PLAYING WITH PIANOS: PRINT MEDIA, MECHANIZATION, GENDER, 
AND CHANGE IN VICTORIAN AMERICA

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

The rise of mechanical music around the turn of the century occurred in the midst of simultaneous explosions in national print media, advertising industries, mass production, and middle-class consumption. During this time, print advertisements for mechanical pianos and phonographs appeared alongside ads for such familiar commodities as sheet music and acoustic instruments. These ads, the messaging they contain, and their placement within particular print publications offer a window into the changing face of music commodities in an increasingly mechanized America. Within this time of transition, I choose to focus primarily on ads for acoustic pianos and mechanical pianos, two classes of the same instrument on opposing sides of the manual/mechanical divide.

Although significant work has been completed on early advertising trends and print media, the intersection of these developments with music commodities remains largely unexplored. Surveying ads during the span of 1914–1916 from the widely-circulated *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Saturday Evening Post*—two periodicals with a shared publisher (Curtis Company) and distinct target audiences—I examine how inherited notions of the Victorian, female-gendered acoustic piano appear in ads and discourses surrounding the mechanical piano during its mid-1910s “player piano” stage. As background, I investigate the confluence of editors, periodical ideologies, general content and ad placement utilizing Curtis Company sources, biographies, and twentieth-century scholarship surrounding the two publications and the piano industry at large. These findings, combined with ad analysis and the compelling near-singularity of ad placement for each piano type in one or the other periodical, point to a distinct set of
social meanings attached to each piano type. The resulting contextualized side-by-side analysis casts an ambiguous light on similarities between the piano types while encouraging the identification of areas of unmistakable difference, challenging current scholarship on both America’s transition to mechanical music and the mechanical piano itself.
Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to many friends and mentors whose academic and personal support is woven into the fabric of this project.

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in my excitement over “player” pianos and the *Ladies’ Home Journal* has served to encourage me endlessly along the way.
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Introduction

Early twentieth-century America witnessed the rise of mass production and middle-class consumption. Simultaneous explosions in national print media and advertising industries brought images of mechanized and mass-produced products ranging from factory-made clothing to automobiles into homes across the country. Music commodities followed suit, and the rise of such industries as sheet-music printing, record pressing, and instrument making are recorded in print ads. New music technologies emerged at this time as well, and the individual commercial histories of the player piano, the phonograph, and later the radio can be found in print ads alongside those musical commodities already familiar to middle-class audiences. These ads, the messaging they contain, and their placement within particular print publications offer a window into the changing face of music commodities in an increasingly mechanized America. Within this time of transition, I choose to focus primarily on ads for acoustic pianos and player pianos, two classes of the same instrument on opposing sides of the manual/mechanical divide.

Significant work has been completed on early advertising trends and print media; however, the intersection of these developments with music commodities remains largely unexplored. Scholarly research that has considered ad messaging behind early mechanical music technology has not included discussion of those ads’ original contexts. Such abstraction overlooks the reality that every ad was placed alongside general content (such as general features, editorials, and so forth) and ads for other commodities. It also

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1 As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, scholarly and general use of mechanical piano terms can be confusing and inconsistent. Although “player piano” has become synonymous for “mechanical piano,” it actually refers to a specific moment in the mechanical piano’s technical development (a stage spanning approximately 1905–1916). My analysis deals primarily with the player piano stage of the mechanical piano’s development.
overlooks the fact that ads were located within specific periodicals, each with their own agendas and target audiences. The goal of this study is to capture that nexus, contextualizing and comparing how and where player pianos were advertised in the years immediately preceding America’s entry into World War I, how player-piano ad messaging and placement compare to that of the instrument’s closest contemporary, the acoustic piano, and what the resulting data suggest about each instrument’s social meaning as music commodities during America’s transition to mechanized sound. This study considers ads and general content from two extremely popular middle-class periodicals: the family-oriented weekly *Saturday Evening Post* and the monthly women’s magazine *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Both were managed under the direction of Curtis Publishing Company. Juxtaposed analysis of the two periodicals brings into acute view links between ad placement patterns and each publication’s agendas and distinct target audiences. Marked by ideological and gendered differences, ad placement trends between the two Curtis Company publications provide a compelling encapsulation of tension between the piano types: within the *Post* and the *LHJ* between 1914–1916, player pianos—despite their growing popularity—can be found only in ads sections of the family-friendly *Post*, while acoustic pianos ads are almost exclusively found in the female-oriented *LHJ*.\(^2\) Side-by-side analysis of the ads themselves uncovers more complicated tension. While surface similarities link player and acoustic piano ads to a Victorian value system, stronger patterns of difference mark player and acoustic ads’

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\(^2\) The span of 1914–1916 was selected for a number of reasons that become clearer as the analysis unfolds. Briefly, this time span marks the midpoint of the player piano’s technological development and the beginning of its mass popularity. In addition, these years fall in the immediate wake of an acoustic piano sales boom (which reached its American height in 1909). Establishing an endpoint at 1916 also avoids the commercial and social complications that accompanied America’s entrance into World War I.
relationships with gender, technology, active music-making/learning, and musical objects.

The power that ad images and text would have had upon middle-class audiences would have been based in those audiences’ familiarity with both instruments’ contemporary social meaning. In Chapter Two of this thesis, I chart the diachronic development of the acoustic and player piano with an emphasis on their presence among, and meaning for, the American music non-specialist. This chapter pays special attention to the intersection of piano types and American channels of mass production and distribution, especially as they involve print media. It also highlights the mechanical piano’s little-discussed mid-1910s developmental stage. In Chapter Three, I detail the social history of the two piano types and look at the intersection between them. Focusing primarily on social rules and ideas around playing acoustic and player pianos, this chapter highlights the state of domestic Victorian acoustic music-making at the turn of the century, as well as how that state was portrayed and reframed within emerging player piano discourses. In this, the player piano’s associations with technology, activity, masculinity, and musical mastery become established against the backdrop of the acoustic piano’s American Victorian associations. Together, Chapters Two and Three narrate how the player piano simultaneously complimented and competed with the Victorian acoustic piano as it exploded onto the American scene. Treating the instruments’ social and consumer histories as inseparable, the analytical method in these chapters aligns itself with Timothy Taylor’s theory that musical commodities have a special capacity to accrue and shift in social meaning specifically because they are
uniquely “caught up in historical, cultural, and social forces.” This approach also follows Mark Katz’s thesis that the effect of any new technology arises from the differences between it and the older technology it “supersedes, improves upon, or extends,” as well as the way individuals react to those differences.

In Chapter Four, I present a comprehensive ad analysis. Patterns of surface similarity and distinct difference between player and acoustic piano ads emerge out of this chapter’s discussion of iconography and text. Background provided in Chapters Two and Three helps bring out the nuanced and often implicit suggestion and metaphor in these ads. The resulting instrument profiles are mutually reinforced by general content and ad placement trends within the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post. Chapter Five concludes the analysis, and presents potential questions for further study.

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4 Mark Katz, Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd., 2010), 4.
Chapter One: Setting the Stage

Several platforms underpin the telling of the social and commercial histories of the acoustic and player piano. These include references to American turn-of-the-century consumer culture, print media and the specific use of Curtis Company publications. This chapter will establish these platforms. First, I will define and defend my use of Victorianism as a temporal and cultural referent. Next, I will present background information on American print media and consumer culture, especially as they relate to the rising role of women’s periodicals in defining gendered consumption patterns. Finally, I will present relevant information about Curtis Company, its advertising innovations and policies, and the particular characters of the LHJ and the Post as personified by their editors.

Victorianism

American Victorianism might seem an unusual starting point given this study’s turn-of-the-century focus, especially when considering the Progressive Era (1896–1916) as an alternative framework. However, this platform effectively anchors the study around nineteenth-century patterns of cultural thought that had continuing influence over twentieth-century music practices. Most periodization labels (like the Progressive Era) are defined by key figures, pieces of legislation and watershed moments, but scholarly and non-scholarly works primarily define American Victorianism as a conceptual set of attitudes and values. Despite their origination in the nineteenth century, attitudes and values within the concept of Victorianism continued to color twentieth-century thought.
Piano types and their ad messaging in 1914–1916 were bound up in lingering Victorianism, and retaining such a focus captures meaning behind the intersection of pianos, print media, mechanization, and gender.

American Victorianism by name directly references the reign of British Queen Victoria (1837–1901), a connection that emphasizes the diffuse cross-Atlantic cultural exchange marking the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholars have since attached the term “American Victorianism” to any number of contrasting times spans within the two centuries; nevertheless, their work consistently refers to a related set of cultural phenomena. For example, although the often-cited yet relatively older essay in Victorian America (1976) by Daniel Howe operates within the literal span of Queen Victoria’s life, Thomas Schlereth’s 1991 publication by the same title begins around the year 1876 and extends analysis to 1915.1 Despite time frame differences, the two scholars’ works align conceptually, and both describe similar European-influenced constellations of ideas—or, as Howe phrases it, “cultural motifs”—whose manifestations across the USA were culturally pervasive throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.2 Other scholarly and popular publications rely on the most familiar conceptual indices of Victorianism, and attach little or no importance to timelines. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (1985) omits specific temporal boundaries, while Stanley Coben’s Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus of Cultural Change in 1920s America (1991) extends Victorianism vaguely...

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2 Howe, Victorian America, 12–13; see also Schlereth, Victorian America, xiv.
beyond World War I in order to discuss its cultural decline.\(^3\) Along the same lines, whereas Ronald G. Walters’ *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America* (2000) limits its discussion to American sex manuals from the nineteenth century, Wayne Erbsen’s more humorous *Manners and Morals of Victorian America* (2009) looks at primary source documents spanning 1836–1916.\(^4\) Throughout these examples, stronger focus remains on attitudes and values than on time frames.

Attitudes and values included within American Victorianism are more readily identifiable than timelines. Rebecca Edwards’ recent account of the American Gilded Age offhandedly describes American Victorianism as primarily, “parasols and bustles, over-stuffed parlor furniture, and sexual prudery,” an analysis that—despite being facile—concisely captures elements of gendered etiquette, material culture, and morality central to an American Victorian value system.\(^5\) Howe’s work thirty years prior details the centrality of self-control and regulation more completely, including the “postponement of gratification” (including but not limited to sexual gratification), “sobriety,” “self improvement,” and “conscientiousness.”\(^6\)

Although these ideals concerned overall behavior, the concept of American Victorianism specifically located the home as the epicenter of learning and practicing these social rules, with special roles and rules for women in particular. Chapter titles


\(^6\) Howe, *Victorian America*, 17.
from Ellen Plante’s book *Women at Home in Victorian America* illustrate how the home served as the primary site for social rules: “One: Virtuous Women,” “Two: The Victorian Home,” “Three: Motherhood and Family Life,” “Four: Manners, Polite Society and Personal Appearance,” and “Five: Home Work, Handiwork and Leisure.” Such focus on controlling home life makes sense when considering the concurrent rapid changes to society that industrialization caused. In fact, scholars largely agree that ideas and attitudes within Victorian American thought functioned as coping mechanisms during intense processes of modernization. Industrialization fundamentally altered families’ relationships with the outside world, propelling massive rural-to-urban migration and increasing distance between the working world and the home. At the same time, industrialization brought more of the outside world into the home, as increasingly available and inexpensive mass-produced commodities met with growing disposable income levels.

The concept of American Victorianism can be understood as reacting to and against such changes, and many of its central values appear as heightened forms of ideas and beliefs predating the nineteenth century. For example, Christianity took on an increasingly public face, most obviously evidenced by an obsessive and religiously directed focus on morality. In a similar way, increasingly gendered notions of work and public/private life during the nineteenth century tied back to older patriarchal family structures: as men increasingly held jobs outside of the home, domestic spaces and activities became tied more strongly to women and women’s work. At the same time,

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8 See for example Colleen McDannell, “Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America,” in *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, ed. Jessica Foy and
other key values within American Victorianism reflected, rather than rejected, industrialization. For example, work ethic and time thrift saw exaggeration and systemization within the developing industrial environment of mass production and consumption. The development of Frederick Taylor’s famous efficiency method for manufacturing in the nineteenth century and its twentieth-century application to American housekeeping demonstrates the embrace of public-sphere industrialization within the home.9

The strongest public advocates of American Victorian values belonged to a select and specific group—Howe labels them “mostly Northern [US], mostly middle-income, mostly Whig-republican, literary men and women”—however, the pervasive presence and aspirational nature of its ideologies made American Victorianism widely accessible and desirable. Elements of self-conscious didacticism within American Victorianism redoubled the spread of this ideology. Sample titles of etiquette books spanning the mid-nineteenth through early twentieth centuries bring to life the popular currency of “right” living, for example: *Hints on Etiquette and the Usages of Society* (1843), *The Moral Philosophy of Courtship and Marriage* (1859), *Etiquette, the American Code of Manners* (1884), *Right Living* (1894), *The Wrong and Peril of Woman Suffrage* (1909) and *Manners and Social Usages* (1912).10


Print media served as a major site for the cross-country spread of Victorian values, and increasingly available and affordable periodicals and books (such as the titles listed above) introduced an American concept of Victorianism to swelling ranks of literate Americans. Literacy statistics are unreliable and incomplete leading up to the 1870s, but scholars agree that even in 1840 America boasted higher per capita primary school enrollment than any other wealthy (European) nation.\textsuperscript{11} Illiteracy rates fell even further after the Civil War when publically funded primary schools became the norm across the country. Table 1.1 tracks American illiteracy rates beginning in 1870:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black and Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.1: American illiteracy rates, 1870–1920.\textsuperscript{12}**

Table 1.1 highlights higher illiteracy rates among African Americans (and possibly Native Americans); however, illiteracy rates were also very uneven among white Americans, largely depending on where they lived. Whereas illiteracy was essentially eliminated from New England by the 1840s, twenty percent of white native-born southerners remained illiterate into the 1860s.\textsuperscript{13} Such links between geography, race and...

\textsuperscript{11} It is unclear how or if enslaved African Americans are accounted for in these studies.
literacy rates may suggest which groups of Americans were more likely tuning into the Victorian-pitched conversations taking place in national print media sources.

Minority and southern populations aside, countless Americans were able to access Victorian ideas through the conduit of print media. The medium itself facilitated diverse and piecemeal participation: one could follow an etiquette book’s instructions on table place settings without serving a fancy dinner. Howe’s and Nancy Bercaw’s respective descriptions of this aspirational quality both highlight the resulting plurality of experiences. Howe emphasizes the multiplicity of Victorian cultures in the US, both in terms of individuals’ experiences and regional variants, stating that “participation [was] a matter of degree.”14 Along related lines, Bercaw’s work with American nineteenth-century material culture questions the existence of a coherent middle class at all. Bercaw argues that common material traces of middle-class aspirations—like parlor bric-a-brac and decorative needlepoint—cover up the heterogeneity of experiences within the so-called middle class. In arguing that the Victorian middle class was nothing more than the illusionary result of an “ideology,” Bercaw highlights the central importance and legitimacy of simply striving toward that ideology.15

As a broad concept, American Victorianism also accommodated seemingly contradictory manifestations throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The example most relevant to this study is the marked shift from a mid-century producer ethic to a postbellum consumer ethic. In this, strong correlations between women, thrift, and morality from the mid-nineteenth century carried into attitudes marking the era of mass consumption. The following ad (Example 1.1) from 1915 touts values of thrift and

14 Howe, Victorian America, 6.
craftsmanship even while making a sales pitch for a seemingly non-essential mass-produced kitchen gadget:

Example 1.1: “Look for Lisk,” contradictory messaging in advertisements (*LHJ*, 1915)

The text in Example 1.1 emphasizes time and monetary thrift, stating: “No hand basting—only the clock to watch. No shrunken roasts—but lower meat bills.” It also merges scientific innovation with domesticity to frame the purchase in moral terms, as the line, “Sanitary Seamless Stamped Seal with rounded edges where dirt can’t hide,” brings factors of family health into the decision to buy the roasting pan. At the same time as by-hand basting receives criticism, the mass-production of Lisk’s Self-Basting Roaster

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is deemphasized in favor of an image of fine craftsmanship and uniqueness. Text at the end of the ad reads: “Every article is distinctive in design, beauty and durability.”17

Because of its flexibility, an American Victorian lens can be applied to an understanding of elements said to typify the Progressive Era. Key among such Progressive areas targeted for social solution around the turn of the century were labor conditions, temperance, women’s suffrage, and living conditions for immigrants, the working poor, and children.18 These reforms were often enacted by—or demanded of—the state.19 Protestant America became less concerned about saving souls for an afterlife and more concerned with how those souls contended with the here-and-now mortal condition. Results of this “Social Gospel” were legion, evidenced by the settlement house movement, the shortening workweek, education reform, and the achievement of women’s suffrage and prohibition in 1919 and 1920 respectively.20 During this time, American Victorianism existed as one frame through which to advocate or reject such reforms. For example, the moral, gendered, and highly idealistic terms applied to discussions of suffrage and temperance in the LHJ during the mid-1910s contrasted with

17 Although not as central to this study, Howe emphasizes diachronic contradiction as well. For example, the general elevation of women that led many to glorify home life enabled others to seek suffrage and work outside the home. Howe specifically terms this as the difference between Victorian “culture” and “society.” Howe, Victorian America, 12–13.

18 Daniel Horowitz’s history of American attitudes toward morality, spending, and consumer culture around the turn of the twentieth century confirms that social studies of the working poor underwent an attitude shift during the years leading up to and following 1900. He states that reformers began using “conditions” rather than “character” to explain the problems of poverty. Publications such as How the Other Half Lives (Jacob Riis, 1890), Prisoners of Poverty and Women Wage Earners (Helen S. Campbell, 1887, 1893) and The Workers (Walter Whykoff, 1897−98) document the lives of America’s working poor. Daniel Horowitz, The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875–1940 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).


appeals to logic, equality, and realism in the *Post*. As will become central to this study’s unfolding narrative, the continued application of an American Victorian lens to social issues within sites like the mid-1910s *LHJ* speaks to Victorianism’s cultural currency, especially as applied to culturally loaded themes like women’s suffrage and domestic music making.

References to Victorianism in this analysis—despite the rather late span of 1914–1916 at its center—are particularly useful because the ideology continued to index the acoustic piano’s social identity into the early twentieth century. Moreover, this emphasis highlights strongly the distinct ideals and practices surrounding the mechanical player piano, while at the same time illuminating the ways in which advertisements for the player piano continued to reference its Victorian cousin. Victorianism is also a useful way to frame other nodes of this analysis. Early twentieth-century correlations between women and consumption in print media contain Victorian-era conceptions of gender, as does more generally the ideological tone marking editorials, content, and ads within the *LHJ*.

*The American Periodical: Gender, and Consumption*

Although nineteenth-century Victorian etiquette books may be more familiar than Victorian periodicals today, in their time American periodicals played an enormous role in broadcasting the voices of Howe’s “mostly Northern, mostly middle-income, mostly Whig-republican, literary men and women” throughout an increasingly connected country. The year 1825 marked the beginning of the rise of general magazines, especially women’s magazines, and is signaled by a tremendous growth in numbers of

21 Howe, *Victorian America*, 12.
publications: the one hundred magazines in national circulation in 1825 grew to number six hundred by 1850.\textsuperscript{22} Within this group, \textit{Godey’s Lady’s Book} (1830–1898) ranked among the most successful (in terms of circulation numbers) until just after the Civil War, at which point the \textit{LHJ} began its ascent into the top position.\textsuperscript{23} A consumption-oriented magazine before its time, \textit{Godey’s} pages included features that would become common in postbellum periodicals, such as advocacy of laborsaving devices, commentary on competing product types, and the innovation of store-bought clothing.\textsuperscript{24} Well-anchored in Victorian sensibility, the underlying ambition of \textit{Godey’s} creators established another precedent. Writing in 1870, editor Louis Godey wrote:

\begin{quote}
The LADY’S BOOK was organized for the express purpose of exercising a salutary influence over the moral, intellectual, and social characteristics of women; developing, refining, and elevating the sentiments and sympathies of her nature, and preparing her for the duties and offices which give pleasure to domestic life.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

This Victorian-esque, openly didactic orientation with key emphasis placed on the enrichment of women’s characters within domestic spaces marked women’s magazines—including the \textit{LHJ}—well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, \textit{The Magazine in America, 1741–1990} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8, 11. This number does not include startups that had failed. In addition, the earliest American women’s magazines dating from the mid-eighteenth century targeted elite audiences, as the magazines were quite expensive and literacy rates were fairly low beyond the upper classes (11, 3).


