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Self-Gaslighting in Sexual Assault: A Feminist Approach to Reclaiming Agency

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Abstract

Sexual assault often results in gaslighting. In this paper, gaslighting refers to the process whereby a perpetrator (gaslighter) uses illusory evidence so that the victim (gaslightee) is led to misconstrue reality. It is well known in empirical studies that this form of psychological manipulation often occurs in sexual assault. From this established cultural pattern of gaslighting in relation to sexual assault, I derive a secondary and related notion: self-gaslighting. In my argument, self-gaslighting refers to a circumstance where the survivor of sexual assault self-induces themselves as the gaslighter and the gaslightee. The conditions that provoke this self-destructive behavior are rooted in a skewed cultural ecology that transcends mere self-blame. This ecology eliminates the need for the actual perpetrator of sexual assault to be present for self-gaslighting to occur. Self-gaslighting is dependent upon this culturally induced and sustained ecology whereby the victim of sexual assault convinces themselves that they are to blame and at fault. Internalizing this process supersedes surface level consequences and severely damages a person's agency. Using a feminist lens derived from the Latin American philosophers Mariana Ortega and Maria Lugones, I will attempt to offer a way out of these self-perpetuating and culturally supported patterns. Ortega and Lugones have developed an ontology and epistemology of person-hood that challenges these dominant culturally induced thoughts which infiltrate the

minds of those impacted by sexual assault. I argue that this alternative feminist ontology and epistemology allows for the possibility of liberation from this skewed cultural ecology.

Keywords: gaslighting, cultural ecology, self-blame, agency

It is no secret that there has been a history of violence against women within our society. The overwhelming outcry from women to eradicate this violence has pushed the boundaries, and we are finally starting to see real progress. In 1995, there were 556,000 reports of rape or sexual assault on women. This number dropped to 270,000 in 2010 (Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky, Smiley-McDonald, 2016) . However, there is controversy regarding the accuracy of these numbers in the United States. Are there actually fewer rapes and sexual assaults happening, have victims stopped coming forward as frequently or is there a combination of the two?

Research has shown that there was an increase in reports to police of rape or sexual assault in 2003. The reports had reached an all time high at 59% in 2003 but took a nose-dive less than a decade later to only 32% in 2009-10 (Planty et al., 2016). One can argue that the reason for this is due to the decrease in arrests related to rape and sexual assault cases. Between 1994 and 1998, police made arrests related to rape and sexual assault cases about 47% of them time. That percentage again took a nose-dive between 2005 and 2010 when it was reported only 31% of arrests were related to rape and sexual assault cases (Planty et al., 2016). This relationship has been interpreted in a way that implies that as police stopped making arrests related to rape and sexual assault cases, victims stopped coming forward.

Despite the evidence that reports of rape or sexual assault have decreased, there is still an overwhelming number of women who experience this type of violence. It is reported that one in

three women will experience some form of sexual harassment or assault within their lifetime (NSVRC, 2018). This statistic vividly illustrates the severity of violence against women. It acknowledges that violence against women is still a prominent issue in our society. In addition, this statistic does not take into account the sexual assaults that remain unreported due to fear of public backlash and humiliation. This statistic creates an implicit narrative within our society that tells women to make sure they take the necessary precautions in order to avoid an attack. But more importantly, it tells women who have experienced sexual assault that *they* are to blame. It places the blame on the women who wore a skirt that society deemed as too short or on the college girl who just wanted a night out with the girls. It places the blame on the victim instead of the perpetrator. In general, this statistic points to an ecology that is inherently hostile to women.

There is a conversation that needs to be had regarding the psychological effects that sexual assault has on those who experience it. Some of those effects include depression, flashbacks of the crime or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (RAINN, 2019). Additionally, self-blame and guilt can lead to the larger psychological implications stated above. I am arguing that things such as self-blame and guilt are deeply rooted in cultural traditions that place the blame on the victim.

