BeatleBoomers

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BeatleBoomers: The Beatles in their Generation

by

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INTRODUCTION

“When I think about being between the ages of 12 and 15 in 1964, I think about this 'perfect storm' of events. I was the perfect candidate to be a Beatles fan. Where did the music fit in? Certainly the appreciation of the music came later, but I think it was almost a visceral reaction to them rather than to the music, which of course is not to say the music doesn't sustain me to this day.”

—Deborah McDermott  
(Beatle Fan)

Over the winter of 1963 into 1964, The Beatles, a rock quartet comprised of four young boys from Liverpool–John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr–exploded onto the international music scene, setting off a worldwide fervor that would outlast nearly every popular phenomenon that had come before it. Their rise to stardom was so sudden and dramatic that it seemed to defy explanation. When Deborah McDermott, a fairly typical Beatle fan, was asked to explain why she was so vulnerable to the Beatles’ charm and music, the epigraph above was the best response that she could provide. But her answer, simple though it may seem, will serve as the springboard for this project, which seeks to explain both the explosive outbreak of Beatlemania–the two years in which the Beatles completely dominated the world of pop music–and the enduring nature of their success by examining the phenomenon from the perspective of the generation that experienced it: the baby boomers.

1 Garry Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! An Oral History of Beatlemania as Told by the Fans Who Were There (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press,2007). 92
The impact of the Beatles has been examined so many times that it seems unimaginable to say anything new, as popular authors and scholars from nearly every field have offered interpretations of the Beatles’ success. However, to give an idea of how my own research fits in with this massive body of scholarship, I will briefly describe the major arguments that have been proposed over the years.

Many scholars have attempted to explain the Beatles’ success by emphasizing their songwriting. Using melodic, structural, and even lyrical analysis, these scholars have argued that the Beatles’ songs, even their earliest hits, revealed signs of musical genius, and that the response of the general public was simply an impulsive reaction to hearing extraordinary music. Musicologists have scoured over key signatures, instrumentation, harmonic devices and intervals, hoping to uncover a pattern that might explain the success of the Beatles’ first hits.

In his analysis of “I Saw Her Standing There,” Wilfrid Mellers claims that there is “nothing more pristine” than the “pure folk melody that teeters between C and B flat, the flattened sevenths denying the urge to sharpened dominance.”2 He also notes that the lyrics “have an uncanny instinct for the ways in which people of the Beatles’ generation spoke and felt, rather than thought.”3 Music historian Jonathan Gould takes a similar approach in his book, Can’t Buy Me Love, analyzing the Beatles’ songs, including their lyrics, in search of a consistent pattern. His analysis is useful, and, if nothing else, reveals that John Lennon and Paul McCartney, even in their earliest years as songwriters, had an innate gift for delivering short, catchy pop

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3 Unfortunately, Mellers never elaborates on the idea of generational appeal, leaving that to feminist writer Angela McRobbie, who would later explain why teenyboppers—though not necessarily those of the 1960s—found so much appeal in the Beatles’ lyrics.
songs. Unfortunately, while it may be possible to use musical analysis to demonstrate that the Beatles’ early music was indeed well written, it brings us no closer to an understanding of why the Beatles set off such a massive public reaction.

Most people in the music business would admit that while it is certainly possible to identify good music, it is almost impossible to determine whether that music will appeal to an audience broad enough to make it succeed commercially. Dave Godowsky, the director of the A&R (artists and repertoire) department at Rounder Records, insists that while “there will always be a market for music of quality, it is impossible to determine whether or not the music will ‘click’ with a large audience.” Consequently, some scholars have turned to style, rather than musical content, as the main source of their analysis.

Those authors have argued that the Beatles filled a stylistic gap that had emerged in white popular music in the late 1950s and early 1960s. To a certain extent it is true that, between 1957 and 1963, the American music industry was struggling to recover after the demise of the ‘golden era’ of rock and roll. As historian Mark Lytle explains:

By the late 1950s, performers had so much redirected rock toward pop tunes and ballads that much of its vitality was lost. The untimely deaths of some of the most influential talents such as Buddy Holly had further weakened rock. Little Richard gave up rock and roll to follow the voice of god. Others like Freed and Chuck Berry fell victim to their own personal weaknesses. No longer could teens claim popular music as something distinctly their own.⁴

The year 1957 was indeed disheartening for rock and roll, as it marked the departure of some of the greatest contributors to the genre, as well some of its great

