

Music, Gender, and Sexuality Reflection Questions

Overview:

- These were a graded assignment completed in class in the last week of the semester.
 - The questions were as follows:
 1. Reflect on how you thought about music/gender/sexuality before you took this course and how you think about it now that the course is (almost!) over. What's **ONE** thing that changed for you?
 2. Name **one** thing that **surprised** you about our music/gender/sexuality topics.
 3. Which of the subjects we covered was most **thought-provoking** for you and why?
 4. What is one thing that you learned in this class (or at least thought about in relation to this class) that connects with other musicking that you do? (this might include performing, teaching, etc)
 5. What is **one** thing you're **still really curious about** in connection to music & sound's connections with gender and sexuality?
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Anonymized student responses:

Student 1:

1. I think I went into this course thinking about music, gender, and sexuality from a sense of gender oppression in music. While this is true for some of what we studied, there are also many cases of gender empowerment in music. Specifically, in the cases of girl groups such as Riot Grrrl and others, women were able to find community and belonging in music. I think overall this course made me realize that gender studies does not only have to be about studying the problems with gender norms, but it can also be about studying the successes and empowerment of oppressed populations.
2. One thing that surprised me in this course was discovering how the virtuoso was viewed. I guess I never realized that they were viewed as such outcasts, almost as if they were inhumane creatures. I thought it was interesting that this stereotype was true for all virtuosos, regardless of their gender. I feel like women are usually ridiculed for being too talented or unnaturally talented, so it was interesting to learn that men faced this same type of ridicule, specifically in the case of Franz Liszt.
3. While we did not spend a ton of time on it, I thought our discussion on the last day of class about the intersection between music and empathy was very thought-provoking. Specifically, the argument that we should not be valuing music over people. I agree with this completely, but unfortunately there are many people who do not. I found this to be thought-provoking because it can really be applied to almost any style of music. No matter what is being performed, there are always performance practices that some

people will deem to be more important than individual interpretation, making this concept relevant to almost all types of music. It is interesting to think about how this can manifest differently in different types of music and performance.

4. One thing that from this class that connects to other work I do was our discussion on opera and gender studies. As someone who often sings trouser roles, I experience the intersection of opera, gender, and sexuality quite often. It is really interesting how the same vocal registers can express different meanings in different voice parts. For example, we talked about how high coloratura passages often represent the dying, troubled soprano, whereas in my experience singing mezzo repertoire, the high coloratura passages often display humor and wit. This is really such a gendered concept because sopranos roles are mostly female, whereas mezzo roles often portray young men/boys. This discussion was very relevant to me because I often go back and forth between mezzo and soprano repertoire, so I experience both sides of this and it was interesting to gain some more historical context around this.

5. The connection between ethics of care and music, gender, and sexuality really interests me and it is something that I would like to study more. After graduating from Crane, I am planning on getting a masters in vocal pedagogy, and one thing that I really want to research is affirming practices to approaching music in the voice studio. I think many people assume that we are in a place where humans take priority over music, but that is sadly still not true. Specifically, women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community are often degraded for their musical performances disproportionately to cisgender white men, so finding ways to prioritize the human, especially people from underrepresented groups, is something I want to explore more in music.

Student 2:

1. For me, the largest and most important paradigm shift I had while taking this course was that of pivoting my thinking away from envisioning musical innovators as those who performed primarily emotional labor and toward envisioning them as making a monumental physical investment – putting more of their body forward than is typically expected of such an arts-centered pursuit. When I signed up for this course, I expected to learn a lot about how internal sense of gender and sexuality affected a performer or composer's internal or mental process, and instead I gleaned that performers who are marginalized often receive this treatment because their work acknowledges a universal truth often swept under the rug by classical elitists: that the body is just as integral and crucial to the music making process as the mind.

2. I was very surprised to learn that what we now label as "drag" was considered family friendly entertainment before a tidal wave of shifting public perception in the late 1920s began to introduce criminalizing legislation against such performances. The activities and variable identities of male and female impersonators were quite fascinating to view

through the lens of how we think about gender today, and show that progress toward understanding gender as fluid and malleable has not been a straight line, but has gone through waves and cycles of both mainstream acceptance and widespread disdain.

