

Operationalizing Sexuality within Sociophonetic Variation

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Speaker Categorization: **Speaker Sex**

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

- Females have shorter vocal tracts
- Anatomical differences cannot account for the kinds or magnitudes of difference between male and female speakers (Diehl, et al., 1996)
- This isn't sex OR gender... “speaker height”?

Speaker Categorization: Speaker Sex

Men and women *participate* differently in sociolinguistic variation

- women lead change; women are more conservative
- 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 binary gender variable = implicit heteronormativity
- We're still begging the question of *why* these difference exist

Speaker Categorization: Speaker Sexuality

“search for gay and lesbian language”

Discourse-based Approaches

- What do “gays” talk about & how ?

Leap, 1996; Barrett, 1999; Cameron & Kulick, 2003

Perception-based Approaches

- What makes a speaker “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	other
normative	“men”	“women”	---
non-normative	“gay”	“lesbian”	---
other	---	---	“trans”

Problems...

- define “normative”...
- trans individuals = “other” ?

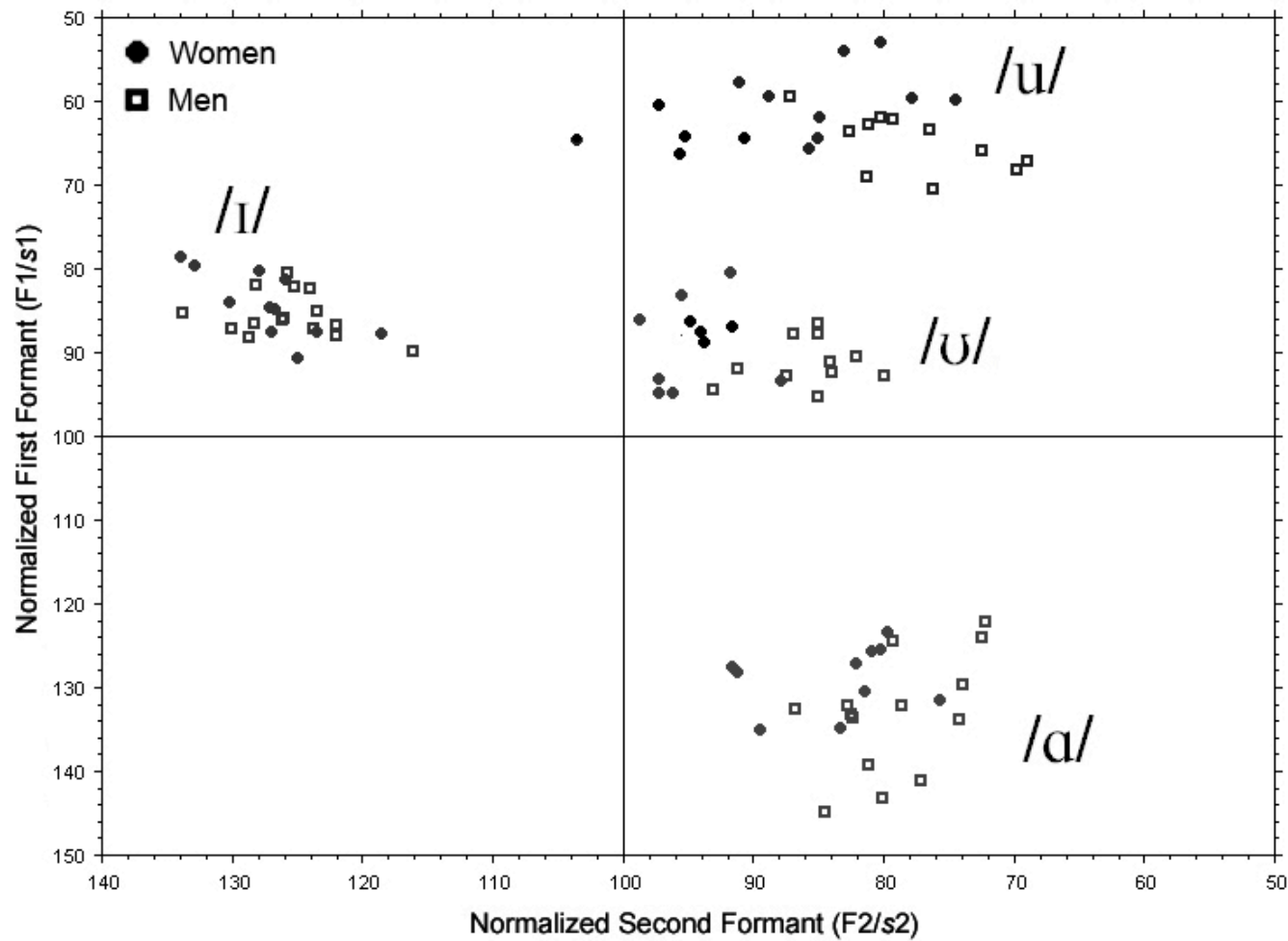
The Speakers

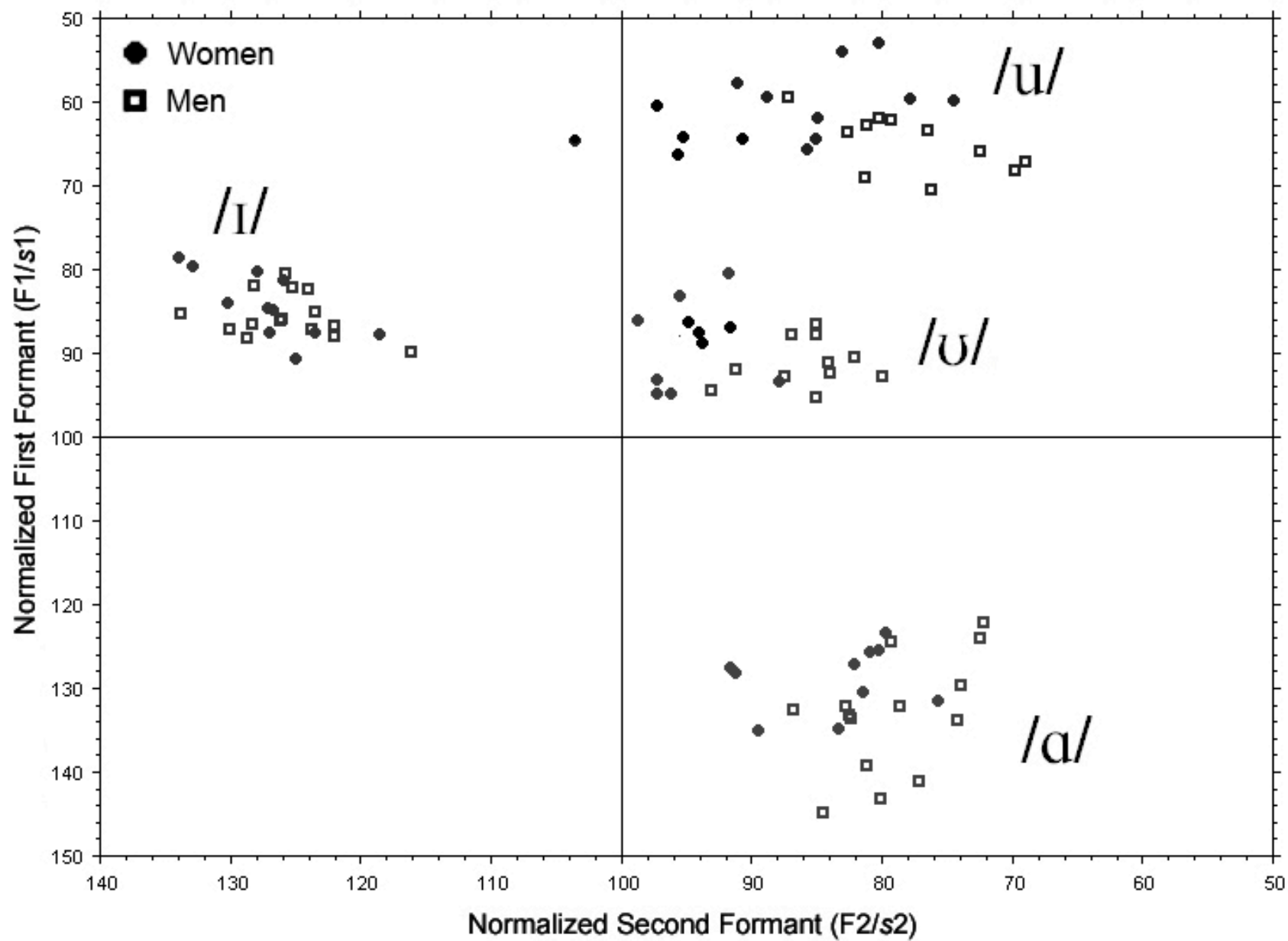
- 15 sexuality-normative females (“women”)
- 10 sexuality-normative males (“men”)
- 2 sexuality-non-normative females (“lesbians”)
- 4 sexuality-non-normative males (“gays”)
- Emerging Adults (Arnett, 2001) in a university setting
 - Dialect contact
 - Southern Illinois South-Midland + Chicagoland NCS

