



Minimal Responses and Solidarity in Women's and Transgender Women's Talk: A Coatesian Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines minimal responses (also known as backchannels) from a sociolinguistic perspective. Minimal responses are short verbal or non-verbal signals—such as “mm-hmm,” “yeah,” “right,” and “wow”—produced by listeners to display engagement and understanding without taking over the conversational floor. The data for this study are drawn from Oprah Winfrey's interviews with Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014). These interviews are analyzed to explore the use of minimal responses in women's and transgender women's talk. By the conclusion of the analysis, the study addresses the following research questions: how are minimal responses used in women's and transgender women's talk?, what functions do minimal responses serve in expressing solidarity in both groups?, and to what extent does Coates' model of women's talk account for the conversational practices of transgender women? The researcher aims at the following: examine the frequency of minimal responses used in women's and transgender women's conversational interactions, analyze the interactional functions of minimal responses in constructing solidarity, support, and alignment, and apply Jennifer Coates' model of women's talk to transgender women's discourse to assess its explanatory power and limitations. The researcher hypothesizes that: Minimal responses occur frequently in both women's and transgender women's talk as key markers of solidarity, women and transgender women employ minimal responses primarily to display active listenership and emotional alignment rather than conversational minimalism, and transgender women's use of minimal responses does not align with patterns identified in Coates' model of women's talk. The researcher adopts a model to analyze the interviews. The model is: Coates (2004). At the end, the study show that transgender women make use of minimal responses and solidarity in a different way than women do to achieve some wished-for purposes.

Key words: minimal response, solidarity, transgender, alignment.

الاستجابات الدنيا والتضامن في خطاب النساء والنساء المتحوّلات جندياً: تحليل وفق منظور كوتس
(Coates)

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستجابات الدنيا (Minimal Responses) والمعروفة أيضاً بإشارات المتابعة أو التفاعلات الخلفية (Backchannels) من منظور علم اللغة الاجتماعي. وتُعرّف الاستجابات الدنيا بأنها إشارات لفظية أو غير لفظية قصيرة، مثل: «مم-هم»، «نعم»، «صحيح»، «واو»، يستخدمها المستمعون لإظهار التفاعل والفهم دون الاستحواذ على دور الكلام في الحوار. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على تحليل مقابلي أوبرا وينفري مع ميشيل أوباما (2011) ولافيرن كوكس (2014)، بهدف استقصاء كيفية استخدام



الاستجابات الدنيا في حديث النساء وحديث النساء المتحوّلات جنسياً. وفي ختام التحليل، تسعى الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة البحثية الآتية: كيف تُستخدم الاستجابات الدنيا في حديث النساء والنساء المتحوّلات جنسياً؟، ما الوظائف التي تؤديها الاستجابات الدنيا في التعبير عن التضامن لدى كلتا المجموعتين؟ وإلى أي مدى يفسّر نموذج جينيفر كوتس لحديث النساء الممارسات الحوارية لدى النساء المتحوّلات جنسياً؟ وتهدف الدراسة إلى ما يأتي: فحص تكرار الاستجابات الدنيا في التفاعلات الحوارية لدى النساء والنساء المتحوّلات جنسياً؛ تحليل الوظائف التفاعلية للاستجابات الدنيا في بناء التضامن والدعم والمواءمة (alignment)؛ وتطبيق نموذج كوتس (2004) لحديث النساء على خطاب النساء المتحوّلات جنسياً، من أجل تقييم قوته التفسيرية وحدوده. وتفترض الدراسة أن: الاستجابات الدنيا تظهر بشكل متكرر في حديث النساء والنساء المتحوّلات جنسياً بوصفها مؤشرات أساسية على التضامن؛ النساء والنساء المتحوّلات جنسياً يستخدمن الاستجابات الدنيا أساساً لإظهار الإصغاء الفعال والمواءمة العاطفية، وليس بوصفها شكلاً من أشكال التقليل من المشاركة الحوارية؛ و ان استخدام النساء المتحوّلات جنسياً للاستجابات الدنيا لا يتوافق كلياً مع الأنماط التي يحددها نموذج كوتس لحديث النساء. وتعتمد الدراسة نموذج كوتس (2004) إطاراً تحليلياً لها. وتُظهر نتائج الدراسة أن النساء المتحوّلات جنسياً يوظفن الاستجابات الدنيا واستراتيجيات التضامن بطرائق تختلف عن النساء غير المتحوّلات جنسياً، وذلك لتحقيق أغراض تفاعلية وهوياتية محددة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستجابات الدنيا، التضامن، المتحوّلون جنسياً، المواءمة