3. Our most thought-provoking subject of study for me were some of our studies that focused on how modes of musical thinking and musical arenas that are typically stereotyped as traditional or even regressive can sometimes be spaces for radical transformation and gender euphoria. I was really inspired by articles that discussed liking Elvis as not unilaterally motivated by sexual desire, but as sometimes being an expression of joy that fell outside of the traditionally feminine and could be liberating for young women who didn't conform to their assigned gender at birth. Discussing some of the early country musicians who shed light on very real issues facing women in both the home and in society brings us to the conclusion that country hasn't always been dominated by conservatism, but instead began as a sort of revolutionary populist musical movement that spoke to issues faced by people of all genders. Similarly, musicals and operas also seem to have the power to provide this kind of experience by showcasing healthy friendships between women that don't always revolve around men, and the "power of the duet" is a very real effect that can lead to greater camaraderie and understanding between queer and trans folks of different generations, backgrounds, and approaches.

4. Having the opportunity to examine historical analyses of "parlor music" was very helpful in formulating certain compositional ideas and research ideas for me. In my upper-division theory elective, I chose to study Cécile Chaminade's *Arabesque No. 1* (1892), as I feel that it's an example of a piece that is structurally strong and harmonically fascinating without being as challenging as a Liszt rhapsody or other piece of comparable difficulty. As I began to uncover more research about Chaminade's life, I found that much of her piano music and vocal music in the 1890s was held in low regard for being perceived as "salon music", and that despite high sheet music sales, her works were typically not regarded as appropriate for professional pianists to play. This has led to a lack of substantial recordings or papers about these pieces even leading into the 21st century; however, reading excerpts from the diaries of women who regularly practiced piano (either with devotion or boredom) made me think a lot more about how much life these works could have been given in the private sphere of home life and domestic influence. The emotional impact that a shorter and less challenging piece can have on both the performer and the listener has inspired me to embrace this style in my own work, as I've never been much for composing works of exceptional difficulty and I prefer to find moments of joy and clarity in elegant yet simple gestures that are easy to understand and to connect with.

5. One thing I remain really curious about in regards to music, gender, and sexuality is how artists, composers and performers formed connections that were based on

solidarity with one another's gender identities. For me, intersecting spheres of influence are the key to understanding so many people's artistic prerogatives and *modus operandi*, and I'd be so interested to see how LGBT composers from the same time period influenced each other. I know quite a bit about how gay male classical composers from the early 20th century influenced each other from reading the diaries of Ned Rorem, but I'd be very curious to know how this same idea of intersecting spheres of influence applied to other, more informal communities: how did the early members of riot grrrl bands influence and credit each other? How did the Black and LGBT voices behind the early disco scene come together and find commonalities in the stylistic origins and experimentations of their music? How do queer, trans and non-binary artists from today join their sounds to form new and exciting developments, especially in the face of increased media attention and decreased levels of personal privacy?

Student 3:

1. One thing that changed for me as a result of this course is how I perceive expressions of gender. I now make a conscious effort to include male and non-binary experiences in my own conceptualization of "gender," rather than blatantly assuming that issues of gender are solely restricted to female persons. Although I was open to doing so prior to this class, this conceptualization was not something I intentionally scaffolded for myself until this semester.
2. One thing that surprised me about the topics we covered in this class was how music has been used for good and for evil, for lack of a better phrase, in its relationships with minority populations over time. Music is often penned as the joyous burst of light in an otherwise gloomy society, but as, say, a young European woman searching for a suitor in the Victorian era or a gay man attempting to perform a virtuosic instrumental solo on an American stage, qualities of masculinity and femininity were more concerning than the irreplaceable talents of these musicians.
3. The most thought-provoking subject for me was the contemporary studies of music, gender, and sexuality. This topic related historical content to modern-day concerns and applications of the course's material, and it felt most relevant for me, personally. Most directly, our class discussion on gendered voices spurred multiple chains of questions and thoughts about my own life. For the first time, I wondered how my life would be different if I considered the many different stereotypes of my own voice type in relation to my gender. I found myself reflecting deeply on my own past experiences to better understand how I want to formulate my opinions for the future.
4. One thing I learned in this class that connects to the performance realm of musicking is that genius and creativity are not restricted to composers at the detriment of performers. Those who shine on the stage are not merely vessels for the notational

genius, waiting to explode. Rather, performers have their own creative strokes of genius that go beyond the page and make them who they are. Although I never interpreted this distinction from a gendered perspective prior to this class, I feel that the added layer of subservience between female performers and male composers is one more reason for refusal of the perceived genius behind the scenes.