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⁴ Interview with Dave Godowsky by the author, July 28th 2009, Burlington, MA.
⁵ Mark Hamilton Lytle, America’s Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). 39
male idols. Still, this period from 1957 to 1963 was not necessarily the barren interlude for popular music that some authors have suggested. Even if rock and roll had passed its prime, this period saw the emergence of four new genres: surf music, girl groups, Motown, and the folk music revival, all of which were commercially successful. Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, groups such as the Beach Boys, the Temptations, and Bob Dylan began to make an impact on popular music. In his book, Boomers, historian Victor Brooks dismisses the notion of a musical vacuum in the early 1960s, insisting that “rock and roll had already entered an exciting transformation period by late 1962, fully a year before anyone had heard of Paul McCartney or John Lennon.” The argument that the Beatles somehow “rescued” popular music from the doldrums is undermined by the fact that while the ‘golden age’ of rock and roll had either ended or become watered down, a new form of popular music had already taken its place by the time they arrived.

Although interpretations that use the history of popular music to create a context for the Beatles’ arrival are useful, they cannot fully account for the Beatles’ impact on popular culture and society. Therefore, some scholars, such as Hunter Davies, Bob Spitz, and Phillip Norman, have turned to a more biographical approach, examining the longer narrative of the Beatles’ growth as a way to explain their rise to success. Some have discussed the Beatles’ two years in Hamburg, Germany, wondering if the group’s experience on the city’s club circuit somehow prepared

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6 Victor Brooks, Boomers (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 106
7 Bob Spitz’s recent biography, The Beatles, is an excellent example of such scholarship.
them for the music scene in Britain. Others have focused on the roles of Brian Epstein and George Martin, the two men who, even today, are referred to interchangeably as the “fifth” Beatles. Brian Epstein’s role as the Beatles’ manager has been discussed repeatedly in biographies of the Beatles, and there is no doubt that his contributions as a promoter and marketer were a fundamental component of the band’s success. However, while these biographies are fascinating, they tend to focus so heavily on the band that they practically ignore the most important component of the pop phenomenon: the audience.

This project departs from previous scholarship in that it does not begin with the story of the four Beatles themselves, but rather with an examination of the generation that welcomed the group so enthusiastically into their lives. The baby boomers were unique, set apart from their predecessors not only by their sheer numbers, but also by their values and societal expectations. Raised during a relative economic boom among a peer group of unprecedented size, the so-called baby boomers ultimately developed the sense of being part of a distinct generational community. While the circumstances of the baby boom differed somewhat from nation to nation, certain universal characteristics and trends became clearer as the

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8 See Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers*. He attempts to explain the Beatles’ success based on a “10,000 hour rule,” which simply states that no one can be successful if they have not practiced for at least 10,000 hours.

9 The only book that studies Epstein in depth is Ray Coleman’s *Brian Epstein: The Man Who Made the Beatles*. Unfortunately, Coleman was a journalist, not a scholar, and since he was the editor of the magazine that first promoted the Beatles (*Melody Maker*), he struggled to separate himself from his subject.

10 Jonathan Gould provides a rich historical context for his biography of the Beatles, *Can’t Buy Me Love*, but ultimately fails to provide an argument as to why this context was so essential to the Beatles’ success.
generation came of age in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{11} These characteristics included their emergence as a distinct consumer market, as well as their sense of disconnect from their parents’ war time generation. As this volatile decade unfolded, many baby boomers began to reject the values of their parents, instead experimenting with alternative lifestyles and political activism.

The explosive impact of the Beatles is easier to explain when it is viewed from the perspective of their audience. If it is already assumed that their music was good enough to appeal to a broad audience, this generational perspective allows us to examine why the Beatles—rather than any of the other bands that emerged during the early 1960s—became the most influential and enduring pop phenomenon of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Beatles were the perfect match for this generation of youth, not just because they were good musicians, but also because they possessed qualities that had a nearly universal appeal to baby boomers of all nationalities and backgrounds.

For the baby boomers, the first generation to emerge as a distinct teenage consumer market, the Beatles presented a captivating image and style that could be copied, marketed, and purchased. Furthermore, for a generation of youth that tended to seek cultural guidance from their peers and role models rather than from their parents, the Beatles presented four iconic figures who embodied their youthful spirit. Finally, for a generation that would both experience and influence a profound cultural transformation throughout the latter half of the 1960s, the Beatles, more than any

\textsuperscript{11} My interpretation of a “baby boomer” does not necessarily apply to every person born between 1945 and 1960. First, a person who was born either in 1945 or 1960 probably missed the full impact of the Beatles because they were, respectively, too old or too young for them. Second, the audience of baby boomers that I am describing in this project was, for the most part, white. This is not to say that black music and culture was not affected by the Beatles; on the contrary, the arrival of the Beatles severely disrupted the success of black artists who had been crossing over to white audiences. Still, the audience that I am most concerned with is white baby boomers, and the generalizations that I make about these baby boomers do not necessarily apply to African-American youth.
other popular music group, presented role models that would continually grow and mature in parallel with the generation.