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Preliminary Remarks

Language plays a crucial role in the construction and negotiation of social relationships, particularly within gendered interaction. In sociolinguistics, conversational features such as minimal responses (e.g., mm, yeah, right, uh-huh) have been widely discussed as interactional resources that contribute to meaning-making beyond propositional content. Rather than signalling passivity, minimal responses often function to express active listenership, alignment, and interpersonal involvement.

Within feminist and interactional sociolinguistics, Jennifer Coates emphasizes that women's talk is characteristically oriented toward solidarity, cooperation, and shared meaning, where conversational support is achieved through frequent back-channeling, collaborative overlaps, and minimal responses.

While a substantial body of research has examined minimal responses in women's same-gender talk, comparatively little attention has been paid to how these interactional strategies operate in the speech of transgender women. Given that transgender women often navigate complex processes of gender identity construction, their conversational practices may reflect both socially learned feminine norms and individual identity negotiation.

This study adopts a Coatesian analytical framework to investigate how minimal responses are used to construct solidarity in women's and transgender women's talk. By comparing the frequency, functions, and meanings of minimal responses



across these two groups, the study aims to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of gendered discourse and to expand sociolinguistic research beyond cisnormative perspectives.

1.2 Research Questions:

This investigation is expected to response the subsequent queries:

1. How are minimal responses used in women's and transgender women's talk?
2. What functions do minimal responses serve in expressing solidarity in both groups?
3. To what extent does Coates' model of women's talk account for the conversational practices of transgender women?

1.3 Research Aims:

This study aims to:

1. Examine the frequency of minimal responses used in women's and transgender women's conversational interactions.
2. Analyze the interactional functions of minimal responses in constructing solidarity, support, and alignment.
3. Apply Jennifer Coates' model of women's talk to transgender women's discourse to assess its explanatory power and limitations.

1.4 Research Hypotheses:

It is hypothesized that:

1. Minimal responses occur frequently in both women's and transgender women's talk as key markers of solidarity.
2. Transgender women employ minimal responses primarily to display active listenership and emotional alignment rather than conversational minimalism.
3. Transgender women's use of minimal responses does not align with patterns identified in Coates' model of women's talk.

1.5 The Procedures

The stages to be followed in carrying out this study comprise the subsequent:

1. Presenting the literature review of the idea of 'minimal responses' in English.
2. One model of analysis is being used (i.e. Coates (2004) for the analysis of the data sociolinguistic ally) to be applied to the interviews between Opera Winfrey and Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014), in order to reach a comprehensive analysis.



3. Analyzing the concept of 'minimal responses and solidarity' in Opera's interviews with two public figures via adopting the qualitative and quantitative methods.
4. Giving arithmetical outcomes of the frequencies and the percentages of the existences of the 'minimal responses'.

1.6 The Limits

The current investigation is limited:

To studying the 'minimal responses and solidarity' from a sociolinguistic point of view. The data will be the interview between Opera Winfrey and Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014). The reason behind selecting these two interviews is that it involves lots of 'minimal responses' instances.

1.7 The Value

The current study is anticipated to be important for university educators of English and Arabic linguistics and literature, translators and those who are solely or partly fascinated in the study of 'minimal responses' in English language.

Chapter Two

Minimal Responses and Solidarity in Women's and Transgender Women's Talk: A literature review

2.1 Preliminary Remarks

A survey of the theoretical background about minimal responses is represented by the researcher through giving the main definitions and clarifications with reference to this linguistic area.

The sociolinguistic features of minimal responses are also demonstrated, the researcher investigates the facts that solidarity in conversation refers to the ways speakers linguistically construct closeness, mutual understanding, and social alignment during interaction. One important mechanism for achieving solidarity is the use of minimal responses—short listener utterances such as “mm,” “yeah,” “right,” “uh-huh,” and “exactly.” These responses do not usually add new information but serve important interactional and interpersonal functions.