5. One thing I am still really curious about with the connections between music, gender, and sexuality is how these topics relate to the influx of social media in the 21st century. For instance, has TikTok sexualized the female, gay male, etc. image to be more feminine than masculine? Does a female posting a photo on her Instagram, holding a brass instrument, communicate a different message than the disgruntled male conductor who angrily sneers at his orchestra with a baton ready to stab someone in the first violin section? These are just a couple of initial thoughts that come to my mind for the seemingly endless possibilities of a topic so current.

Student 4:

1) Before taking this course, I had a somewhat conventional view of music, gender, and sexuality, largely shaped by my experiences in opera and classical music. I understood that gender played a role in how roles were cast in opera, but I didn't think critically about how sexuality and gender intersected in broader musical contexts. For example, I didn't give much thought to the historical and social forces shaping the gendered and sexualized portrayals of characters or how these portrayals influenced the reception of different performances.

2) When it came to talking about gender, race or sexuality not much surprised me. Especially in regards to the marginalization of groups. Unfortunately we still see much of that today. However, I found the very strange ways of discrimination to be surprising. For example, how the vocoder could not be used for a woman's voice. You would think that after all those years of having women in the music field that recording their voice wouldn't be an issue. It just goes to show that wherever oppression can occur it certainly does.

3) I really struggle with this question as I found so many units to be interesting. I deeply enjoyed the Pellicciotti discussion. It is extremely relevant to someone who has been in the completion workshops, the spring workshop, and the final production. Not only that, it brought to light the importance of the competition, that I find not many people know.

4) Once again, any and all topics relating back to opera were extremely relevant to me. Especially as someone who wishes to go on into the Performance world. I found many of the topics we discussed to be relevant in my own practice.

5) I think just the idea of why humans do this. Why do they feel the need to put labels on all things and marginalize certain demographics? I think understanding

the “why” of it all would give an interesting perspective on the human psyche.

Student 5:

1. - A lot of things changed for me, but one thing that I really changed my opinion on is the idea of blind auditions. I used to think that they were a benefit to get rid of potential biases, but now I question them, because why are we putting people in positions like that while we are concerned about them choosing unfairly on the basis of race, gender, etc. I don't remember while reading it was in, but it definitely made me reflect.
2. - I was surprised to learn more about how technology didn't allow higher voices to record with the same quality as a lower voice. In past listening to older recordings, I did notice the clear divide in quality, but never considered that that could've been intentional.
- 3.- The ongoing discussion of gendered instruments was probably the most thought-provoking topic for me. This idea kept coming back, through our discussion of jazz all the way through domestic piano performance. Even today, instruments still have some horrible gender stereotyping, which has honestly been perpetuated by music education. Even in my experience in school, boys mostly played low brass and girls mostly played upper woodwinds. I actually know a boy who was bullied for playing the flute - so as much as we'd like to think we've moved past this, we really haven't.
- 4.- Maybe because I just wrote about it and it's fresh in my mind - but I think something I will carry with me is not to continue perpetuating instrument stereotypes. If I end up teaching band, I want to be intentional about having any student play any instrument they want. In instrument selection, because often we see (still) people in the media matching the instrument that they are “gendered” to fit, I will make it a point to show clips that include all people playing all instruments, especially breaking from these stereotypes.
5. - I would like to look into how today's feminist wave has produced a new subgenre of music. Particularly, I think it would be cool to do a deep dive into music by artists like Chappell Roan, Taylor Swift, and Sabrina Carpenter. It could be interesting to see how artists before them paved the way too.

Student 6:

1. To be honest, I don't think I really thought about music/gender/sexuality before I took this class, and what I mean by “really thought” is I had an assumption that, yeah, it was gonna be about how females were obviously not equal to men, it was just about the how. Now that the course is over, I don't think something has changed for me. I do know the 5W's: who, what, when, how, and why certain situations have arisen through the connection between music/gender/sexuality. So I guess, in a way, something has changed.