Victims of sexual assault are discrediting their own experiences by adhering to these cultural traditions and thereby stripping themselves of any epistemic authority: this results in what I am calling self-gaslighting. Self-gaslighting describes the social and internal battle that most (but not all) victims of sexual assault go through. It highlights the self-blame and guilt that victims often feel. Identifying and giving a name to this experience allows victims to identify the harmful thought patterns brought on by society. They can then work towards eradicating those

thought patterns and coping with the reality of life post-assault. Without the proper terminology to describe what victims of sexual assault go through, little work can be done to eradicate the social and cultural dynamics of self-gaslighting.

Section I: What is the relevance of this topic?

Before articulating the details of self-gaslighting and learning to cope with life post-assault, it is imperative to understand the philosophical importance of this topic. I will be referring to my own sexual assault throughout this paper to give weight to my stance. The details of the actual assault are not relevant for the purpose of this essay. The main point is that when I was a junior in high school, I was invited over to a boy's house and coerced into a sexual act.

My experience is different because I did not know what had occurred was sexual assault until I reached my freshman year of college. This is, in part, due to the culture I was brought up in. I grew up in a small, conservative town where everyone knew one another. Friday nights were dedicated to the football team, and Sundays were meant for church. The message that was sent to kids was to remain abstinent until marriage. No one talked about how to have safe sex, and no one talked about sexual assault. What I did know about sexual assault was learned from watching TV shows like *Law and Order: SVU* or *Criminal Minds*. Because of this, my small-town mind knew of only one type of sexual assault: rape. What transpired that night was not rape, so it did not occur to me to tell someone about it.

It was during my freshman year of college during a theater performance about sexual assault that I realized what had happened to me was sexual assault. This performance highlighted that rape was not the only form of sexual assault that existed. It highlighted coercion into a sexual act as a type of sexual assault. I did not tell anyone after I realized this because it had been

almost three years. I knew there was nothing that I could do now to bring justice to my experience.

I am sure there are many others, men and women, like me who have a similar story. I am sure that there are people who know what sexual assault is but are too scared to speak up because of social or cultural stigmas that plague their life. My goal is to help shine the light on the cultural stigmas surrounding sexual assault. But more importantly, it is to give a name to the feeling that survivors have, to take back what was wrongly taken from us.

Because I am using my own personal experience with sexual assault, I want to acknowledge that my experiences in this world as a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual female are different than other individuals that are members of more marginalized populations. I hold more privilege than most women, making my experiences with various types of oppression and epistemic injustice less about my race and sexual identity and more about my gender. I do not have to navigate a world that discriminates against my race, religion, or sexual orientation. Despite the differences between myself and members of more marginalized populations, there are commonalities among us all when it comes to experiencing sexual assault. Sexual assault is not strictly about sexual arousal or pleasure. Perpetrators of sexual assault are out to assert their dominance over their victims. This can be for a number of reasons, but in most cases, it boils down to control (Scully & Marolla, 1985). While perpetrators of sexual assault do have a tendency to target victims for specific reasons, the end goal is to establish dominance and control over their victim. I do not want to discredit the experiences of those that are members of marginalized populations who are targeted based on characteristics that place them in such populations. I do, however, want the focus of this essay to remain on the commonalities of victims of sexual assault and how they navigate the world post-assault.

Section II: Gaslighting

The psychological phenomenon known as gaslighting has gained traction due to its intricate relationship with epistemology. Most people boil gaslighting down to a type of psychological manipulation that makes a person severely doubt their perception. Common phrases associated with gaslighting include “you’re overreacting,” “don’t get so worked up,” and “you’re crazy”. These phrases are used in an attempt to make someone severely doubt their ability to perceive. Additionally, these phrases strip people of their epistemic authority and do not allow them the chance to speak to their own experiences.

