

# Why Am I So Damaged?

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I've always loved the song I'm Every Woman . . . if African American women had an anthem this would be it! The lyrics: . . . I'm every woman . . . it's all in me . . . speak to my heart and soul. In my mind's eye I am fearless. Reality finds me more of a "wannabe." A quick dictionary.com check reveals when the word fear is used as a noun the denotative definition is: a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling of or condition of being afraid. The etcetera and the possibility of this thing defined as fear being "imagined" are more than a bit problematic. Growing to womanhood while Black left me unsure, tentative and burdened with the proclamation that hung over every person of color and every member of a minority group's head—you have to be better than the best to compete with "them." You must always remain one step ahead (even better if it is two or three steps ahead), be "more" and achieve "more" to claim a mountaintop spot and look over at the next mountain into "their" eyes. I was always questioning myself as to whether or not I measured up to this "them" whose authority and superiority grew every time I read an article or a book, wrote a paper or merely stepped outside my door. Who exactly is this group sometimes called "them," sometimes called "they," but never called me or we? "They/Them" are my Others—the not "me" or the "we" people, rather the majority to my minority, the power to my powerlessness, the Eurocentric worldview to my Afrocentric paradigm, the right to my wrong and the reason I often feel doomed to be a "wannabe" and never an "I Am." All of the aforementioned issues result in my theme song often being relegated to merely my dream song. Too often I allow the weight of the fear associated with not measuring up to hold me in a grip that keeps me bound and stagnant. If dictionary.com resorts to the inclusion of "imagined" in a definition of fear, then I am forced to ask myself if being an Every Woman/Ph. Diva is a real state or merely an imagined one.

The need to not only ace the test, but also to be the best of the rest began at my parent's knees. I heard again and again how I must prepare and be ready to face battle and conquer "them." I learned the lesson well and always excelled, however a curious thing happened along the way. With every achievement, every honor, every award and each degree the fear that has always served as a motivating factor,

moving me from one level to the next, onward and upward to higher heights began to take on another more sinister role. The fear that had always been there to tease me on to and through the next challenge turned from teasing to taunting. The fear no longer spurred me along my way ever climbing; instead it began to nurture and water those seeds of self-doubt planted by my Others yet tended by me. The fears grew in voices that sang in a chorus reaching a crescendo replacing my mantra of standing, courage, growth and analysis with charges of down for the count, wimp, wannabe, stymied, paralysis. What a mess!

I continue to navigate the shark-infested waters surrounding the Ivory Tower, that place where I've decided there is a space at the table for me. I move from dream to theme to reality on a daily basis. A place where fear motivated me to move to and claim MY SPOT! A place even though when fear said "I could not," I responded with "Yes I can, I will, and I did!" I've decided that my personal definition of fear is a rhetorical construct. Like rhetoric it is exaggerated, pompous often pretentious and all the while seducing me with persuasive prowess to succumb to the belief that if I/We need an anthem, then fear most likely isn't the only problem! The realization that this place where fear smirks while whispering and sometimes shouting that I should not teach that class or reach for that promotion settles over me as if I am shrouded. The question I am left asking is: "When will fear leave me?" Perhaps the better question is: "If fear leaves me what will take its place?" The rhetoric of fear continues its seductive dance lulling me into that void where I am neither the Every Woman or the Ph. Diva, caught between the state of wannabe and I am, between everywhere and nowhere. However, it is what it is and I am what I am . . . I created, prepped and taught that new class. The promotion has also been checked off my "To Do" list. Ivory Tower culture always has another hoop to jump, another mountain to scale. I'll continue to replay my theme/dream song's lyrics stating I'm Every Woman over and over in my mind . . . But is it ever, will it ever, can it ever be ALL in Me?

## References

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