\textsuperscript{24} Tebbel and Zuckerman, \textit{The Magazine in America}, 34.

\textsuperscript{25} Louis Godey, “Godey’s Arm-Chair,” \textit{Godey’s Lady’s Book} 80 (1870), 100.

Paralleling macro-industrial growth, a rush of converging factors spurred an even larger periodical explosion in the post-Civil War years. Schlereth states that whereas 1885 boasted four American monthly magazines with circulation numbers above 100,000, by 1905 that number had grown to twenty magazines with a combined circulation of 5.5 million.27 (Putting this in perspective, the US Census Bureau estimates a US population in 1885 of about 57 million, and in 1905 of about 84 million.28) During this time, industrial escalation brought more people to cities and into greater levels of disposable income. Simultaneous to this urban-to-rural migration, the Postal Act of 1879 and the advent of rural free delivery in 1898 made cross-country print media and commercial shipping more affordable.29 Printing innovations—including mass-production methods and new machinery—resulted in fixed manufacturing expenses that in turn incentivized the push for larger and larger circulation numbers.30

The innovation that most dramatically spurred lower costs and higher circulation was the new nexus of print advertising and general periodicals. Other than on the occasional back cover, early periodicals rarely carried ads.31 Advertisements began supplanting subscription fees as the main income source for American general periodicals beginning in the late-1800s. The impact the purchasing of ad space had on magazine

27 Schlereth, *Victorian America*, 160.
prices and circulation is dramatic: whereas a reader would have spent twenty-five cents on an 1880 issue of *Cosmopolitan* or *McClure’s*, she would only spend ten cents for the same publication in 1893. Average income information among laboring classes found in Table 1.2 puts these prices in perspective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Income per day in 1880</th>
<th>Income per day in 1893</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Labor</td>
<td>$1.25</td>
<td>$1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Mason</td>
<td>$2.58</td>
<td>$3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>$2.68</td>
<td>$3.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Select average income levels among laboring classes in the US, 1880 and 1893

As Table 1.2 helps us understand, magazine prices were dropping even as incomes (other than farm labor) were rising.

By the first decades of the 1900s, the top circulating women’s magazines in the US were all comparably and inexpensively priced. Table 1.3 shows the 1912 circulation numbers and prices of what have come to be labeled the “Big Six” women’s magazines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Cover Price</th>
<th>Annual Price (with Subscription)</th>
<th>Annual Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ladies’ Home Journal</em></td>
<td>¢15</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>1,538,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>McCall’s</em></td>
<td>¢5</td>
<td>¢50</td>
<td>1,084,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Delineator</em></td>
<td>¢15</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>930,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Women’s Home Companion</em></td>
<td>¢15</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>758,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pictorial Review</em></td>
<td>¢15</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>616,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Good Housekeeping</em></td>
<td>¢15</td>
<td>$1.50</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3: “Big Six” women's magazines, 1912

(Membership in the “Big Six” was based on claimed circulation numbers.)

Advertising gained a progressively stronger voice in publication identity from the turn of the century, evidenced by greater ad volume, increasingly indiscriminate

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placement of ads among non-ad content such as editorials, short stories, and advice columns, and growing stylistic congruency between content and ads. The normalization and integration of advertisements within women’s magazines and magazines for the home led trends in the wider American print media industry.

Changes in consumer culture were bound up with the print media and advertising boom, and the wave of post-Civil War periodicals increasingly naturalized connections between women and consumption, particularly women’s consumption on behalf of their children and husbands. Cited reasons for the emerging connection between women and consumption are legion; however, the increasing division between domestic and commercial spaces within Victorian-era social trends provides one clear-cut explanation. Helen Damon-Moore’s extensive work with the LHJ led her to conclude that early twentieth-century ideas of gendered consumption correlated strongly with the distinctly domestic orientation of the earliest mass-produced items, as many advertised consumable products available to the 1915 middle-class citizen—from store-bought clothing to washing machines—related in some way to in-home use. Other scholars connect women’s consumption with their Victorian roles as their family’s source of morality and upward social mobility. Karen Kitch, for example, links family social mobility to how

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35 Garvey states that although a limited number of magazines integrated ads into text columns by the 1890s, by the 1910s not only were ads intermingled in texts, but also individual non-ad features were broken up into nonconsecutive pagination in order to more fully expose readers to ads as they sought out the conclusion of a story or article. Adman in the Parlor, 4.


and what women consumed, a point well supported by contemporaneous references to women’s higher capacity to select quality commodities, as well as strongly emphasized aspects of middle-class respectability and status through “proper consumption.”

Hints at morality in the earlier Lisk Automatic Basting ad (Example 1.1) demonstrate this phenomenon. The correlative strength between women and consumption was so strong that advertisers often identified women as the singular consumer market: according to Scalon, during the first few decades of the twentieth century manufacturers and their advertising agencies viewed the market as: “female, middle class, and white.”

This same scholar points to women’s periodicals as a critical site for modeling women’s consumption, stating that, “women’s magazines…helped naturalize women’s link to the marketplace through consumption.”

Curtis Company

Curtis Company Publishing was in the vanguard of publishing and print advertising during this time, going a step beyond cornering the market to change it. Curtis’s stand-alone marketing research department—founded in 1911—was the first of its kind within the magazine industry, serving as a model for its peers. The company’s business acuity directly reflected the experience and expertise of its personnel. Founder-publisher Cyrus Curtis (1850–1933) brought to the company a background in selling ad space, and is recorded to have stated, “Advertising. That’s what made me whatever I

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am. In addition to Curtis’s experience, iconic LHJ editor Edward Bok—holding that position between the years of 1889 and 1919—came to Curtis from Scribners, where he held the position of advertising director. Comparatively, Post editor George Horace Lorimer came to the periodical without a propitious literary or business résumé, but quickly found his feet within the magazine business within the first few years of his tenure and would remain at the magazine for nearly forty years (1899–1936). The two largest Curtis Company periodicals rapidly rose to the top of the field, both hitting circulation numbers above the one million mark by the mid-1910s. By 1929, the combined share of ads placed in the LHJ and the Post within national markets reached forty percent. (Within any given issue around the 1910s, a LHJ reader could expect about forty percent of page space allocated to ads, while a Post reader could expect about fifty percent.) Commerce and publication identity were so connected that at an advertising conference in 1915, LHJ’s readership was specifically defined in terms of its average income level rather than its regional or urban/rural demographic. Neither was the Post’s identity uninfluenced by commercial concerns. When Lorimer began in 1899, the Post was a men’s magazine, targeting businessmen specifically. After much difficulty convincing advertisers that men would respond to their ads, the publication rebranded itself as “family friendly.” A female Post readership was crucial to the

43 Scalon, Inarticulate Longings, 198. Scalon does not specify what sort of ad space Curtis sold.
44 Charles Scribner was a New York publisher. Steinberg, Reformer in the Marketplace, 2.
46 Scalon, Inarticulate Longings, 199.
47 Damon-Moore, Magazines for the Millions, 302.
48 Scalon details that this target audience included “middle-class women, those from families whose incomes were between $1200 and $2500 per year.” Inarticulate Longings, 14. LHJ readership did appear to follow regional patterns, a topic considered by Douglas Ward. See Douglas Ward, “The Geography of the Ladies’ Home Journal: An Analysis of a Magazine's Audience, 1911–55,” Journalism History 34, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2–14.
publication’s success in part because they were the presumed consumers, and it became anecdotally known that a portion of the LHJ readership also read the Post.\(^49\)

Given Bok’s and Cyrus Curtis’s advertising savvy and the publishing company’s market share, Curtis Company’s reputation for exerting considerable influence on advertising agencies and individual advertisers is hardly surprising. Although the majority of ad copy was supplied to Curtis from outside advertising companies—such as J. S. Thompson—Curtis Company did assert a degree of agency. According to Salme Steinberg, Curtis aimed to mold advertising content to match publication personality and non-ad content, holding sway over layout and design. These decisions affected what and how products received ad space as well as what sorts of products the company sought to advertise. Curtis himself was specifically known to “reject” ads he thought incompatible with particular publications.\(^50\) The precise level and types of influence Curtis Company and its editors had upon what and how commodities were advertised in the two publications is not clear; however, both publications featured self-conscious, pro-advertising messaging, and the LHJ in particular modeled for its readers instances of women putting full trust in the magazine’s reliability and discretion with regards to advertising.\(^51\)

Curtis Publishing Company paired its control over advertising with a strict hands-off philosophy when it came to the individual publication’s content, meaning LHJ editor Edward Bok and Post editor George Lorimer each set the ideological tone for their

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\(^{49}\) Although figures are not available, high ad volume for the LHJ placed in the Post, and vice versa, suggests Curtis Company was aware of readership overlap.

\(^{50}\) Steinberg, *Reformer in the Marketplace*, 14.

\(^{51}\) Particular instances of this will be discussed in Chapter 4; however, Bok encouraged women to trust the magazine with all their concerns though his weekly “To Whom To Write” column, which offered women free, personalized advice from experts on everything from hat trimming, to child care, to female-appropriate reading matter.
respective publications. Although the two editors shared a publishing company, an orientation towards the American middle class, and a penchant to micromanage their publications’ content, their respective publications reflected contrasting aims and ideologies. Side-by-side content analysis of sample editorial pages from each publication crystallizes these differences: The Post editorial from November 28, 1914 included discussion of foreign labor on American cargo ships, government ownership of railroads, American import/export numbers, and Germany’s financial situation, as well as critiques of America’s two-party system and Americans’ general hesitancy towards “progress.” Also included was a denouncement of global poverty in an era of science and technology. Bok’s LHJ editorial from the same month and year advised mothers to allow their boys to be boys, towns to choose their librarians well, and women to bear the trials of life with character and a smile and to reconsider the way they treated wait staff. It also reported on the state of prohibition in Kansas and on congressional debate over the flammability of flannel baby clothing. Clearly, content in the two sample editorial pages shows contrast between the obvious politically and publicly oriented topical focus of Lorimer’s editorials and the home life emphasis marking the LHJ. Elsewhere, Bok’s candid discussion of his own resistance towards adding a current events department to the LHJ confirms this as a trend rather than a coincidence.52

When the editors did approach a common topic, their take and tone often contrasted. Examples 1.2 and 1.3—taken from the earlier described LHJ and Post editorials—both address the topic of women’s suffrage. Lorimer’s logic-based endorsement of women’s suffrage (Example 1.3) is anchored around the editor’s comfort

52 Within a column asking for readers’ input, Bok directly stated, “we cannot start a ‘current events’ department.” Edward Bok, editorial, Ladies’ Home Journal, September 1914, 1.
with overall “change in the form of the game.” On the other hand, Bok affirms an increasingly outmoded image of woman-as-homemaker, applying a dismissive and condescending tone to the question of women’s suffrage. Bok’s and Lorimer’s editorial voices—along with their stances—are markedly different in these excerpts, supporting Damon-Moore’s overall characterization of Bok as “pedantic and preachy,” compared with Lorimer’s “flippant and funny” tone.\(^{53}\)

In addition, the two editors’ viewpoints on women’s duties during a time when women were working outside the home in increasing numbers does a particularly good job of encapsulating each editor’s relationship with contemporary America.\(^{56}\) Examples 1.4 and 1.5 capture the two editors’ orientation toward social change:

Example 1.2: Editorial from the *LHJ* (1914)

Example 1.3: Editorial from the *Post* (1914)

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56 Women were certainly working outside the home at greater rates at the turn of the century; however, precise figures are difficult to quantify. Women’s work often went unreported in census documents, and women’s part-time employment was not always recognized. This does not appear to change until the 1940s. What existing data does show is an upward curve in women’s
As in Example 1.2, Bok naturalizes an idealistic Victorian-esque view of women’s boundaries in Example 1.4. Lorimer, on the other hand, uses blunt imagery (literally) to present social change as fact, and his sarcasm strongly communicates the message: “of course women are strong enough to vote.” Notably all of the characters in the public-


sphere context in Example 1.5 are women whose obvious physical robustness is made to stand for their mental and psychological fortitude.

While editorial and non-editorial content from the mid-1910s *Post* evidenced Lorimer’s progressive stances towards women’s education, suffrage, and rights in the workplace, Bok’s *LHJ* generally opposed or reacted with negative ambivalence towards social change when it appeared to threaten his ideal vision of men’s and women’s roles.59 Besides opposition to married women working outside of the home, Bok expressed skepticism toward women’s higher education, opposed women’s suffrage and many public-sphere clubs, and disapproved of the “New Woman.”60 Some of the most powerfully suggestive writing in the *LHJ* during the years leading up to World War I achieves this conservatism through the combination of personal tones of experience with veiled opposition to change. An excerpt from “As We Go Marching On” found in the 1915 May issue of the *LHJ* exemplifies this style:

> Being out in the world is, like most other great experiences, just a “state of mind.” Many a girl whose home is her workshop, whose baby is her job and whose salary is love, is more truly out in the world than many another girl who takes the 8:15 car every morning, yet whose inner self is so carefully or blindly shut away from the realities that they never “get her goat.”61

59 Cohn has noted a shift towards inclusion and progressivism in Lorimer’s attitudes towards women around the year 1910; Cohn, *Creating America*, 76. Damon-Moore hypothesizes that this shift was potentially influenced by Lorimer’s need for a female audience for the economic success of his publication, although as far as I am aware Lorimer never spoke to this fact (*Magazines for the Millions*, 319). For his part, Bok did promote certain kinds of social reform—such as his infamous campaign against the alcohol hidden in patent medicines and his failed attempt to steer American women away from using aigrette feathers on their hats. Scalon, *Inarticulate Longings*, 110.


61 “As We Go Marching On,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, May 1915, 44.
Signed by “A Girl,” this sort of anonymous writing—possibly penned by Bok himself—stood for common sense in the LHJ. Bok’s social conservatism is readily evident during the years at the heart of this study, and his Victorian-influence idealized vision of women and the wider world grew so far from common public opinion during his final years at the LHJ that the editor’s 1919 “retirement” may have been less elective than compulsory: Steinberg points to a 1933 News-Week article confirming that Bok had rejected Cyrus Curtis’s call for modernization before he stepped down as editor of the LHJ.62

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Editorial autonomy in the two Curtis Company publications allowed both periodicals their own ideological profiles. Both targeted middle-class audiences, and overlap of readership can be assumed between the two publications. Both carried similar kinds of content, such as editorials, commissioned fiction stories, interviews, and nonfiction pieces. Both were products of nineteenth-century Victorian literacy trends, the print media boom, and turn-of-the-century consumer culture (a phenomenon that will be discussed further in Chapter Four). However, the massively popular LHJ and Post approached the mid-1910s with very different lenses, to the extent that Damon-Moore describes how their mutually unintelligible “cultural language[s]” prevented them from being “in dialogue” with one another.63 As Chapter Four will explore at length, orientational differences between the two publications extended beyond editorials to include general content, music and cultural production content, and trends in the nature and placement of advertising for general commodities. All of these trends, combined

62 Steinberg, Reformer in the Marketplace, 143, 71.
63 Damon-Moore, Magazine’s for the Millions, 323.
with specific ad placement trends for acoustic and player pianos, produce a rich profile of what the two piano types stood for (and against) as contemporaries of one another during the mid-1910s. First, however, a discussion of the piano types themselves is in order.
Chapter Two:  
Pianos Everywhere, From Acoustic to Mechanical

Example 2.1: Player Piano ad Iconography (*Post*, 1915)

The piano’s history during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is nothing short of incredible, transitioning from a cottage-industry specialty instrument, to a mass-produced commodity, to include eventually both acoustic and mechanical models. In 1870—one hundred and seventy years after its Italian birth—Britain, France, Germany, and the United States produced a combined 85,000 acoustic pianos; forty years later, annual output by these countries had increased more than sevenfold to 600,000 in the wake of imperialism. This piano explosion traveled simultaneously beyond Western Europe and the United States, and the instrument began appearing in parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia in tandem with its growing prominence in the West. During this period, acoustic pianos became increasingly accessible commodities understood not only as music objects, but also as highly-gendered ideological icons of upper- and middle-class Western European life. Nowhere was this value-laden boom felt more strongly than in the US, whose relationship with pianos—both in the ways they were made and used—

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3 Arriving first at the sides of foreign envoys seeking to recreate “home,” Hirai and Parakilas describe scenarios in which pianos were used by conquerors—in conjunction with other tools—in an effort to replace indigenous habits and value systems with Eurocentric ideas. As the authors describe, the piano and the ideologies it was made to represent were not always offered to the newly conquered as much as they were forced upon them (“Seven: 1870s to 1920s,” 285).
betrayed a complicated industrial and cultural relationship with the European Old World. The player piano’s popularity came on the heels of the acoustic piano’s commercial and social success in the first decade of the twentieth century. Bound up in the waning mass appeal of its acoustic cousin and America’s warming attitudes towards semi-passive music experiences, the mechanical piano’s ascent marks a shift in how Americans thought about and made home music.

This chapter explores the turn-of-the-century piano vogue in America with the goal of understanding the mechanical, economic, and social factors that influenced production and consumption. It begins with the acoustic piano industry during the mid-to late nineteenth century, including description of the various domestic strategies that underpinned mass production and distribution, and of its relationship to international markets. Next, it describes the acoustic piano within American social life, focusing on the instrument’s value and meaning for middle-class music amateurs. The second part of the chapter applies a similar method to examine the player piano’s development out of the acoustic piano tradition, with particular focus on its mechanical history. Specifically, this section highlights the mechanical piano as it was around the mid-1910s, a little discussed phase during which player piano operators were encouraged to actively shape music. Its social history will be covered in Chapter Three.

_Acoustic Pianos: Industrial History_

America’s piano industry in the mid- to late nineteenth century was caught up in a perfect storm as technological advancement and entrepreneurial spirit met with seemingly insatiable waves of new consumers. Although keyboard building before the 1870s saw
its strongest production numbers in England and France, by 1896 the world’s five largest piano manufacturers were located in America (driven by the knowledge capital of European immigrant craftsmen).4 America was able to produce more pianos more quickly and sell them to more consumers, all the while improving the mechanism of the still-young instrument, in large part because the American business atmosphere lacked the weight of convention that had hitherto been Europe’s strength. Reaction back in Europe toward American techniques included both imitation and skepticism; however, American methods and technology were widely reproduced despite their newness and unorthodoxy. Ehrlich would later label the US industry during the years leading up to World War I as the “pacemaker of technology and business organization” among its European counterparts.5

Oriented in modernist discourse, positive attitudes toward science, technology, and progress marked the American piano manufacturing paradigm.6 Domestic manufacturing, design, and sales at this time were notable for their willingness to accept change and technical innovation.7 In a momentous modification of European-modeled by-hand and made-to-order craftsmanship, the “American System” of manufacturing capitalized on laborsaving machinery and Taylorism-inspired notions of efficiency.8

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6 Full discussion of modernist discourse is beyond the scope of this analysis. For further discussion of modernist tenets and turn-of-the-century music commodity manufacturing, see David Suisman, “The Sound of Money: Music, Machines, and Markets, 1890–1925” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002), Chapter 3.
8 See Frederick Taylor, Principles of Scientific Management (New York: Harper, 1911). For discussion of the American System, Taylorism and piano manufacturing, and overall attitudes toward piano-making, see Craig Roell, The Piano in America: 1890–1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North...
These processes resulted in an entirely different conception of piano making that separated American industry from its European forbearers: while well-established European names continued producing instruments from their small workshops, new American companies willingly embraced assembly-line manufacturing and machine-aided production. These practices translated into particularly high production numbers for American companies in comparison with their European counterparts, and by 1900, more than half the world’s pianos were American made.