Psychology Today (2019) outlines several ways in which someone can perform gaslighting. One example is denying that they ever said or did something, even though there is explicit proof that they did. The purpose of this is to convince the gaslightee that their ability of perception is distorted for this specific event. However, there is much more to gaslighting than just making a person doubt their ability to perceive an event. This type of behavior is so deeply rooted in society’s public language and ecology that some people do not realize they are gaslighting another person. This section will dive deeper into this psychological phenomenon by outlining specific aspects of gaslighting and analyzing the cultural implications that lead to gaslighting.

Having a firm grasp of gaslighting is imperative to understanding how it functions as an ecological issue. Aside from the basic understanding of gaslighting as a psychological manipulation, there are several other aspects that are important to recognize. I want to start with how epistemic authority of the gaslighter and the gaslightee allow for gaslighting to take place. Epistemic authority refers to a person’s ability to speak with credibility about a personal event, produce knowledge, and be regarded as a credible source from which knowledge comes (Rachel

McKinnon, 2017). Not everyone is granted the same level of epistemic authority as others. Who is given epistemic authority and when is based on different power dynamics of a culture? For example, in the United States, White and male hold more epistemic authority than Black and female. This is based on how the society has historically assigned gender and race roles.

Gaslighting, then, is a type of epistemic injustice because it dismisses and unjustifiably strips the speaker of the authority to speak about a personal event based on their position in society. Rachel McKinnon (2017) explains gaslighting in a way that the hearer “directly or indirectly expresses doubts that the harm or injustice that the speaker is testifying to really happened as the speaker claims.” These doubts can be due to the race, gender, religious affiliation, or other demographically based characteristics. It can also be due to the emotional reaction to the event that the speaker displays. The doubts that are put on the gaslightee for a varying number of reasons is how epistemic authority and gaslighting are connected.

An example of this is the infamous Brett Kavanaugh case. In 2018, Kavanaugh, who was nominated to the Supreme Court, was accused of sexually assaulting Christine Blasey Ford thirty years prior at a high school gathering. Ford thought it was in the best interest of the people to bring forward her traumatic experience to showcase Kavanaugh’s character. The two battled it out in front of the senate, filled with fear and anger. Ford and Kavanaugh both received backlash from the incident, but Ford was ridiculed by the public far more than Kavanaugh. Questions such as “why didn’t you bring this up sooner” were demanded of her, and Ford’s credibility was questioned when asked how confident she was that Kavanaugh was the one that assaulted her (Stolberg & Fandos, 2018). This alone qualifies as gaslighting because Ford’s credibility to accurately remember who assaulted her was called into question. Insinuating that Ford was not a credible witness to her own experience diminishes her epistemic authority on the issue.

There is more to gaslighting than calling credibility into question. Another aspect of gaslighting involves the relationship between the gaslighter and the gaslightee (Abramson, 2014). I do not mean that the gaslighter and the gaslightee are in a romantic relationship, although this can be the case. What I am referring to is more of a power dynamic. There is a relationship between the gaslighter and the gaslightee that puts the gaslighter in a more dominant position. This can be from a boss, a professor or anyone that holds a higher social standing than the gaslightee. There are, however, other distinctions in the level of social standing a person holds.

I want to be clear that gaslighting does not always occur in relationships where one person is in an obvious position of authority. Peers can gaslight each other as well. The dynamic in this situation is that the gaslighter *feels* or is *assumed* to have more authority to tell the gaslightee how and what they should be feeling or that their feelings are over-dramatic or invalid. Oftentimes, gaslighting amongst peers happens involuntarily. This means that the gaslighter may not know that they are gaslighting. This can be due to a skewed public language that society uses. In other words, there is a system of language that a society uses to communicate with each other. This system is based on the everyday interactions people have and, on the value, society places upon people. When these everyday interactions are plagued with stereotypes and systematic oppression, a skewed public language is formed. I will return to the topic of public language during the cultural analysis.

The use of public language in everyday interactions is what allows gaslighting to unfold. These everyday interactions allow for the repetition of behaviors that allow gaslighting to further develop. I want to clarify that in some cases, gaslighting can and will be a single incident. These incidents will depend on various conditions. However, most cases of gaslighting consist of a

repetition of behaviors used to convince the gaslightee that their ability of perception or knowledge is in question.