Vowel Variants

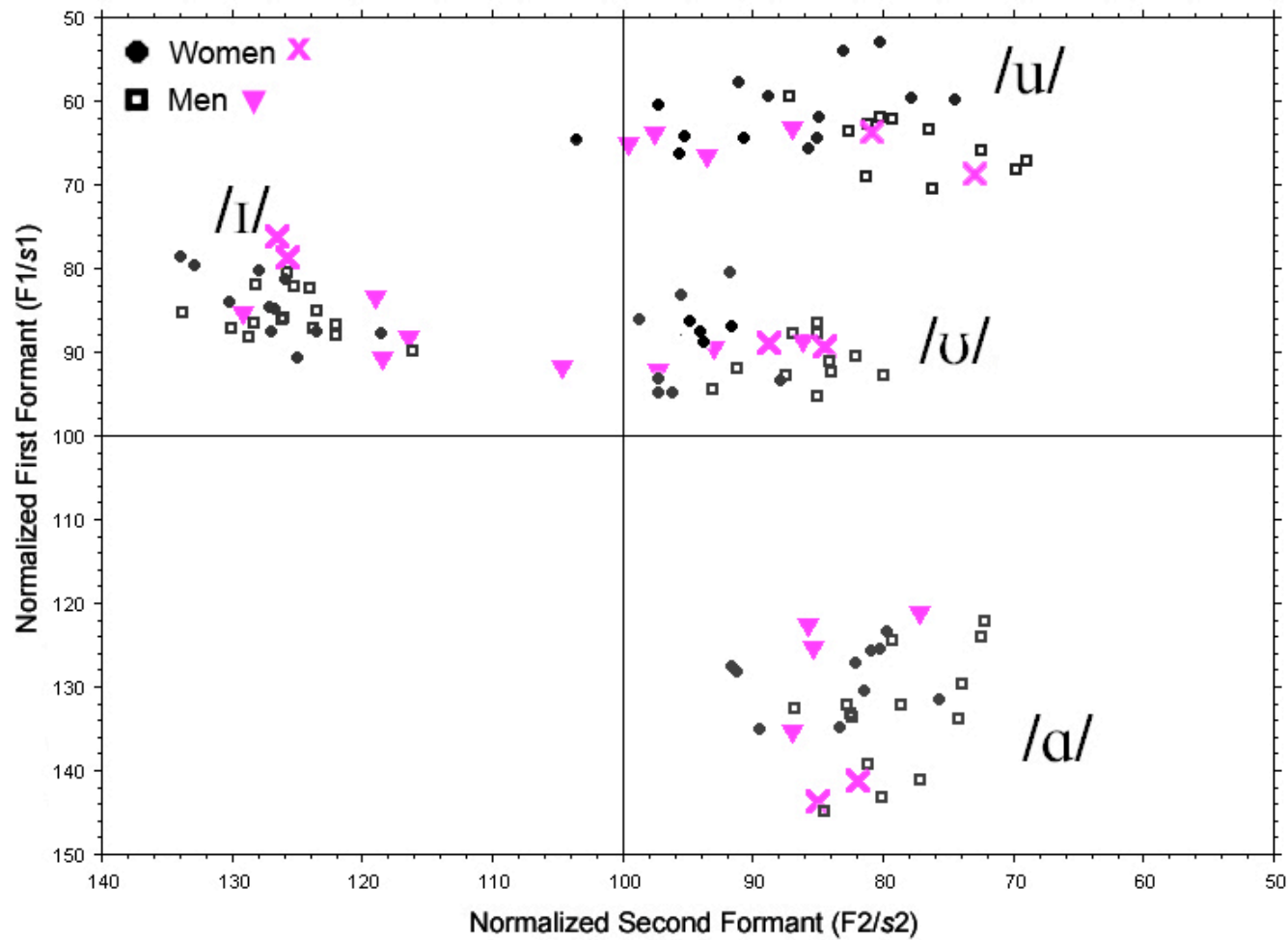
- LOT
 - Raising
 - merger with THOUGHT
- GOOSE
 - Fronting
- FOOT
 - Fronting
- KIT
 - not undergoing any shifts

