

Gonzalez, Shannon Malone. *The Secrets of Silence: The Everyday Policing of Black Women and Their Stories about Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025.

Shannon Malone Gonzalez's *The Secrets of Silence* investigates how the policing of Black women is deeply tied to the silencing of their narratives. Drawing on four years of interviews with sixty-two Black women, the book focuses on how their experiences are excluded from official data, public discourse, and even community conversations. Gonzalez illustrates how their encounters with police—and the retelling of those encounters—are simultaneously marginalized, suppressed, and distorted in ways that perpetuate both racial and gendered inequalities. The book joins a growing body of Black feminist sociology and abolitionist research by arguing that policing is not only about overt violence, but also about the quiet, everyday practices that render certain voices unheard.

Gonzalez argues that policing is not only about direct violence but also about silence. She develops the concept of the “silence matrix” to show how Black women's experiences are systematically suppressed by institutions, communities, and even family structures. This framework positions policing as both a racial and patriarchal project that enforces a system of politics, norms, and sanctions that discourage Black women from speaking out, reporting, or even fully naming their experiences.

The book is organized into five substantive chapters, each centering on a different “space between”—whether between family rules and police contact, or between speaking out and facing retaliation. Chapter 1 highlights the ways family “talks” about survival often fail to prepare Black girls for the gendered vulnerabilities they face, leaving them “taught” to endure silence rather than disclose harm. Chapter 2 examines the painful dissonance between intrafamilial rules—such as “you don't call the police on your

family”—and the reality of domestic or community violence, which further discourages seeking outside help. Chapter 3 highlights the widespread normalization of police sexual and gender-based violence, demonstrating how even when women disclose these harms, they are met with disbelief or inaction. Chapter 4 turns to the consequences of disclosure, showing how speaking up often brings intracommunal backlash, victim-blaming, or direct retaliation from police. Finally, Chapter 5 situates collective gatherings and storytelling as counterspaces where Black women attempt to reclaim their narratives and reassert self-definition against the backdrop of systemic silencing.

Gonzalez’s analysis weaves together intimate personal accounts with Black feminist theory, offering a textured understanding of everyday policing. Drawing on the works of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Beth Richie, and others, Gonzalez demonstrates how Black women navigate these contested spaces while weighing the risks of disclosure. Her interviews demonstrate how Black women across class backgrounds—whether from working-class neighborhoods, gentrifying inner cities, or suburban communities—confront a continuum of violence that is both material and knowledge-based. The book reframes silence not as absence, but as evidence of systemic exclusion and domination. One of the book’s most significant contributions is its insistence that policing must be understood as a problem shaped by both race and gender and argues that it is not only a racial project tied to white supremacy but also a patriarchal one.

The *Secrets of Silence* further contributes to broader debates within sociology and public discourse. Gonzalez critiques the field’s complicity in maintaining silence around Black women’s experiences, noting that their encounters rarely appear in national data or media accounts of police violence. By centering these stories, the book demands that

sociologists and policymakers reconsider not just the definition of police violence but also the mechanisms by which certain harms are made legible while others are obscured.

In the end, Gonzalez not only documents the silences surrounding Black women's experiences but also shows how listening to their stories opens new possibilities for justice, solidarity, and social transformation.

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ENDNOTES

1. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.
2. Beth E. Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (New York: NYU Press, 2012).
3. Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017).