American design innovation exhibited this same readiness towards change and risk, a characteristic visible in the example of the development and adoption of the piano’s now-standard solid-iron frame. Construction of pianos in the 1700s and early 1800s left them unable to maintain high levels of string tension, limiting what materials could be used in piano strings and affecting instruments’ tuning integrity. Addressing this problem, Bostonian Alpheus Babcock patented blueprints for a one-piece iron frame for the piano in 1825. Babcock joined forces with the American Chickering Company in 1837, which—although it was widely feared that iron would negatively affect sound quality—was willing to cast aside convention to try the new design. By the 1840s, Chickering adopted the plan for its square and grand pianos, eventually setting US

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9 As an example, whereas American-based Chickering and Steinway built piano factories in 1838 and 1860 respectively, their English counterpart Broadwood did not adopt assembly line processes or machinery until 1902. Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making and Selling Pianos,” in Piano Rolls: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano, ed. James Parakilas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 56.


Nevertheless, certain major European companies remained hesitant to follow suit, even after one-piece iron frames became the norm across the US.\(^1\)

At the extreme of American efficiency and innovation were the legendary cost-cutting methods of American Joseph P. Hale, the man credited with taking the mass production of pianos to unheard-of heights. Motives aside—Hale was accused in his time of prioritizing the bottom line over quality—the piano maker succeeded in turning out large quantities of pianos at lower rates: Hale’s annual output of 7,200 pianos in 1880 put to shame Steinway’s and Chickering’s production of 2,000 and 2,900 instruments respectively. In addition, Hale’s pianos sold at about one-third of the cost of his competitors.\(^3\) Hale is perhaps best known for his popularization of “stenciling” pianos, a process wherein instruments were branded post-production with the names of individual dealers or with fictitious names made to resemble familiar piano brands.\(^5\) Example 2.2, a cover page from the *Music Trade Review*, reflects the American music world’s less-than-favorable opinion of Hale’s dominance:


\(^3\) Good and Hoover specifically describe hesitation on the part of English Broadwood and French Erard piano companies toward the one-piece iron frame on the grounds of tone quality. Hoover also mentions initial uneasiness among certain American companies towards adopting the solid-iron frame, especially in New York and Baltimore. Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making and Selling Pianos,” 59.

\(^5\) Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* 139; Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making and Selling Pianos,” 60–61. Good and Hoover also discuss how some companies—such as Steinway—showed deliberately little interest in lowering prices (61).

\(^1\) Sometimes these pianos were of decent quality, but more often than not, fraudulent names led back to shoddily built instruments. For discussion of stencil pianos, see Roell, *The Piano in America*, 74–79; Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*, 90; and Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 182.
Besides evoking “Uncle Sam” in both effigy and headline, this cover bitterly protests Hale’s market power with (faded) captions of “Nothing but the cheapest,” (middle right of image) and “Hail to the Chief” (bottom center).

Despite the seemingly inexorable and independent forward march of the American piano industry, its ongoing relationship with Europe was of no small consequence. As mentioned earlier, American companies were often built on European intellectual capital. Heavy immigration mid-century (particularly from Germany) meant that today’s American piano maker was often yesterday’s European craftsman. The prominent Steinway Company, for example, was founded by German immigrant Henry Steinway in 1853, three years after his US arrival.\textsuperscript{17} The Steinway story also illustrates the importance of US-European feedback loops: although the company quickly rose to

\textsuperscript{16} Music Trade Review, cartoon, November 18, 1876. Image found in Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making, and Selling Pianos,” 63.

\textsuperscript{17} Ehrlich, The Piano: A History, 48.
join the ranks of American builders, historians point to the twin gold medals awarded to Steinway and Chickering at the Paris Exposition of 1867 as the major watershed moment for the company and the American industry, with recognition abroad finally tipping American piano consumption away from imported instruments.18

American piano sales—like manufacturing and design—strongly favored innovation and took their business cues from the broader manufacturing sector. Great and modest companies alike adopted various strategies, often utilizing the burgeoning print advertising industry. From new financial products, to artistic endorsements, to catalogue sales, piano industry tactics aimed to make pianos and their purchase more familiar and possible for the general public.

Lowering the instrument’s traditionally prohibitive price and bringing it to rural America were two major factors in broadening piano manufacturing, sales, and distribution. Installment buying and catalogue sales—two strategies already familiar to consumers of more general goods—specifically lessened earlier geographic and economic barriers to piano purchase. Borrowing from the sewing machine industry and anticipating the automobile industry, selling pianos on installment successfully put instruments into the homes of a wider pool of individuals and families, provided they could keep up with monthly payments.19 Installment sales for pianos began as early as 1854, accompanied by other alternatives to outright piano purchase such as piano rental.

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18 For example, see Loesser, *Men Women and Pianos*, 511, 512; Charlotte N. Eyerman and James Parakilas, “Five: 1820s to 1870s: The Piano Calls the Tune,” in *Piano Rolls: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano*, ed. James Parakilas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 184; and Edwin Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos: A Technological History From Cristofori to the Modern Concert Grand* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 183. Good specifically points to 1867 as the moment when European makers began endorsing American methods in earnest, particularly Steinway’s model (183).

and rent-to-own options.\textsuperscript{20} Installment sales of high-quality instruments (like Baldwin pianos) increased the practice’s reputability.\textsuperscript{21} These financial products widened ownership dramatically: \textit{Music Trades’} one-hundred-year retrospective states that by 1892, “the general industry consensus was that 90\% of all pianos were sold on some type of installment credit.”\textsuperscript{22}

Besides affordability, piano companies also needed to overcome problems of distribution. One solution was catalogue shopping. In the decades leading up to the turn of the century, pianos could be found alongside other commodities in mail-order catalogues, the most ubiquitous of which was Sears & Roebuck. For shoppers in western states and territories and in rural pockets throughout the country, catalogue shopping (often with installment plans) combined with decreasing shipping costs to make piano purchase more feasible.\textsuperscript{23} Regional networks of consignment salesmen—as best exemplified by Baldwin—also brought pianos beyond big city showrooms to rural areas.\textsuperscript{24} Table 2.1 illustrates the great price range between new pianos, comparing off-brand instruments sold in the Sears & Roebuck catalogue with instruments manufactured by Steinway. When compared with a small sample set of income levels, the impact installment plans and no-name instruments had on the feasibility of piano purchase is made clear:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Instrument & Price Range & Average Income Level \\
\hline
Sears & $500 - $1000 & $20,000 \\
Steinway & $1500 - $2000 & $50,000 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Price Range of Pianos}
\end{table}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making, and Selling Pianos,” 61; Roell, \textit{The Piano in America}, 99, 142.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Brian T. Majeski, ed., “Chapter One (1890–1899): America’s Industry Comes of Age,” in \textit{The Music Trades Centennial Issue: Celebrating 100 Years of Continuous Publication} (Englewood: Music Trades, 1990), 31. This source also states that the average installment package broke piano purchases into twenty-four monthly payments, with average down payments approximately 1/12 of the piano’s value (31).
\item \textsuperscript{23} The iron frames common to American pianos likely made them better able to weather transportation. See Loesser \textit{Men, Women, and Pianos}, 464; Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making, and Selling Pianos,” 64.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Roell, \textit{The Piano in America}, 99.
\end{itemize}
The data in Table 2.1 point out matching disparity between Americans’ income levels and between high- and low-end pianos. Looking at 1910, we see that even the least expensive piano from Sears & Roebuck equaled less than 1/5 of the average low-skill worker’s annual income.

Increased piano sales were also bound up with widespread increased interest in pianos themselves. This phenomenon can be attributed in part to advertising methods designed to reach populations in rural and urban areas alike that had hitherto been excluded from piano purchase by geography or income level. Looking beyond elite and specialty markets, companies—especially those with larger names—took advantage of the flourishing advertising and national print media industries to display their wares in general publications. For example, Steinway chose N. W. Ayer & Son advertising company to create aesthetically satisfying advertisements. A company that also created ads for Montgomery Ward (department store), Procter & Gamble (known at this time for Ivory soap), and Singer Sewing Company, Steinway’s choice of advertiser points to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approx. Year</th>
<th>Sears &amp; Roebuck (off-brand)</th>
<th>Steinway</th>
<th>Average Income: Middle Class</th>
<th>Average Income: Lower-Skilled Labor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>$125–179</td>
<td>$550–1400</td>
<td>Federal Civilian $940/year</td>
<td>Lower-Skilled Labor $459/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>$87–195</td>
<td>$550–1600</td>
<td>Federal Civilian $1096/year</td>
<td>Lower-Skilled Labor $506/year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>$128–238</td>
<td>$550–1600</td>
<td>Federal Civilian $940/year</td>
<td>Lower-Skilled Labor $905/year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Highs and lows of American piano prices, 1900–1915

market aims and savvies more akin to general consumer products than to specialty-crafted musical instruments.26

Besides selling pianos, Steinway’s ad campaigns were a part of a new and significant market trend: national brand recognition. One strategy Ehrlich labels, “uniquely American” involved brand-sponsored countrywide tours by imported European virtuosos on American-made instruments.27 Steinway first brought in Anton Rubinstein in 1872, followed by a host of names like Ignacy Jan Padrewski and Franz Liszt.28 The practice of using big names to advertise pianos modeled brand loyalty to the American public, and other piano manufacturers that could afford to followed suit. Example 2.3 shows an artist endorsement ad from a 1915 edition of *Musical America*:

![Example 2.3: Artist endorsement for Foster & David](image)

Stenciled near-homonymic imitation of high-end brand names—such as “Steinmay” and “Steinvey” pianos—suggests that the general public was paying attention to, and assigning qualitative value to, elite-market piano names.30

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Economic and social trends and consumer attitudes found in the young country also reflected influence from abroad. In this regard, the US most closely resembled England, whose economy was the most developed among its European peers and whose colonial parental role in US history continued well into the twentieth centuries in the form of cultural borrowing.\textsuperscript{31} “Stencil” pianos and installment buying, for instance, were very common in England.\textsuperscript{32} In addition, testimonials and artist sponsorship, although nowhere near as widespread as they would become in the US, long predated the American piano industry in France and England.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Acoustic Pianos: Social History}

The initial American impulse to manufacture, sell, and purchase pianos came from a deep place of European emulation; however, even after even after instruments began displaying American names on their fallboards and sat in working- and middle-class homes, they continued to index the socio-economic profile of older European—particularly British—ideas about class and gender.\textsuperscript{34} America’s gaze toward Europe as a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Stencil examples taken from Loesser, \textit{Men, Women, and Pianos}, 528, and from Roell, \textit{The Piano in America}, 143; Also see Roell for an argument about the piano as a particularly early example of national brand recognition (Chapter 4).
  \item Eyerman and Parakilas, “Five: 1820s to 1870s: The Piano Calls the Tune,” 184–185.
  \item Loesser, \textit{Men, Women, and Pianos}, 465. In addition, see Holly Kruse’s work regarding music commodities and their extra-musical associations. In this work, Kruse argues that socio-economic conditions present during a commodity’s popularization often stick with that commodity. For example, even after it became affordable and common, the piano continued to index wealth and high class. Holly Kruse, “Early Audio Technology and Domestic Space,” \textit{Stanford Humanities Review} 3, no. 2 (1993): 1–14.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
wellspring of cultural ideas and physical status icons continued well into the twentieth century, an unsurprising fact considering colonial history and the continual waves of European immigration that fed US population growth.\textsuperscript{35} Music commodities ranked high among cultural imports, and England in particular supplied the states with instruments and printed music.\textsuperscript{36}

Describing indices between the piano, wealth, and moral propriety is alternately straightforward and evasive. Keyboard instruments at the sophistication level of the harpsichord or early piano commonly stood for high wealth and social class simply because high production costs put them beyond the reach of most until at least the mid-1800s.\textsuperscript{37} Keyboard instruments, gender roles, and morality also connected with wealth and status, though in more complicated ways. Keyboard instruments in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England—although sometimes mastered by men—were common amateur instruments for girls and women (and were perceived as such). Having piano-playing women in the family—like the purchase of an instrument itself—made dexterous statements of wealth and social class: a family’s ability to afford leisure time and musical

\textsuperscript{35} Keller and Koegel, “Secular Music to 1800,” 49, 76; Preston, “Art Music from 1800 to 1860,” 187. Connection between class and keyboard instruments is one area that differed between Germany and England, for instance. According to Loesser, a special focus on chastity among the German middle class led many to use piano-playing by German bourgeois women and girls as a statement of high morality against the depravity of the lower classes and of upper class aristocracy. These particular class dynamics were not as strong in England. See Men, Women, and Pianos, 64, 267.

\textsuperscript{36} Although the question of repertoire will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three, it is worth noting in this chapter that even after the US printing industry took off, domestic copyright laws in the early nineteenth century protected American composers only, meaning that music from abroad was cheaper to print. On this topic, Richard Crawford states: “The American appetite for European music owed much to the notion that Old World culture was superior, but the dollars-and-cents advantage to publishers was also a factor.” Richard Crawford, An Introduction to America’s Music (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 144. Crawford also notes that sheet music of European-composed pieces were also more “venerable” (44).

\textsuperscript{37} An obvious exception to this class pattern among keyboard instruments is the German clavichord, which was often roughly constructed and affordable for the working classes.
tutelage for its girls and women was interpreted as a reliable marker of that family’s wealth and general adherence to social convention.\(^{38}\)

Unpacking gender conventions around the piano is considerably less obvious than the direct link between the commodity’s cost and its role as a token of wealth. At the heart of English gendered piano practices were ideas about both music and gender roles that were initially separate from—yet through time indexically coupled with—the piano. These ideas in practice included: the intersection of piano-playing with limits on women’s physical activity and public visibility; women’s roles as moral surrogates for their families; and the intersection of Victorian work ethic with high valuation on women’s economic inactivity. These rules, in turn, influenced how the piano was to be played and what was to be played on it.

The piano’s physical and musical properties fit well with contemporaneous limits on girls’ and women’s physical behavior. The piano’s moderate size combined with the possibility of simultaneously playing melody and harmony made it an ideal instrument for the home or other semi-private settings open to women’s participation. What the piano required physically was also in keeping with existing social strictures on female conduct, as playing the piano did not lead to moral compromise in terms of bodily position or physical exertion, especially of the legs and mouth.\(^{39}\) Conversely, women were generally discouraged from instruments requiring physical strain (such as brass instruments), those effecting awkward appearances (such as the violin), and those drawing attention to women’s sexuality (such as the cello).

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\(^{38}\) I use Tom Turino’s semiotic definition of “dicent” found in *Music As Social Life*: “where signs are interpreted as actually being affected by their objects.” Thomas Turino, *Music As Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 9.

Female piano-playing fell within the wider social tradition of women’s accomplishments. Late eighteenth-century England stands as the time and place where the piano became an essential component to successful high social life.40 To be accomplished did not necessarily entail mastery in any singular pursuit, but rather a generalists’ familiarity with any number of fine arts that could be perfected to an amateur level in a domestic setting.41 Although not limited to England, it was here that a young woman’s “accomplishments” began to stand for both her and her family’s economic, social and moral status.42 Roell brings up the specific argument that the way in which young women were encouraged to invest copious amounts of time practicing reflected a focus on work ethic and a converse contempt toward idleness, a central Victorian conception.43 A passage from Loesser’s *Men, Women, and Pianos* encapsulates how women’s physical presence at the keyboard combined with the social capital of piano training to convey powerful messages about her—and by extension her family’s—morality:

A girl could finger a harpsichord, a clavichord, or a pianoforte with her feet demurely together, her face arranged into a polite smile or a pleasantly earnest concentration. There she could sit, her well-groomed hands striking the light keys with no unseemly vehemence. …There she could sit, gentle and genteel, and be

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43 Roell, *The Piano in America*, xiii, 5−12.
an outward symbol of her family’s ability to pay for her education and her
decorativeness, of its striving for culture and the graces of life, of its pride in the
fact that she did not have to work and that she did not “run after” men.\textsuperscript{44}

Loesser paints a picture where a piano performance is about everything besides the
music. The girl herself appears as an emblematic prop whose visual appearance stands
for the social, economic, and moral standing of her family.

Social values and practices surrounding the piano travelled overseas along with
imported instruments and music, beginning with colonists’ attempts to replicate home.
Adrienne Block specifically describes music-making by American amateurs before the
1830s as, “a social grace in imitation of English high society” that only the wealthy could
afford; however, the middle class grew along with American cities, and increasingly
affordable and available commodities such as the piano made traditionally upper-class
ideas of accomplishments and gentility more accessible.\textsuperscript{45} Class and gender remained
correlated with the piano as it traveled from the highest economic echelons to the middle
classes in the early to mid-1800s, and then to the working classes closer to the turn of the
century.

Jumping ahead to America in the second half of the nineteenth century, we see
that the middle-class (and increasingly working-class) goal of piano purchase fitted well
within Victorian materialistic consumer-based social climbing, and the piano began to
stand for American-ness along with its previous Eurocentric indices. In America and
elsewhere, piano purchase forged social advancement, especially for those populations

\textsuperscript{44} Loesser, \textit{Men, Women, and Pianos}, 65.
\textsuperscript{45} Adrienne Fried Block, “Chapter VIII: Women in American Music, 1880–1918,” in \textit{Women and Music: A
“Chapter VIII: Women in American Music,” 198; Crawford, \textit{An Introduction to America’s Music}, 221.
struggling to blend in with mainstream cultures. Hirai and Parakilas found that during 
the fifty-year window between the 1870s and World War I, many of the strongest piano 
markets were found in the countries accepting the largest numbers of immigrants, such as 
the US, Australia, and Argentina.\textsuperscript{46} As the piano became increasingly visible in America, 
its purchase came simultaneously to index economic and social caliber as well as 
American assimilation.\textsuperscript{47} In his work with American immigrant populations, Nicholas 
Tawa cites a 1903 New York \textit{Evening Post} column detailing the high number of Italian 
immigrants providing piano lessons for their daughters, and violin and mandolin lessons 
for their sons, regardless of their finances.\textsuperscript{48} Tawa also quotes from an article in which a 
Polish immigrant recalls her mother’s advice: “In America, to be a gentlewoman, I hear 
you must know how to play the piano. So you go take lessons.”\textsuperscript{49} Not exclusive to 
immigrants, Hirai and Parakilas use the example of Duke Ellington’s parents to show 
how the piano could be a component of social climbing for other groups excluded from 
the middle class:

J. E. Ellington’s work defined him and his family as belonging to the working 
class, but it was precisely among the literate and advancing working-class 
families like the Ellingtons—no matter what their race—that the piano was 
making the greatest inroads at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Hirai and Parakilas, “Seven: 1870s to 1920s,” 287. Hirai and Parakilas also discuss how immigrants’ 
prior experiences with the instrument varied (287).

\textsuperscript{47} Hirai and Parakilas, “Seven: 1870s to 1920s,” 287.

\textsuperscript{48} Nicholas Tawa, \textit{A Sound of Strangers: Musical Culture, Acculturation, and the Post-Civil War Ethnic 

\textsuperscript{49} E. G. Stearn, \textit{My Mother and I} (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 75, quoted in Nicholas Tawa, \textit{A Sound of 
Strangers: Musical Culture, Acculturation, and the Post-Civil War Ethnic American} (Metuchen: 

\textsuperscript{50} Hirai and Parakilas, “Seven: 1870s to 1920s,” 286.
The piano conferred status to the Ellingtons and others even while silent, as its social capital was heavily wrapped up in its physical materiality. Like the female player in the earlier-referenced excerpt from Loesser’s work, the simple appearance of the piano at this time carried heavy indexical meaning for a family. Accordingly, the nineteenth-century piano’s physical appearance mattered a great deal, and often correlated less strongly with function than with furniture trends. Built-in shelves and candelabra common on nineteenth-century instruments exemplify such extra-musical display. Piano casings were regularly adapted to follow general styles, such as the connection between the waning bulky square piano in the second half of the nineteenth century and overall desire for a “simpler style” which smaller rooms could accommodate. Pianos registered so strongly and naturally as furniture at this time that a 1905 article titled “Keyboard Instruments and their Relation to Furniture” from The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs tells a history of keyboard instruments solely in terms of their adherence to, or deviation from, concurrent interior styles. Loesser and Burgess even detail examples where pianos’ exterior designs impeded functionality.

