have different experiences that come into play regarding-- I don't know, like if we're all taking AP Biology. We're all in different mental states. We all have different passions, or like what our career paths are. And if we're comparing ourselves to one another, and we're like, oh my gosh, Kaelyn's getting an A in this class and I'm like, getting like a B minus, like, I don't understand what's happening. It's kind of like having to come to terms with being kinder to yourself, and realizing like, you know, what, like, maybe Kaelyn has a lot more. Like she's at a better place. I guess, like a certain circumstance compared to where I am right now. Like I could be dealing with a lot at home, I could be dealing with a lot with, like my career, etc, etc. and that definitely affects performance. So it's like a matter of mindfulness and just thinking like, "Am I really, like, am I doing the best that I can in this current situation? And if you are, and you're able to say yes, then like, I think it's okay to kind of lower your expectations a little for that class because you are doing your best and you're succeeding in that factor.

**Kaelyn** 15:22

Yeah, I completely agree. But like sometimes, I don't know for me, in my situation, when my parents saw that, it wasn't doing so well, they were like, "Okay, why don't you just drop a couple classes?" And then they were like, "It's okay if you drop it," but like in their voice and in their tone, it's like, "If you drop it, we expect you to get A's in those other classes." And it was like a little bit of a disappointment. And I was like, "No, I know I can do this." I just stuck with it. And it ended up getting better. I ended up with A's, so I'm like, I guess it was okay just like push through, which wasn't necessarily good for my mental health, but it got better with quarantine. So it's all good.

**Jay** 16:01

I love that you mentioned that your parents were kind of like talking to you. And they're like, "Oh, maybe you can do this, too." I kind of help with that situation. And I don't know if this is with your parents, but sometimes when my parents do it, I don't know if they're purposely doing it. But I'm kind of like internalizing some of it, and I'm like, What are you trying to say? What, I'm like, not able to do it? Like, that's okay. So I'll just use a real life example. So I'm pre-med. I've been pre-med for like a hot minute. And so I decided to take a sabbatical just because I was going through a lot of burnout and my mental health was just like [deflating noise], like it was in a bad place. And so I needed time to recuperate. And my parents were starting to realize how difficult the whole medical school process was. Because in their minds, they're like, you do bam, bam, bam, you go to undergrad, you go to med school, and then you're done. And I'm like, there's more to med school than just finishing. After med school, you have residency. After residency, you have, potentially, a fellowship. You can also do a subspecialty-- oh, sorry if this is new information, Kaelyn. You're making a face, and I know you're pre med as well. [shared laughter] Um, but they started talking to me and they're like, "Oh, maybe you shouldn't be a doctor because it seems too hard. And I'm like, okay, like, I know you mean that in a good way, but

what do you want me to be? And they're like, "You can do nursing." I'm like, that's just as hard. Like, I don't understand. Like, I understand where you're coming from, but it was just kind of like, interesting how they change those expectations of me. And in a way, it was kind of like, "Am I disappointing ya'll, because I'm not fulfilling your desires of me becoming a doctor, like, doing it so quickly?" But as I grow older, I'm just kind of like, "Eh. They have those expectations. Maybe that's their expectations, not mine." Like I'm already like, set. Like, I'm going to be a doctor one way or another. Like, if it takes me a couple more years, it takes me a couple more years. Um, so it's just, I think it comes with time. I know it's super annoying, especially when you're younger, and I've been there. I hated when my cousins were like, "Oh, yeah, it's gonna take time. You'll figure it out." And I'm like, "That's so condescending," like, "Don't tell that to me." But now that I'm older, I'm like, "Yeah, it does take time." At least sometimes.

**Kaelyn 18:28**

I think your parents are more understanding than my parents are. I'm not sure if you have any siblings or not, but I have two younger siblings. And well, sometimes it feels like whenever I don't do well in a class, or, I didn't do so well, like on a test or something. It was like a pretty big test. And my parents were in the car because they were dropping us off at school. And they sort of-- my dad just sort of turned his attention to my siblings after talking to me, like how I didn't do so well. And then it was sort of like, "Oh, so like my first daughter failed, maybe my other children can do it." And I was like, "Oh, okay, so one slip up and like, I guess that's it." But yeah, they still have expectations, though. It's just a little bit lower. It goes up and down over time.

