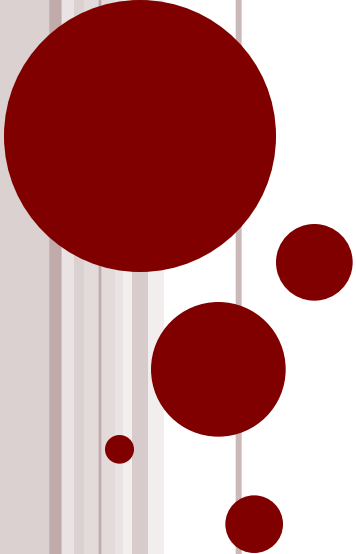# SEXUALITY AS A FACTOR FOR SOCIOPHONETIC VARIATION

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A Little Background…
Dialect Contact among University Students
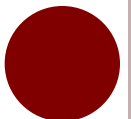
- Dialect Contact
  - What happens when speakers of two different dialects interact with each other?
  - Trudgill, 1986; 2004
- University Students
  - Close, persistent, intimate contact
  - Population is transient and dynamic, but "anchored"
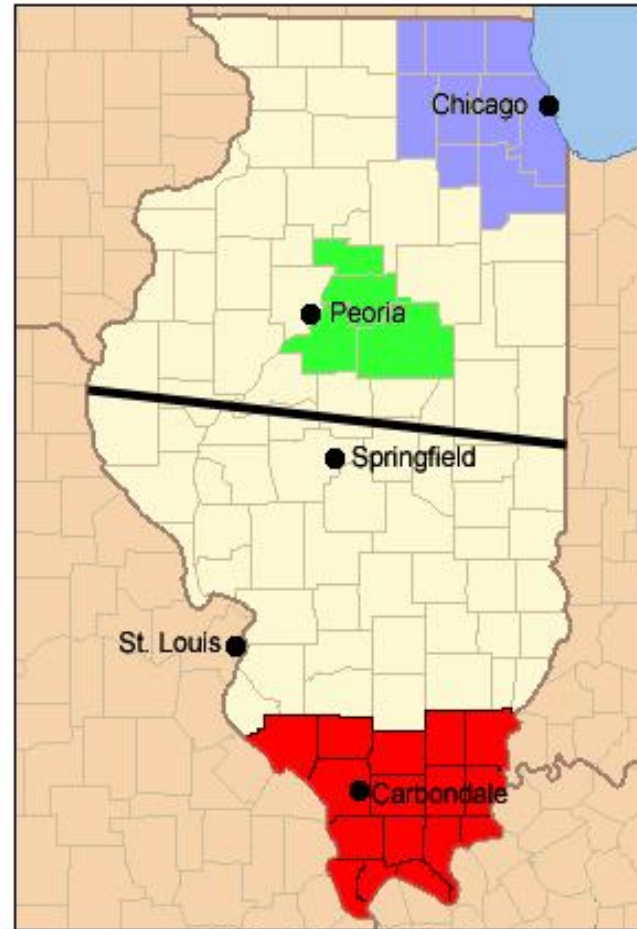- Emerging Adulthood
  - Period between High School and "true" Adulthood
  - Roughly 18-26 age range
  - Marked by exploration, self-discovery, and change
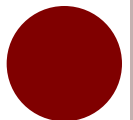 - J. Arnett, 2001

DIALECT GEOGRAPHY FOR THIS STUDY: THE NORTHERN CITIES SHIFT (NCS) IN ILLINOIS

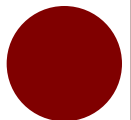The position of Illinois in the United States

Dialect Regions in Illinois
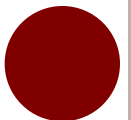
SPEAKER CATEGORIZATION:

SPEAKER SEX

- Female vowel space is, on average, larger than male vowel space
    - Anatomical differences cannot account for the kinds or magnitudes of difference (Diehl, et al., 1996)
- Men and women *participate* differently in lg. variation
    - women lead change; women are more conservative lg. users
    - women adhere more to overtly proscribed norms (Labov, 2001)
    - women prefer community-level, wide-solidarity forms...
      ...while men prefer group-level, close-solidarity forms
      (Milroy & Gordon, 2003; see also Coates, 2003)
- Problems...
    - Implicit heterosexuality / heteronormativity
    - Begging the "why?" question…

