

# **The Role of Sexuality in the Construction of Gender**

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(tweet : @dsbigham #hulls)

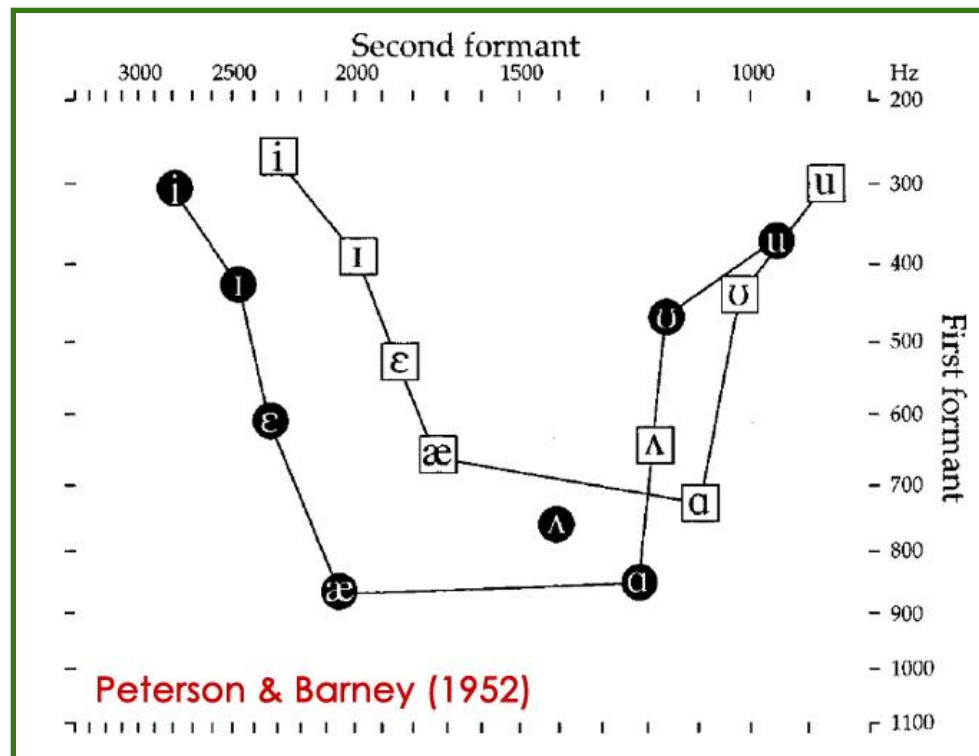
# Gay Man: a question of gender



- Gender is pervasive
  - social histories / social access
  - freedoms / mobility
  - sanctions / expression
- Gender is compositional
  - sex
  - sexuality
  - power

# Gender in Linguistics: Phonetics & Sex

Female vowel space is, on average, larger than male vowel space.



# Gender in Linguistics: Phonetics & Sex

- Females have shorter vocal tracts
  - Gender = height ?
- Anatomical differences cannot account for the *kinds* or *magnitudes* of difference between male and female speakers
  - Fant 1975 ; Diehl, et al. 1996

# Gender in Linguistics: Society & Sex

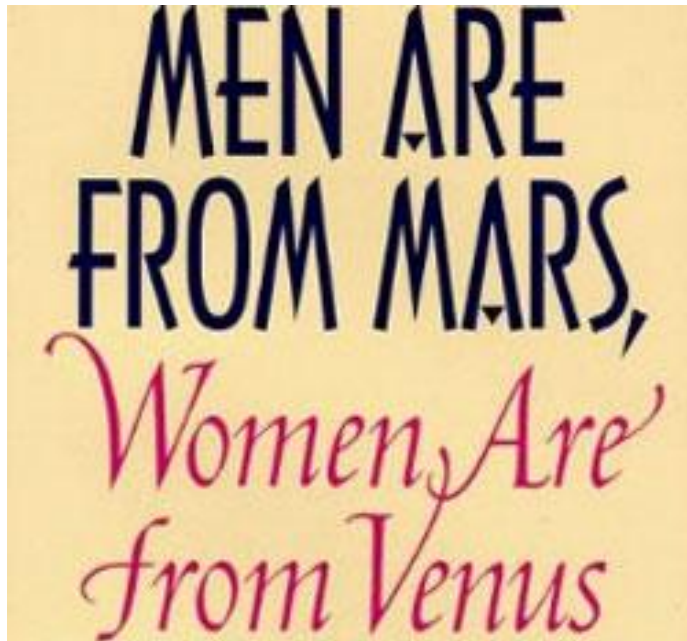
Men and women *participate* differently in sociolinguistic variation