**Dr. David Rivera 19:19**

A lot of what I'm hearing, and thank you both, all of you for sharing these very meaningful stories that are really giving a lot of life to this idea of expectations and how they operate in our lives. But you're talking a lot, we've been-- what I'm hearing a lot of are these implied expectations, especially from parents and family, that aren't always spoken that then as a young person, we have to-- I'm saying we even though I'm not young anymore-- but you have to then kind of decipher and figure out what is really what is what is the implied message, right, what is really being sent to me. And the messages can be a variety that we can come up with. If we don't kind of get to the root of what do you mean? And I heard Jay, you're talking to your parents, you kind of question. "What do you mean by that?" Right? So sometimes we have to kind of engage in that process with our families, especially where we're used to having just a lot of implied messages coming through. That's a lot of how we were, we were taught initial things growing up. It's how we learn culture. That's how we learn a lot of the basic things that we now rely upon to just lead our lives. But when we don't interrogate what the meaning behind it, where it's coming from, sometimes we kind of miss the-- we kind of misinterpret what that implied expectation is, and we can develop it into something that is greater than what it actually was. And so it kind of becomes contingent upon the children, sometimes, to kind of question their parents. And I know that that can sound defiant, sometimes. I know that sometimes we're in cultures where you're not supposed to question your parents. I can definitely relate to that one. And at the same time, I think it's important for us to engage in meaningful conversation, which means that we will have to question our parents or what have you in a respectful way, of course, about their expectations they have for us and how we're kind of being impacted by that as well,

by sharing that impact with with our families. I think in the long run, our families just want us to succeed, they want us to do well. In many cases, they want us to do better than them. I know, that's come up in other conversations, which is also another set of expectations, but we can dialogue with them. And I think that when it comes down to it, people tend to be a bit more understanding than not. Sometimes we need to chip at that ice for a long time, but I think that that understanding is often achievable.

**Dannie 21:45**

That brought to mind [I think,] a famous quote in the church. I think St. Francis of Assisi once said, "Don't seek to be understood so much as to seek to understand." And it really pays off a lot. I've found that sometimes, if I think that my parents are implying some sort of expectation, or I feel like they're like challenging me or they're, I don't know, if I feel slighted or something, sometimes I'm just reading into something that maybe isn't really there. Instead of dialoguing with them, and like, trying to understand them, sometimes I'll just react. And then it's just kind of like, "Okay, then we have to, like, go backwards" and be like, "Okay, what happened?" They're like, "Well, we really weren't trying to offend you." But I just sometimes when I'm on edge that can happen. But I think dialoguing is a really great way to prevent that. Because it's a win-win situation, it sheds light on the topic. Maybe they were, maybe they did have some sort of expectation, and you can talk about that, and maybe educate them a little bit more. And maybe they really just want you to succeed, and they just want to support you and then you can understand that more. So I think, seeking to understand, it's a good place to start because when other people feel understood, they're more likely to try to understand you. So I think it goes both ways.

**Jay 22:57**

And I love that you mentioned how sometimes you may not be-- like you may be like in a certain like emotional space and you may misinterpret it because of that. Because like, I definitely have had circumstances where I'm like maybe not in a good place, and my parents make a slight comment that they usually say that I typically just brush off because I'm like, I've been hearing that since I was three, no big deal. Like in that particular moment I'm like, "What do you mean by that?" And so like it's sometimes it's good to pause and then kind of sit, and like think back about it later on when you're in like, in a calmer zen mode, because it may have been, like, no a big deal, as you were mentioning, Dannie. So we've been talking about expectations, a lot, regarding family. So I'm just wondering like, where are other places that y'all have found that expectations kind of derive from? At least for like, pressures on you.

**Kaelyn 24:02**

I know that I sometimes get expectations from my teachers in my AP classes. In the beginning of the school year, my AP bio teacher told the whole class "Oh, last year, everyone-- like 98% of the class got fives. Only, like two people got twos." And then we all just looked around. We're like, "Oh, okay, shoot, like, well, hopefully I'm part of that 98%" And so, we there's kind of expectations from my teachers to do well, especially when they have a reputation of having, like, so many students having/getting fives on the test.

**Dannie 24:40**

That's a lot of pressure. I feel like I didn't have that at my school so much like my AP Spanish class senior year had like five people in it and it was like the first time they'd brought the class back in like 15 years. So slightly different culture. Um, yeah, I think I get it from my parents, sometimes family like sometimes like my grandmother. I feel like cousins like I look up to them. And I feel like they can definitely be intimidating sometimes to talk to you because they've accomplished a lot. And they're older, and they've just lived through a lot. So I guess it's, it's really inspiring to be able to talk with them sometimes, but I don't feel a lot of pressure from them necessarily. Because they're also like younger, and I guess they can relate to me. And they don't want to add more pressure on because they already know like, my parents and everybody, so yeah, and from school, not as much, not as much. But] if I had like a really good teacher, something I'd be like, I really want to do well, because like, they just did such a good job. And that kind of adds another motivation for me. So that would be more like a positive motivation.