SPEAKER CATEGORIZATION:
SPEAKER SEXUALITY

- Kulick (2000): "search for gay and lesbian language"
- Discourse-based Approaches
  - What do "gays" talk about & how do they talk about it?
  - Leap, 1996; Barrett, 1999; Cameron & Kulick, 2003
- Perception-based Approaches
  - What does a speaker do that makes him "sound gay"?
  - Gaudio, 1994; Levon, 2007; Munson & Babel, 2007
- Sexuality as a factor in sociolinguistics
  - Speaker sexuality *as a factor for categorization* has largely been ignored.
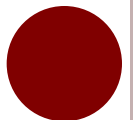
SPEAKER CATEGORIZATION:
SPEAKER "GENDER"

- Sex+Sexuality = GENDER

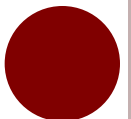| SEX→ SEXUALITY↓	biologically male	biologically female	n/a
normative	"man"	"woman"	---
non-normative	"gay"	"lesbian"	---
n/a	---	---	"trans"

- Problems...
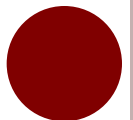 - define "normative"...
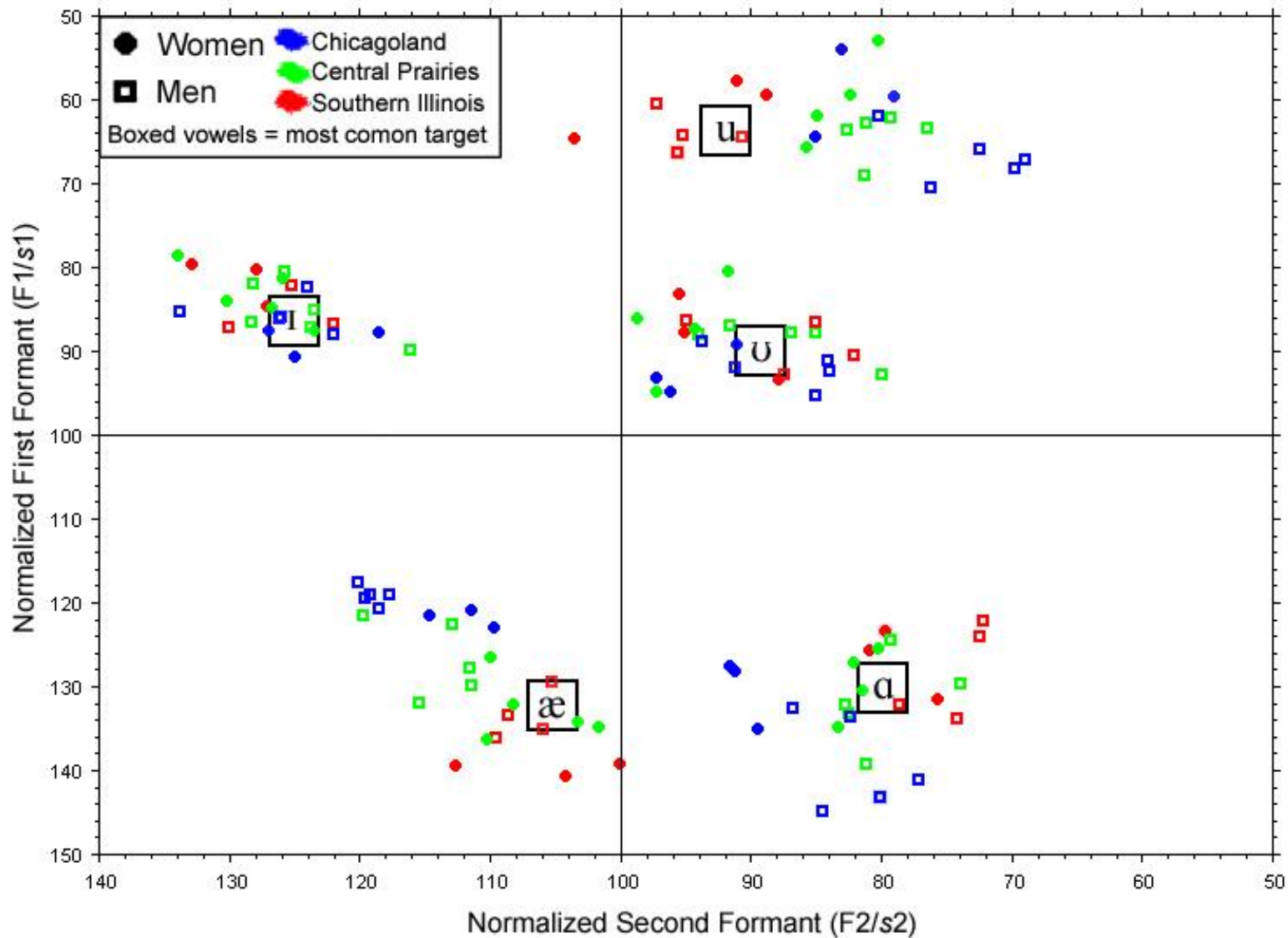 - trans individuals...