For these reasons, I argue that the Beatles’ rise to stardom, as well as their enduring success, occurred because they offered just the right qualities for the baby boom generation at the right moment. Of course, my analysis cannot stand on its own, and I would not suggest that this interpretation should stand in place of the others that I have mentioned. Brian Epstein himself insisted that “the Beatles [simply defied] analysis as to the specific ingredient to their success.”\(^\text{12}\) In many ways he was right. To attribute the magnitude of the Beatles’ impact to only one or two factors would undermine the complexity of both the group as well the era in which they lived. Still, examining the phenomenon from the perspective of the audience allows for a unique interpretation of the Beatles’ story, one that has yet to be considered.

\(^{12}\text{Brian Epstein, A Cellarful of Noise (New York: Pocket Books, 1967). 95}\)
I. The Baby Boomers

“Among democratic nations, each new generation is a new people.”

-Alexis de Tocqueville

Beatlemania was, in many ways, the product of two forces coming together at the right time: the Beatles and the baby boomers, the generation born during the first decade following the Second World War. While it is impossible to know whether the Beatles would have had the impact that they did among a different generation, it is possible to examine the qualities of the baby boom generation that would have made them particularly open to a group like the Beatles. It is important to recognize, of course, that a baby boomer in England did not necessarily share the same experiences as a baby boomer in the United States, as the baby boomers were as much a product of their respective cultures and nationalities as they were a product of their chronological happenstance and numbers. Despite these differences, however, there were certain characteristics common to all baby boomers in the Western world.

First, the baby boomers made up one of the first distinguishable communities of youth. The feeling of belonging to this unique community would impact how they

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responded to new commercial products, including musical acts. Furthermore, because the baby boomers grew up in a somewhat isolated community of youth, they tended to seek moral guidance from their peers rather than from their parents, often looking to role models who could embody their youthful spirit. Finally, the baby boomers underwent a rapid and transformative evolution throughout the latter half of the 1960s, largely in response to the volatile social and political climate of the decade.

While these were not the only characteristics that set the baby boomers apart from previous generations, they were the ones that made the baby boomers a particularly welcoming market for the Beatles. An examination of these characteristics will help to explain why the Beatles were able to make such a dramatic impact on this generation.

**A New Community of Youth**

Many historians have indicated that the baby boomers—and perhaps the war babies—were one of the first generations that adults began to recognize as being part of a contained sub-culture of youth, at that time referred to as ‘teen-agers.’ However, only a handful of scholars have noted that the baby boomers themselves managed to acquire this sense of community as they grew up. As Steve Gillon describes in his book, *Boomer Nation*, the boomers were “the first generation to have a defined sense of themselves as a single identity.” Historian Arthur Marwick expands on Gillon’s observation, suggesting that this phenomenon was not restricted to the United States:

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14 *Ibid.*, 1
“While [the effects of the baby boom] appeared earliest in America, ultimately Britain, France and Italy were also affected. By the beginning of the sixties…it was not unreasonable to perceive the totality of teenage customs and practices as constituting a separate and distinctive subculture.”15 Historians like Gillon and Marwick have often disputed the origins of this sense of generational community; however, there are two general lines of argument that seem consistent in scholarship on the subject.16

The first argument is demographical, and suggests that the baby boomers’ unique sense of community was attributable to their sheer size. The baby boom was not a phenomenon that could go unnoticed, either by those who produced it or by those who grew up among it. In the years following the Second World War, a refreshing climate of peace and domestic tranquility encouraged young couples to begin producing children, which they did at historic rates. Within five years, nearly nine million babies—produced at a rate of almost one birth every seven seconds—were born in the United States alone. Over the course of the boom, nearly 80 million babies were born, creating a population of youth that, by 1959, would make up over 35% of America’s population. In contrast, the “Greatest Generation,” those born before 1930, and the “Swing Generation,” born between 1930 and 1945, each represented around 15% percent of their respective populations.17