52 For description, see Loesser, Men, Women, and Pianos, 248.
53 Good details significant separation between British and American style preference during the mid- to late 1900s. Bulky square pianos—waning in popularity in Britain—remained Americans’ preferred casing. Good suggests this may signal that physical weight and square footage of the instrument may have been an icon for wealth. Good, Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos, 170. Concern about bulky pianos and floor space could have been partly related to growing urbanization. Good, Giraffe, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos, 192.
Nineteenth-century parlors further offset material aspects of the nineteenth-century piano by spatially setting the instrument apart from the rest of the family home.\textsuperscript{56} Parlors—or “best rooms”—often went along with piano ownership, and the social capital that was gained when a family designated space in its home for a parlor mirrored that of piano ownership and playing. Most middle-class homes had a parlor-like space by the mid-nineteenth century, with variations depending largely on regional and urban-versus-rural tastes.\textsuperscript{57} By the 1890s, upward-aspiring working-class families often maintained parlors, emulating what Schlereth refers to as “the parlor ideal.”\textsuperscript{58} The designation of a separate domestic space for cultural activities made a statement of “social ambition” even if the rest of the family habitation and lifestyle were still of a modest class, reflecting the overall aspirational quality of American Victorianism itself.

\textsuperscript{56} Parlors were to exist in contrast to the larger world, or as Green describes them, as “miniature universe[s] of culture and education for families and visitors.” Inherently focused on material items, the parlor gathered the family’s “best” objects, which tended to emphasize the Victorian values of etiquette, gentility, work ethic, and moral propriety. Besides perhaps a piano or other instruments, parlors contained an assortment of books—including the family Bible—elaborate needlework, photographs, statuettes, and so forth. Although parlors served to represent a family to the outside world—and to itself—the job of directing, organizing, and upholding the exhibition space belonged to the women of the house. Harvey Green, The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 93.


\textsuperscript{58} Thomas Schlereth, Victorian America (New York: Harper Collins Publishers), 120. The parlor so aptly embodied characteristics now associated with American Victorianism that Grier labels it the “quintessential Victorian room.” Katherine C. Grier, “A Decline of the Memory Place: The Parlor after 1890,” in American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services, ed. Jessica Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 50. McMurry’s work shows an urban-rural dissonance regarding the parlor. Although many middle-class farm families had a parlor or something similar, there was resistance to several of its urban associations. Sometimes, parlor-like spaces would be included in house plans, but would be referred to as “sitting rooms,” “living rooms” or “family rooms.” McMurry, “City Parlor, Country Sitting Room.” See also Grier, “A Decline of the Memory Place: The Parlor after 1890,” 53; and A. J. Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses (New York: D. Appleton, 1850), 97, quoted in McMurry, “City Parlor, Country Sitting Room,” 266.
Player Pianos: Industrial History

At the point when the American piano industry reached a production height of 330,000 instruments in 1909, mechanical piano manufacturing reached just one-tenth of that volume. That relationship had shifted dramatically by 1914: as domestic acoustic piano production contracted by over one quarter to 238,000 instruments, 98,000 mechanical pianos rolled off American assembly lines. Astonishingly, the booming mechanical piano industry actually surpassed acoustic piano production in the years immediately following World War I (see Table 2.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>US Piano Production (Acoustic)</th>
<th>US Piano Production (Mechanical)</th>
<th>US Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>171,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>76,094,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>330,000</td>
<td>34,000</td>
<td>90,490,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>238,000</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>99,111,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>156,000</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>104,514,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Domestic acoustic and mechanical piano production with population numbers

Unlike the incredible international rise of the acoustic piano, the mechanical piano’s mass popularity was largely limited to America. In fact, the development and normalization of mass production and consumption specific to the nineteenth-century American acoustic piano paved the way for the twentieth-century mechanical piano industry, including earlier discussed aspects of mass production, catalogue sales, consignment

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59 Approximately 2,180 player pianos were produced in 1905. Timothy Taylor, “The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of ‘Mechanical Music,’” *Ethnomusicology* 51, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007): 286. Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos*, 235. Good and Hoover state that players were manufactured at 1/10 the rate of acoustics in 1901. Good and Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making, and Selling Pianos,” 65. Approximately 34,000 player pianos were produced in US factories in 1909. Roell, *The Piano in America*, 32;

60 In 1919, 180,000 mechanical or “automatic” pianos and 156,000 acoustic pianos were manufactured in the US. Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos*, 235. For a longer range of comparative production statistics, see Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*, 136.


62 Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History*, 134. It is worth noting that various developments on the mechanical piano came out of Europe; however, the popularity of the technology was far more wide-reaching within the US.
sales and knock-off brand naming. Moreover, the role played by print media advertising picks up in the mechanical piano’s story where it left off with the acoustic piano.⁶³

Mechanical Pianos: A Technical Timeline Out of Order:

This section deals with the considerable confusion surrounding mechanical piano terms. Labels such as “piano player,” “player piano,” “pianola,” and “mechanical piano” have been used interchangeably to reference specific instruments and/or the whole mechanical instrument family. Casual labeling is common both in early twentieth-century piano discourse and in contemporary scholarship. As I will clarify, mechanical piano technology includes three distinct technological stages. “Piano player” is a term specifying the earliest stage (1897–1905), “player piano” is specific to the middle stage (1905–1916), and “reproducing piano” signals the mechanical piano’s late stage (1916–today). “Mechanical piano” is a general term for all three instruments. Presenting the mechanical piano’s three stages of development out of chronological order, beginning with the familiar late-stage “reproducing piano,” helps establish what set the stages apart from one another.

Late Stage: “Reproducing Pianos,” 1916—Today

When we reference the “player piano” today, what typically comes to mind is the mechanical piano during its late stage (the reproducing piano). In the years following World War I, American companies marketed instruments capable of recreating from mass-produced perforated paper rolls the nuanced sound of human-recorded

performances. The label “reproducing piano”—an eponym quickly adapted by the industry from Aeolian Company’s “Duo-Art Reproducing” model (circa 1916)—distinguishes these later, more technically sophisticated instruments from earlier mechanical pianos. Especially considering coeval phonographs’ difficulty reproducing piano sounds, sources suggest that reproducing pianos actually did do a remarkable job of “sounding like” live piano performance. Just as renowned pianists had endorsed pianos starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, famous performers (such as Godowsky in Example 2.3) began recording piano rolls for various companies in the late 1910s.

Taylor’s argument that mechanical piano technology contributed to musical reification—that is, the masking of human labor—aptly fits the late-stage reproducing piano. Because nuanced musical detail could be captured, rolls were often marketed and sold as concrete musical icons of specific recording artists, linking late-stage reproducing piano rolls with hi-fidelity phonograph records. Conversely, some roll marketing framed iconicity to specific composers or specific musical works, effectively masking the involvement of the recording artist. The semiotically dense iconography in Example 2.4, taken from an Apollo Reproducing Piano ad, demonstrates overlapping instances of reification:

65 For example, see Ehrlich, The Piano, A History, 136 and Roell, The Piano in America, 44.
67 Taylor’s analytical model of commodification applied to music serves as my primary model in this chapter and in the next for understanding changing perceptions of music labor. Taylor, “The Commodification of Music,” 295.
68 I use “icon” in this instance to refer to the music commodity as it directly “resembles” artists’ performances, following Thomas Turino’s model articulated in Music As Social Life.
The ad’s iconography and text work together in this example to mask both the piano’s music-reproducing technology and the recording artist’s original labor. The piano’s reproducing mechanism is masked entirely, as the perforated piano roll itself is missing from the ad’s image. The ad’s main body of text initially evokes Beethoven as an ultimate source of perfect musical interpretation, casting the recording artist as an invisible and inactive intermediary between the composer and the contemporary listener. The deemphasized presence of the (non-composing) recording artist is further underlined by the ad’s textual reference to “today’s” composers recording their own work; however, it is the visual of a diaphanous Beethoven that most strikingly stresses the abstract perfection of the piece of music over the recording artist’s interpretation.

Text and iconography in Example 2.4 also portray the minimal input expected from the reproducing piano’s operator, whose musical contributions rank at best as unnecessary and at worst as a hindrance. Text found beneath the body of the ad directly eliminates the operator’s role in creating the music, reading: “Without personal

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69 Ad example taken from Harvey Roehl’s Player Piano Treasury (New York: The Vestal Press, 1961), 92. Unfortunately, Roehl does not include ad-specific citation details.
manipulation, the Apollo reproduces the exact interpretation of the artist in every detail of
tone, phrasing, accent and pedaling.” Phrases like “preserved exactly,” and even the
general term “reproducing piano,” clearly show a 1920s definition of musical sound
broadened to include comfortably the new phenomenon of fixed icons of live
performance.

*Early Stage: “Piano Players,” 1897–1905*

The late-stage reproducing piano’s ability to recreate nuanced performances by
quality artists fundamentally distanced it from two earlier mechanical piano types, the
piano player and the player piano. To understand the piano player, we should look at E.
S. Votey’s 1897 “Pianola.” The “Pianola”—incidentally another eponymous term for the
entire mechanical piano family—ranks as the first substantial mechanical piano prototype
to be met by an interested public. Votey’s Pianola took the shape of an exterior
cabinet—containing a piano roll—that when pushed up against a standard acoustic piano
would make music by the depression of mechanical “fingers.”70 The Pianola’s success
owed much to the energetic advertising efforts of its manufacturer, the Aeolian Company,
whose revolutionary two-toned, four-page, multi-periodical ad campaign in 1902 made
the mechanism (and the brand) a household name. Examples 2.4 and 2.5 respectively
show the cabinet-style piano player from front and back angles. Example 2.5 is taken
from an Aeolian advertisement:

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70 It should be noted that Dolge discusses how various self-contained mechanical piano models predated the
1900s, but that this style was not as well received as the push-up cabinet players. Dolge, *Pianos
and Their Makers*, 131–150. Ord-Hume disagrees with Dolge on the existence of self-contained
Examples 2.5 and 2.6 highlight the stand-alone quality of this early instrument, the feature that earned it the label “piano player.” The pedals (shown in Example 2.5) activated a pneumatic, or air-pressure driven, player mechanism. Human operators controlled the pedals, along with the hand levers visible in Example 2.5 (beneath the piano roll). Votey’s cabinet-style player inspired many imitations; however its bulk proved a practical annoyance, especially when family members wished to play the piano beneath it as an acoustic instrument. The piano player waned in popularity by 1905, just a few years after its advent, and by 1909 was effectively supplanted by the self-contained “player piano.”

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71 Drawn image of Aeolian’s Pianola is taken from Roehl’s compilation. No further citation information is provided. Roehl, *Player Piano Treasury*, 1.

72 The Aeolian Pianola (piano player) in this image dates from 1900. The photo was taken at the Smithsonian Museum. Image is taken from Edwin M. Good and Cynthia Hoover, “Two: Designing, Making, and Selling Pianos,” 74.

73 Invention of various pneumatic mechanical pianos predate Votey’s model, including some that used the perforated rolls of paper so iconic of the mechanical piano family; however, their rudimentary technology combined with a skeptical public stalled their success. For description of some of these late nineteenth-century creations, see Loesser, *Men Women, and Pianos*, 580–581. For discussion of the 1902 ad campaign, see Taylor, “The Commodification of Music,” 286.

Middle Stage: “Player Pianos,” 1905–1916

Although the label “player piano” has also come to represent the entire mechanical piano family, in its time it designated a self-contained mechanism that triggered a piano’s action without the external depression of keys.  

Models of self-contained player piano mechanisms date back to the 1880s; however, Dolge and Loesser attribute the early popularity of the cumbersome cabinet “piano players” to industry-wide apprehension toward incorporating player devices into already-complicated upright pianos. As will be discussed later in the chapter, this hesitancy also reflects the great conceptual distance initially separating mechanical player devices and acoustic piano music-making.

Example 2.7 features one of the most familiar images of the player piano taken from a Gulbransen-Dickinson advertisement:

![Example 2.7: Gulbransen-Dickinson Baby: “Easy to Play”](image)

This image emphasizes the facile nature of operating the player piano while clearly showing the foot pedals, which activated the pneumatic player mechanism found in piano players, player pianos, and reproducing pianos alike.

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75 Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos*, 226
In terms of operator input, piano players and player pianos fell somewhere between acoustic and reproducing pianos. Piano rolls made for these instruments produced sounds without much contrast, akin to that of a music box. To compensate, piano players and player pianos came equipped with various mechanical devices—usually levers and pedals—that allowed operators to add their own nuances of tempi, dynamics, and sustaining power.\textsuperscript{78} Example 2.8, taken from a 1915 American Piano Company advertisement, shows an example of hand levers in use:

![Example 2.8 Levers for expression control](image)

Description included later on in the ad explains how the “Flexotone Expression Control” allows the operator to emphasize different ranges of the piano through dynamics, for example bass and treble (see Example 2.9):

![Example 2.9: American Piano Company description of how to operate the Flexotone](image)

\textsuperscript{78} For description of levers, see Ord-Hume, \textit{Player Pianos}, 160.
This ad’s textual emphasis on intuitive playing by way of “expressive keys” creates a sharp contrast with the ad for the Apollo reproducing piano discussed above, where the operator’s inactivity was favorably framed. Accoutrements like the “Flexotone” were alternately built-in to new pianos and sold separately (allowing for retrofitting), with each company promoting its own devices. Besides American Piano Company’s “Flexotone,” examples include Aeolian’s “Metro-style” and “Thermodist,” Wilcox and White’s “Phrasing Lever,” and Melville Clark’s “Transposing Mouthpiece.”

The piano roll’s eye-level position visible in the Gulbransen-Dickinson ad in Example 2.7 points to another significant way the operator was made to feel like an active music maker: through “reading” music. On many rolls themselves—alongside printed lyrics in the case of songs—were printed guidelines for adding dynamic and tempo nuances. As the perforated piano roll steadily entered the player action, the operator was able to “read” the ongoing musical instruction, often including color-coded tempo lines and word-based suggestions like “pianissimo,” “fortissimo,” “crescendo,” “diminuendo,” and “pause.” The ad iconography in Example 2.10 conveys the experience of “reading” such music:

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82 For details and descriptions, see Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos*, 582; and Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 158. Dolge’s work also connects specific devices with particular inventors. Examples of tempo and dynamic indicators printed on rolls are taken from Ord-Hume, *Player Piano*, 92.
“Playing” the player piano in Example 2.10 includes many of the same features as acoustic piano-playing, including hand and bodily position at the instrument. Even the location of the piano roll focuses the operator’s visual attention to the spot where music might have sat on an acoustic piano.

The operator’s participation—and equally important, his or her perception of participation—separates the piano player and player piano from the reproducing piano, as well as from other associated music commodities such as the radio and phonograph. Scholarship typically overlooks this semi-passive music-making phase in the mechanical piano’s history, or retrospectively casts it as a positivistic steppingstone toward the sort of full-blown musical reification manifest in reproducing pianos. For example, the mechanical piano’s “player piano” stage fits poorly into the model Katz developed to

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84 Roell states, “The ultimate in mechanical music technology and sound recording fidelity was the ‘reproducing’ piano,” anticipating similar statements by Katz, Taylor, and others. Roell, *The Piano in America*, 42. As another example, Katz cites music sampling during the latter part of the twentieth century as the first example where individuals were able to influence actively the sonic outcome of a prerecorded/pre-coded music commodity, not taking into account the player piano’s semi-active technology. Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd., 2010), 47.
illustrate changed dynamics between composers, listeners, and performers after the advent of recorded or “captured” sound. Applied to the reproducing piano, Katz’s model helps describe how the ability to replay/replicate performances broke bonds between listeners and composers as well as between listeners and performers. (The latter scenario is implied in Example 2.4) Central to these changed relationships is musical passivity and audience unawareness of sound mediation.\(^{85}\) Although his model takes into account new abilities of the listener to control reproduction of music, it does not account for mechanical pianos that predated the reproducing piano (i.e., piano players and player pianos), when the “listener,” was—through both discursive framing and the actual musical necessity of his input—cast as a “player.”

Alfred Dolge’s 1911 publication *Pianos and Their Makers* provides first-hand evidence that piano players and player pianos registered as active music-making devices to contemporaneous populations. Even with some access to an early German model of the reproducing piano, Dolge *preferred* the active element of piano players and player pianos, stating: “However, the music-loving amateur requires the pleasure of his own interpretation, the only real pleasure anyone can get out of a piano.”\(^{86}\) Dolge’s comments were made before the full normalization of recorded/reproduced sound, and help recreate the player piano experience during the mid-1910s focus of this analysis. Like Dolge, most music non-specialists engaging with mechanical piano advertisements and instruments in the mid-1910s would have been most familiar with player pianos and piano players rather than reproducing pianos, and thereby likely engaged with the

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\(^{85}\) On mediation, see specifically Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 3.

\(^{86}\) Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 157.
instrument as potential “players,” rather than “listeners.” From here forward, my study primarily considers player pianos, with occasional reference to piano players.

Players’ Popular Ascent: Right Place at the Right Time

The sudden popularity of the mechanical piano at the turn-of-the-century belies the relative age of its basic technology and the striking paradigm shift underlying its integration into the American piano industry and domestic music-making scene. Although associated with the twentieth century, mechanical piano devices date from as early as the eighteenth century. These mechanical piano devices were (and often continue to be in scholarly circles) linked more closely to other musical automata such as music boxes and mechanical organs than to acoustic pianos. For example, Aeolian company—manufacturer of Votey’s Pianola—specialized in mechanical organs from its founding in the late 1870s. Separation between mechanical and acoustic instruments came from both sides. From the vantage point of 1911, Dolge bluntly states that before Votey’s instrument, “there was neither competition nor encouragement from the piano trade,” articulating the now-common conclusion that the late nineteenth-century acoustic piano industry paid little attention to mechanical music devices. Considering this distance, the twentieth-century marriage between acoustic and mechanical technology

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87 See Dolge’s 1911 publication *Pianos and Their Makers* for detailed description of the flurry of efforts toward a pneumatic mechanical piano in the decades and years leading up to Votey’s success (132). For technical information on the mechanical piano throughout its stages, see Arthur W. J.G. Ord-Hume, *Clockwork Music: An Illustrated History of Mechanical Musical Instruments from the Musical Box to the Pianola: From Automation Lady Virginal Players to the Orchestron* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1973), 255. See also Ord-Hume, *Player Piano*.


90 Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 328.
appears swift and far-reaching. The acoustic/mechanical ad put out by Baldwin Company in 1915 found in Example 2.11 illustrates industry comfort with mechanical music technology:

![Example 2.11: Advertisement from The Music Trades, aimed at piano sellers (1915)](image)

Within fifteen years of its popular debut, the mechanization and musical mediation inherent in this technology had become all but normalized within American musical social life.

Player devices’ early association with the “mechanical” proves critical to understanding the location and timing of their growing public acceptance. The American piano industry’s overwhelmingly receptive attitude toward mass-production and technological advancement facilitated an easy transition into mechanical piano production, distribution, and consumption. Conventions as seemingly small as the 1908 US standardization of piano rolls could not have happened without an industry-wide ideological embrace of interchangeable parts. The mechanical piano’s commercial success as a musical instrument, however, reflects overall societal comfort with those same ideas: Americans had to be willing to use technology to make music.