Vowel Variants:
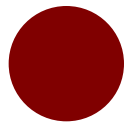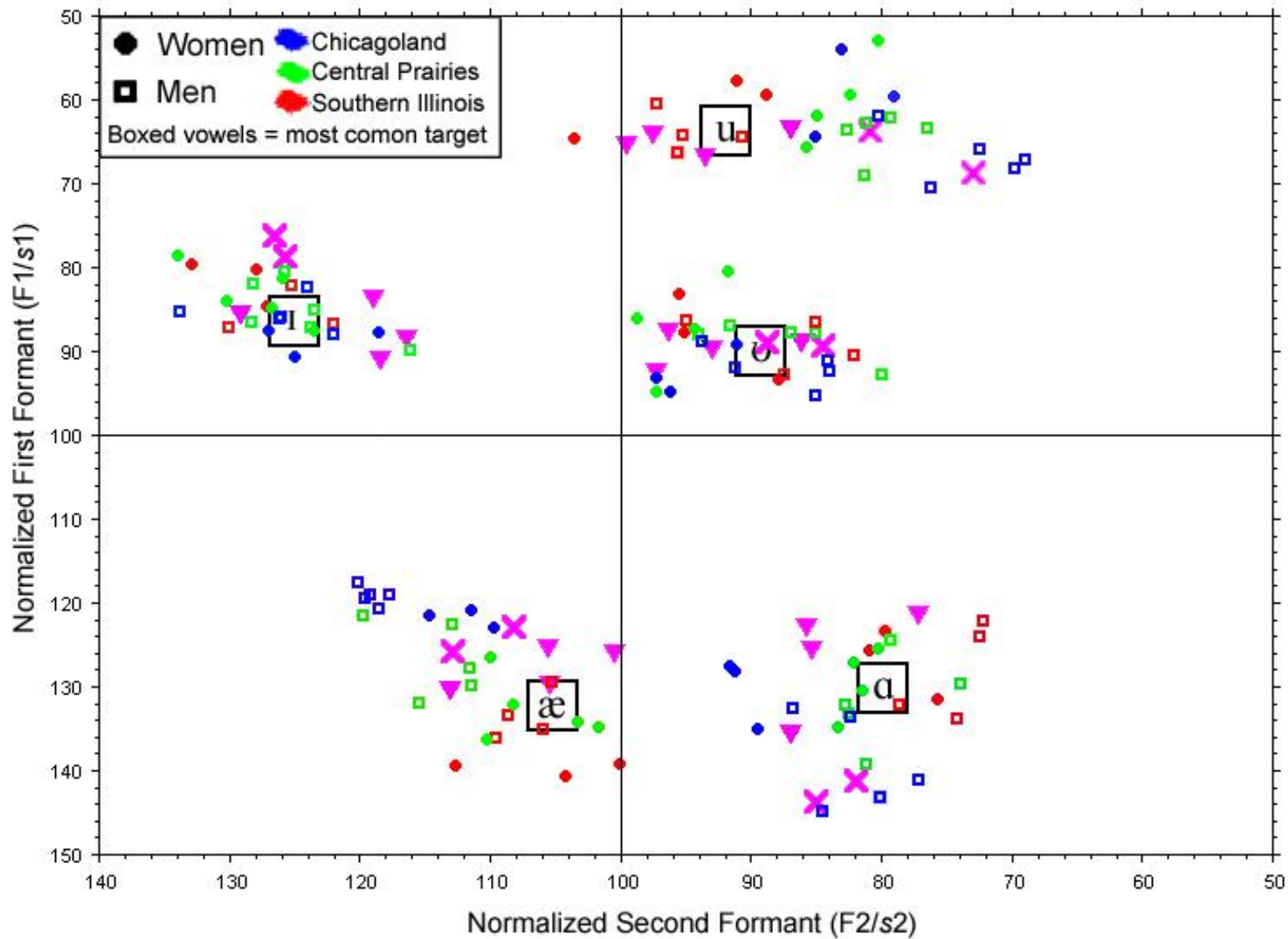## Production & Perception