- Fisher 1958 ; Tannen 1990 ; Labov 2001 ; Milroy & Gordon 2003 ; Eckert 2000 ; Coates 2003
- women lead change; yet are overtly conservative
- Girls are producers ~ social engineers
- women use community-level, wide-solidarity forms...  
while men use group-level, close-solidarity forms

# Gender in Linguistics: Society & Sex

## Problems?

- “women” “girls” “boys” “men” = BINARY GENDER
- Implicit erasure of non-normative genders



# **Sexuality in Linguistics: the search for gay & lesbian language**

## Discourse-based approaches

- What do “gays” talk about & how?
- Leap 1996; Barrett 1999; Cameron & Kulick 2003

## Phonetic-based approaches

- What constitutes “Gay Speech”?
- Gaudio 1994; Podesva et al. 2001; Levon 2007

# **Sexuality in Linguistics: the search for gay & lesbian language**

## Problems?

- “Queer Speech” vs. “queer speakers”
- Speaker sexuality *as a factor for categorization* has largely been ignored

Where does Gay Man belong in standard sociolinguistic (esp. variationist) work?



# Speaker Gender: a revised imperfect model

Sex+Sexuality = GENDER

SEX→ SEXUALITY↓	biologically male	biologically female	other
Hetero-normative	“men”	“women”	
Homo-normative	“gay”	“lesbian”	
other			“trans”

Problems?

- “other” and “trans” ... ?