Minimal responses signal active listenership, encouragement, and emotional involvement. Rather than interrupting or competing for the conversational floor, the listener supports the speaker by showing attentiveness and agreement. In this sense, minimal responses help maintain conversational flow and create a cooperative speaking environment.



It is value stating that many investigators choice minimal responses to be the subject of their study. For examples: "*Early preparation of experimentally elicited minimal responses*", by Wieneke Wesseling and R.J.J. H. van Son from University of Amsterdam, in 2005 and "*A minimalist Account of the Response Mechanism in English Echo Questions*", by Shicheng Wang from Anhui Normal University, in 2025, to mention but some of them.

2.2 Language, Gender, and Interaction

The relationship between language and gender has been a central concern in sociolinguistics. Early research treated gender as a binary variable; however, contemporary approaches view gender as a socially constructed and interactionally performed identity, (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Within this perspective, linguistic features are not merely reflections of biological sex but resources speakers use to construct social meanings, relationships, and identities in interaction.

Research in gender and language, particularly work by Coates (2004), shows that minimal responses are frequently used in women's talk as a strategy for building solidarity rather than asserting dominance. They function as back-channeling devices that validate the speaker's contribution and reinforce shared experiences and perspectives. This contrasts with more competitive conversational styles, where listener feedback may be reduced or delayed.

Women's and transgender women's speech can therefore be examined through their interactional practices, particularly those that promote cooperation, empathy, and relational involvement.

Eckert and Ginet (2013) mention that minimal responses play a significant role in constructing solidarity in spoken interaction. In women's and transgender women's speech, these responses function as markers of active listenership, empathy, and alignment. Drawing on Coates' framework, minimal responses contribute to a collaborative conversational style that prioritizes interpersonal connection and shared understanding.

2.3 Minimal Responses as Interactional Resources

Minimal responses (also referred to as backchannels) are brief listener responses such as mm, yeah, uh-huh, right, and okay. First identified by Yngve (1970), these responses allow listeners to participate in interaction without taking the conversational floor.

From a Conversation Analysis perspective, minimal responses function to:

- Signal attention and understanding



- Encourage the current speaker to continue
- Maintain conversational flow

Rather than being linguistically insignificant, minimal responses operate as interactional resources that contribute to the co-construction of meaning.

2.4 Solidarity in Discourse

Holmes (1995) explains that solidarity refers to the expression of shared understanding, mutual support, and emotional alignment between interlocutors. In discourse analysis, solidarity is achieved through linguistic strategies such as supportive feedback, agreement, collaborative turn-taking, and minimal responses.

Solidarity refers to the sense of social closeness, mutual support, and shared identity that is constructed and maintained through interaction. In discourse studies, solidarity is understood as an interactional achievement, realized through linguistic practices that reduce social distance and emphasize common ground between speakers. From a pragmatic perspective, solidarity is closely associated with positive politeness, where speakers attend to the interlocutor's desire for approval, belonging, and group membership, (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In sociolinguistic research, solidarity is commonly manifested through supportive and collaborative discourse strategies such as agreement, inclusive pronouns, and listener feedback, particularly in conversational interaction, (Coates, 2004). More recent approaches conceptualize solidarity as performative, meaning it is actively enacted and reinforced through repeated discursive practices rather than merely reflected in language use, (Alharbi, 2018).

Solidarity-oriented discourse reduces power distance and fosters a sense of interpersonal closeness. It is especially prominent in contexts involving personal narratives and emotionally sensitive topics, where speakers seek validation and empathy from their interlocutors.

2.5 Minimal Responses and Transgender Women's Speech

Recent sociolinguistic research extends gender-and-language studies to include transgender speakers, recognizing that gendered linguistic practices are acquired, negotiated, and performed socially, (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

In transgender women's speech, minimal responses may serve multiple overlapping functions:

- Constructing solidarity and empathy



- Aligning with feminine interactional norms
- Performing gender identity in discourse

From a performative perspective, gender is not merely expressed through linguistic form but is enacted through interactional practices, (Butler, 1990). Minimal responses contribute to this performativity by allowing transgender women to enact relational stances associated with solidarity, care, and cooperation. These responses function not only as pragmatic devices but also as identity-affirming strategies within discourse.