While I have witnessed a single person continuously gaslight another person, I think it is imperative to recognize the social aspect of gaslighting. Oftentimes the gaslighting comes from a collection of people. Being raised in a uniform community meant that the majority of the town thought in similar ways. When something would happen, like a teenage pregnancy or a drug bust, people concluded that the girl shouldn't have been having sex and the people arrested shouldn't have been doing drugs. There was very little room for outside opinions. Based on these social norms, one can conclude that if a victim of sexual assault came forward, the community that I was raised in would blame the victim or insist that the assault was, in some way, her fault. This type of public thought pattern instigates gaslighting on the part of the community and plants a seed for what I am calling self-gaslighting.

It was and is the repetition of behaviors that lead to more *severe* cases of gaslighting. If one person had told me that I was not being overly dramatic about my assault, I probably would not have started to doubt myself as much as I did. Repeating behaviors in an attempt to alter a person's sensory perception can lead to the creation of a false memory or an altered memory. This can be a reason that people who are gaslit often have an altered memory of the event that occurred. Research done by Elizabeth Loftus has shown that memories can be altered or created from nothing. This research shows that the repetition of behaviors that lead one to doubt their sensory perception can be detrimental to one's mental state and agency.

I would like to return to the social aspect of gaslighting and the idea of public language and how it is connected to another characteristic of gaslighting. Literature about gaslighting often highlights how it is implicitly learned (Abramson, 2014, Clark, 1998). This means that people

often do not consciously recognize that they are gaslighting someone. They use language that has become normal to use when someone is describing an event that happened to them. In my case, the response I got was, “Aren’t you being overly dramatic?” and “Are you sure that was even assault?” This language is used because topics like sexual assault are not discussed often or because this type of language is normalized and accepted when this topic is discussed. This type of language points to a type of culture that ignores problems rooted in systematic oppression.

There is not a requirement for primary schools or parents to sit down with their children and explain what consent looks like. There is also no requirement teaching children how to react if someone comes up to them and tells them that they were sexually assaulted. Generally, children are seldom taught to think about their own thoughts or experiences. It is often the case that what children learn is in relation to wider circumstances. This lack of knowledge contributes to a culture that places the blame of sexual assault on the victim and sympathizes with the perpetrator. This lack of knowledge also contributes to the notion that victims of sexual assault are in some way “asking for it”. However, there is a collection of knowledge that disputes these notions. Many scholars have done research to support the claim that perpetrators of sexual assault have learned this behavior through social constructs that are deeply engrained in social doctrine.

Without equal access to this type of information, there can be little expectation for society to evaluate the skewed public language and reform it. This lack of knowledge is a vital reason why this epistemic injustice goes unchecked. A culture must collectively agree to work towards eradicating the skewed public language, but how a culture goes about doing this is abstract.

The ways in which gaslighting occurs has focused on the relationship between the gaslighter and the gaslightee. There is one key element to gaslighting that does not directly involve its relational aspect. This element describes how it is not enough for the gaslighter to simply disagree or ignore the gaslightee's statements or claims. The gaslighter has to convince the gaslightee and the surrounding audience that what the gaslightee is saying is either false or an exaggeration. The gaslighter's main purpose is to convince the gaslightee and other people that what the gaslightee is saying is incorrect. Like it is described above, this behavior can be done implicitly. Our society has cultivated a culture that allows this behavior to go unchecked. It is my opinion that this element is what drives the moral injustice of gaslighting.