2. I wouldn't say I was surprised but each topic was very similar to the next one just a different genre.
3. The topic that was the most thought-provoking was the topic of instruments, which instrument was deemed feminine and masculine. It was funny because I definitely saw both sides of it. There's definitely a lot to unpack with this topic but I understood why certain instruments were considered feminine. I feel like it also has a lot to do with how feminine and masculine roles were back in the day.
4. One thing that I learned was even if you are yourself people are still gonna have a problem with you. I learned this with the topic of ballroom culture. I also tried to make the connection between being ourselves which is also a way of being confident in using that with my performance aspects of things. I've been told that I need to have a little bit more of a stage presence.
5. Why do we think certain sounds or types of music feel "manly" or "girly," and how did we decide that? And how does music make people feel more connected to their gender or sexuality, like when a song feels really queer or super empowering?

Student 7:

1. I was not sure what to expect in this course this semester because I didn't know anyone who had taken this course before, so I was walking on eggshells a little at the beginning of the semester. I was worried there would be more debates rather than just discussion, which I'm glad there was not any debating, but I think I would be more comfortable in that situation now than I would have been at the beginning of the semester.
2. A lot of the topics we discussed had connections to gender and sexuality because at the time, that's just how things were, and yet we were still able to uncover a lot of deeper meaning in those topics.
3. The "girling" article struck me the most, but I am also watching Bridgerton right now, so I am also seeing a lot of the rituals that girls had to partake in while they were growing up to be considered an eligible wife.
4. I have thought about how women were not allowed to play brass instruments for a long time because of how it can change your face. That has always been an insecurity of mine as a brass player, but after briefly discussing it in one class I've just been happy with playing my brass instrument.
5. I would have liked to talk more about musical theatre and those connections to gender and sexuality in the past and present.

Student 8:

1. We have discussed many great topics throughout this course that changed my way of thinking. One topic/class, when Dr. Jessie Vallejo came in, really changed my

thinking on ensemble stereotypes. I think we talk a lot about retiring some of the old and tired repertoire in our ensemble settings, which is a great conversation, however what does not get discussed enough is who are in these ensembles? What challenges are they facing to simply be a part of music making due to traditions of the past.

2. I really was surprised to learn about Opera, specifically Chinese Opera and the gender roles that played a huge part in that. That was a whole category of gender issues, outside of the typical Castrati, female antagonists, power issues, we normally talk about.
3. I think that this week's Cheng reading was very thought provoking for me. It is such an important conversation to have in regards of "do we actually love music? Or do we just like to hate on people we don't like?".
4. One thing I learned more about in this class was the direct relation between the HIV epidemic and music. I think talking about queer issues in the music field and creating communities that normalize queer music is something that is super important. It is awesome to see the growth we have made (though there's still much more that needs to be done) ie IPO.
5. I am still super curious about 19th century female and queer composers, and how their work got swept under the rug not only because society didn't feel like it was "good music" due to their gender roles, but a lot of the time, the composers themselves did not feel like their music was "worthy"

Student 9:

1. One thing that changed for me is realizing how deeply ingrained these issues are across all disciplines of music, all classes, all time periods, and more. I think going forward I'll be able to look at contemporary topics with a much more critical and refined lens compared to before taking the class.
2. This is kind of the same as the answer to my first question but it is truly shocking how vast and deep these issues are.
3. The subject I found the most thought-provoking was probably when we talked about women and the blues in the beginning of the semester. The blues and the jazz sphere I feel like is often seen to be this inclusive space (or at least more than the classical sphere) and during this time it was very much the opposite of that.
4. One thing I learned in this class that relates to other spheres of music I'm in is all of the conversations we had about how historically women are not seen as "professionals" in the music and teaching spaces. Women are often assumed to be passive enjoyers of playing/ participating in music rather than professionals in it. As well as the idea that women can teach amateurs but not professionals. It is not something I really thought about before but will probably carry in the back of my mind from now on.

5. One thing I am still curious about is the gendering of certain instruments and how that came about. I know we talked a little bit about it in the beginning of the semester but I would like to go more in depth and learn about more instruments!

Student 10:

1. Before this course, I thought that music, gender, and sexuality in music would discuss more of the political aspect of music (protest, movements, etc.) Now, I see music/gender/sexuality as an intersection of gender roles, biases, and history. Music is commonly used as a form of expression, and by examining gender and sexuality in music, we can learn a lot about what was going on in history at that time.