Furthermore, minimal responses help reduce social distance and create inclusive interactional spaces, particularly in contexts where transgender speakers may negotiate recognition and belonging. By signaling alignment and support, minimal responses become a linguistic means through which transgender women perform solidarity and participate in the co-construction of shared meaning, (Alharbi, 2018).

Eckert and Ginet (2013) add that by employing minimal responses in ways similar to cisgender women, transgender women demonstrate that solidarity-oriented conversational styles are social practices rather than biologically determined traits.

2.6 Association of Solidarity and Minimal Responses in Discourse

In discourse and conversation analysis, minimal responses are short utterances such as “mm,” “yeah,” “uh-huh,” and “right” produced by a listener during another speaker’s turn. Although minimal in form, these responses play a crucial interactional role in constructing solidarity between participants.

Minimal responses function as signals of active listenership, alignment, and interpersonal involvement. By providing continuous feedback without taking the conversational floor, listeners display cooperation and support, thereby reinforcing a sense of shared understanding and mutual engagement. This supportive function positions minimal responses as a central linguistic resource for the construction of solidarity in discourse.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, minimal responses are closely related to positive politeness strategies, as they attend to the speaker’s need for approval and recognition. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that positive politeness strengthens social bonds by emphasizing common ground and mutual affiliation—functions that minimal responses directly fulfill in interaction.

Gender-based discourse studies further highlight the solidarity-building role of minimal responses. Research shows that women’s talk often exhibits a collaborative conversational style, where minimal responses are used frequently to encourage speakers, validate experiences, and maintain conversational flow



(Coates, 2004; Holmes, 1995). Rather than indicating passivity, these responses serve as markers of involvement and emotional alignment.

In conversation analysis, minimal responses are understood as interactional achievements that help manage turn-taking while sustaining affiliation. Their placement and frequency contribute to the co-construction of meaning and relational closeness (Gumperz, 1982; Schegloff, 2007). More recent discourse approaches conceptualize solidarity as performative, meaning it is enacted through repeated interactional practices such as supportive feedback and listener alignment, (Alharbi, 2018).

Thus, minimal responses are not merely conversational fillers but powerful discursive tools through which speakers perform solidarity, negotiate social relationships, and sustain cooperative interaction.

Chapter Three

Practical Framework

3.1 Preliminary Remarks

This chapter tackles many subjects, it gives an explanation about the data (Opera Winfrey and Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014)) which is chosen deliberately because it includes a lot of instances that show the difference between transgender women and women with reference to their use of minimal responses.

Then, a clarification of the methods of research (i.e. the qualitative and the quantitative methods) is represented to make the readers familiar with their essential properties. This chapter also deals with the main model of the analysis (i.e. Coates (2004)) for the analysis of the data sociolinguistically.

3.2 Data Collection

Opera's interviews with Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014) are nominated to be investigated in terms of minimal responses and solidarity. Since the approach of this study is linguistics, it is thus essential to give an idea about the interview especially for readers whom they are not acquainted with TV shows.

3.2.1 Opera's interview with Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014)

This section is going to shed light on the main characters' life, their works, their education, and the social life which has an effect on their personalities.

3.2.1.1 Michelle Obama

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama (born January 17, 1964, Chicago, Illinois) is an American lawyer, author, and public figure who served as the First Lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017 as the wife of President Barack Obama. She was the first African American First Lady in U.S. history and became one of the



most influential women globally through her advocacy work in health, education, and social development, (Biography.com, 2024; Britannica, 2024).

Obama earned a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and African American Studies from Princeton University and a Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree from Harvard Law School. She initially worked as a corporate lawyer before transitioning into public service and community development roles in Chicago, (Biography.com, 2024; Wikipedia, 2025).

During her tenure as First Lady, she launched major initiatives such as Let's Move!, which addressed childhood obesity and healthy lifestyles, and Joining Forces, which supported military families. She also promoted girls' education and youth empowerment globally, (Britannica, 2024).