The above characteristics help paint a picture of how gaslighting operates. I want to be clear that a situation does not have to have each characteristic presented above to be considered gaslighting. For example, let's say that a woman confides in her male friend that she has recently been a victim of sexual assault. As she is divulging the details of what happened, her friend starts to realize that he has committed some of these behaviors during sexual encounters. The anxiety that he feels compels him to minimize his friend's account of her sexual assault. He does this in an attempt to relieve his anxiety regarding his questionable sexual behaviors. This minimization is gaslighting. There is a power dynamic present within this relationship, there is the aspect of the male friend insinuating that what his friend is telling him is an over-dramatization of the incident, and there is the inability of the male friend to just ignore the girl's claim. He has to insist that what she is telling him is untrue in some way. However, this specific example does not have repeated behaviors. This friend does not continue throughout the day, week, month, or year that what his friend said was untrue, it was only in the initial conversation that the male friend discounted his female friend's assault.

Section III: Self-gaslighting

The above characteristics of gaslighting outline how a society contributes to things like rape culture and toxic masculinity. These thoughts and actions are what lead victims of sexual assault to blame themselves for being assaulted. For me, I blamed myself for allowing myself to be alone with my attacker. I blamed myself for attempting to allow myself sexual pleasure because god forbid a woman has the same right to orgasm as a man does. And I blamed myself for not speaking up, for not telling someone what happened. I tried to convince myself that what had happened was not in fact sexual assault. I tried to down-play what happened and stuff my emotional reaction down. At one point, I tried to convince myself that the sexual assault was a dream and that it never happened.

After some time doing this, I began to realize I wasn't sure what was real anymore. I had distorted my memory of the assault so severely that I had a hard time distinguishing what was real and what I had told myself was real. I decided that therapy was the only way to start processing my thoughts and feelings about this sexual assault. It was there that my therapist and I were able to determine what actually happened and what I was telling myself happened to alleviate the psychological distress. What we determined was that my logic was functioning under a skewed public language that adheres to ideals that are inherently harmful. The ideals that I was functioning under were ones that tell victims of sexual assault that it is, in some way, their fault they were assaulted. These were the same ideals that were/are so heavily ingrained in the society that I grew up in. Acknowledging these skewed notions of sexual assault allows me to push the boundaries of gaslighting and propose a new concept: self-gaslighting.

Gaslighting has been defined and analyzed through a lens that allows us to see the cultural implications. These cultural implications carry the same weight when addressing the

self-gaslighting that victims of sexual assault experience. Self-gaslighting operates under the same cultural perimeters that traditional gaslighting does. It has the aim of denying the gaslightee of her rightful epistemic authority and includes repetition of behaviors. The distinction between traditional gaslighting and self-gaslighting lies within the unique relational aspect of self-gaslighting. Self-gaslighting is dependent upon the relationship one has with themselves. The trauma of sexual assault has been shown to create, in some cases, a new self that needs to learn how to navigate the world (Brison, 2007). There is a disconnect between the person they were before the assault and the person they are after the assault. Brison (2007) made this distinction between the pre- and post-trauma self in her book 'Aftermath'. This distinction recognizes the impact that trauma can have on an individual. The idea that there is a self that existed before an assault and after an assault coincides with the concept of multiplicity. The theory of multiplicity describes how self-gaslighting takes place within the self after a sexual assault has occurred.

There are several philosophers that have a personal take on multiplicity. Lugones and Mariana Ortega (2016) are two feminist philosophers that give an account of multiplicity. While Lugones does an excellent job explaining how a person can have multiple selves, she does not acknowledge that there is still a oneness to the self that allows for the intimate connection between the selves. Ortega's depiction of multiplicity does recognize this oneness. I will argue that the concept of multiplicity that Ortega presents explains how the concept of self-gaslighting works, reconciles the new self that emerges after a sexual assault, and allows victims of sexual assault an escape from the dominant logic.

To begin, I want to explain how self-gaslighting works within the self because it is not as straightforward as it seems. The idea of self-gaslighting is dependent on there being more than oneself. This means that there is not oneself but multiple selves within a self. They function

under different social constructs and adhere to different logics. Mariana Ortega (2016) explains this by stating that the “self is situated in specific material circumstances that include particular histories, occupies multiple positionalities or social identities” (p. 63). This means that while there is a sense of oneness about the self, there are multiple selves that occupy different positions and follow multiple logics within the “worlds” they inhabit.