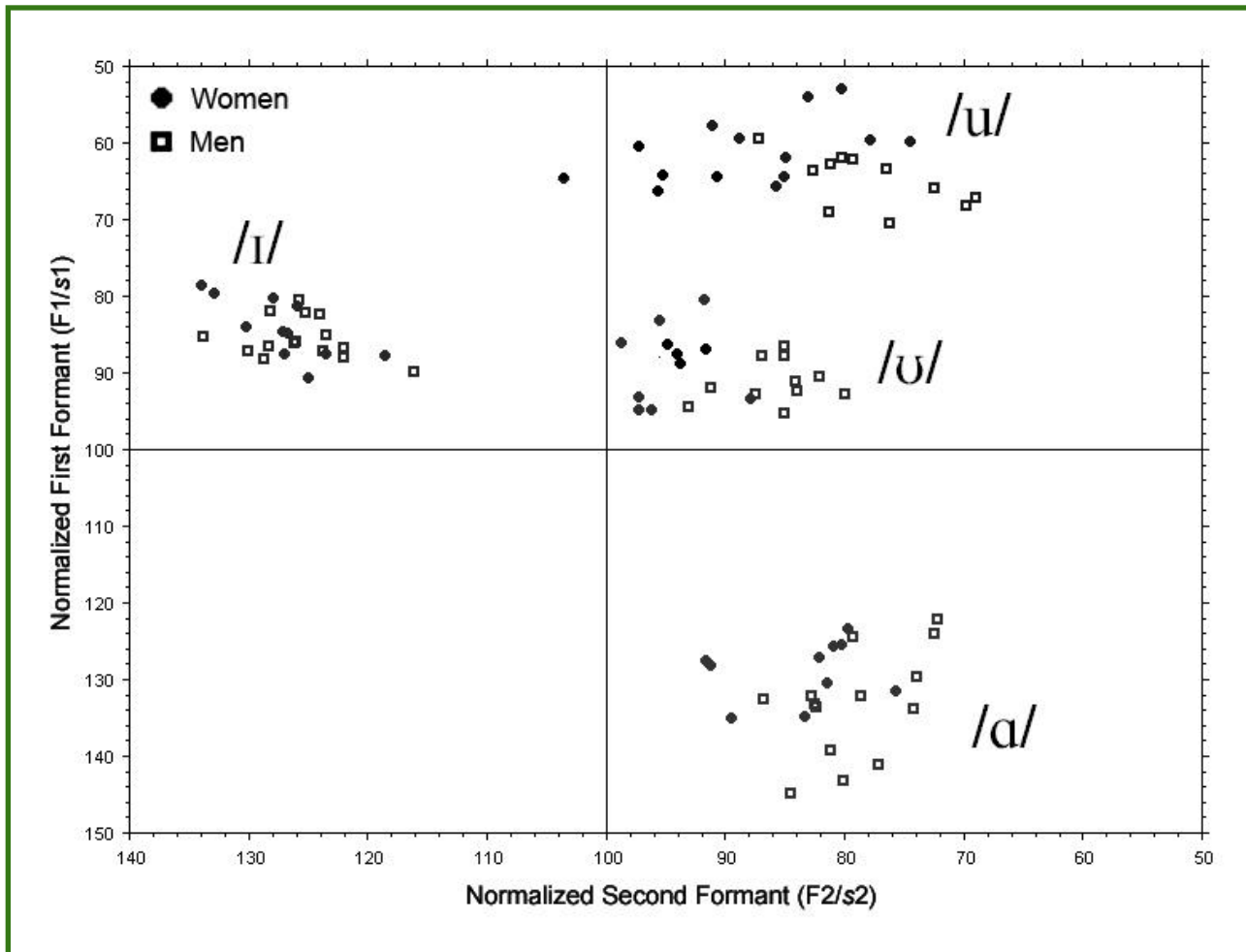
# **Testing the Model: the speakers**

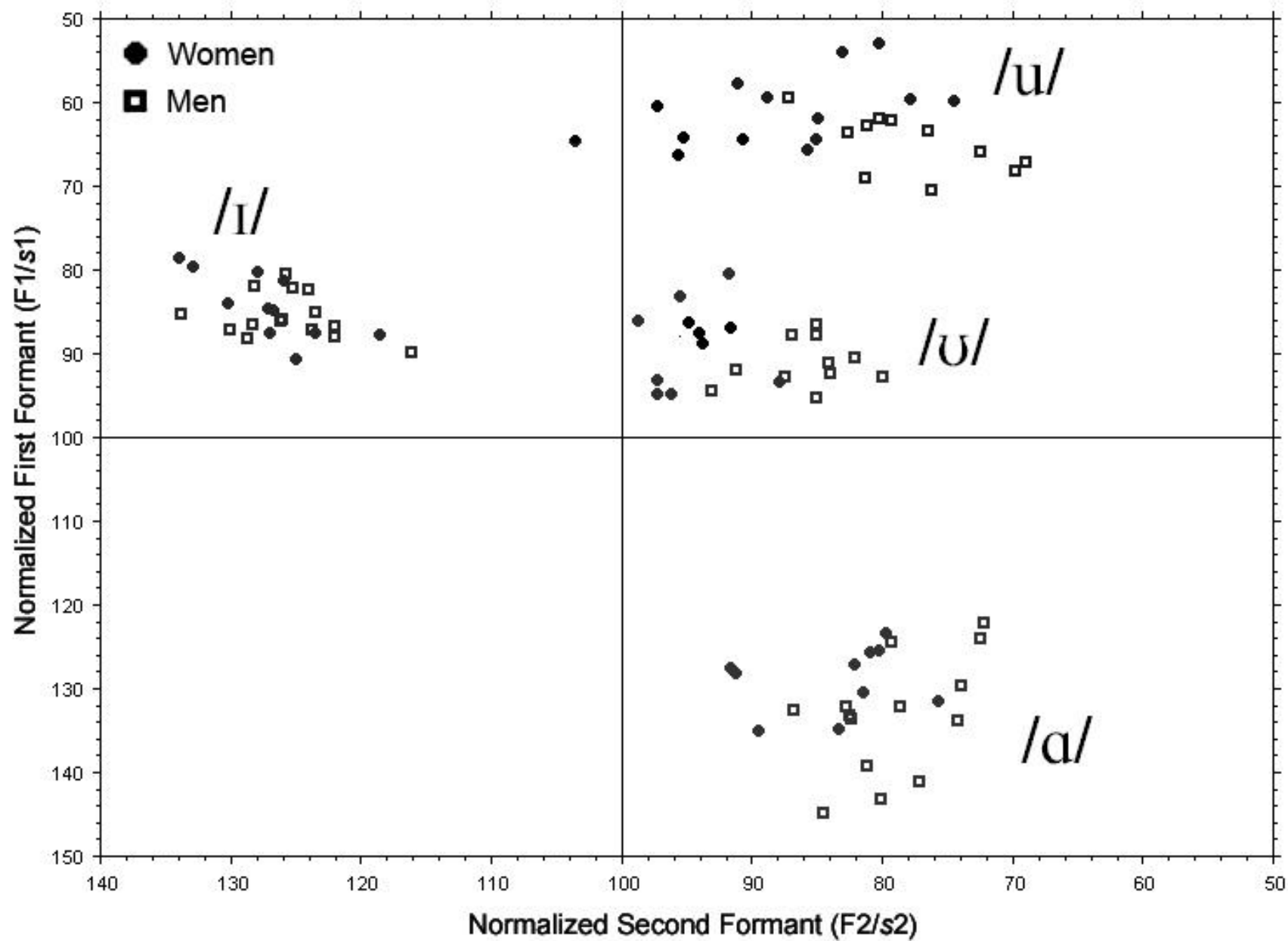
- 11 heteronormative females (“women”)
  - 15 heteronormative males (“men”)
  - 2 homonormative females (“lesbians”)
  - 4 homonormative males (“gays”)
- 
- Emerging Adults in a university setting
    - Dialect contact
    - Southern Illinois South-Midland + Chicagoland NCS