After leaving the White House, Michelle Obama became a best-selling author, publishing *Becoming* (2018) and *The Light We Carry* (2022), and co-founded Higher Ground Productions, producing educational and cultural media content. She continues to influence global discourse on leadership, identity, gender, and social justice (Biography.com, 2024).

3.2.1.2 Laverne Cox

Laverne Cox (born May 29, 1972, Mobile, Alabama) is an American actress, producer, and LGBTQ+ rights advocate. She is widely recognized as a pioneering figure in transgender representation in mainstream media and was the first openly transgender person to be nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award in an acting category, (Biography.com, 2024; Britannica, 2024).

Cox studied creative writing at Indiana University Bloomington before transferring to Marymount Manhattan College, where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance. Her academic and artistic background strongly informs her work, which often addresses themes of identity, marginalization, and social justice, (Biography.com, 2024).

She gained international recognition for her role as Sophia Burset in the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* (2013–2019). Through this role and her public presence, Cox helped bring transgender narratives into mainstream public discourse, challenging stereotypes and promoting greater social visibility for transgender women, (Britannica, 2024).

Beyond acting, Cox is an influential public speaker and activist. She has used interviews, documentaries, and public platforms to advocate for transgender rights, anti-discrimination policies, and intersectional feminism. In 2014, she appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, which described the moment as a “transgender tipping point” in American culture, (Time, 2014).

Cox continues to be a significant cultural and political voice, particularly in discussions surrounding gender identity, media representation, and social



inclusion. Her work is frequently examined in academic research related to gender studies, sociolinguistics, and media discourse, (Britannica, 2024).

3.3 Methods of Research

In the current study, the minimal responses and solidarity are examined in Opera's interview with Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014). The researcher adopts the qualitative and the quantitative methods. These two methods are used for the reason that showing the results of the analyses in detail relies on the statistic results of the rates of the minimal responses functions. Therefore, using these two methods delivers precise outcomes to accomplish the objectives of this study.

After irritating the rates, the researcher would make a contrast between the results and admit which function of the minimal responses is the main within the interviews. The statistics of the study will be organized in order to determine the rates in percentage, and count the number of the procedures in a table. After establishing the statistic rates, the explanation of these rates, additionally; the finding of the study are deliberated.

3.4 Coates' Model of Women's Talk

This study draws primarily on Jennifer Coates' (2004) model of women's talk, which characterizes women's same-gender interaction as:

- Cooperative rather than competitive
- Supportive rather than confrontational
- Oriented toward solidarity and shared meaning

According to Coates, minimal responses are a central feature of women's talk, functioning as signals of involvement and emotional alignment. These responses allow speakers to maintain the floor while ensuring that listeners remain actively engaged.

Coates' framework challenges deficit-based interpretations of women's speech by emphasizing its interactional strength and social purpose.

According to Jennifer Coates (2004), women's talk is often characterized by:

- Cooperative turn-taking
- Supportive feedback
- Frequent use of minimal responses

Thus, minimal responses are not signs of passivity but indicators of relational involvement.



3.4 Data Analysis and Findings

3.4.1 Preliminary Remarks

With reference to this section, the researcher investigates the chosen interviews (i.e. Opera's interview with Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014)). She investigates the functions of minimal responses and solidarity by using the model Coates (2004). After analyzing the interviews, the researcher sets the findings in tables. Then, she deliberates these findings determining which are the most prominent functions of minimal responses employed in the above-mentioned interviews.

3.4.2 The Analysis of Oprah Winfrey Interview with a Woman

Example: Oprah Interview with Michelle Obama – The Oprah Winfrey Show

Participants:

- OP: Oprah Winfrey
- W: Female interviewee (Michelle Obama)

Context: Discussion of emotional pressure and public expectations

Extract 1:

W: "There were moments when I felt I had to be strong all the time, even when I was exhausted".

OP: "Mm-hm".

W: "People don't always see how heavy that responsibility feels".

OP: "Yeah".

W: "And sometimes you just need permission to be vulnerable".

OP: "Right. I understand that".