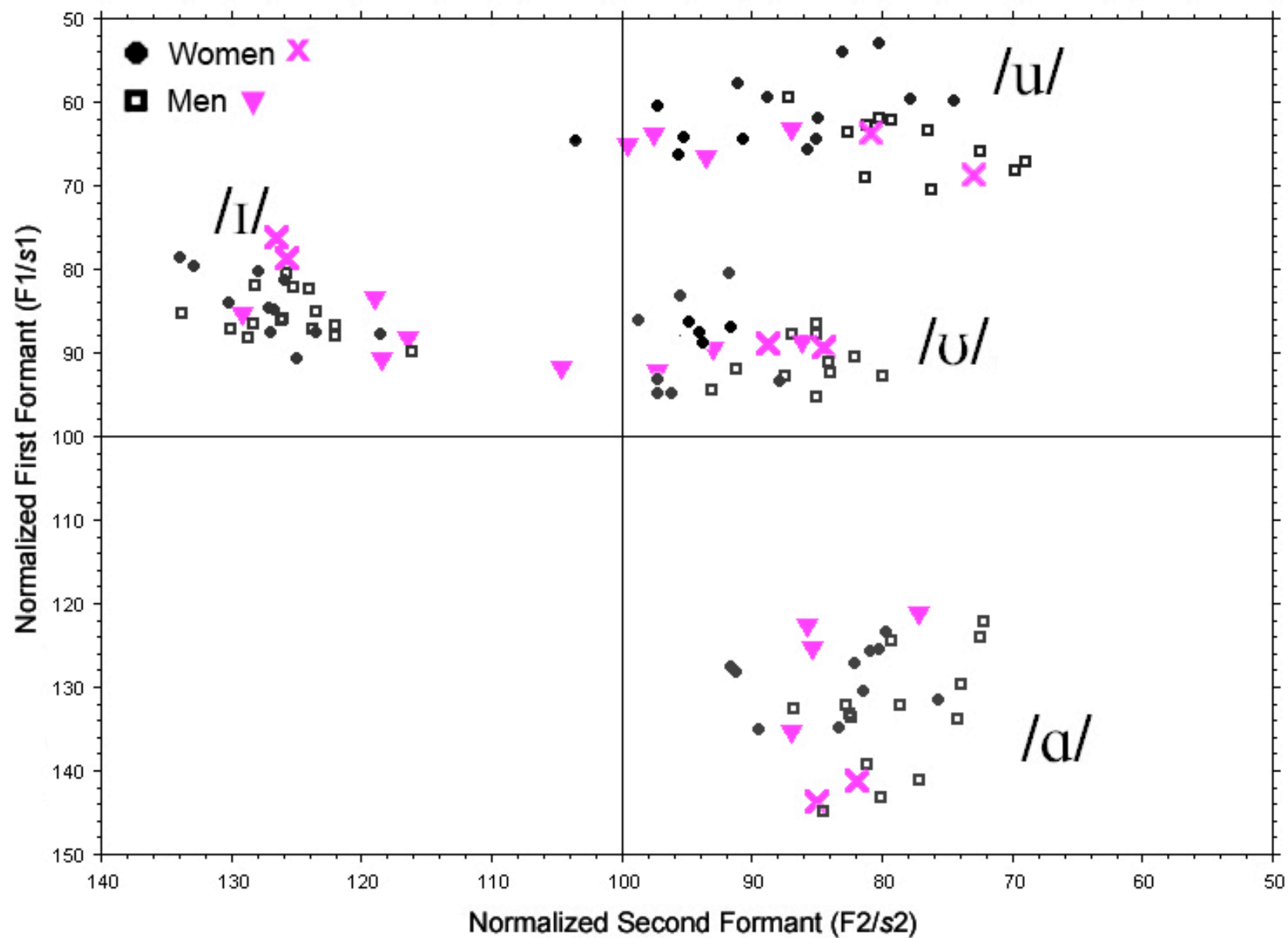
“Straight” Men & Women





“Gays” & “Lesbians”





Summary: **“Gender”-based Variation**

Variation by GENDER

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

Ta-da!

- Sexuality *is* important in sociolinguistic research, even if sexuality *per se* isn't under investigation
- But why?
(Hint: sexuality has nothing to do with it)

Explaining The Patterns: **Reconsidering “Gender”**

- 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...
 - ?

