

The Sound of Silence by Maury Brown

Number of players: Minimum: 2, Maximum: 12

2 players: storyteller and silencer are opposite each other.

3 players: storyteller is the point of a triangle and silencers are at 10 and 2 o'clock facing each other.

4-6 players (optimal): storyteller at center, silencers circle around them; storyteller turns to face each as they speak.

7+ players: two storytellers, in groups of 2-6 configured as above.

Background: This is a game about communication and trying to be heard. Players will play the roles of people trying to tell their stories, and of people responding in various ways that oppress or silence the storyteller, sometimes in well-meaning ways. It's an exploration of privilege, agonistic rhetoric, and the Enlightenment separation of emotion from reason. It codifies emotional abuse into a set of mechanics that are used strategically against the storyteller.

Many of you will play the roles of authority figures and abusers who use manipulative and domineering tactics to control conversations and silence dissent. They do so for the purpose of maintaining the status quo, a position they vigorously defend as best for society (if not themselves). The result is to keep those who are oppressed or marginalized in their place. This may feel very uncomfortable and difficult. We will debrief following the game to discuss how it felt to be both silenced and the silencer.

Setup: the game is played in rounds, where the role of the storyteller(s) switches until each player has been both a storyteller and a silencer. In a game with more than 2 people, you will be the silencer most often.

Storytellers (1 or 2 players total)

Emotion: Choose 1 or more suggested emotions to portray. Try not be shy about being emotive. Feelings matter.

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| Anger | Sadness | Frustration |
| Fear | Explanation fatigue | Defeat |
| Outrage | Defensiveness | Passion (enthusiasm) |

Topic: Choose 1 or more to narrate (or one of your own choosing) Catcalling; Laws that restrict abortion or access to birth control; misogyny; homophobia; transphobia; misgendering; lack of representation in x; rape culture; gun violence; mental health; disproportionate sentencing for crimes; police brutality; media bias; gender policing; discrimination on the job; being hit on with your headphones on; unsolicited dick pics; manspreading; a personal experience where you felt upset, or hurt, etc. Something that you wish to be heard about.

Silencers (remaining players)

Choose 1, 2, or 3 tactics depicted below (in smaller games each Silencer will use multiple tactics).

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| Lying Blatantly telling an untruth or leaving out important information on purpose to give a false impression. | Denial “That’s not true!” “That never happened!” “I never said that!” Nope, wasn’t you. |
| Blame shifting Instead of taking responsibility for words or an action, you turn it around to be the other person’s fault. Now you are the victim and they need to worry about you! | Moving the goalposts Changing the original topic of discussion to something else that is either more simple (so as to be resolved without getting to the actual issue), more complex (so as to not be resolved), or something else entirely (usually something in your favor). |

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Gaslighting</p> <p>Altering someone else’s reality by telling them how it “really was” and calling into question their own memories and experiences.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Faux apology</p> <p>“I’m sorry you think that way.” “I’m sorry you’re so sensitive.” Don’t apologize for your own actions and don’t be sincere.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Tone Policing</p> <p>“People would take you a lot more seriously if you weren’t so angry.” “You’re so emotional, it makes it hard to talk to you.” “Your tone is making me feel uncomfortable, maybe you should be nicer to me.”</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Projecting</p> <p>Take your own insecurities or mistakes and tell the other person they have them or did them! Accuse them of doing exactly what they are bringing up!</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Name-calling</p> <p>Doesn’t have to be vulgar or crass. Can be diminutive (e.g. calling someone a girl or a baby) or simply “you’re so _____, you’re such a _____”</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Humiliation</p> <p>Shame the other person for even bringing this up, taking up your time, worrying about this “insignificant issue,” not understanding “the way things work,” etc.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Yelling & shouting over</p> <p>Getting loud and talking while the other person is talking. Stop their train of thought.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Fear mongering</p> <p>Using your body, expressions, or words, incite fear in the speaker. They should be afraid of retaliation, exposure, abandonment, reputation damage, etc.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Body shaming</p> <p>Turn the conversation to something about the person’s body or physique -- hair, nose, weight, skin color, size of parts, height, gender norms, etc.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Paternalism</p> <p>Don’t you think the person talking is so cute? So naive and quaint and idealistic and childlike? Show how you are a grown-up who knows best for them.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Moralism & Appeal to Tradition</p> <p>Take the moral high ground and declare that there is religious or legal or moral authority that negates what they are saying. Or that change isn’t always good and traditions are there because they work.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Bait and switch</p> <p>State that you hear the other person and then talk about something completely different that you prefer talking about. It’s about you!</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Exaggerating & generalizing</p> <p>Be sure to use absolutes like “always” and “never” and to state that “everyone knows _____.” When specific details or personal experience are given, be sure to ignore them and instead speak generally.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Be Happy with scraps</p> <p>Point out all the other things that you’ve done, or the other things the storyteller should be “happy” they have. Compare their experience to something worse and declare they are lucky.</p> |

Play: Storyteller 1 begins speaking, silencer(s) use their tactics to interrupt, divert, and defend. Facilitator (or designated player) calls cut when scene is at a dramatic height but has mostly played out. Rotate the storyteller position in the group(s). Previous storyteller takes up the role of silencer. At this point, other silencers exchange tactics to try out new ones. Each round will likely be 3-5 minutes. Rounds continue until each player has been both storyteller and silencer. At any time, any player can call cut if the scene gets too intense, uncomfortable and triggering.

Debrief: Players gather in a circle. Now you will practice active listening. Players are invited to reflect on the game experience. When a person talks, others are quiet and attentive, seeking to understand the speaker. After the speaker finishes speaking, others may respond by validating and repeating what the person said, seeking clarification on a point, thanking them for their thoughts, corroborating and relating to them, valuing their contribution and being compassionate. Body language should show that you care about what they have to say. Facilitator may prompt with some questions, as needed. No one is forced to share. They may simply say “pass.” Others do not push or demand an explanation if someone chooses not to share. On exit, make eye contact and thank everyone for participating together.