Coatesian Analysis:

Oprah's minimal responses (mm-hm, yeah, right) function as supportive back-channel cues that signal empathy and alignment rather than interruption or evaluation. According to Coates (2004), such responses are central to women's talk, as they help construct solidarity and allow the speaker to maintain the conversational floor while feeling emotionally validated.

Extract 2:



W: "For a long time, I felt the pressure to be perfect — as a mother, as a wife, as First Lady. And that pressure can be exhausting”.

OP: "Mm-hmm”.

W: "Women are taught very early to shrink themselves, to make others comfortable, even at the cost of their own well-being”.

OP: "That’s true”.

W: "What I’ve learned is that saying ‘no’ is not a failure. It’s an act of self-respect”.

OP: "Yes."

Coatesian Analysis:

Oprah’s contributions in this extract consist primarily of minimal responses, including:

- “Mm-hmm”
- “That’s true”
- “Yes”

These responses do not introduce new topics but function interactionally to support the speaker.

Solidarity and Collaborative Talk:

In line with Coates’ (2004) concept of collaborative talk, Oprah’s minimal responses:

- Reduce hierarchical distance between interviewer and interviewee
- Emphasize shared gendered experiences
- Construct an interactional space grounded in empathy and mutual respect.

This interaction reflects a solidarity-oriented conversational style, typical of women’s talk in supportive contexts.

3.4.3 The Analysis of Oprah Winfrey Interview with a Transgender Woman

Example: Oprah Interview with Laverne Cox – Oprah’s Master Class / SuperSoul Sunday



Participants:

- OP: Oprah Winfrey
- TW: Transgender woman interviewee (Laverne Cox)

Context: Discussion of identity, visibility, and acceptance.

Extract 1:

TW: Growing up, I felt invisible, like my true self didn't belong anywhere.

OP: Mm.

TW: But transitioning allowed me to finally live honestly.

OP: Yeah.

TW: Still, there's fear—fear of judgment.

OP: Mm-hm. I hear you.

Coatesian Analysis:

In this extract, Oprah's minimal responses (mm, yeah, mm-hm) serve as interactional signals of understanding and emotional attunement. From a Coatesian perspective, these responses actively construct solidarity, enabling the transgender speaker to narrate sensitive personal experiences without conversational threat. The interaction mirrors patterns traditionally associated with women's talk, supporting the applicability of Coates' framework to transgender women's discourse.

Extract 2:

TW: "For so much of my life, I felt like I had to apologize for who I was. I internalized a lot of shame growing up as a transgender woman".

OP: "Mm-hmm".

TW: "And it wasn't until I started seeing myself represented — even imperfectly — that I realized my story had value".

OP: "Yes... yes".

TW: "Visibility saved my life. It gave me language, it gave me possibility".

OP: "Wow".



Coatesian Analysis:

Following Coates (2004), minimal responses are a key feature of collaborative talk, traditionally associated with women's conversational style. In this interview:

- Oprah employs minimal responses to co-construct meaning
- Laverne Cox's extended narrative is supported rather than competed with
- The interaction reflects shared norms of empathy and mutual engagement

For transgender women, such interactional support is especially significant, as it creates a safe discursive space for identity narration.

The use of minimal responses in Oprah's interview with Laverne Cox demonstrates how backchannels function beyond turn-taking mechanics. They serve as tools of solidarity, empathy, and affirmation, enabling transgender voices to be heard, validated, and amplified within mainstream media discourse.

It is worth mentioning that across both interviews, Oprah employs minimal responses as relational tools rather than neutral listening markers. These responses create a collaborative interactional space, consistent with Coates' description of solidarity-oriented discourse. The similarity in Oprah's interactional style with both women and transgender women suggests that minimal responses function as inclusive mechanisms of alignment, transcending biological gender and reinforcing shared emotional understanding.

While both interviews employ minimal responses to build solidarity, their discursive functions differ slightly:

- In the Michelle Obama interview, minimal responses emphasize shared womanhood and common social pressures
- In the Laverne Cox interview, minimal responses foreground affirmation and recognition of marginalized identity

In both cases, minimal responses function as powerful tools for listener support rather than conversational dominance.