# Testing the Model: vowel variants in “Saluki Dialect”

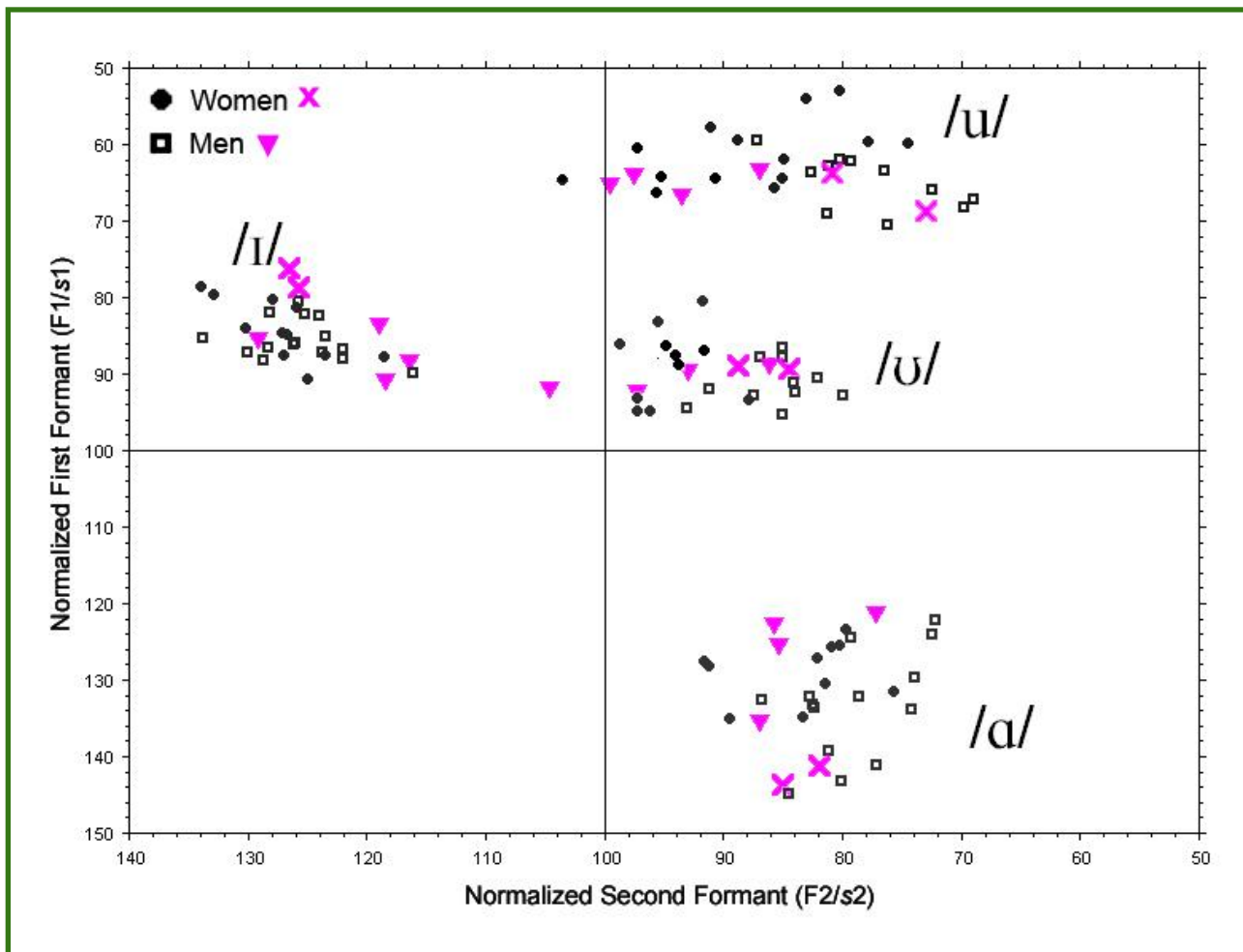
- LOT
  - raising
  - merger with THOUGHT
- GOOSE
  - fronting
- FOOT
  - fronting
- KIT
  - not doing anything interesting at all