- Vowels (using Wells' Key Words):
  - TRAP
    - raised & fronted in NCS-influenced dialects
    - high front DRESS-like variant = Chicagoland identity
  - LOT
    - fronted and/or lowered in NCS-influenced dialects
    - fronted variant = Chicagoland identity
  - GOOSE
    - fronted in Midlands speech, but not NCS dialects
    - no variants are salient
  - FOOT & KIT
    - not undergoing NCS-related shifts (~FOOT may be fronting)
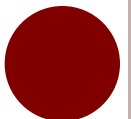   - completely non-salient

"STRAIGHT" MEN & WOMEN

"GAYS" & "LESBIANS"
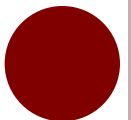
SUMMARY:
"GENDER"-BASED VARIATION

- "Gays" show the most progressive linguistic variants, regardless of salience

- After "Gays", "Women" show the most progressive *non-salient forms*, followed by "Men"

- Which speakers show the most progressive *salient forms*, however, depends on the "meaning" of a variable

- "Lesbians" show the least progressive / most conservative variants

EXPLAINING THE PATTERNS:

RECONSIDERING "GENDER"

- Ta-da!
- But why?

  Why would "gays" be among the first adopters of linguistics changes and "lesbians" among the last?

- Reconsidering what we "know":
  - Women are 'community-oriented'
  - Men are 'group-oriented'