2. Something that really surprised me was the "Voice, Technology, and Gender" subunit. I spoke about this a bit in my final, and essentially what really shocked me the most was my own unawareness. When you read about events regarding music/gender/sexuality that took place in the past, there is some hope that we as a society have moved away from that and experience less of these issues. However, it was really eye opening for me not to have seen clear gendered stereotypes in music staring me in the face in my day-to-day life.

3. The Disco Unit/ subject was very thought provoking for me. This unit really highlighted the ideals of commercialized music. Many people lost their safe spaces because someone in a position of power decided it could be a money maker. Those who experienced disco in its early days were barred from it at the height of its success. This reminded me of what Beyonce is currently doing with her newest albums; reclaiming cultural music that had been stolen and commercialized in the past

4. Something I learned in this class that connects with my current musicking is the erasure of composers and musicians from the canon. I am currently trying to create my hour recital program and I really wanted to include music from queer and female identifying composers. The current violin "canon" has about three pieces that fit this category and programming them felt more like checking a box, because they are the only pieces from queer/female identifying composers that are "currently"/commonly performed. This class challenged me to dig a little deeper in my search, because music like this does exist; it's just really hard to find. I came up with a better program that I am really excited about that steers away from your traditional "Classical" requirements (so thank you !!). Also- I am currently looking at grad school applications and they all require "a piece by an underrepresented composer)..... and this feels oddly like universities checking a box.

5. Something I am still very curious about are the small pockets of culture that arose over shared discrimination (horrible wording, I will explain): For example, how a whole genre of music arose from hidden Drag Balls, or how discrimination fueled lyrics and

meaning behind music. I'm curious about all of the hidden pockets we have yet to uncover.

Student 11:

1. One thing that changed throughout the course of this class was my view on music, gender, and sexuality in the rehearsal process. In the past, I had viewed music, gender, and sexuality as being important in the process of rehearsal, learning, studying, and performing music. Now, I believe that music, gender, and sexuality should be at the forefront of my attention when it comes to learning, rehearsing, and performing music so that musicians can perform in a manner that is authentic to each performer.

2. One thing that surprised me were the comparisons to Elvis and drag. It seems obvious, but I had never thought about artists like Elvis through that perspective.

3. The most thought-provoking subject was opera, which I think is because opera fascinates me already. It was interesting learning the roles that music, gender and sexuality play in opera. In addition, despite operas often being disconnected from present day society, it is paramount to have music, gender, and sexuality at the forefront of discussion to ensure that performers are in a comfortable working environment as well as performing a character in a manner that is that unique to that of the performer.

4. One thing that I will be doing in teaching is discussing the role of gender and sexuality with students when introducing, rehearsing, and practicing a piece.

Students are able to understand these complex themes and it is important that we as educators do this. For example, prior to the Pellicciotti performance, Cassidy and I taught a lesson at Canton High School in which we introduced students to opera, as well as explaining the complex themes of gender roles, norms, and beliefs in the 19th century and their significant role in the opera.

5. One thing I am curious about is why is there so much pushback when discussing music, gender, and sexuality? This is kind of an unanswerable question, but it is hard to understand why people are opposed to active discourse in music.

Student 12:

1. I have always believed that gender and sexuality are intertwined with each other, you cannot separate one from the other. I now have a much deeper understanding of the connections between the three.

2. One aspect of the course that surprised me was the music that was played at Saloons and "deviant" establishments. I am not super shocked that this part of history has gotten erased or watered down over time, I wish there was more research and primary documents related to this topic.

3. I loved the Disco unit. I knew the music was a safe space for expression, in every aspect of one's self, but I had no idea that by the end of the movement it had turned into a sort of vanity competition. I really enjoyed confronting my own biases in my music tastes.
4. This class has taught me to be more cautious with what and how I teach topics to my future students. I need to hold space for students to have different ideas and beliefs than myself and allow them to feel safe in the expression of them. If a student says they hate jazz music, I can't kick them out of my room.
5. I would love to learn more about military bands and the roles women and Queer people played in them. I have family in the armed forces and they do not think very highly of Queer people and women, but they play a huge part in their lives. I would love to learn more just to one up them.

