

April, 2022

*Hola,*

*Afromestiza* is the result of a journey I started in 2018. I had completed a doctorate in education, and it was the proudest moment of my life. I was officially a chain breaker. I accomplished the unimaginable with limited resources and many odds against me. To me, it was primarily a personal journey. It was a goal that I had chosen at an early age because I felt intelligent enough, capable enough, and had a strong desire to learn, teach and serve.

A doctoral journey can be like the so-called "dark night of the soul". It can break you down until you emerge anew, grown, wiser, and with a different view of life. It left me physically exhausted and mentally disoriented. Therefore, I took time to rest, recover and start over.

I never envisioned that a title would change my presence in the world and take a blindfold off my eyes. Suddenly, some people were nicer to me while others walked in a different direction when they saw me. Some people seized every moment to call me doctor, while others negotiated a way to call me anything that did not require my newly earned professional title. But the most interesting part to me was that I was suddenly a woman of color, brown, Puerto Rican, Latina, or any other suitable identifier.

Sometimes this meant the pride of those claiming me as part of their community, and other times it came as a warning from others in positions of influence not to overstep any boundaries.

Then, I realized I had been a White-Presenting Puertorican who benefited from the privileges of light skin color. A woman with internalized patriarchal traits that believed in meritocracy and was now forced to study her racial history and deeply examine her values and beliefs.

The result is the work that I'm sharing with you today. It is a journey. It is a process of rediscovery, healing, and grounding so that I can view all the parts of my identity as powerful elements that positively support my professional practice rather than diminish it. I want to encourage you, to also lean into the discomfort of difficult conversations, look back into your family history when ready, and challenge your notions of yourself and the world around you. In the process, remember to be kind to yourself, take time to rest, ask questions, share space and most importantly take space.

Peace, love and light,

Doctora Collado