Lugones elaborates more about this idea of navigating multiple and contradictory circumstances. Lugones states that there are “worlds” that each self-inhabits and travels between. These worlds are real places that exist within society and are made up of dominant and nondominant constructs based on race, gender, class and so forth. These worlds stand in power relations to one another (Ortega, 2016). Some worlds are composed of people who are inherently more privileged than most. These worlds would be made up of people who are white, Christian, heterosexual, etc. Other worlds are composed of people who are marginalized. In contrast, these worlds would be made up of those who do not identify with white, Christian, heterosexual, etc. These two worlds function under different cultural constructs. When a person is a member of a marginalized group and a dominant group (white and LGBTQ), they learn to navigate between those two worlds within themselves.

As stated before, there are multiple selves that reside within the one, physical self. I would like to address the two selves that function under the dominant logic. First, there is the dominant self. This self follows the social constructs that place white and male in the forefront. In regard to ideals about sexual assault, it tells women that they are responsible if a sexual assault occurs or not. It operates under the notion that if a woman is sexually assaulted, she must have done something to provoke it. The other self that functions under the dominant logic is the subordinate self. This self-adheres to the social constructs of the dominant logic and is

continuously subject to oppression. It accepts that white and male are characteristics that are necessary to have in order to be successful or believed. In relation to sexual assault, this self believes that it is her responsibility to prevent an assault from happening.

Self-gaslighting then is when the dominant self tells the subordinate self that it is her fault the injustice occurred. In my case, my dominant self-told my subordinate self that the reason I was assaulted was because I allowed myself to be alone with a boy. And, because I did not know of a self that functioned under a logic different than the dominant one, I believed it. I had no concept of a logic that did not believe that sexual assault was the victim's fault. But it is only in the dominant logic that self-gaslighting can occur. This is because the thoughts that the victim is at fault do not exist under any other logic.

Section IV: Pre and Post Trauma Self: How the selves are connected after sexual assault

I want to turn now to how victims of sexual assault can reconcile the feelings they have post-assault. Susan Brison (2003) refers to the pre- and post-trauma self when discussing her personal experience with sexual assault. Brison describes a self that exists before the trauma and a self that comes into existence after the trauma. While I agree that there is a pre-trauma self and post-trauma self, I argue there is a disconnect between these two selves. It is recognized that often people do not feel the same after experiencing a sexual assault. In my own experiences, I notice that I hold myself much differently and am much more hypervigilant when not in the comfort of my own home. However, I still recognize the connection I have with the self I was before the assault. I still remember what she was like and how she moved in the world. It is because of this that I want to explore how I can feel this way.

Ortega's (2016) theory of multiplicity allows for there to be multiple selves that remain connected to each other in a way that other theories of multiplicity do not. In her account,

Ortega (2016) maintains through Heidegger and Anzaldua that the multiplicitous self is always a self that is in the process (p. 63). This means that the multiplicitous self is never done creating new selves. And this is because of the multiple locations, histories and social identities that the multiplicitous self-inhabits (Ortega, 2016). In the traditional sense, there is oneself. Ortega (2016) argues that while there may be a singular body, that body is made up of multiple selves that inhabit a variety of worlds.

Temporality is what Ortega argues allows the selves to remain connected to one another. This aspect is key in how I reconciled self-gaslighting and how I reconciled the pre- and post-trauma self. The idea of temporality refers to a relationship with time (Dictionary.com). It is precisely the relationship between time and the multiple selves that allows them to remain connected to each other. There are, of course, other selves that interact with one another, but for the purpose of this paper I am only focusing on those selves that adhere to the concept of time (past, present, future). Ortega (2016) states that, “Temporality makes it possible for the self to project toward the future while being in a particular present and being informed by a particular past” (p. 79). In other words, time is the key that connects all of the selves together. It is the relationship with time that the past, present and future selves are allowed to interact and communicate with each other.