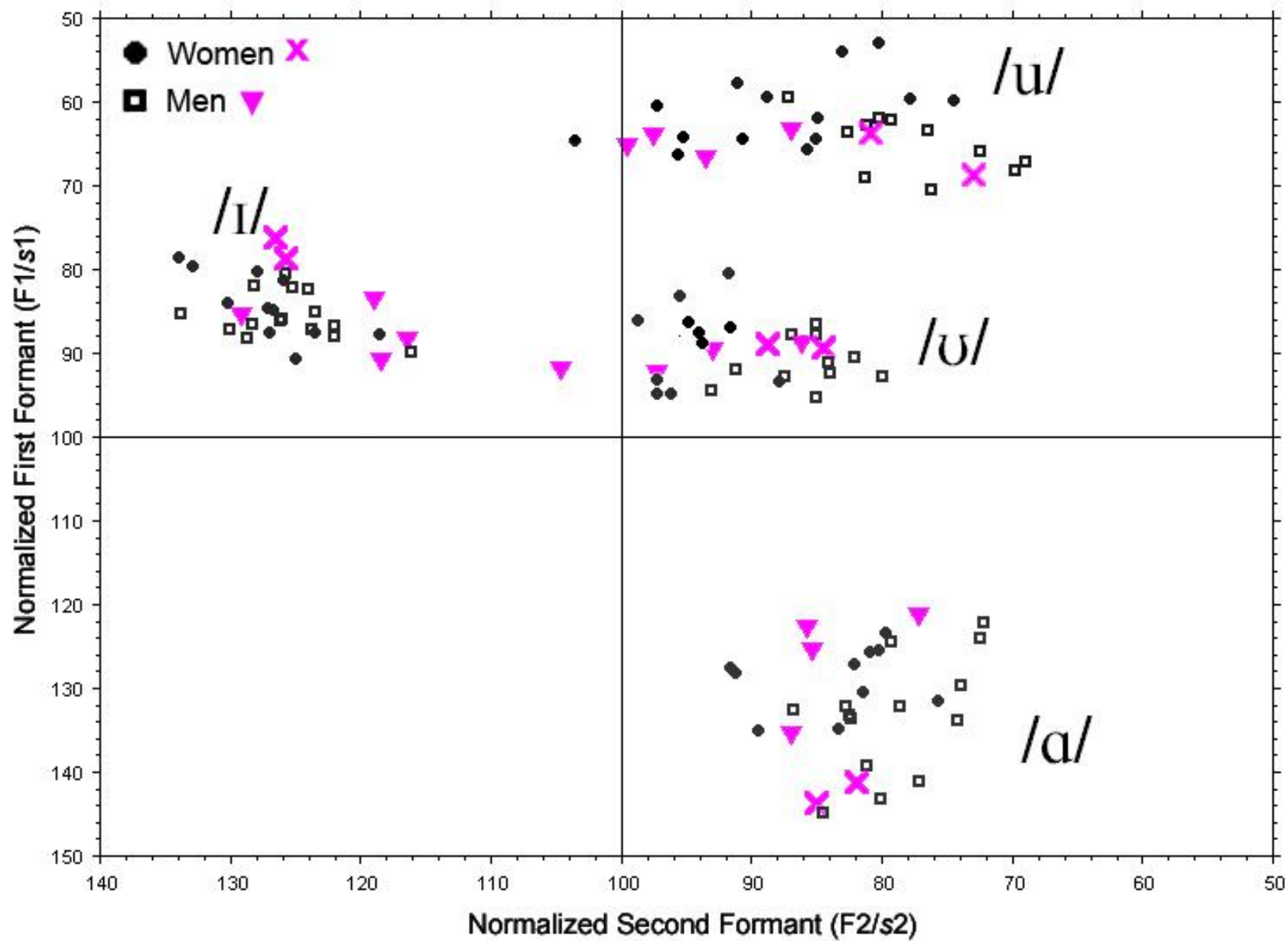
# “Straight” Men & Women





# “Gays” & “Lesbians”





# Results: GENDER-based variation

## Variation by GENDER

- “Gays” show the most progressive variants
- “Women” follow “Gays” in progressive variants
- “Men” & “Lesbians” use the most conservative forms

## Furthermore...

- backed-KIT variant discovered

## Ta-da!

- Sexuality *is* important in sociolinguistic research, even if sexuality *per se* isn't under investigation
- ...but *why* should this be the case?



# **Toward an Explanation:** **gender theory**

- Males and Females...
  - are afforded different opportunities
  - engage in different kinds of networks  
(women tend toward more loose connections)
  - conceptualize sex & sexuality differently
  - Women are “community-oriented”
  - Men are “self-oriented”
  - Can a person be both? Neither?
- Gays and Lesbians...
  - ?

# **Toward an Explanation: gender theory**

- Gender is...
  - social & external
  - personal & internal
  - developed early (2-4 years)
  - “the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes” (Butler 1999)
  - labeling & marking
  
- Are (straight) men gender free?

# Gender Study Two: sock puppets

## Performance Speech

- Schilling-Estes 1998; Trester 2007
- Sock puppets require **vocal** performance above all else

## “Gay” and “Straight” sock puppets

- sex- and sexuality-matched dyads
- one “straight” performance, one “gay” performance

# **Gender Study Two:**

## **sock puppets**

### Scenario One: Chris and Jesse

Chris and Jesse are two friends who met each other at UT last year. This year, they're both very busy and haven't seen each other much, but today, they bumped into one another outside the union. Both of them have a couple of hours free and they have decided to hang out. Unfortunately, they can't decide what to do. Chris wants to go to a movie, but Jesse wants to go get lunch. Eventually, they decide to just go downtown.

*Your job is to show how Chris and Jesse talk through their different ideas and eventually reach a solution that neither one had thought of at the beginning. Take as much time as you like.*

# **Gender Study Two:** **sock puppets**

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Homosexual actors, gay characters

Homosexual actors, straight characters

Heterosexual actors, gay characters

Heterosexual actors, straight characters

# Sock Puppet Performance: things to notice

## Phonology

- precise speech vs. mumbled speech
- *-ing* vs. *-in'* ... *-ing* is always gay, *-in'* is variably straight

## Lexicon

- feminine address forms – exclusively homosexual
- solidarity forms (*dude*, *man*) excessive in straight speech

## Discourse

- straight men love food, beer, and sex
- straight men are more agro than gay men
- Kiesling: power, competition, dominance as solidarity

# **Straight Man: gender, power, embodiment**

## **“Straight Man”**

- clearly, not an unmarked gender
- accessible to both hetero- and homosexual actors
- Coates: men are lawyers, bowlers, etc. but not “men”

## **Disembodied Gender ?**

- heterosexual males  $\neq$  “straight man”
- Could all genders be disembodied, then?