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92 Roehl, Player Piano Treasury, 12.
The acoustic piano’s commercial success was built upon American embrace of technology, mass-production and distribution, and creative advertising and sales techniques. Yet, social clamor for the instrument remained tied to an older set of highly-gendered, non-modern indices. The acoustic piano’s success paved the way for the mechanical piano, whose identity was both tied to its namesake’s domestic Victorian heritage and to the American embrace of all things mechanical, up-to-date, and “fun.” Emphasis on “playing” the early- and middle-stage mechanical pianos added further complications. Layers of resulting conflict took shape within the two instrument’s (often) competing discourses and rules of “play.”
Chapter 3: Rules of Play: Discourse around Acoustic and Player Pianos

Example 3.1: Piano Joke (LHJ, 1915)

The sarcastic excerpt above from a 1915 issue of the LHJ casts the mid-1910s piano as a quotidian commodity, ubiquitous enough that the scene of husband John endeavoring to aid a piano thief against the protective cries of his wife likely evoked a chuckle from the magazine’s non-music-specialist readership. The joke’s prosaic gendering is funny in its familiarity, reflecting longstanding Euro-American divisions in home piano music-making where women and girls played piano while men looked on (and perhaps sometimes offered mild disparagement). However, music-making in the mid-1910s was not a simple extension of nineteenth-century norms, and new music technologies and changing expectations and opportunities for women and men were beginning to alter how, what, and by whom domestic music was being made.

This chapter explores nineteenth- and twentieth-century social rules and ideas around acoustic and player pianos. It begins by briefly comparing what and how acoustic piano decorum was conveyed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Next, it describes how mechanical piano discourses and rules about “playing” the player piano developed against this Victorian acoustic piano backdrop. This discussion elucidates three central components of player piano discourse that play a

2 This chapter specifically discusses the mechanical piano’s “player piano” stage, with occasional reference to earlier “piano player” discourses.
central role in Chapter Four’s ad study: 1) the construction of facile binaries between acoustic and player piano identities 2) an emphasis on characteristically “masculine” qualities associated with the player piano, and 3) the overall importance of the music appreciation movement in prioritizing listening to “great” music over amateur music-making.

Acoustic Pianos

Women’s and girls’ nineteenth-century piano-playing was characterized by private- and semi-private-sphere amateur performance. Amateur performance norms were not simply the result of too many uninterested girls forced into lessons within the Victorian accomplishment tradition. Instead, these norms reflect in part broad discouragement of women’s and girl’s professional-level skill acquisition. Craig Roell voices the common conclusion that routine practice and time-filling were the primary emphasis for women and girls, stating: “accomplishment was secondary to the dignity, graceful manner, and moral replenishment inherent in learning music.”3 Although a separate analysis would be required to discuss adequately parlor repertoire, brief examination confirms that music written and adapted for parlor performances often reflected a modest focus on skill.4 For instance, Gretchen Wheelock includes “pastiche sonatas and simple sonatinas, variation sets, and simplified arrangements of works originally intended for other media” on her list of nineteenth-century parlor-specific

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4 Cursory repertoire discussion in this chapter should not be interpreted as a dismissal of the parlor music tradition, which has played a rich role in American music life. For a positive spin on the diversity and alternate environment provided by the “parlor” scene, see Edith Borroff, “An American Parlor at the Turn of the Century,” American Music 4, no. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 302–308.
genres. Transcriptions of large-scale public-sphere works (such as symphonies and operas) and easy-to-play arrangements of all kinds were also common.

Ideas about women’s music-making in the nineteenth century frequently appeared in women’s general home magazines, many of which regularly carried sheet-music inserts (some written by their readers) and referred to domestic music-making in various types of content. Bonnie Miller’s study of sheet music in fifteen American magazines from 1830–1930 finds that *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and the *LHJ*—together the two most popular American women’s magazines from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s—carried particularly high-caliber parlor music. Popular from the 1830s through the Civil War, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* offers examples of mid-century modeling of music behavior. In her study of how music training was treated in *Godey’s* between 1830–77, Julie Koza found that overwhelmingly—even in cases of gifted or particularly focused daughters—parents were advised to limit their musical training to “a few musical fundamentals.” At least as equally powerful as direct cautionary counsel, *Godey’s* female readership saw warnings against excess pride couched in nonfiction and fiction pieces alike. The parody in Example 3.2 recreated from an 1853 issue of *Godey’s* serves as a striking condensation of mid-century piano “rules”:

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Firmly within an American Victorian value system, excerpts from *Godey’s* must be read as aspirational and didactically oriented advice rather than realistic description; even so, the parody in Example 3.2 contains remarkably critical moments. Much of the tone and style of advice-giving rings true with what one might have found in any etiquette book, such as advice on how the pianist ought to approach the hostess (“inquire…if she ‘plays much nowadays’”) and how the pianist might suggest modestly that she did not intend to play, but that she did happen to have her music with her (“you were trying [your notes] out with Adelaide that afternoon, and forgot to take them out”). However, other remarks remind the female pianist not to overreach in repertoire choice, and to expect to appear foolish. Difficult music by “Hertz” (sic) was unlikely heard in the parlor, and the piano player’s amateurishness is deliberately overstated through sarcastic technical critique

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9 Recreation of “Centre-Gossip Table,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 46 (1853), 569.
(“remember that, in the modern school, attention to time, expression, and correctness is not considered essential to brilliant execution”). By painting the aspiring pianist as silly and mediocre, this parody discourages women’s professional music aspirations.

Positive images of women and music in *Godey’s* reveal as much about social rules around piano-playing as do articles that specifically articulate women’s limitations. The following excerpt from a *Godey’s* fiction piece includes a depiction of musical performance quite different from that found in Example 3.2. In this excerpt, the performer makes none of the gaffes alluded to in the earlier satire. Here, Walter’s sister does not play until asked. She sings naturally and without regard for her audience, as if not really performing at all: indeed, her singing draws more upon natural talent than upon any procured skills that might carry with them suggestions of technical sophistication. She also chooses a simple air with minimal instrumental accompaniment, likely something specifically written or adapted for the amateur domestic market. Her singing elicits nostalgic reactions in her audiences. She does not aim to prove her virtuosity, and therefore makes no embarrassing mistakes.

‘My sweet sister,’ said Walter, after the tea-things were removed, ‘will you sing for me, as of old, and charm Eugene?’ With a fond glance, she seated herself unhesitatingly upon the piano-stool, and after a slight accompaniment, sung with exquisite pathos, a plaintive air. There was a natural beauty in her voice—a profound melancholy in its intense sweetness, that could dissolve the soul of the listener. Eugene was entranced; all that was dear to him in the memory of the past; the joys of home and childhood; the tenderness and truth of his first friendship—every cherished hour—every endeared spot; all that he had loved and lost upon earth—his gentle mother, seemed again to live, and again to fade, as he listened to the strains. Without paying any attention to him, and apparently without any effort to herself, she breathed forth melody after melody, for her own pleasure, like some lone nightingale, that, in a home of green leaves, sings to cheer its solitude with sweet sounds.10

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10 Miss Mary E. Macmichael, “School-Fellows,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 13 (1836), 68–69.
Turn-of-the-century domestic piano music alternately held onto and moved away from mid-nineteenth century social rules and ideas. Parlor repertoire popular from approximately the Civil War to World War I remained generally familiar in its style and small scope, and transcriptions and arranged works continued to be played. However, as Loesser describes, the overly sentimental thematic focus on “death and religion” characterizing mid-century parlor music began to fade as lighter fare such as “Tin Pan Alley” popular songs became more commercially available.\(^{11}\) Ragtime influences were certainly also found in the parlor by the beginning of the 1900s, despite taboo associations with African-American music.\(^{12}\)

Ideas around piano-playing underwent significant change at the turn of the century, and casual piano study began falling out of favor as middle-class women themselves increasingly entered public worlds of work and play. As Loesser phrases it, “standards of behavior” in music were changing as a function of wider patterns of changes for women, such as the decreasing availability of outside domestic help, the proliferation of women’s sports (and clothing styles to match), and increased access to travel and outside work (especially before marriage).\(^{13}\) Female musicians were not yet wholeheartedly allowed onto the mixed-gendered public performing and composing scenes, nor were they found in the more prestigious teaching positions; however, they were teaching in greater numbers, composing larger-scale (mostly non-parlor) pieces, and


\(^{12}\) Although regrettably beyond the scope of this study, ragtime was also heavily associated with the mechanical piano, in part owing to sonic similarities between ragtime’s syncopated style and sounds of the early mechanical piano. Roell, *The Piano in America,* 33. (Chapter Two of this work by Roell extensively covers ragtime.) In contrast, see Cyril Ehrlich for an example of the brief discussion ragtime receives within much piano scholarship. Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976), 133.

\(^{13}\) Loesser, *Men, Women, and Pianos,* 606.
playing hitherto unfeminine instruments in all-female orchestras. Specialization, rather than the general study making up the “accomplishments” system, was increasingly the order of the day.

Perceptions of musical amateurism also shifted dramatically. American music critic James Huneker’s often-quoted assessment of domestic music-making published in a 1904 issue of Overtones not only connects musical changes to wider changes in the American social fabric, but also embraces them. Huneker states:

Begun as a pastime, a mere social adjunct of the overfed, music, the heavenly maid, was pressed into unwilling service at the piano, and at times escorted timid youths to the proposing point, or eked out the deadly lethargy of evenings in respectable homes. Girls had to pull the teeth of this artistic monster, the pianoforte, else be accounted frumps without artistic or social ambitions. …[T]he girl of the middle century went about her task muddled in wits, but with matrimony as her ultimate goal. To-day she has forsaken the “lilies and languors” of Chopin, and the “roses and raptures” of Schumann, and if she must have music, she goes to a piano recital and hears a great artist interpret her favorite composer. …The new girl is too busy to play the piano unless she has the gift; then she plays it with consuming earnestness. We listen to her, for we know that this is an age of specialization, an age when woman is coming into her own, be it nursing, electoral suffrage, or the writings of plays.”

Tellingly, Huneker not only points out the growing anachronism of several of the domestic piano’s nineteenth-century roles, such as courting and marriage, but also simultaneously idealizes the “great artist” at the cost of denigrating the amateur tradition.

Huneker’s viewpoints were far from isolated or revolutionary, and the American

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magazine *Etude* published a series of articles beginning in the 1880s that likewise criticized amateur music study, specifically aimed at female pianists.\(^\text{16}\)

*Player Pianos*

Player piano discourses developed against the backdrop of the Victorian acoustic piano. Rules around “playing” the player piano often contrasted with the acoustic piano’s identity. Such contrast appeared in several forms, including deliberately constructed binaries, conflicting extra-musical “masculine” associations, and anti-amateur sentiment within the music appreciation movement.

**Creating Binaries**

Growing anti-amateur prejudice around the acoustic piano became exaggerated and solidified within early mechanical piano discourses. Although glaringly ironic to a present-day audience, during the early twentieth century such discourses came to frame mechanical piano music as a modern, active antidote to the passive, inactive and temporally antiquated Victorian acoustic piano tradition. As an example, the recreated excerpted from a 1910 Aeolian (mechanical piano) advertisement in Example 3.3 dramatizes the Victorian acoustic piano’s “object” identity by contrasting it with the “active” Pianola (early stage piano player):

When people buy a piano nowadays, they buy it for music. The day when pianos were bought as ornaments is past. It is the PIANOLA PIANO that has wrought this change.

Example 3.3: Framing techniques in a 1910 advertisement

Aided by careful framing and growing public skepticism of the Victorian amateur tradition, the ad in Example 3.3 presents the acoustic piano as outmoded furniture from a nonmusical past, while the piano player is framed as a facilitator of genuine present-day musical experiences.

Ads like that in Example 3.3 demanded activity in the place of passivity, employing the common early 1900s strategy of assigning competing commodities to a commercial past and present. The importance of such framing is especially clear in this case, as the “modern” identity of the relatively old mechanical piano technology had more to do with the timing and discursive depiction of its ascent into popularity than with its actual age. A 1905 piano player slogan recorded in Loesser’s study keenly captures the temporal dislocation and fading esteem for both the semi-trained amateur girl (who has either grown up, married, and has ceased to play, or simply no longer exists) and the beautiful but useless acoustic piano: “How many thousands of American parlors contain that shining monument to a past girlhood—a silent piano?” This slogan bemoans (and

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19 These ideas are partly informed by Holly Kruse’s article on turn-of-the-century audio technology and domestic spaces. In this article, Kruse describes how musical objects accrue extra-musical associations based on events unfolding around them: if the decadent phonograph synecdochically stands for the excess of the roaring 20s, the comparative thrift of radio technology is paired with the economic austerity of the Great Depression. Holly Kruse, “Early Audio Technology and Domestic Space,” Stanford Humanities Review 3, no. 2 (1993): 1–14.
20 Loesser describes this line, attributing it to an Ohio piano store advertisement for Cecilian Piano Players in 1905. It is unclear what medium the line was presented in, or whether it was generated by the piano company or the piano store. Men, Women, and Pianos, 583.
thereby declares) the passing of a whole style of girlhood, while offering in its place the solution of mechanical music.\textsuperscript{21} Chapter Four’s analysis of Curtis Company ads and content treats temporal displacement in greater depth.

Masculine Associations

Technology and expanded repertoire are two elements of player piano discourse that clashed with the Victorian acoustic piano by way of their extra-musical masculine associations.\textsuperscript{22} Technological aspects were commonly downplayed in late-stage reproducing piano ads, such as in Example 2.3 (Beethoven and the reproducing piano); however, ads from the early 1900s necessitated a mechanical focus if only to explain to the public how player mechanisms worked.\textsuperscript{23} In this case, general indexical connections between technology, machines, and men likely provided a gateway to their participation. As Katz states of the parallel phonograph case, it “mitigated the supposed ‘feminizing’ influence of music (particularly classical music), because as a machine it opened opportunities for tinkering and ‘shop talk,’ traditional men’s activities.”\textsuperscript{24}

Ironic considering anti-amateur sentiments directed at the acoustic piano, the minimal amount of training required to operate player technology also opened up domestic music-making to men. Explored in greater depth in Chapter Four, player ads from the years leading up to World War I emphasized intuition to the point of casting player-piano musical expression as more natural, instinctive, and even musical, than

\textsuperscript{21} Considering this slogan’s date (1905), the target market was likely those looking to purchase an external piano player for an already-existing piano.

\textsuperscript{22} As discussed in Chapter Two, the mechanical piano had extra-musical mechanical associations long before its popularity.


\textsuperscript{24} Mark Katz, Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd., 2010), 66.
acoustic music-making. This theme connects with gender in that the player mechanism allowed men to circumnavigate formal amateur musical training and its strong ties to girls’ and women’s accomplishments. In fact, much discussion around piano players and player pianos involved recasting musical training away from traditional markers of acoustic piano education. In place of rigorous technical training came the notion of the “self,” and the suggestion that player mechanisms facilitated a level of musicality unavailable to those musicians who had formal training. An excerpt from a player piano guidebook written in 1907 is representative of this contemporaneous logic. Gustav Kobbé—a figure perhaps best known for his opera guidebooks—writes:

if he has natural musical instinct or has developed it through the piano-player, he will be as correct in his judgment of what to play and how to play it as if he had devoted his whole life to an arduous study of pianoforte technique. The Pianolist’s experience with music is wholly musical, while the pianist’s is largely technical.

Again, referencing “his judgment,” this quote reaffirms high valuation of the operator’s input at the player device (as well as masculinity more generally through choice of pronouns).

Although rarely discussed in player piano scholarship, expanded repertoire also created a gender separation between player and acoustic piano traditions. Player mechanisms made difficult pieces of music written for the piano more accessible,

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25 Katz argues a similar case for the phonograph and men’s participation.

26 Gustav Kobbé, *The Pianolist: A Guide for Pianola Players* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1907), 48. Other guide books, such as Sydney Grew’s *The Art of the Player-Piano* (1922), express some of these same sentiments; however, they were not included in this analysis because they relate to the later reproducing piano, and were written at the height of the instrument’s popularity.
allowing men to create music associated with professional performance rather than limiting home music making to those genres of parlor music associated with amateurism. Perhaps even more significant, player mechanisms were able to recreate pieces of music usually restricted to the orchestra halls and opera houses, and in their technical perfection were able to surpass most renditions of four-hand piano transcriptions long familiar to the parlor. Discussing a parallel phenomenon with the phonograph, Katz states that its mechanical associations allowed men to experience domestic music-making differently than women: whereas women’s domestic music-making had traditionally revolved around “uplift and education,” fitting with concepts of Victorianism, mechanical music allowed men to approach music-making from the perspective of “mastery and exploration.”

This description applies just as well—if not better—to early and middle stage mechanical pianos, where heavy emphasis on the self and repertoire choices impressed upon the operator a sense of command and skill. Kobbé unequivocally illustrates this point, saying of his Pianola guide, “one of the aims of this book is to stimulate the Pianolist to explore for himself.”

Music Appreciation

Changing views on musical amateurism connected with a groundswell of support for general music appreciation in America during the early 1900s. Music appreciation propelled the mechanical piano into public conversation, where the mechanism was given credit for bringing more music, and better music, to public institutions (such as schools)

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27 Katz, Capturing Sound, 68.
28 Kobbé, The Pianolist, 141.
Proponents of mechanical music (including phonographs and player pianos) frequently asserted the egalitarian rights of all people to “great” (meaning of the Western art tradition) music. Within these arguments, pronouncements of music’s moralizing force—familiar from the 1800s—registered increasingly as common sense, much like American Victorianism itself had decades earlier. Some advocates framed mechanical piano technology as a bridge to greater acoustic piano proficiency, with the idea that introducing novice acoustic-piano students to new repertoire played by famous artists would inspire them to continue their studies; however, not until the reproducing piano stage did the mechanical piano register as this sort of replay device. Instead, two central qualities of piano players and player pianos were emphasized as furthering music appreciation: their ease of operation, which opened the piano’s use to the untrained, and their many-fingered player mechanisms, which widened the piano’s repertoire to orchestral and operatic works.

Kobbé’s guide expresses the logic dominating the growing music appreciation movement, equating and even elevating love for music over technical achievement. He states, “If you love music and appreciate it, you may be more musical than many pianists and singers; or latent within you there may be deeper love and appreciation of the art than

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30 Roell quotes a powerful statement by the American Association for the Advancement of Education in 1855, saying that music “is one of the best means of quickening the moral sensibilities and elevating the affections of the young.” Roell, *The Piano in America*, 18.

31 An example from Dolge’s 1911 publication captures this. Dolge writes, “These artistic players [meaning earliest German reproducing piano, the Welte Mignon] will be a most valuable assistant to the piano teacher, aiding him in instructing his pupils as to how great artists interpret the compositions of the masters. They are furthermore of inestimable value in recording for posterity the wonderful playing of a Joseffy, Rosenthal, De Pachman, Busoni and other virtuosos.” Alfred Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers* (Covina, California: Covina Publishing Company, 1911), 157.

32 In American public schools in particular, the mechanical piano inspired new programs of music education that emphasized exposure to great works, as curricula shifted away from active singing and toward listening (see Roell, *The Piano in America*, 38.)
can be attributed to many virtuosos.”

By equating mechanical music-making not with amateur playing, but with professional virtuosity, the act of making mechanical piano music remained more connected with masculinity than with older female-gendered indices tied to the private sphere and Victorian accomplishments. Another quote from Kobbé’s piano guide corroborates the total disconnect between amateurism and mechanical piano-playing: “Although Chopin figures on almost every pianoforte recital program the average amateur has comparatively slight knowledge of the range of his genius. Only the player able to go over his works in person can acquire such knowledge, and the number of amateurs possessed of sufficient technique to play Chopin’s music is very small.”

Although likely referring to human operators when it was written, Kobbé’s use of the word “player” registers as ambiguous and fitting to the semi-passive music-making experience possible with player pianos.

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The mid-1910s mark a strange moment in acoustic and mechanical piano relations. Rising just as enthusiasm for the amateur acoustic piano began to fall, the player piano’s entrance onto the music-making scene both changed and reflected change in the way Americans thought about, made, purchased, and listened to music in the home. Unlike the massively popular reproducing piano, the mid-1910s player piano shared with the acoustic piano the requirement of an operator. Combined with their shared production and distribution methods, basic target demographic, physical appearance and even (often) brand names, acoustic and player pianos in the mid-1910s were far more similar to each other.