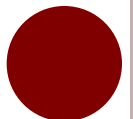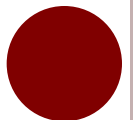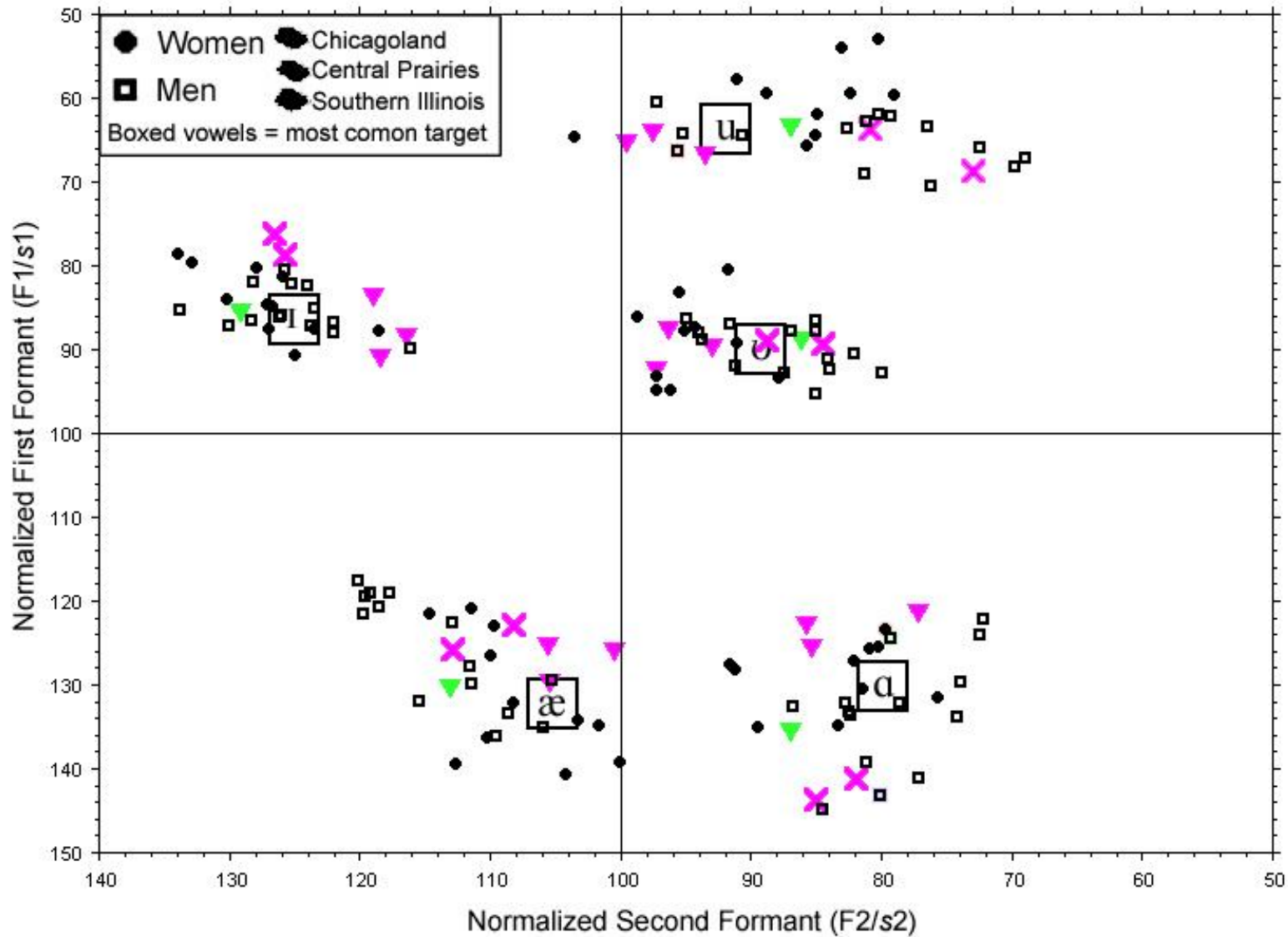 - Can a person be both? Neither?

"GENDER" PATTERNS:
A TENTATIVE EXPLANATION

- "Community"-level vs. "Group"-level
  - "community" = global, society, out-group-oriented, sex… professional/public-level issues…status, power
  - "group" = local, self, in-group-oriented, sexuality… personal/private-level issues... solidarity, affect
- Active vs. Passive Identity Construction
  - Active = aware, self-constructed, oriented towards
  - Passive = subliminal, society-constructed, oriented away

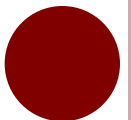| Community→ Group↓	active "community"	passive "community"
active "group"	"gay"	"male"
passive "group"	"female"	"lesbian"

THE EXCEPTION...

GRAND CONCLUSION:
"GENDER" RE-REVISED

- Vanguard Speakers
  - Actively creating "community" and "group" identities
- Progressive Speakers
  - Actively creating "community" identity; passively creating "group" identity
- Old-guard Speakers
  - Passively creating "community" identity; actively creating "group" identity
- Conservative Speakers
  - Passively creating "community" and "group" identity

THANK YOU!

Contact Info for References, Further Questions... job offers...

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