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16 For this project, the majority of the literature used for this subject was based on the American baby boomers. While it is important to emphasize that the experience of baby boomers differed significantly from nation to nation, the principle arguments that I have explored in this section can, in theory and practice, be used to describe the experience of baby boomers in a few Western nations.
17 Gillon, *Boomer Nation*. 2-4
Although the presence of such a large population of children was noticeable from the beginning, it was when the baby boomers entered elementary school that they began to have a clear societal impact. As Victor Brooks describes, “In 1952, the first class of boomers pushed public school attendance over the 34 million mark amid projections that even this staggering number would increase by 50% by the end of the fifties.”\textsuperscript{18} As the school systems swelled and overflowed, the community of baby boomers began to take shape. Gillen describes how “high schools [and art colleges in Great Britain] provided a perfect breeding ground for a subversive ‘youth culture,’” an environment in which “young people [were encouraged] to look to their peers, and not their parents, for direction and approval.”\textsuperscript{19} In this sense, the effect of pure demographics cannot be overlooked; however, it was not the only factor that helped to create this community of youth.

The baby boomers were also the beneficiaries of a post-war economic boom, one that affected Western nations around the world. While the impact of the boom ranged from nation to nation, the overall effect was such that, for the first time in decades, young people found themselves with disposable incomes. Steve Gillen estimates that at least American youth “had $10 a week to spend [in 1954] compared with $2.50 in 1944.” As it became clear that the baby boomers represented their own unique market, professional analysts and marketers learned to target them as such, contributing to the baby boomers’ sense of communal identity.\textsuperscript{20} As Gillen explains,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[18] Brooks, \textit{Boomers}. 44 \\
\item[19] Gillon, \textit{Boomer Nation}. 7 \\
\item[20] One might question whether the effects of the post-war economic boom can be applied when countries like Great Britain were still suffering a post-war depression. However, the economic boom was relative. Young people in Britain, even working-class youth, still found themselves with extra spending money in the late 1950s, despite the fact that the country’s economy was still in shambles.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
“Almost from the time they were conceived, Boomers were analyzed and pitched to by modern marketers, who reinforced their sense of generational distinctiveness.” Gillen describes contemporary marketing experts like Eugene Gilbert, who was one of the first to realize the potential of the teenage market. “Our salient discovery,” Gilbert realized, “is that teenagers have become a separate and distinct group in our society.” Because of marketers like Eugene Gilbert, the baby boomers constantly found themselves surrounded by products ranging from clothes to dollhouses that had been designed to appeal specifically to their tastes.

Television, “the institution that solidified the baby boomers’ sense of generational identity,” was the primary medium through which American advertisers reached their target audience. During the 1950s, television sets became a commonplace item in North American households. By 1960, 90% of American homes had at least one television, if not two, and Americans spent an average of four hours a day in front of them. Because there were only a few channels, young people tended to watch the same programs and view the same commercials. As Gillen observes, “children could recite the Pepsi-Cola theme song before they learned the national anthem.” Watching television, memorizing catchy jingles, and sharing the experience in school the following morning helped to engender a sense of youth community. Of course, the emergence of a teenage market was not a uniquely American phenomenon and did not rely entirely on television, which, by the late 1950s, had become ubiquitous only in the United States.

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21 Gillon, Boomer Nation. 5
22 Ibid. 8
23 Ibid. 8
24 Ibid. 9
The post-war economic boom affected nations around the world, even if the effects were not as dramatic as they were in the U.S. Mark Donnelly, a scholar on Britain in the 1960s, suggests that even young Britons, who did not necessarily grow up with the affluence of their North American counterparts, also developed new spending habits. As he describes, “Unlike earlier generations, whose lives were forged during the hard times of war or the depression years of the twenties and thirties, many [British] baby boomers grew up in what Eric Hobsbawm has called the 'golden years' of post-war economic growth among the industrialized nations.”

In England, a large population of working-class youth, many of whom had grown up in poverty, suddenly found themselves with small amounts of extra pocket money. As Donnelly notes, “these working class youths tended to spend their disposable income on leisure, luxury items and cultural markers, a point that the culture industries were quick to grasp.”

What is particularly interesting about the case of England is that consumerism in working-class youth contributed to the rise of sub-cultures, many of which used material goods such as fashion as a mode of identification.

Throughout the 1950s, youth sub-cultures such as the Mods and the Rockers blossomed throughout Great Britain, occasionally sparring with each other in what would become well-publicized battles. As historian James Perone notes in his monograph, *Mods, Rockers and the Music of the British Invasion*, these sub-cultures used material consumerism to define themselves stylistically:

The Rockers were associated with motorcycles, and in particular with the larger heavy, and powerful Triumph motorcycles of the late 1950s. They favoured black leather. By contrast, the Mods made a conscious attempt to appear new by favouring Italian motor scooters and wearing suits. They

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26 Ibid. 35
thought of themselves as more sophisticated and more stylish than the Rockers. [And then there were] the Teddy Boys, whose male members were identified by the Edwardian suits they wore.27

The British phenomenon of youth sub-cultures was certainly extreme. However, it mirrored the growth of youth communities in the United States in that it depended largely on demographics and the emergence of youth as consumers. This same pattern could be observed in many Western nations, where radio programs, music, and even magazines were beginning to be marketed towards their own baby boom populations.