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33 Kobbé, The Pianolist, 7.
34 Kobbé, The Pianolist, 119–120.
other than acoustic pianos and reproducing pianos would be in the late 1910s. In the
words of Katz, what separated the player piano from the acoustic piano was the
technology it “supersede[d], improve[d] upon,” and “extende[d].”35 As this chapter has
shown, the work of defining similarities and differences was largely achieved through
discursive social rules of “play” for both instruments. Chapter Four presents a
contextualized case study of these rules applied to instrument advertising.

35 Katz, Capturing Sound, 4.
Chapter 4: Playing with Ads: Pianos, Print Media, Mechanization and Gender in the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post

Example 4.1: Player Piano Iconography (Post, 1915)

This chapter presents the little-discussed middle stage of America’s transition to mechanical pianos by way of contextualized ad comparison. Acoustic and player piano ads from mid-1910s issues of the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post at first glance appear alike in their reference to American Victorian values, an unsurprising finding given the almost parental relationship between the well-established acoustic piano industry and the growing player piano industry. However, side-by-side examination of these acoustic and player piano ads casts an ambiguous light on such areas of surface similarity, and encourages the identification of areas of unmistakable difference between the ad types. In other words, even though ads for both instruments claim similar Victorian values, constructed meanings such as those discussed in Chapter Three put them at odds. Broader ad placement trends within the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post serve to reinforce these patterns. In short, this study reveals yet-unexamined nuances in, and conflicts between, ads for acoustic pianos and mid-1910s player pianos in terms of technology, gender and domestic music-making.

1 Baldwin Piano Co, “Again the Fetters of Music are Broken,” advertisement, Saturday Evening Post, November 27, 1915, 34.
This chapter analyzes acoustic and player pianos as contemporaries of one another within the specific context of the wildly popular, advertising-savvy *LHJ* and *Post*. It references ad and non-ad content from both publications—including editorials, fiction, and nonfiction pieces—in order to connect acoustic and player piano advertising to each publication’s distinct overarching editorial agenda. Part one outlines attitudes toward advertising as well as ad placement trends for general (non-music) commodities across both publications. Next comes a discussion of attitudes toward music and other cultural production in each publication, including motion pictures, domestic music-making, and the phonograph. These two sections recreate the differing journalistic environments in the female-centered *LHJ* and the family-oriented *Post*, and their contrasting attitudes towards technology, contemporary entertainment and domestic music specifically shed further light on ad placement trends for piano types. Part two includes an analysis of iconography and text from several acoustic and player piano ads, limited to ads from the commercially-heavy months leading up to Christmas (October, November, and December) during the span of 1914–1916.² Ad analysis and contextualization elucidate the complex relationship between acoustic and player pianos.

*Part I: General Commodities and Cultural Production*

The placement of player piano ads exclusively in the *Post* and acoustic piano ads almost exclusively in the *LHJ* was very likely a deliberate strategy, and falls inline with more general trends in content and ad placement. As discussed in Chapter One, Curtis Company specifically advocated advertising’s important and trustworthy role within their

² This year span was selected both to capture the mechanical piano’s middle “player piano” stage and to avoid complications of America’s entrance into World War I (see Chapter One, footnote 1).
publications, and offered hard evidence that readers agreed. Both the *LHJ* and the *Post* presented advertisements and national brand development as a partnership between advertisers and readers from which both sides stood to benefit. Pro-consumption attitudes prevailed in both publications; however, beliefs that women did/should consume on behalf of themselves and their families meant that this relationship received more open emphasis in the *LHJ* than in the *Post*. Examples 4.2 and 4.3 suggest how each publication shaped consumption attitudes. Example 4.2 is taken from the *LHJ* “Editor’s Personal Page” in the December 1915 issue. The column is made to resemble person-to-person correspondence, with paragraph one containing editor Bok’s response to a reader’s letter, which is found in paragraph two and offset by quotation marks. The reader in this excerpt echoes the common statement by the *LHJ* that its readership valued its advertisements perhaps even more than its non-ad content. The excerpt also conveys the trust the reader might have felt in her purchase of products found in the *LHJ*:

![Image of an advertisement](image.png)

**Example 4.2: Pro-consumption ideas in the “Editor’s Personal Page” (*LHJ*, 1915)**

This style of editorial did not appear in the *Post*; however, consumer-advertiser relationships were also modeled through inserts that the Curtis Company placed in both the *LHJ* and *Post*. Example 4.3 presents an excerpt from a full-page Curtis Company

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insert placed in the *Post* entitled, “A Story of Public Service,” in which advertising is lauded for its role in creating better products and new technologies:

![Image of an advertisement from the *Saturday Evening Post*, December 26, 1914, page 44. The main question, however, is: What does advertising do besides stimulate competition? As a matter of fact, its chief use lies entirely beyond. It creates new markets, new demand, new desires. It makes possible new products, new ways of doing things, a better national life.]

**Example 4.3: Pro-consumption ideas in a Curtis Company insert (Post, 1915)**

In addition to epitomizing the sorts of achievements Curtis attributed to advertising, this insert suggests links between consumption and such modernist tenets as progress, science, and novelty.\(^5\)

The ideological endorsement advertising received within Curtis Company publications was accompanied by implicit assurance that that the publications would carry advertisements for high-caliber products while restricting ads for products deemed questionable. The *LHJ* explicitly guaranteed the quality and trustworthiness of products and services advertised within its pages beginning in 1910, when Bok specifically stipulated: “no mail-order advertisements of general merchandise, no installment buying, no alcohol, no patent medicines, no immodesty in text or illustration, no financial advertisements, no tobacco, no playing cards.”\(^6\) Although Bok’s attitude toward promoting installment plans softened by the mid-1910s—an unsurprising concession given the increasing popularity of big-ticket items like automobiles—his *LHJ* continued to exclude the other forbidden items through this study’s time frame. The *Post* largely


\(^5\) A conspicuous large-font banner bearing the Curtis Company name ran along the bottom of these inserts, both marking them apart from ad content and emphasizing the publishing company’s presence. The regularity of this banner created continuity between Curtis Company inserts through time, but also across publications, an especially important fact considering readership overlap between the *Post* and the *LHJ*.

followed suit, and much of the two publications’ advertising overlapped both in terms of products advertised and actual advertising copy itself; however, the Post did run ads for product types specifically denounced by Bok (such as tobacco) as well as for products tacitly excluded from the LHJ (such as firearms). Products like underwear, clothing, canned foods, silverware, cars, and so forth were common to both the LHJ and the Post, with many companies placing identical ads in both publications.

A full comparison of general ad trends is beyond the scope of this study; however, Table 4.1 uses data from November 1915 issues of the LHJ and the Post to give an overview of advertising. Several factors complicate side-by-side comparison of the two periodicals and should be kept in mind with this table: the data comprise a very small sample set, including ads from one weekly edition of the Post and one monthly issue of the LHJ. Specific to the issues selected, the Post’s 64-page publication is 36 percent shorter than the 100-page LHJ volume. Given this discrepancy, a product type advertised three times in the Post would be proportionally equivalent to (in terms of volume) that same product type advertised five times in the LHJ. At the same time, applying this ratio obscures advertising strategies of specific companies like Crisco (shortening), which placed a single ad in each publication during the period surveyed, regardless of periodical length or publication frequency. In addition, this table does not take into account the relative size of ads placed, nor their locations within the respective publications:

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7 Page length appears to fluctuate significantly across months and years of both periodicals.
Table 4.1 shows some products clearly associated with one or the other publication (such as tobacco and cold cream/face powder) and other products unequally represented across the two publications (such as automobiles and toothpaste).

Ad patterns in Table 4.1 substantiate the *LHJ*’s mostly female audience and the *Post*’s mixed audience. However, as discussed in Chapter One, the *Post* began as a men’s magazine in the late 1890s, shifting to a “family friendly” frame in the early 1900s only after experiencing commercial struggles selling ad space to advertisers who connected women, not men, with consumption. Helen Damon-Moore suggests that the *Post*’s initial masculine frame continued to influence content into the 1910s, a thesis that almost goes without saying given the central role editor Lorimer’s personality played in the publication’s shape during his tenure (1899−1936). Nevertheless, and despite likely overlap in readership between the *Post* and the *LHJ*, various ad trends do suggest that the *Post* was friendlier towards themes and products stereotypically gendered male than was the *LHJ*.

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**Table 4.1: General ad placement trends in the *LHJ* and the *Post*, data from *LHJ* November 1915 issue and *Post* November 6, 1915 issue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Type</th>
<th>Number of Ads Placed, the <em>Post</em></th>
<th>Number of Ads Placed, the <em>LHJ</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automobiles</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Razors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds (Investment)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Lights</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosiery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Cream/ Face Powder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toothpaste</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

The handful of the product trends evident in Table 4.1, in addition to statements made by Curtis Company founder Cyrus Curtis, closely link the \textit{Post} to technology, gadgets, and “tinkering.” For example, although both the \textit{LHJ} and the \textit{Post} regularly ran advertisements for automobiles, the \textit{Post} carried significantly greater ad volume. Looking at a four-page Curtis advertisement in \textit{Printer’s Ink}—an American publication self-described as a “journal for advertisers”—Curtis persuasively characterizes the \textit{Post} as a “pillar” in the growth of auto sales and includes several charts indicating the volume of auto ads placed in the \textit{Post} throughout the early 1910s. The ad does not mention the \textit{LHJ} nor its ad volume.\(^9\) In addition to greater visibility of auto ads in the \textit{Post} during the issues surveyed, the \textit{Post} alone carried accessory “tinkering” commodities needed to deal with the new auto technology, including tires, oil, and sparkplugs. In a related trend, Table 4.1 also shows the \textit{Post}’s exclusive run of ads for electric lights.\(^{10}\) The following excerpt from a two-page Curtis Company ad (also from \textit{Printer’s Ink}) entitled “Developing Advertising: Electrical Goods” demonstrates how Curtis specifically promoted the \textit{Post} as a mechanism for technology sales: “During the period referred to \([1911–1913]\) 64\% of the total national advertising in this field was done through THE POST. In 1913 it was 74\%.”\(^{11}\) Like the earlier \textit{Printer’s Ink} auto ad, this electrical goods ad does not mention the \textit{LHJ}.

The pro-technology environment in the \textit{Post} was lacking in the \textit{LHJ}, a trend that included sound technology. The iconography in Example 4.4 from a series of ads placed in the \textit{Post} by the American Telephone and Telegraph Company conveys public open-


\(^{10}\) Another 1915 issue of the \textit{LHJ} does feature one ad for lighting fixtures.

mindedness and excitement towards the new sound technology. Comparable ads cannot be found in the *LHJ* during this period:

Example 4.4: Ad imagery for American Telephone and Telegraph Company (*Post*, 1915)

All of the images in Example 4.4 give primary and positive emphasis to new sound technology, and the public exhibition settings in the second and third images in particular are striking in the way they appear to elevate technology itself, not just products.

Presentation of phonograph ads also connects with this trend. Although a full discussion of phonograph ad patterns is beyond the reach of this study, the data on phonograph ad placement in both publications during 1915 found in Table 4.2 suggests links to pro-technology trends. In Table 4.2, data from weekly *Post* issues are condensed.

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into a monthly profile:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>The Post</th>
<th>The LHJ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Ads</td>
<td>Number of Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1915</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1915</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1915</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Phonograph ad placement trends in the LHJ and the Post, October–December, 1915

The number of phonograph ads placed in the Post during this period outstrips placement in the LHJ even after figuring in page length and issue frequency differences for the two publications. The margin of difference is less obvious than with electric lights or tobacco, an especially interesting (and perplexing) trend considering the comparatively stark differences in acoustic and player piano ad placement between the two publications.

Another set of patterns contextually relevant to the study of player and acoustic piano ads emerges from attitudes in the LHJ and the Post toward music and other types of cultural production. In this area a fuller story emerges out of the LHJ, both because editor Bok left a record of his viewpoints and because the arts played a more conspicuous role within the women’s journal. The absence of non-ad music content within the Post, in addition to Post editor Lorimer’s silence on the subject, tellingly suggests that domestic music-making was simply not within magazine’s purview.

Compared to the Post’s rather anonymous editor, Bok expounded freely on his views of music. In his 1921 autobiography, Bok explains (in the third person) how he “lacked musical knowledge,” but enjoyed it when his (Bok’s) wife played piano in the Bok home. Bok describes his early view that “the appeal of music…was largely, if not wholly, to the feminine nature,” and left men without music roles, but goes on to describe

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that his gendered attitudes had shifted by the early 1910s to the point where he himself participated in the world of music. Bok was apparently not referring to domestic music-making, as his expanded musical activities comprised an administrative role with the Philadelphia Orchestra Association’s Board of Directors beginning in 1913.\footnote{Edward William Bok, \textit{The Americanization of Edward Bok}, 367–368. The founding of the now-renowned Curtis Institute of Music in 1924 by Bok’s wife (Mary Louise Curtis Bok, daughter of Curtis Publishing Company president Cyrus Curtis) further illustrates the Bok/Curtis family’s civic-minded, “high-culture” penchant.}

Bok freely discusses art music in his autobiography—including the opera, the symphony, and home music-making—while omitting mention of vaudeville, ragtime or tin pan alley-type popular music, a trend strongly reflecting the content of the \textit{LHJ} in the years leading up to World War I. Placing this trend within the direction Bok took the \textit{LHJ} more generally, it appears that he simply excluded matters he felt were not edifying for women.

Piano-playing and pedagogy received clear sanction from Bok, who allotted regular space in his periodical for sheet music and a monthly “Piano Questions” column. Regular inclusion of piano music (including pieces written by women) harkens back to nineteenth-century general magazines for women, and the short length, moderate difficulty, and solo piano/piano and voice scoring of the pieces featured in the \textit{LHJ} fitted an earlier profile of parlor music. Example 4.5 includes an excerpt from a light, one-page Beethoven minuet for piano:
Example 4.5: “Beethoven’s Charming Minuet: As Leopold Godowsky Plays It” (*LHJ*, 1915)

Despite the parlor music content of Example 4.5, the title of the sheet-music insert bears the influence of early-twentieth-century popular culture: “Beethoven’s Charming Minuet: As Leopold Godowsky Plays It,” is emblematic of the star power surrounding phonograph records and later player piano rolls (after the advent of the reproducing piano). In addition to sheet music, the *LHJ* regularly included a full-page “Piano Questions” column under the charge of performing artist Josef Hoffmann. Within this column, readers’ questions appeared beside Hofmann’s responses in the same format shown in Example 4.2. Most of the printed questions and answers related to technical or interpretive matters, and—at least within the 1914–1916 time span considered in this analysis—pertained strictly to art music. Player pianos were not mentioned during these years.

The appearance of Hoffmann’s “Piano Questions” column within a general women’s magazine, like the presence of sheet music itself, reflects a Victorian conception of women’s accomplishments; however, also like the sheet-music insert, the

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contents of the column betray the influence of contemporary cultural pressures.

Specifically, the strong censure against playing “by ear” in the replicated query found in Example 4.6 pushes back against the encroachment of casual “fun” into domestic music-making:

**Why “Playing by Ear” is Injurious**

My Little daughter shows a strong desire to play things by ear rather than work on what her teacher gives her. How far should this be permitted or should it be allowed at all? MOTHER

To play by ear is not a pleasure; it is an amusement, and only for the player, never to the listener. You should discourage it and make your child understand that music is a serious matter, one which some of the most luminous minds of all times have devoted their best powers. To trifle with it is frivolous and unworthy of any person who aspire to culture. Do not delay to inculcate this principle in your child’s mind—now, while she is young; now is the time!

**Example 4.6: “Why ‘Playing by Ear’ Is Injurious” (LHJ, 1915)**

Hofmann’s attitude in this response substantiates Judith Tick’s argument that specialization had largely replaced American Victorian musical amateurism by the turn of the century. However, within the non-specialist LHJ, Hoffman’s comments also appear to censure fun-seeking pianists, and can even be read as a critique of the player piano’s by-ear operation. Considering the emphasis on player piano technique during these years when the instrument saw massive popularization, the omission of the player piano from Hofmann’s column suggests two equally interesting possibilities: that it was deliberately disregarded, or that it did not register as a domestic music-making “piano” in the gendered tradition of acoustic pianos. The absence of player piano discussion and ads within the LHJ mutually reinforce the idea of incompatibility between the two piano types.

Marked difference between the two publications’ attitudes towards another type of cultural production, the “movies,” also sheds light on acoustic and player piano ad placement trends. Anchored in contemporary mid-1910s social life, the motion picture sits opposite Victorian domestic music-making in a number of binaries: movies were a passive, public-sphere, (largely) gender-neutral, pleasure-based activity, while parlor music was an active, private-sphere, heavily gendered, tradition historically focused on the work girls and women put into practicing. Like the phonograph, a full study of movies is beyond the scope of this analysis; however, general movie trends contribute to an understanding of the way piano types were featured and advertised. Although ads for motion picture companies are found in both publications throughout the mid-1910s, their appearance is neither uniformly even, nor neutrally situated, across the LHJ and the Post. This parallels the phonograph case. Whereas a full-page ad like that seen in Example 4.7 ran in at least one issue of the Post during October, November, and December of 1915, just one comparable ad ran in the LHJ:
Given the cultural currency of movies during the mid-1910s, a detailed content analysis of both publications would likely reveal regular references to movies in non-ad content; however, the cursory content survey included within this study—based largely on iconography and titles of articles—strongly suggests that movies appeared in the LHJ with an ambivalence and hesitation not present in the Post. Contradiction is evident within the women’s magazine. For example, the November 1915 issue of the LHJ included a full page article entitled “Tonight at 8:15: The Real Trouble With the Theater in Your Town,” which attributes the overall decline in “good drama” to the rise of “new”...
theater (presumably vaudeville) and motion pictures. The author somewhat begrudgingly acknowledges the appeal of movies, labeling them a “veritable oasis,” while cautioning their lack of educational content and emphasizing their bad influence on young people. Paradoxically, an advertisement for singer/actress Geraldine Farrar performing in the movie version of Carmen is featured two pages later (see Example 4.8).

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Example 4.8: Mixed messaging within and across *LHJ* content (*LHJ*, 1915)

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Several factors may have mitigated the LHJ’s inclusion of the ad for the film version of Carmen. It is unclear what (if any) role Farrar’s singing career had on her overall image as a movie star, and whether that identity made for a better fit between the LHJ and the ad found in Example 4.8. A full-page article entitled “Geraline Farrar’s Own Story of Her Life: When I First Began to Sing” can also be found in the November 1915 issue. Situated on page 49, the interview with Farrar regarding her singing career sits directly between the article “Tonight at 8:15” and the advertisement “Geraldine Farrar in ‘Carmen’” (located on pages 48 and 50 respectively). In addition, the singer/actress was particularly known for her operatic performances of Carmen, an index that may have carried over to affect the acceptability of an ad for her performance in the film version.\textsuperscript{23} It is also possible that Carmen’s initial index to opera-as-high-art softened the appearance of its film version within the women’s magazine.