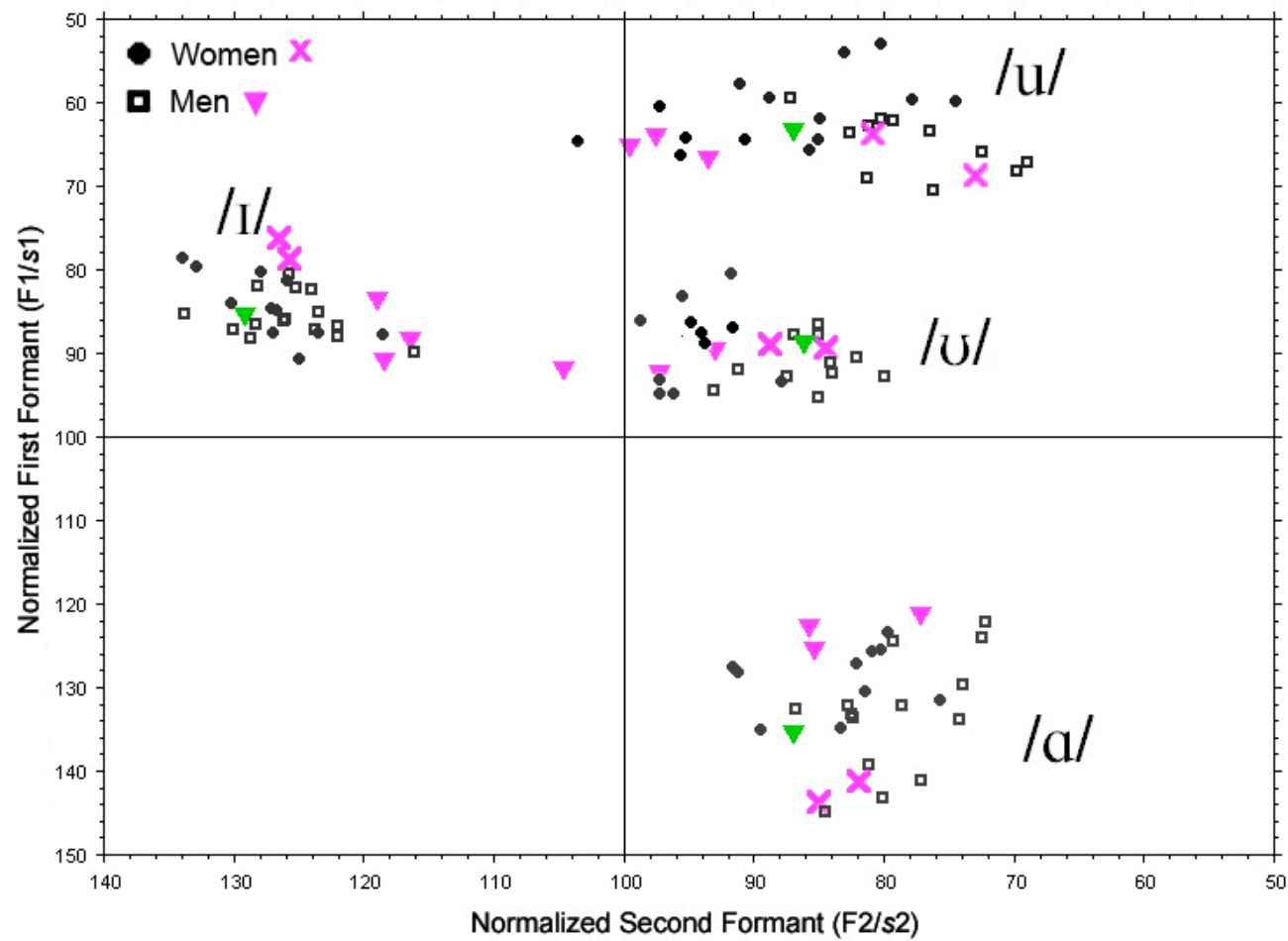
“Gender” Patterns: A Tentative Explanation

Active vs. “Passive” Identity Construction

- Active
 - aware, self-constructed, oriented *towards*
- “Passive”
 - subliminal, society-constructed, oriented *away*

COMMUNITY→ SELF ↓	active “community”	passive “community”
active “self”	“gay”	“male”
passive “self”	“female”	“lesbian”

The Exception...



Grand Conclusion: **Get Rid of “Gender”!**

Vanguard Speakers

- Actively creating “community” and “self” identities

Progressive Speakers

- Actively creating “community” identity; passively creating “self” identity

Old-guard Speakers

- Passively creating “community” identity; actively creating “self” identity

Conservative Speakers

- Passively creating “community” and “self” identity

Grand Conclusion: **Get Rid of “Gender”!**

Nah, maybe not...

- “Gender” as related to sex has advantages
- People & society USE sex-linked “gender”
- People likewise are aware of sexuality

But

- Gay & Lesbian speakers account for 4~10% of randomly selected data
- Speaker sexuality can no longer be ignored, conflated, or overlooked

Thank you!

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