# **Gender Study Two:** **sock puppets**

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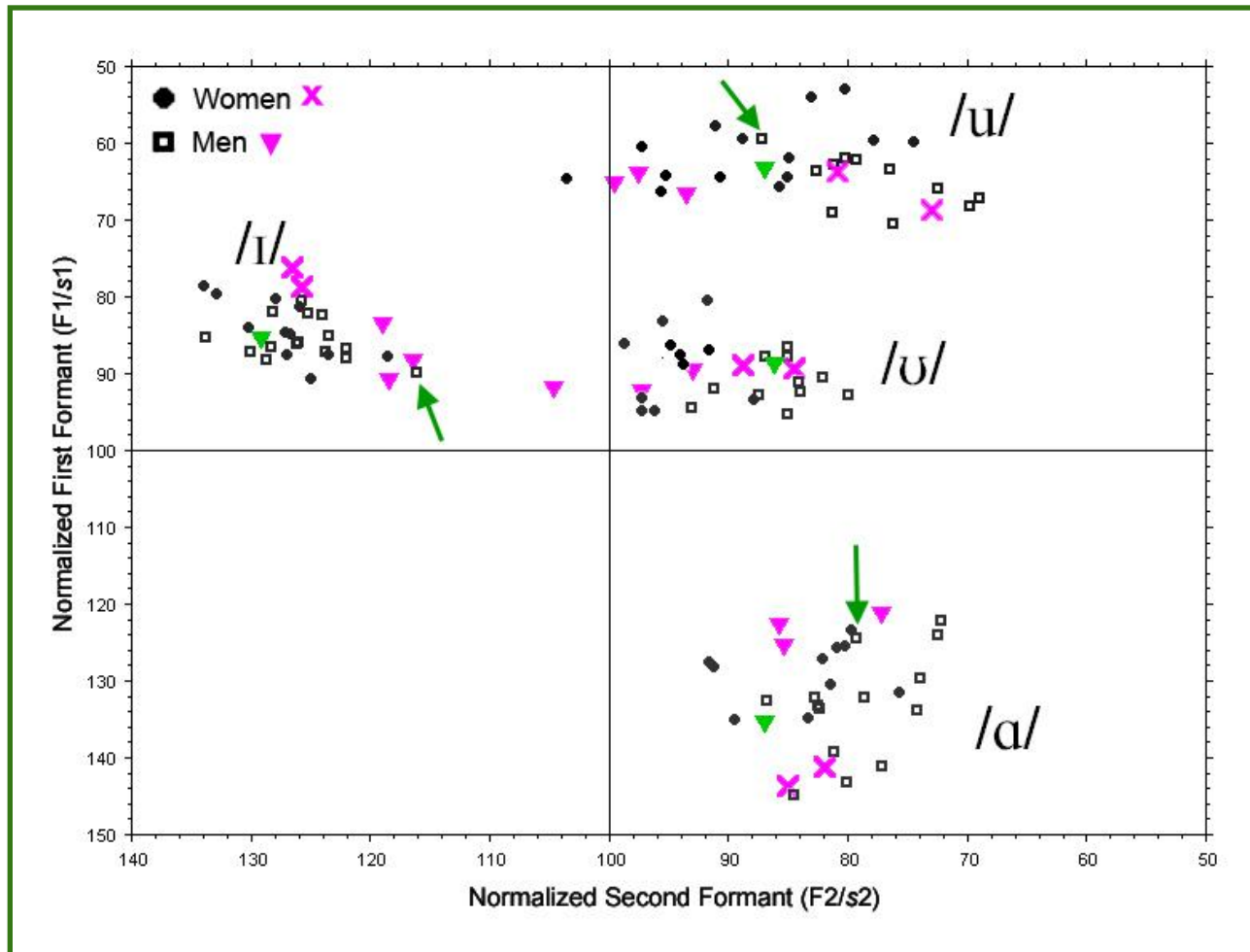
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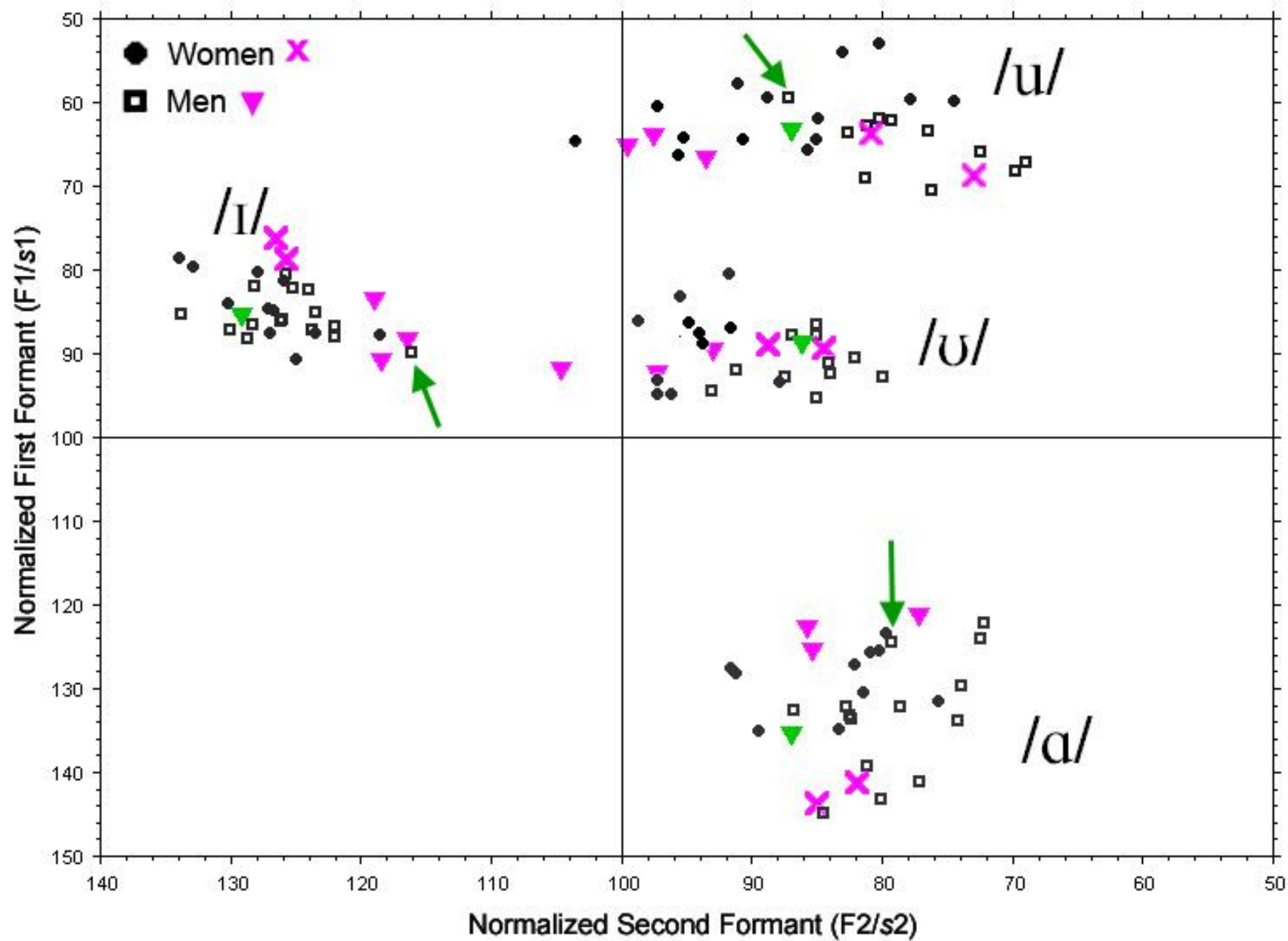
Heterosexual actors, gay characters

Heterosexual actors, straight characters



# An Exception...





# Why “GENDER” at all?

## Third-Wave Sociolinguistics

- Variables as indexical, no top-down categories

## But...

- People & society USE sex-linked “gender”
  - Gender is part of the hegemonic marketplace
  - First- and Second-Wave Sociolx. are still around
  - Gay & Lesbian speakers account for 4~10% of randomly selected data
- 
- Speaker sexuality can no longer be ignored, conflated, or overlooked. It must be incorporated.

# Thank you!

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