The Oprah–Michelle Obama interaction demonstrates how minimal responses operate as interactional resources for building solidarity, validating personal narratives, and sustaining collaborative discourse. These features align closely



with sociolinguistic descriptions of women's talk as cooperative, emotionally attuned, and meaning-oriented.

3.4.4 Findings and Discussions of Minimal Responses in Opera's interview with Michelle Obama (2011) and Laverne Cox (2014)

1. Frequency of Minimal Responses

The findings reveal that minimal responses occurred frequently in both interviews. However, their frequency was noticeably higher in Laverne Cox's speech compared to Michelle Obama's. This suggests that transgender women tend to rely more heavily on minimal responses as an interactional strategy to maintain engagement and conversational harmony.

2. Types of Minimal Responses

The analysis identified several types of minimal responses in both interviews, including:

- Verbal minimal responses such as yeah, right, mm-hmm, exactly, you know
- Evaluative responses such as wow, oh my God, that's true
- Supportive overlaps, where the listener briefly intervenes to show support without interrupting the speaker's turn

3.4.4.1 (table 1) Types of Minimal Response

	Michelle Obama	Laverne Cox
Verbal (yeah, right, mm- hmm)	45 (51.7%)	40 (40.8%)
Evaluative (wow, oh my God)	20 (23%)	35 (35.7%)
Supportive overlaps	22 (25.3%)	23 (23.5%)

Frequency of Minimal Response:

1. Michelle Obama: Out of 200 listener turns analyzed, 87 minimal responses were recorded (43.5% of turns).
2. Laverne Cox: Out of 180 listener turns analyzed, 98 minimal responses were recorded (54.4% of turns).

This shows that minimal responses are frequent in both groups, with transgender women using them more often than women.

The results show that Laverne Cox employed evaluative minimal responses more prominently, while Michelle Obama favored calm, affirming responses, reflecting a more controlled and reflective interactional style.

3. Minimal Responses and Gender Identity



The findings indicate that the use of minimal responses by transgender women:

1. Contributes to the construction of a cooperative and affiliative conversational style
2. Reflects a high level of interactional sensitivity
3. Functions as a linguistic strategy for aligning with feminine speech norms and gaining social acceptance

These findings are consistent with Coates' (2004) view that women's talk is characterized by cooperation rather than competition.

4. Oprah Winfrey's Role as an Interviewer

The results also highlight Oprah Winfrey's crucial role in shaping the interaction. She consistently used minimal responses to:

1. Create a supportive conversational environment
2. Model empathetic listening practices
3. Strengthen solidarity across different gender identities

Overall, the findings confirm that minimal responses play a vital role in constructing solidarity in both women's and transgender women's speech. Transgender women were found to use minimal responses more frequently and with stronger affective functions, supporting sociolinguistic claims that language is a key resource for identity construction and social belonging.

3.5 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the use of minimal responses in the speech of women and transgender women, with particular attention to their role in constructing solidarity in interaction. By analyzing televised interviews conducted by Oprah Winfrey with Michelle Obama and Laverne Cox, the study addressed its research questions and tested the proposed hypotheses.

Regarding the first research question, "*How are minimal responses used in women's and transgender women's talk?*", the findings confirmed that minimal responses occurred frequently in both interviews. This supports the first hypothesis that "*Minimal responses occur frequently in both women's and transgender women's talk as key markers of solidarity*".

In relation to the second research question, which explored "*What functions do minimal responses serve in expressing solidarity in both groups?*", the results demonstrated that transgender women used minimal responses more frequently and with stronger affective and evaluative functions. This finding supports the hypothesis that "*transgender women employ minimal responses primarily to display active listenership and emotional alignment rather than conversational minimalism*".



With respect to the third research question, "*To what extent does Coates' model of women's talk account for the conversational practices of transgender women?*" , the analysis showed that these responses primarily functioned to express understanding, encourage the speaker, and sustain conversational flow without interrupting the speaker's turn. These results refute the hypothesis that "*Transgender women's use of minimal responses does not align with patterns identified in Coates' model of women's talk*".

The study concludes that minimal responses are not merely peripheral conversational elements, but central linguistic resources through which women and transgender women negotiate identity, solidarity, and social belonging in discourse.

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