Student 13:

1. Before taking this class, I thought that all examples would be extreme. However, after taking the class I learned that there are nuanced themes of gender and sexuality in lots of different types of music, from all different time periods.
2. I vividly remember the day we talked about Elvis. I have always thought of him to just be every young girl's favorite during the time period, but it was interesting to learn that people were speculating about his sexuality and other things at the time.
3. This is pretty generic, but the role of girl groups as a whole. I didn't know of many, so to learn about the community they built for themselves or bands they made for themselves when there wasn't the opportunity was very inspiring.
4. A lot of these problems still exist today towards women in classical fields. During my time here at crane I have experienced people telling me "oh, you need to play more like him' or other comments like that. It made me think of all the girls who experienced the step further, you can't play because you aren't a man.
5. We've obviously made a lot of advancements, but can these advancements be abused by people that don't deserve it? This is obviously a pessimistic outlook, but I wonder if there are any scandals/research into people who have done bad things for the music world and pin that they're an underrepresented person (in whatever capacity that may look like) to like ignore their problems.

Student 14:

1. A lot of what I thought about music, gender, and sexuality before I took the course ended up being what the course ended up being. One thing that changed for me was my view of the canon. I have always known that the canon was biased towards White

dead male composers, but knowing why that is more in depth makes me dislike the canon more than I already did.

2. One of the things that really surprised me in this class was the All girl swing bands. All the Jazz I had been exposed to before was solo male instrumentalists. So it is very surprising that I never thought of women in jazz before, let alone all the girl groups that were popular but not remembered.

3. The most thought provoking subject that we cover was The Blues in the 1920s. This is because I found it very interesting what music is remembered and what has been forgotten. The idea of the canon being made by white men and only having white male (specifically solo) Jazz musicians.

4. One thing I learned in this class is the importance of including underrepresentative composers. I found it very interesting about why the canon is considered the canon. In part because straight white males made it, and they only put composers who looked like them into the canon. So, the importance of when I'm picking music for my students to play is to make sure that it is unbiased and diverse so that every student can see themselves in the composers and the music they're playing.

5. One thing I'm still very curious about is why women weren't allowed to play instruments or sing, especially in the 19th century. I want to know more about the reasoning behind that, beyond that, which is just how it was. I want to know why women were allowed to play certain instruments but not others and why they were allowed to sing certain songs but not others that fascinate me.

Student 15:

1. Before I took this course, I always knew there were problems with gender and sexuality when it came to music, but I pretty much thought it was all in the past. Taking this course made me realize that a lot of these problems are still happening today.

(2) One thing that surprised me about our music/gender/sexuality topics was how underrepresented women are in jazz history. There were so many women involved in jazz history that aren't mentioned in school/discussions.

(3) The subject that was most thought provoking for me was when we discussed the ideas of gender in Broadway musicals. I never really thought of the behind the scenes aspect of Broadway like, but there's a lot of issues!

(4) One thing that I learned in this class that made me think in other areas of music was just the general idea of gender discrimination in the music field. I realized that in general, the majority of my instructors have been men. This was eye opening to think about.

(5) One thing that I'm still really curious about is if there's a wage gap between female and male Broadway performers. How do they get paid? Is it equal?

Student 16:

1. I knew that there was a great variety of ways that music is connected to gender and sexuality before taking this class. I have gained an understanding of how many more people are affected by the influence of music and exactly how they are affected. I also see more how not only the entertainment industry but also the government has a hand in what music is expected to be written and produced.

2) One thing that surprised me is how many different corners of the music world are connected to gender and sexuality. There has always been some level of bias and/or prejudice against different demographics of people for different reasons, but knowing that there are less obvious ways in which these are applied has been interesting to discover.

3) I think American Popular Music in the 1950s and 1960s was one of the most thought provoking topics covered in this class. It was interesting to see the difference in how popular music of males and females were treated so differently. The hidden messages, social influence, and the intended audiences were different and there were things that were acceptable for one side that were highly discouraged for the other.

4) I've learned, in greater detail than I formerly knew, that some people will always find a way to justify how they treat others in a musical setting based on their own thoughts and opinions with little to no regard on how it affects those around them.

5) We looked at these topics from the perspective of America. I'm curious to see a comparison of these topics with another country or culture. America, in some ways, has a more accepting community in many regards than some other countries and I would be intrigued to see what experiences for musicians in other countries is like in the same time period.