**Selorna 25:37**

When you were talking, Dannie, it actually reminded me of an experience I had this year concerning my physics class and expectations with that, I would say, expectations can also come from the community you're in. And so my church does an academic recognition program. Every year since I was little, my sisters and I have done it, and then we've always had, you know, like all A's, honor roll, that type of thing on there. And so this year my sister and I, we didn't have, you know, all A's, that 4.0 GPA. And so we kind of, like, purposely forgot to sign up for that program because of that, I guess, implied expectation. I mean, no one at our church was telling us, "You have to be a perfect, straight-A student." But because of what we've had in the past, and people at our church always congratulating us and talking about it, "Oh, you guys are like the Smart Girls and things like that. We kind of felt that pressure almost that not only did we have to get, not only did we want to get this good grade, but it matters in like our communities and like our family and things like that, and it's going to show in it almost as if we would change our identity. So I mean, looking back, I kind of wish that I did participate, just to kind of show you know, I'm not perfect, I'm gonna make mistakes and also for myself to come to that realization that I'm working as hard as I can, and I deserve to have academic recognition. So yeah, that's one thing I actually hadn't really considered until I was sitting here right now in this podcast. Like, they're also like, expectations coming from, you know, my every, community experience and like situations.

**Kaelyn 27:29**

I like you said how it's sort of part of your identity, because my family-- I know my grandma, every time she visits us, she would only she would always say like, the same three things: one-- "Become a doctor," two-- "Play the piano," and three-- "Can I see your grades?" And it's always the same thing. And so whenever my siblings and I have to, like, show her our grade and print it out for her because she likes to keep it in a binder in her office. Like, that's how serious it is. Ever since kindergarten and like anything with reports, she always asked for a copy. And for each of her grandkids, she has a binder with all of our grades. And if you look back, like all mine, like were A's, but like up until, like, junior year, like they were like, there was like a B or so,

or something like that. Well, yeah, basically a B, but um, I kind of just told her like, “Oh, you know, like, we don’t really do grades anymore.” And she was like, “Oh, wait, really?” And I was like, “Yeah, you know, new school, kind of different system.” I just like sort of, like, brushed it off and was like, “I don’t want to put that in the binder.” But yeah, I thought it was-- I think it’s kind of weird how expectations make us do stuff like that. I kind of lied, but, you know, it’s part of my identity, I guess. And I guess that’s something I want to change. Like, my grades don’t really define who I am as a person.

**Jay 28:48**

So I really like how you like were comfortable sharing that interaction with your grandma, because I’ve definitely had circumstances where like, I’m not comfortable going to certain family events anymore because of those like familial expectations or ideas or concepts that they may have, right, like, my family has a very tight knit like community. My grandma, when she immigrated here to the states, she brought like six out of her nine children here with her. And so like we all live in Houston, we’re like, we’re like in Houston, Houston’s our home base. And so like when we all meet with each other, it’s like this huge gathering of like 20-30 plus individuals. And very typical of collectivist culture, everybody knows everybody’s business. And there are times when, you know, like when you’re on like breaks, or you may not be doing so well, like, everybody’s on top of them. They may be meaning well, but it’s just, it’s a lot of pressure and it’s a lot coming at you at once, especially if that’s so many people. And at times, like I found myself like closing myself off and then cuz like I’m like “I love y’all”, but like I don’t want to share this part of my life with you cuz I don’t want to get nagged at, or I don’t want to kind of be like come after because of this. And like, I’m slowly trying to, like break out of that like idea. They mean well; they’re not trying to be harmful about it. And I think it’s because there are points, in terms of like my certain expectations that I’ve set for myself that I may not have currently achieved at the moment. And there’s like, a bit of shame that I have personally because I haven’t done so. And I think that’s kind of like manifesting in this and some like kind of like, work through that as well. Like it’s okay that I haven’t achieved like, all these like goals that I made like 10 years ago for myself, like it’s okay to be, as I mentioned earlier, like kinder to myself, that it’s okay to extend expectations a bit, or lower them or whatnot. And so, that was a really good point that you made, Kaelyn.