Other articles within the LHJ appear to accept film only conditionally. For example, Bok used his editorial page to portray movies as the lesser of two evils when compared with saloons, begrudgingly stating, “the ‘movie’ may not be all we would like to have it, but it certainly has developed an unexpected strength in a direction that no one ever dreamed.”\textsuperscript{24} Disapproval underlies this sort of conditional acceptance, illustrated well in the stern conclusion from another LHJ article presenting movies as a possible saloon alternative. The author states: “let it be said with all emphasis possible that…the home must be the best substitute for the saloon.”\textsuperscript{25}

Compared with movies, the phonograph, and more general commodities, ad placement trends for piano types across the two Curtis Company publications appear

straightforward: between 1914–1916, player piano ads appear exclusively in the *Post* and acoustic pianos appear almost exclusively in the *LHJ*. A more detailed look at ad placement trends in the two publications can be found in the series of tables below. Tables 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 detail yearly ad placement specifics, including volume by piano type and brand:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October, November, December</th>
<th>October, November, December</th>
<th>October, November, December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acoustic Piano Ads</td>
<td>Player Piano Ads</td>
<td>Acoustic Piano Ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LHJ</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Ad Volume By Piano Type in the *LHJ* and the *Post*, October –December 1914, 1915, 1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>LHJ</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinway</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivers &amp; Pond</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallet &amp; Davis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Acoustic Piano Ad Volume by Brand in the *LHJ*, October–December 1914, 1915, 1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Post</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin (Player)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexotone (Player)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallet &amp; Davis (Acoustic)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallet &amp; Davis (Player)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion &amp; Healy (Acoustic)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Player and Acoustic Piano Ad Volume by Brand in the *Post*, October–December 1914, 1915, 1916
A few major trends stand out from these three tables. Looking at Tables 4.2 and 4.3, it is clear that acoustic piano ads only rarely appear in the Post, with one Lion & Healy ad and two Hallet & Davis ads appearing in 1916. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 indicate that the pool of companies running ads in both magazines is small and consistent, with Baldwin Piano Co. placing the majority of player piano ads, and Steinway and Ivers & Pond dominating ads for acoustic piano.\(^{26}\)

Because LHJ and the Post were both newsprint giants run by the same publisher, targeting the same socio-economic demographic, connections between the two publications’ specific ideologies and their coverage of music and other cultural production creates a basis for interpreting specific commodity placement patterns. Fitting ad trends for acoustic and player pianos within these two publications’ specific ideologies produces a profile of each instrument’s social identity. The impact of the two commodities’ extra-musical identities upon ad placement have not been a part of piano scholarship as yet, and the presence of these ad placement trends within the two massively popular American magazines adds a new angle to our understanding of the piano types and their relationship as contemporaries. Multiple contextual trends in the Post suggest why it proved a more hospitable environment for player piano advertisements, ranging from its comparatively high ad volume for automobile and auto “tinkering” accessories, to its open endorsement of technology-for-technology’s-sake evident in telephone ads, to its comparatively uncomplicated relationship with contemporary entertainment. Conversely, the presence of acoustic piano ads in the LHJ

\(^{26}\) In part because this small pool is largely populated with a limited number of big names in piano manufacturing, this analysis does not propose that ad messaging itself reflects the specific influence of the LHJ or the Post, nor that of their in-house ad copy departments, but more aims to align patterns in the Curtis Company publications with patterns in the ads.
seems in logical keeping with its continued support of women’s domestic music-making, evidenced by its nineteenth-century-esque inclusion of piano music and Hofmann’s piano pedagogy column. The particular exclusion of player pianos also makes sense within the publication’s general hesitation towards new forms of cultural production, and in light of Bok’s own perception of domestic and public music-making.

Part II: Ad Study

A close reading of player and acoustic piano advertisements produces a wealth of complicated patterns. Taylor and Roell in particular have highlighted how player piano ads tended to borrow heavily from American Victorian piano indices, and regular portrayals of family and middle-classness have led scholars to characterize the player piano as falling within the cultural lineage of the acoustic piano tradition.27 Ad placement trends in the *Post* and the *LHJ* suggest otherwise, as does an in-depth ad analysis. Side-by-side comparison of the two ad types demonstrates that areas of similarity commonly highlighted by scholars are in reality ambiguous at best, with singular Victorian concepts—such as high valuation of family—appearing quite differently between the two ad types. In fact, themes of difference between the ads are more numerous than these areas of similarity, and certain features of player piano ads, such as the active presence of men, technological emphasis, and the framing of player piano “music-making,” explicitly counter trends in acoustic piano ads.

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Similarities: Player Pianos, Acoustic Pianos, and Middle-Class Family Life

Especially in their iconography, the player piano ads surveyed from issues of the mid-1910s family-focused *Post* reference familiar central values of Victorian America. The theme of “family” echoes throughout the texts of the following ads, and their images frequently feature family music-making. Example 4.9 includes several images suggesting “family” from the surveyed ads:

![Example 4.9: Images of Families and Domesticity in Player Piano Ads (*Post*, 1915–1916)]

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The appearance of children, mothers, and fathers in all of the above ads demonstrates the centrality of family to player piano discourses, and of the thirteen player ads included in the ad study, only one depicts an unambiguously unaccompanied solo performer. Upon first glance, the ads in Example 4.9 bring to mind scenes of in-home, middle-class acoustic piano-playing, illustrating Roell’s point that scenes of family life paired with an instrument so iconically reminiscent of the acoustic piano implied the Victorian piano’s “accompanying mythology,” including, “home and family life, art, and morality.”

Taylor articulates a similar logic, specifically highlighting how such images borrowed social capital from the acoustic piano, stating, “player piano advertisements emphasized the social status offered by the acoustic piano by depicting instruments in beautiful houses, with well dressed people enjoying themselves. Everybody always looks happy, children look well behaved.”

In addition to iconography, the surveyed player ads also frequently emphasize “home” textually. The ad in Example 4.10 below achieves this by directly referencing “family:”

![Example 4.10: Textual reference to “family” in a player piano ad (Post, 1915)](image)

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29 The ad with a solo player can be found at: Baldwin Piano Company, “As Instinctive as the Song of the Nightingale,” advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*, October 30, 1915, 31; One ad for a Virtuolo player piano features a woman operating the player with two diaphanous figures dancing in the background: Hallet & Davis Piano Co., “You Don’t know What the Virtuolo Is,” advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*, October 28, 1916, 69. Some ads also include no player-piano operator.


Other ads include phrases like, “Your house will ring with every favorite tune,” (an instrument) “welcome in every home everywhere,” and “today in thousands of homes.”\(^{32}\) As will be discussed later in this chapter, even though images of multi-member families (such as in Example 4.9) and references to home music-making feel like acoustic piano ads, images of and direct references to families making music are actually atypical of contemporaneous acoustic piano ads in the *LHJ*.

**Similarities: Music Appreciation**

Music appreciation—discussed in Chapter Three—is also regarded as a general outgrowth of the Victorian value of self-betterment, and the frequent touting of player pianos and phonographs as a means to access art music spilled over into advertisements. Although many player ads from the *Post* at this time do not specify what is to be played on their instruments, art music references far outweigh references to popular music (such as ragtime). Most often, these references include grand comparisons between the player piano operator and a composer or work of art. Example 4.11 features one such ad placed by Baldwin Piano Co.:

Example 4.11: Music appreciation in player piano ad (*Post*, 1916)

The iconography points to composer George Frederick Handel, suggested both by the ad’s text and by the caption at the top right of the image. The juxtaposition of the child Handel with Baldwin Piano Company’s familiar child player (in the right-hand corner of the ad) is particularly effective for simultaneously emphasizing the player piano’s extreme accessibility and the novice player-piano operator’s potential to make art music.34 (Many ads in this study, including that in Example 4.11, are evocative of multiple themes and reappear in different parts of the analysis.)

Example 4.12 highlights the player piano operator’s ability to experience a specific work, the Toreador’s song from Bizet’s *Carmen*:

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34 It is interesting that Baldwin Co. chose Handel, a composer without an illustrious career as a child prodigy, over such figures as Mozart.
Example 4.12: Music appreciation in player piano ad, repertoire-specific (*Post*, 1914)

The text in Example 4.12 spells out the amateur-as-skilled-musician experience alluded to in Example 4.11’s title: “The Only difference between Händel and You.” Example 4.12 presents the player piano’s transportative quality in incredible detail, allowing the operator to re-experience (and recreate) a performance at the New York Metropolitan Opera House. In addition, this excerpt epitomizes the mix of passive music appreciation and semi-active operation unique to the mechanical piano’s mid-1910s “player piano” developmental stage.

The iconography and text in Example 4.13 again express the amateur’s new musical freedom and potential artistic command over the player piano.

This ad is bizarrely eclectic, with a visual image of the player piano literally breaking free from the chains that held it back (the chains are not visible in the excerpted example) paired with textual references to Beethoven, Sousa, and the theoretical development of “harmony”:

---

Example 4.13’s text applies odd deductive reasoning—“Beethoven could not have composed his picturesque symphonies if he had lived among the ancient Greeks”—in order to frame the player piano’s improvements on the acoustic piano within the specific progression of Western art music. At the same time, the ad’s grandiose references imply the potential greatness of the individual operator.

These two areas of similarity demonstrate links between player piano ads and Victorian America, be they organic outgrowth from Victorian thought, deliberate sales ploys, or a combination of the two. Heightened emphasis on “family” in player ads’ iconography and text seemingly places the mechanical piano type in the direct lineage of the acoustic piano (see Example 4.9). However, even seemingly shared values (such as family) conflict when player and acoustic ads are compared side-by-side. As we shall

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see, areas of distinct difference between the two piano types emerge and suggest that the
player piano was not perceived as a simple outgrowth of the acoustic piano, but rather
that its new social functions were framed in direct contrast to the identity of the Victorian
acoustic piano. It is only through this side-by-side examination that similarities begin to
appear superficial and differences incontrovertible. This next section highlights three
main themes of difference between the two piano types: active versus passive music-
making; men’s roles; and the presence of technology. This is in order ultimately to point
out conflicting differences in function and social identity.

Differences: Music as Activity, Music as Object

A strong active-passive binary distinguishes player piano ads from acoustic piano
ads in this study. A phenomenon discussed in Chapter 3, the player piano’s “active”
discursive frame was derived from efforts to differentiate player technology from the
acoustic technology it aimed to supersede. Accordingly and somewhat surprisingly,
“passive” components of the acoustic piano’s identity appear most strongly articulated
against the foil of “activity” in player piano ads. The Victorian acoustic piano’s object-
centered identity and emphasis on piano ownership over piano use is one such
component. Example 4.14 features object-centered iconography common among the LHJ
acoustic ads surveyed. Not only are the women in the ads not playing the piano, but also
their instruments lack benches:

In addition to the instruments, the dreamy absent expression worn by the woman in the first ad and the hand-on-breast pose in the second depict both women as complimentary (and equally idle) objects. A line up of iconography from the various Ivers & Pond ads placed during the period surveyed only solidifies this effect. (See Example 4.15):

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Consistency among these images is striking. Only one example captures the featured woman in a realistic piano-playing pose (December 1915), and most of the images


feature women (and girls in the case of October 1916) with eyes cast away from the piano and with either no keyboard contact or one-handed contact. In only one of the ads is the woman holding sheet music (October 1915, rerun in November 1916). The women all appear as lovely compliments to their inactive pianos, young and demure in dress and pose.  

Although Steinway ads take a different approach during the years surveyed in the *LHJ*, the piano-as-object messaging remains the same. The text accompanying Example 4.16 reads, “consider what a Steinway would mean in your home”:

![Example 4.16: Empty Steinway ad (*LHJ*, 1914)](image)

This acoustic piano is accompanied by lavish surroundings rather than featuring a musician, and as the high ceilings, decorative lamp, and heavy drapes signal, the piano “means” something for the home independent of music-making. The Steinway iconography in Example 4.17 also features the “home” as background to its acoustic commodity. Aided by the text’s opening line, “To the bride, the Steinway piano is a most

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39 It is also worth noting that all of the women appear dressed in white, a signal of their moral purity.
acceptable gift,” the iconography clearly emphasizes the acoustic piano’s physical identity as a piece of furniture:

Example 4.17: Steinway as a gift (*LHJ*, 1915)

With the new bride clasping her hands and looking adoringly at her new husband as he stands leaning against the piano, this ad also exemplifies the intersection of gender roles with the Victorian acoustic piano’s identity as an object. As will be discussed with more detail and examples momentarily, this ad models a typical gendered portrayal wherein men’s participation in music-making is limited to providing the instrument and giving the impression of supervision and/or appreciation of the woman and her performance, often from a standing position.

Ad text is another site where the acoustic piano is made to take the identity of an object, and ads frequently reference high-quality craftsmanship to depict the piano as a long-lasting, socially-admirable investment. Besides referring to the piano as a “gift,” the text accompanying the Steinway ad in Example 4.16 labels the piano as a “lifetime possession.”42 Another Steinway ad references its gift-giving as “enduring evidence of

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the noblest sentiment." Text paired with the image in Example 4.17 contains the phrase “enduring possession,” and a Steinway ad from 1916 depicts the brand as a “priceless possession.” Craftsmanship and high quality were central to the public image Steinway created for itself, but even the comparatively modest Ivers & Pond used the phrase “work of art” in one of their LHJ ads.

Textual omissions also emphasize the piano’s status as an object. Although the Ivers & Pond ad in Example 4.18 has ample text, it spends little time describing musical attributes of the advertised piano:

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Surrounded on either side by physical description of the instrument and claims of its popularity, the brief and vague reference to “delightful musical qualities” gives the ad’s only indication of what the commodity is used for.

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Emphasis on craftsmanship within these acoustic piano ads is well in keeping with Victorian ideas of piano ownership; however, the tradition of active piano-playing was implied even as the instrument was coveted as a piece of furniture. Paradoxically, constructions in player piano ads and discourse during the mid-1910s often reframed the Victorian acoustic piano within a musically inactive temporal past, greatly exaggerating the actual decline in piano-playing.\textsuperscript{46} Within the ads surveyed, those for the Flexotone Electrelle player piano attachment appear particularly and explicitly critical of the acoustic piano’s object status. Various points of wordplay in the Flexotone ad in Example 4.19 attempt to sell the attachment (designed for already-purchased acoustic pianos) based on its ability to make active a previously inactive instrument:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{example419.jpg}
\caption{Example 4.19: Flexotone, “At Last—A Player in Your Own Piano” (\textit{Post}, 1915)}
\end{figure}

The ad’s title makes use of the multiple meanings of “player,” which can signify the inanimate player piano mechanism or the operator of an acoustic or mechanical piano. Given the pointed jabs at the “silent piano” found near the end of this excerpt, the title’s declamatory “At Last” appears as a strong critique towards the absent human “player” at the acoustic piano. The ad goes on to state, “Your piano was meant to be played,” firmly and explicitly framing the acoustic piano within an inactive state. Along similar lines, the

\textsuperscript{46} For discussion of the decline in girls’ piano-playing, see Tick, “Passed Away is the Piano Girl,” 325–348.

combination of text and iconography in Example 4.20 (also a Flexotone ad) is breathtakingly cutting:

![Example 4.20: “Provide a Soul for your Silent Piano” (Post, 1915)](image)

The piano in the corner cobweb casts the acoustic instrument both in the past and in a state of chronic disuse. The text in the ad emphasizes inactivity at the family acoustic piano, presenting as a solution the possibility of active music-making with the player piano. The redundant use of the word “play” functions much as it did in the earlier Flexotone ad (Example 4.19). In addition, the ad in Example 4.20 proclaims the unused acoustic piano as not only “silent,” but also without a “soul.” As will be discussed later on, the relatively large size of the player piano mechanism compared with the miniature acoustic piano in the corner creates a tie between that newly found “soul” and the player piano’s visibly emphasized technology.

49 Note, this ad refers to the Flexotone as a “piano player”; however, its internal player component merits the label “player piano.”
Many player ads within the *Post* elicit implicit comparison between player piano activity and acoustic piano passivity, especially given the likely readership overlap between the *Post* and the piano-heavy *LHJ*. In implicit contrast with the acoustic piano iconography in Examples 4.14–4.18, emphasis on music-making dominates the iconography in Example 4.21 taken from a 1916 Baldwin player piano ad:

![Example 4.21: Emphasis on “playing the player piano (Post, 1916)"

Even when ads like those found in Example 4.21 do not directly critique acoustic piano-playing, they still present a contrary set of values. In addition, rather than simply adding to the Victorian acoustic piano identity (as Taylor’s work emphasizes), presentation of activity in this example supplants descriptions of craftsmanship and images of idle picturesque women.51

Differences: Men’s Engagement

Increased emphasis on active music-making in player ads intersects with the most frequently cited difference between player and acoustic piano ads and discourses: gender

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roles and the presence or absence of men. Except for two outlying acoustic piano ads (one for Chickering in the LHJ and one for Lyon & Healy in the Post), all of the acoustic piano ads surveyed either feature women/girls as the presumed (yet usually inactive) music makers or feature a vacant piano. In contrast, half of the player piano ads that included a player piano operator feature men. In addition to earlier acoustic piano examples, Example 4.22 presents an overview of the different ways gender is depicted in the surveyed acoustic piano ads:

![Example 4.22: Gendered roles in acoustic piano ads](image)

Left to right: Ivers & Pond (LHJ, 1914), Steinway (LHJ, 1916), Hallet & Davis (LHJ, 1916)

The first image from an Ivers & Pond ad represents the most common gender depiction among the acoustic ads (including the three acoustic ads within the Post), with ten out of the total twenty-one ads featuring an unaccompanied woman or girl. The second two ads show a gendered mix. Six of the twenty-one acoustic ads fall into this category, and of

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those six, five feature a seated woman next to/facing a standing man.\textsuperscript{53} Four ads feature an acoustic piano without a performer.

In sharp contrast, player piano ads present an indiscriminate picture of domestic music-making and gender. Example 4.23 includes three player piano ads featuring images of mixed-gendered and mixed-aged music-making:

![Example 4.23: Gendered roles in player piano ads](image)

Of these three ads, the top row’s second ad (no. 2) closely resembles gender roles as depicted in the Steinway ads, including a seated woman under the observance of a standing man; however, the two are not alone in the image (as they are usually depicted in acoustic ads), and the entire scene is literally framed by the conception of family by

\textsuperscript{53} The outlier in this case is the singular Chickering ad, which features a man playing in what appears to be a concert setting, with a woman singing or bowing while holding flowers. Chickering & Sons, “Chickering Pianos,” advertisement, \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal}, October 1915, 76.

way of its window-gazing perspective. The other two images in Example 4.23 both feature men seated at the piano. The first image (no. 1) is paired with the earlier-described ad text depicting the experience of “playing” Carmen on the player piano (Example 4.12), explaining the somewhat distant expression on the male player’s face as he gazes at a ghostly opera singer. The bottom image (no. 3) clearly depicts a man playing for the benefit of his family, a reversal of how one might envision gender in acoustic ads. Among the player piano ads surveyed, men and women are depicted equally as players of the player piano, and of the six player piano ads that include adult operators within the Post during this time, three are men and three are women.

In addition to depicting men’s new ability to participate actively in family music-making, Example 4.24 displays groups of only men gathered around player pianos, a phenomenon without female parallel and wholly divorced from familiar Victorian acoustic piano gender roles:

![Image of two ads featuring men playing player pianos](image)

**Example 4.24: player piano ads featuring only men in groups**
Left to right: Baldwin Piano Company (*Post*, 1916), Baldwin Company (*Post*, 1916)

These two ads’ rich meaning and exhibition-like style will be discussed later in relation to player pianos and technology.

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Comparing player piano iconography in Examples 4.22, 4.23 and 4.24 with earlier examples of acoustic piano ads demonstrates the new inclusion of men into active domestic music-making; however, it is also clear that rather than simply “[bringing] men into the picture,” as Taylor states, men’s inclusion signals a whole new competing set of social functions.56 The acoustic piano ads in Example 4.22 either feature young women or young men and women together in scenes of highly gendered courting. In contrast, when the player piano ads surveyed include depictions of operators and/or audience members, they tend to be of families or less commonly—such as in Example 4.24—groups of men. None of the player piano ads surveyed depicted scenes of courting, nor of individuals making music without an audience. Such side-by-side comparisons confirm that the valuing of family within player ads actually represents stretched conceptions of Victorian piano traditions, and that men’s new presence as domestic music makers in fact altered scenes of domestic music-making.

Differences: Technology

Technology is a final major theme of difference between the acoustic and player piano ads and serves as a point of connection between themes of men’s inclusion and active music-making. Taylor attributes technological over-emphasis during the mid-1910s to the relative newness of player piano technology, noting that by the 1920s, instrument ads focused on selling reified music (to be played on the 1920s sophisticated reproducing pianos) rather than on mechanical technology itself. My argument in this section, based on arguments from Chapters Two and Three, is that emphasis on technology and active music-making within the mechanical piano’s early (piano player)

and middle (player piano) stages functioned apart from the late stage reproducing piano owing to different expectations placed on the mechanical piano operator. Technological emphasis in player piano ads functioned distinctively because player piano operators were expected to engage physically and musically with the advertised technology, not passively experience nuanced music on prerecorded piano rolls. This special set of expectations aligned the player piano more closely with the acoustic than the later reproducing piano would be, causing unique conflict.