The concept of temporality has allowed me to reflect on why I gaslit myself. One key thing that I want to focus on in the treatment of myself I realized I was assaulted. As stated above, I shamed myself allowing myself to be left alone with a male. I also felt guilt for wanting equality in regard to sexual pleasure. Other ideals surfaced as well. I thought that if women went out dressed in revealing clothing, they may just be asking for it. I want to be clear that the self that thought those things grew up in a very conservative, Catholic community. I had never been

talked to about sexual assault or consent. Women and girls were taught to not drink too much and to wear clothes that cover our body. While I still know who that girl is, I am not her anymore. This is because, after the realization of the assault, I took a feminist ethics course that changed my thinking drastically. I learned what oppression of women was and what it looked like. I learned the language that was used to instruct girls on how to behave when I was younger was extremely sexist and further oppressed women. I also learned that the victims of sexual assault are never responsible for or the cause of the assault. It is because of the concept of temporality that I still know the girl that held those notions. I would argue that it is because I am still familiar with that past self that I am able to recognize how corrupt my thinking was. I am able to reflect on the ecology I was brought up in and recognize how oppressive that ecology is. It is precisely within this dynamic of recognizing that I held different beliefs before I was assaulted that I am able to reconcile the way I treated myself after the assault. I didn't know the things that I know now.

Section V: Reconciliation

I want to now turn to the reconciliation of coming to terms with the self I had become after the assault. The self that emerged after the assault had no idea who she was. I was completely lost and had no direction. I started to control every aspect of my life. I struggled to get through my day without to-do lists and I started working out excessively as if becoming more fit would deter someone from trying to assault me again. In essence, I tried to control every aspect of my day and life to gain some sense of independence back. I was not content with the fact that the self that had emerged was now terrified to do daily tasks. The self that had emerged made it nearly impossible for me to go get lunch or enjoy any activity on campus. How could I live with this much fear?

After a while, I came to accept the idea that I would live the rest of my life with a heightened sense of awareness. While researching, I struggled with this idea of multiplicity when reading Lugones. She argues for a multiplicitous self that has no means of connection to the other selves. There are parts of the selves that interact but in no way is there a oneness. This troubled me because I felt that, even though I agree that there are multiple selves, all of the selves that were a part of my being had been assaulted. There was not one world that I could travel to where I felt completely safe. Each self-had been traumatized by the assault. This is why I think Ortega has a more plausible view. She recognizes the aspect of multiplicity but still argues for this oneness. And it is in this oneness that I argue allowed the assault to affect each self-resulting in this unease that I feel I cannot escape. It is also in Ortega's (2016) explanation of temporality that I do find an escape. I am able to still connect with the self that was not assaulted. I am able to remember what it was like to live in a world where I did not fear every man that walks past me. It is in the memory of the self that had not been assaulted that I find relief.

I still do not feel at ease in this world. There are days that I feel my past self-resurface when remembering the assault. I begin to think that maybe there was something I could have done. Instead, I remember what I have been taught by my professors and friends. I return to the self that understands and accepts the notion that victims of sexual assault are never at fault. The concepts drawn out in this paper give context to how and why victims of sexual assault feel the way they do. Self-gaslighting gives a word to the feelings and ways that victims treat themselves after being assaulted. I think it is important to recognize that it is not just victim-blaming. Self-gaslighting is a type of testimonial injustice that has far deeper implications than victim-blaming. By understanding self-gaslighting and how it works within the self, victims can better understand

why they feel the way they do and search to find worlds that do not function under the dominant logic that allows them to escape.

It is in the theory of multiplicity that allows victims to understand why they feel like a different person after the assault. For me, it provided a type of comfort. While I struggled with my identity for quite some time, I came to accept that it is okay to not be or feel like the same person I was before the assault. I learned that it is relatively normal to not recognize the self that existed before the assault. Ortega's account of multiplicity also offered me a safe haven. By understanding her component of temporality, I am able to reflect and sit in a past self that was not assaulted. I am able to remember what it was like to move in a world not being in constant fear.

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