**Dannie 30:58**

I think it’s really interesting. We have these roles for ourselves like, the smart one or like-- that either we gave ourselves or the church gave us or like our parents or the grandma with the binder, which I’ve never heard of that one before, but that’s very impressive. Um, but yeah, it’s like, almost like Instagram. Like if a girl is like really, or a guy or whoever has an account and they’re known to be certain type of influencer, they feel like they have to post within that theme. So like, either like lifestyle or all their pictures that have to make them look really good. Or maybe they’re like a goofy YouTuber or something. So they get to have some like funny pictures and personality pictures. But it kind of feels like our lives are almost like a portfolio, in some way or another within our roles. Like as a student, we have like the whole portfolio. And it’s like, we don’t want-- if something isn’t up to, I guess, a certain standard, we want to erase it and not

include it but that's not-- like, it happened. So just being able to acknowledge that it kind of frees yourself from its grasp.

**Kaelyn** 32:00

Dr. Rivera, how would you say that we adjust our expectations in a way that wouldn't affect our mental health as much? Because I feel like expectations come from everywhere we go. And sometimes it's just really hard to focus on what's important and what's not.

**Dr. David Rivera** 32:16

Kaelyn, that is a very important and a big question, and I'll try to answer as best as possible without speaking too much. But I think that that's a process of human development, kind of normative development as we progress from childhood to adolescence to early adulthood to adulthood. And I know that many of you are in that late adolescence, early adulthood stage. I think a lot of special things happen during that time of our life. You know, there's a brain physiology that we have some pre-med folks on the phone, so you can probably describe that physiology of what happens to the brain as it's developing in later adolescence to kind of solidify the connections of learning that the neurons have created in our brains, but kind of towards later adolescence, there's an influx of gray matter in the brain that naturally all those loose neurons are just waiting to make connections. And I think that we can really harness the power of our physiology, in our late adolescence, early adulthood, by really being intentional about what our path is, what motivates us, what is our moral compass. Now, that term moral is very loaded, but I mean, what is your personal guide? What do you feel are the things that drive you in that are crucial and essential to who you are as a person, and that requires a deep dive into who we are, into our self awareness. And it requires us to kind of navigate, if you will, the murky waters of our identities, that include all of the external stuff that we've internalized, that we might not even agree with, but the messages have been so strong over time that we have, they become a part of who we are, we almost forget that these things came from an external location and not really from who we are as our unique personalities and people that we're developing to be. So I think that young people especially are, and I think can happen at any time of our time, our lifetime, but especially younger folks, I think that that there's a lot that can happen in these younger years again, as the brain is still forming, to create the, the strong pathways that really program who we are as people, that we can kind of mess with it a bit by being intentional about what our motivations are, by taking stock of what are what are the things that that motivate us? Who do I want to be? Who do I see myself as? And kind of trying to tease out some of those external things that maybe we just don't quite really believe in, or that might actually be causing us undue stress in terms of trying to meet an expectation that again, is unrealistic for who we are and who we hope to be.

**Kaelyn** 34:56

Thank you for that. I think I understand. Like, I guess it's sometimes-- it's just hard to do that deep dive, I guess, and break away from those expectations.

**Dr. David Rivera** 35:08

It really is, so it's easier said than done. And it's also easier from my perspective in life where, not only now I'm at a different stage of life, generationally, then you all, but I also, you know, my training to become a psychologist has forced me to take a deep dive into my persona in terms of my worldview, and what drives me. Like I had to do that in certain courses and along the way, and continue to do that. And so I'm really thankful for that training and for those experiences, but I know that those are applicable for anybody, regardless of the kind of career that you're, you're going down. So maybe it's even just starting to journal, and the journal topic being this is about me. And I'm going to try to figure out, everyday, what are the things that that are that I'm doing in my life that help me to kind of stay centered, and what are the things that are kind of causing disruptions in my life. And that can maybe be a first step in trying to figure out what my true ideals and expectations are, apart from what society and family and culture and all these things are telling me I should be.

**Jay** 36:25

What you just mentioned, Dr. Rivera, encompasses all of it. But like, for me, there are certain aspects of my culture that have caused a lot of dissonance, and a lot of like internalized fighting for myself with certain identities that I hold, right. So like, for example, like being LGBTQ and then being like a male in the family, the first like, male, I guess in line. There's this pressure of like, having to like one, take care of like the extended family, and then also the pressure of, you know, of carrying the family line, which is very misogynistic. I know. And it's, it's very, like, it's archaic. But it's very ingrained and at times, it kind of brings shame, or has. Being able to balance the cultural aspects of it and also just like the logistical like, "No, like that's what they want." That's like old-school, whatever. And like, this is who I am as a person and carrying on. So for those instances, like would you say like, it's much like what you were just mentioning with like journaling and like kind of, like centering yourself? Or are there additional techniques and exercises that would be able to kind of help in those situations?