Beginning with what I call “technological exhibition” (conscious showcasing of the mechanical object) in the Post, I argue that deliberate displays of technology counterintuitively served to naturalize the player piano operator’s sense of participation in music-making. By this, I mean that the emphasis on technology actually served to persuade the player operator that it would not interfere with his or her creation of music (just as an auto ad might emphasize the motor in order to stress its silence). Out of this come several ideas about player piano music-making that are specific to the particular semi-active mid-1910s stage of player piano development and that specifically display conflict with—if not hostility toward—acoustic piano music-making traditions. These ideas include 1) emphasis on musical “intuition” within the player piano operator, 2) comparisons between manual and mechanical music-making, and 3) gendered depictions of player piano music mastery.
Technology: Exhibition

Elements of exhibition mark both player and acoustic piano ads; however, whereas acoustic ads present the commodity (and often the performer) as exhibited inactive objects, player piano ads specifically display their technology, and often in a state of use. Examples 4.25 and 4.26 respectively feature such contrasting exhibition iconography within an acoustic piano and player piano ad:

![Example 4.25 (Inactive) exhibition in an acoustic piano ad (LHJ, 1914)](image1)

![Example 4.26: (Active) exhibition in a player piano ad (Post, 1916)](image2)

The visual similarity of the two ads is striking, especially considering the great divide between the textual messaging in their respective ads. As in Example 4.26, the majority of the player piano ads surveyed include direct visual imagery of the devices’ mechanical player technology, including some combination of piano roll, manual levers, and foot pedals.

The tone of foregrounded exhibition of player piano technology amidst a large crowd in Example 4.27 resonates closely with a Post ad for another relatively new sound technology—the telephone (also found in Example 4.27).

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58 Baldwin Piano Co., “Everybody in Your Family was born to play the Baldwin Manualo,” advertisement, Saturday Evening Post, November 18, 1916, 56.
Technology is foregrounded in a different way in Example 2.28. Here, the focus on hands alone allows for undistracted emphasis on technology:

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Across player piano ads and brands, iconographic emphasis on player piano technology is matched by textual discussion of various features. Whereas texts in acoustic piano ads emphasize qualities such as aesthetic design, the fit of particular models into particular spaces, or the social capital of owning a piano, descriptive texts in player piano ads serve a different function. Rather than focusing on the value of simply having the technology

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Example 4.28: Technological exhibition in player piano ad (Post, 1915)

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in one’s home, the majority of player ads within this study discuss technology in order to shape how readers perceive it. Namely, technology is overemphasized (presumably) in order to convince ad readers of its musical unobtrusiveness, and conversely, of the authenticity of their participation in music-making. This effect is evident in Example 4.29, taken from an ad for a Flexotone player piano attachment:

Example 4.29: Descriptive exhibition of technology in a player piano ad (Post, 1915)

Example 4.29 strives to convince readers of the intuitiveness of the Flexotone’s technology. The final sentence borders on redundant, employing the words “naturally,” “instinctively,” and “unconsciously.” An even bolder claim for the authenticity of the player piano is found in a defensive-sounding excerpt from a 1916 Baldwin ad. It claims that its use provides, “not the temporary novelty of operating a mechanical player-piano—but the soul-satisfaction of personally playing a musical instrument” (italics original).

As the next series of ads details, technological emphasis within these mid-1910s player piano advertisements did not aim to educate readers about or familiarize them with passive music-listening technology. Rather, it aimed to naturalize the player piano

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62 Baldwin Piano Co., “Everybody in Your Family was born to play the Baldwin Manualo,” advertisement, Saturday Evening Post, November 18, 1916, 56.
operator’s sense of authentic and active music-making at or above the level of manual piano-playing. The human element is made to take center stage despite technology.

*Technology: Naturalizing Musical Ability and Manual/Mechanical Comparisons*

The surveyed player piano ads employ a number of creative techniques to depict intuitive music-making by way of technology. Among the ads, Baldwin Piano Co. commonly tells stories in order to portray technology-facilitated intuition. Example 4.30 uses iconographic and textural references to nature in order to convey the “instinctiveness” of the operator’s inborn musicality:
Example 4.30: Nature imagery and musical intuition (Post, 1915)

The italicized text towards the top of the ad uses the word “instinctive” four times. One’s musical voice is compared to the “song of birds,” and the entire left side of the ad features a tree trunk. The nature imagery in this ad leads directly to a discussion of the unobtrusiveness of the Manaulo’s technological interface: “In Manaulo music, the volume, the accent, the light, the shade, the very style of playing, are controlled from the one place where you are in constant contact with the instrument and where your musical

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feeling is naturally expressed—the pedals.” In effect, the ad naturalizes the technological medium (especially the pedals) as a means of expressing already-inherent musicality.

Example 4.31 presents another Baldwin ad. The iconography in this example features Uncle Sam (a token American) at the player piano surrounded by caricatured representatives from other nations, each with their own iconic national instrument:

![Example 4.31: Nationalistic imagery and musical intuition (Post, 1916)](image)

The text accompanying this example makes three main assertions: that musical instruments are naturally suited to members of particular nations, that Americans’ industrial productivity does not allow for the pursuit of learning, and that regardless of their lack of time, American “desire” for musical expression all that is needed to successfully operate the player piano:

It seems second nature for a Spaniard to play the guitar; a Scotchman, the pipes; a Hawaiian, the ukulele; a Welshman, to sing. Almost every nation and race has

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64 Baldwin Piano Company, “The Instrument He was Born to Play,” advertisement, *Saturday Evening Post*, October 14, 1916, 73.
its national method of musical expression. In America, the pursuit of material things leaves little time for keeping hands or voice in practice. But we love music and we long to play. Because only this desire for musical expression is needed to make the Baldwin Manualo play with all the individuality, life and feeling of a hand-played instrument it is becoming the Nation’s favorite.

In addition to depicting an American national identity tied to technology and the “pursuit of material things,” this ad reframes the mechanical piano as a type of manual musical instrument, in the same category as the guitar, the “pipes,” or the ukulele. The almost defensive sounding reference to the acoustic piano (“hand-played instrument”) is coded, yet palpable. In addition, this ad directly challenges the Victorian acoustic piano tradition by advocating a short-circuited music-learning process.

The Baldwin ad in Example 4.32 uses the metaphor of language to describe how the player piano functions as the “mother tongue of all”:
Example 4.32: Language as a metaphor and musical intuition (*Post*, 1915)

The incredible imagery in this ad features a myriad of men, presumably representing a plurality of language groups. A depiction of a Teddy Roosevelt lookalike stands out in the ad (bottom middle) as well a Native American in a feathered headdress and several

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other men whose ambiguously exotic hats and facial hair imply “Otherness.” The text of this ad implies musical intuition by equating musical expression with language. In telling the reader that the Manualo’s technology allows for musical expression that is “undiluted, unchanged,” the ad suggests a certain natural directness to musical expression that is best facilitated by the Manualo’s unobtrusive technology.

Themes of “intuition” and natural expression in these ads often legitimize player piano technology at the expense of manual piano-playing, and some examples even present playing the player piano as a desirable alternative to manually playing an acoustic piano. One ad reads, “You play it [the Manualo] as easily, directly, freely and satisfactorily as the pianist plays the piano” (italics original).66 The Uncle Sam player piano ad in Example 4.31 takes this logic a step further, portraying the player piano as the same sort of by-hand instrument as an acoustic piano by literally labeling the two experiences as “equivalent.”67 Another Manualo ad claims, “The Manualo will do all this—will give you and everybody in your family the unalloyed delight of actually playing a musical instrument.”68

Although Taylor pinpoints the 1920s as the point when passive music listening through the reproducing piano was branded as superior to home music-making, examples of negative critiques of acoustic piano-playing within player piano ads and discourses can be found within the mid-1910s.69 For instance, the text from Example 4.32 suggests that manual piano-playing does not allow for the transparency of expression available through

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67 Baldwin Piano Company, “The Instrument He was Born to Play,” advertisement, Saturday Evening Post, October 14, 1916, 73.
player piano technology. The text reads: “Feeling is best expressed in the mother tongue because then it is expressed *instinctively*. Otherwise, it is the head—not the heart—that speaks” (italics original).70 This general argument echoes an earlier statement from Gustav Kobbé’s player piano guidebook (*The Pianolist: A Guide for Pianola Players*), which suggests that a certain falseness necessarily accompanies manual playing: “The pianolists’ experience with music is wholly musical, while the pianists’ is largely technical.”71 Another Baldwin Manualo ad from 1916 articulates this notion, claiming its technology functions as a shortcut, circumnavigating the nuisance of training: “To satisfy your musical desires, you need an instrument that responds *directly* to your musical feeling and does not require the manipulation of trained and talented fingers.”72

Technology: Gender and Player Piano “Mastery”

The overall devaluation of manual acoustic-piano learning and playing allowed family members (especially men) to participate in domestic music-making. While themes of intuition allowed men to eschew the overtly female-gendered aspects of piano practice associated with Victorian piano-playing, the player piano’s technical capabilities allowed them instant access to virtuosity and concert-level repertoire. Within the phonograph case, Katz terms this as “mastery and exploration,” hypothesizing that such

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instant access to large-scale professional music aided men’s entrance into the domestic music scene.\textsuperscript{73}

Men’s “mastery” in player piano ads relies on references to individuals, concepts, and musical works typically gendered male by virtue of their large scope, public-sphere orientation, or other extra-musical masculine associations. The air of masculine “mastery” in Example 4.33 primarily stems from the large-scale, operatic work (and recognizably masculine Escamillo character) at its center:

\begin{quote}
I came in and put the Toreador song from Carmen into my Virtuolo player piano. I hid the music roll behind the sliding panel. I closed my eyes to get the feeling of distance. Playing by instinct is wonderful—my finger tips and my listening ears are all that is left of me.

The music bursts forth with a flourish. It is quick as the entrance of a Spanish dancer, whirling, stamping, posing. It is full of the rap and jingle of tambourines.

I thought of the great stage scene at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. I saw the courtyard of the old Spanish tavern, with its rambling balconies. Black-haired Gypsies and picturesque smugglers mingle together at the tables. The center of all is Carmen, the sullen, fascinating Gypsy, with her soldier lover.

Then Escamillo, the Toreador, hero of the bull-ring, enters with a crowd of admirers, laughing, boasting. He notices Carmen. Now the music changes, and out of the Virtuolo floats an accompaniment like the softened chords of a Spanish guitar. The Toreador is singing to captivate Carmen.
\end{quote}

\textbf{Example 4.33: Mastery in a player piano ad (Post, 1914)}

\textsuperscript{73} Mark Katz, \textit{Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music} (Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd., 2010), 68.

\textsuperscript{74} Hallet & Davis Piano Co., “The Toreador’s Song,” advertisement, \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, October 3, 1914, 45.
The male operator’s control is evident, and it is as if his description floats above the scene, jumping from character to character. In this, his role is more reminiscent of a conductor than of an amateur pianist. The operatic repertoire he engages with is much larger in scope than typical parlor pieces. Fittingly, as he “plays” the player piano, he visualizes a large opera house in New York. Along with the remote gaze in his eye, the operator appears far from the private and intimate scene he is pictured in.

Example 4.34 depicts mastery in another way. In this ad, iconographic and textual elements of suggestion elevate the amateur player to the level of Handel:
Example 4.34: Mastery in player piano ad (Post, 1916)

The text reads, “there is not much difference between the greatest musicians and the average man. You, like they, have musical feeling which seeks expression. They simply have a natural ability for playing some musical instrument by hand” (italics original).

Handel’s technical prowess (not to mention skills as a composer) are textually mitigated into mere “manipulation of trained and talented fingers.” In a similar way, “musical feeling” is presented as inborn and equally dispersed rather than developed and

individualized. In addition, the portrayal of Handel as a child also serves to balance his stature with that of the advertisement’s readers, whom the ad’s text frames as adult men, proclaiming: “after all, there is not much difference between the greatest musicians and the average man.”

The final example of mastery I noted in the mid-1910s Post player piano ads is perhaps the most grandiose of all. Example 4.35 employs male-gendered individuals, concepts, and musical works to convey the player piano (and player piano operator’s) command over the musical world:
Example 4.35: Mastery in player piano ad (Post, 1915)

Baldwin Piano Co., “Again the Fetters of Music are Broken,” advertisement, Saturday Evening Post, November 27, 1915, 34.
References to Beethoven symphonies and Sousa marches connote masculinity in their distance from parlor music traditions. Music theory is also referenced in this ad (second paragraph from the top), a strongly masculine topic at the turn of the century, and one far from the typical American Victorian parlor. Like in Examples 4.33 and 4.34, this ad frames player piano use in terms of virtuosity and authority. The inborn skills of the performer are assumed, waiting to be un“fettered” by the player piano much like “harmony emancipated music for music composers.” Although most of the player piano ads surveyed address the ad reader in the second person, the masculine pronouns in this ad serve to portray a greater closeness between male player-piano performers and male composers: “The Manualo is enabling each individual when playing music to express his musical feeling as completely as a modern composer expresses his musical feeling when writing music” (italics original).

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Side-by-side analysis of acoustic and player piano ads, couched within broader LHJ and Post ad placement trends, presents rich profiles of the two commodities during this specific mid-1910s snapshot. Not only are ad placement patterns clear between the two periodicals, but they are also found in the midst of a host of other telling patterns, such as each publication’s treatment of music and other cultural production, women’s expanding social roles, and general forms of mechanical and/or innovative technology. Although scholarship typically treats the culture around mechanical players as a natural offshoot of the culture around acoustic pianos, the way they appear in LHJ and the Post suggests otherwise, as surface similarities rooted in American Victorianism reappear ambiguous at best, and areas of distinct difference become obvious. Surrounding general content and
non-music commodity ad trends mutually reinforce the emerging contrasted profiles of
the two piano types. In short, the ads (and even the commodities themselves) look
similar at first glance, but their areas of difference number many, and even their “shared”
Victorian indices are rooted in wholly separate sets of associations and functions.

By the late 1910s, ads for both piano types began appearing more freely in both
publication, the likely result of personnel change in editor within the LHI, changing
social perceptions around the mechanical piano, and the advent of the reproducing piano,
which functioned in ways wholly separate from the mid-stage player piano. Logically,
the middle-stage player piano conflicted with the acoustic piano in ways that the later
passive-listening reproducing piano did not, and discursive emphasis on and
technological necessity of actually “playing” the player piano put the player piano and
acoustic piano in close dialogue. In this way, the player piano’s specific semi-passive
technology, as well as the way it was presented and received, offers untapped insight into
America’s transition to mechanical sound.
Conclusion

This study set out to build upon and challenge recent scholarship on the rise of mechanical and mediated music commodities. The recent work of Mark Katz and Timothy Taylor in particular contributes tremendously to an understanding of America’s transition to mechanical music and passive listening, and this study leaned heavily on the historical narratives and theoretical approaches put forth by these two scholars. My study differed from theirs in methodology. Firstly, it placed the mechanical piano in dialogue with the acoustic piano, its forbearer and contemporary. Secondly, it specifically focused on print media discourses, particularly ads, with heightened attention paid to surrounding context. Lastly, it limited analysis to the mechanical piano’s “player piano” stage, whose semi-passive technology differed greatly from its better-known “reproducing piano” successor.

Findings from my contextualized player piano/acoustic piano ad study counter several ideas that have been applied to the mechanical piano and/or to mechanical music more generally. Although scholarship tends to present areas of overlapping similarity between mechanical and acoustic piano identities based on their common Victorian lineage, a side-by-side and contextualized examination of the two commodities’ ads and discourses shows that they actually represented (or were made to represent) very different social meanings. In addition, scholarly focus on the mechanical piano’s “reproducing piano” stage has overlooked the mechanical piano as it was and was experienced during the middle point of its technological development. Far from unimportant, this study highlights how emphasis on “playing” the player piano—a discursive theme that had faded by the late 1910s—was critical to mechanical piano/acoustic piano relations during
the mid-1910s. Borrowing from Katz, the effect of any new technology arises from the
differences between it and the older technology it “supersedes, improves upon, or
extends.”¹ In this case, the “superseded” technology was the extant acoustic piano, and
although Katz’s and Taylor’s works specifically focus on elements of reification,
passivity, and the invisibility of mediation involved with mechanical pianos and
phonographs, the middle-stage player-piano’s unique semi-passive technology created a
different relationship with the acoustic piano, which in turn created a different set of
discursive emphases.

Chapters Three and Four of this thesis presented themes in player piano discourse
that do not follow, and in some cases oppose, these two scholars’ theories. Besides ad
placement patterns, broad contextual analysis of the *LHJ* and the *Post* within my study
has produced enriched profiles for both commodities by suggesting what sorts of
ideologies, cultural production, and general advertising were compatible with either piano
type. Contrast between these profiles refutes the current narrative surrounding acoustic
and player pianos, as despite the commodities’ presumed homogeneity, wholly separate
sets of associations and functions clearly underlay their ostensible similarities. In a
related way, player-piano discursive features typically regarded as little more than benign
additions to the acoustic piano’s profile (such as men’s new roles, emphasis on
technology, and changing ideas of active music making) reappear as starkly contrasted
against the acoustic piano. My findings also call into question the narrative surrounding
America’s transition to mechanical sound. As Katz and Taylor discuss, reification,
passivity, and muted perceptions of technology surround the late-stage reproducing

¹ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California
Press, Ltd., 2010), 4.
piano. However, the semi-passive music making emphasized with the player piano signals that opposing themes also played a part during the midst of the transition, including emphasis on active and authentic music making and overemphasis on technology.

Moving forward with this project, one might extend several analytical nodes and add others. Remaining within the parameters of the current study’s time frame, the inclusion of more periodicals could serve to reinforce or contradict findings from the LHJ and the Post. Any of the “Big Six” women’s periodicals (see Chapter One) would create interesting comparisons. Extending the analysis to magazines targeting higher or lower income earners would also give a fuller image of either commodity’s profile. Moving away from non-music specialty publications, a study of American music periodicals and their coverage of player pianos is also needed. The brief work I completed with such sources suggested possible parallels to the LHJ and the Post. For example, Music News in the years 1914 and 1915 only carried only a handful of player ads (alongside many acoustic ads), while Musical America and Musical Currier both featured player and acoustic ads indiscriminately. Related to this, reaction against mechanical music within music periodicals is another area left unexplored in mechanical piano scholarship. (My brief survey of American music periodicals did uncover at least some resistant and dismissive attitudes toward the mechanical piano in various non-ad content.) Extending the analysis backward through time and print media would also prove interesting, and might allow for further comparison between the “piano player” and the “player piano”.

The current analysis involved a small pool of piano brands, and individual studies of how major piano manufacturers approached advertising mechanical pianos would be
interesting. For example, although Steinway offered models with player devices (made by the American Piano Company), within the two Curtis Company publications it only ran acoustic piano ads. In contrast, Baldwin also carried both mechanical and acoustic pianos, but only advertised its mechanical line. Trade publications (like *Music Trades*) often carried single ads with both types of pianos advertised (see Example 2.10). A comparison between a handful of piano brands across the price spectrum might show a connection between individual brands’ images and the way those brands did or did not freely adopt and showcase mechanical piano technology.

Finally, a study of repertoire advertising would undoubtedly add considerable depth and complexity to this project. For example, in contrast with clear-cut ad placement trends for piano types themselves, during the 1914–1916 span in this study, both the *LHJ* and the *Post* indiscriminately carried both acoustic piano sheet music and player piano rolls. A study looking at what categories of music were advertised (and if possible, what music was purchased) would be immensely interesting, and would provide either a parallel or counter case to Katz’s findings that music advertised for phonograph play often differed from music consumed. Ragtime in particular has well known ties to the early mechanical piano; however, it is rarely mentioned in the player piano ads surveyed. Consideration of acoustic-piano repertoire would also add tremendously to this study, as would analysis of what was being played compared to what was being advertised, and how that repertoire compared with player piano repertoire.
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