**Dr. David Rivera** 38:04

I think, Jay, I love all the points that you're making and definitely culture, I don't want to give them this impression that I want people to break away from cultural influences because our cultural influences are really important, right? But we also get to choose how we live out our cultural influences, right, to an extent. And it's kind of figuring out that nuance of "Well, how do I make this cultural norm my own brand of the cultural norm?" Culture changes over time. Every generation adds something different, you know, culture is ever-shifting. As people, we are influenced by culture, but we also shape the cultures that we are a part of by being active participants and actors in those cultures. Given that, I think that it's also important to have these conversations with other people that we trust and love around us, people whose opinions that we value. This is where having mentors is really important. I rely on mentors on a daily basis. I have a variety of mentors that I've accumulated over the course of my lifetime. And my mentors aren't always older than me. Sometimes they're younger than me. I learn so much from every time I have a conversation with the Youth Advisory Board and the members that compose it and, and their friends, I'm always enriched by that conversation. So in a way, you're mentoring me, in terms of your current experiences and what you're going through. But the point is that we need others around us to kind of serve as reflections of our information. People give back things

to us that we give to them. And we sometimes hear it in a different way. We also can, we also need other people to tell us things that we might not even see about ourselves. I have this conversation with my students often about taking stock of their strengths. And when I ask people about their strengths, and I asked all my students, first day of class, when they're introducing themselves-- I want to know how they got their name. And I also want to know one strength. And sometimes there are seconds and minutes that follow that question. But when I ask what are some challenges, and I usually do that rhetorically, because people can readily list off a litany of challenges, that they have, harder time with strengths, right. And so that's why it's often-- sometimes people around us can see our strengths before we can see them and acknowledge them. So similarly, it can be helpful to have these conversations with other people about, about our expectations, about their expectations, just as you all are doing this with each other, as a way to kind of take stock of expectations and then trying to really figure out "What are what are mine?" and "How do I want to live them out?"

### **[Rose-Bud-Thorn Song]**

**Kaelyn** 42:23

I can go first. I guess, for me, one of the thorns would be that I have to retake my bio exam on the third. And then something good that happened was that I've been playing a lot of games with like my sister, like because my sister is in seventh grade and she plays a lot of Minecraft, so I've just been like bonding with her over Minecraft. So like whenever I go on she's like, "Kaelyn, party with me," and then we just play for like hours, which I guess is kind of cool to like, just, she's like the main one I've been FaceTiming because like we have our computers in our room, and it's kind of fun.

**Dannie** 43:40

Okay, I guess I'll go now. So a rose for me would be celebrating-- I think I said this in the other episode, but just getting to celebrate my cousins this week like graduating from high school and college, like all over, being able to celebrate them over family Zoom calls and toasts has been a big rose to me. And then a thorn is I guess the fact that it's just not in person, but we're all really looking forward to when we can celebrate in person with each other, and birthdays, too.

**Selorna** 44:07

I have a similar thorn. Mine is I guess not being able to enjoy the summer outside and with my friends, and also dance and things like that. Because last summer I spent it all studying for the SAT. So I was kind of looking forward to that. And then I think my rose will be getting to help plan my twin and my own birthday, which will be at the end of June. I think it'll be really fun because we'll have more time since we're normally super busy. So even though it's at home, we'll get to kind of like sit down and celebrate with just ourselves and our family. So I'm really excited for that.

**Dr. David Rivera** 44:52

No, I think there's so many thorns right now. It's hard to pick one, but a major one has been the heaviness of the anti-black actions that continue to permeate our society and that have just

achieved so much more attention this week. So just sitting with that a lot right now, but a rose was we were able to celebrate the graduation of the the counseling students in the program that I work in. So launching another class of healers into the communities that really need them, especially right now was a highlight of my week for sure.

**Jay** 45:30

For me, I share Dr. Rivera's thorn. There's just a lot of a lot of overstimulation and then a lot of needing to kind of look towards my immediate circles and trying to counter any like anti-blackness that I see, and like really having those like tough conversations with family members which was kind of interesting, I think just to see where they're coming from, because I'm like, huh? But anyway, a rose for me would be that I got to see my cousin. Granted, we were like, we were doing like a car date. We were like in two separate cars. But she came down from St. Louis to visit her mom and help out. So it's been a hot minute and it was really good to catch up with her. So yeah. And thank you all for joining us today for the podcast. And until we see each other again, be safe and be well.

**[Outro]**