Arthur Marwick discusses the development of European radio shows, which, by the early 1960s, had begun to target their respective teenage markets. As he describes, “It was in the autumn of 1959 that the commercial radio station Europe No. 1 took the decision to create a programme specially for young people.” The show was called “Salut Les Copains,” (Hello friends), and its creator, Daniel Filipacchi, attributed the show’s success to the fact that “thousands of young boys and girls were so delighted to be able to listen to ‘their’ radio programme.”28 Filipacchi was quick to realize what many historians have since struggled to describe, which is that teenagers who grew up in these boom populations had a very real sense of themselves as a distinct market or community. They desired products that could distinguish themselves from their parents’ generation and be uniquely their own.

This community is what the Beatles stumbled upon when they appeared so suddenly in late 1963 and early 1964. The Beatles were a unique band, distinguished

28 Marwick, The Sixties. 102
from their peers not only by their music, which was honed by several years of
contant performing, but also by their refreshingly new and unique identity, an
identity that could be packaged, marketed, and then embraced by a generation that
had been brought up to define themselves by what they watched, listened to, and
owned. The Beatles were a musical product that could be distinctly their own, and
their arrival could not have been better timed. Pete Kennedy, who was a young boy
when the Beatles arrived on the international stage, recalls how the initial
convergence of the baby boomers and the Beatles was like that of a perfect storm.
““There was a vacuum waiting to be filled, a generational desire to establish ourselves
as being different from the 1950s [generation.] The Beatles personified all of that
right at the same time.”  

Seeking a Cultural Icon

The unique social and economic circumstances under which the baby boom
generation was born led to the formation of a distinct community of youth. But as this
community entered adolescence, it began to seek ways of distinguishing itself even
further from its parents’ generation. Many scholars refer to the ‘generation gap’
between the baby boomers and their parents, suggesting that it was somehow wider
than the usual gap between teenagers and parents. While this term has perhaps
become overused, it is still capable of describing a very real cultural divide between
the two generations. As Klaus Fischer writes in America in White, Black and Gray:

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29 Numerous scholars on the Beatles, including Jonathan Gould and Bob Spitz, have credited the
Beatles’ manager, Brian Epstein, for designing their image to cater specifically to the Mods, the most
popular stylistic group at the time. But while Epstein was certainly perceptive, he could not have
possibly understood the depth to which the Beatles’ image would appeal to youth around the world.
30 Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 35
The way in which young people were brought up and initiated into the mainstream of society began to veer away sharply and perhaps decisively from traditional patterns, [resulting in a generation of youth that] tended to cluster in their own age groups. Since they did not extensively interact with their parents, they were less acculturated in the traditional mores and beliefs of society. They increasingly fed on each others’ perceptions of the world, which often proved stubbornly resistant to parental and educational correction. 31

Arthur Marwick points to a 1964 study by the French writer, Michel de Saint-Pierre, who sent out hundreds of questionnaires to French students inquiring about their views of adults. Their responses indicated that many French youth harbored a fundamental distrust of their parents’ generation. As Marwick describes, “In response to the question, ‘what opinion do you have of your parents,’ a large majority were very critical.” One student even responded, “Our parents? They mean well but they are soft.” 32 Of course, it is hardly unusual to hear adolescents speaking critically of their parents, as most young people go through a brief–or painfully prolonged–period of rebellion against their parents. However, as Donnelly explains, the baby boomers were unique, and would “show themselves to be less like their parents than any previous generation in modern times.” 33 Because of this ‘generation gap,’ the baby boomers would look to cultural icons–or role models–that could embody the unique spirit of their generation.

Some scholars have suggested that Elvis Presley was the first to fulfill this role of a cultural icon, but the reality is that most baby boomers were too young for Elvis when he exploded onto the national stage in 1956. As one contemporary recalls, “We had missed all the Elvis excitement because we were little kids in the mid 1950s.

32 Marwick, The Sixties. 101  
33 Donnelly, Sixties Britain. 1
My cousins, who were older, had gone through the Elvis craze we had missed out on.”34 In 1958, Elvis left the rock and roll scene to serve in the military. He would return in 1960, but as the boomers noticed, this incarnation of Elvis was not “the raw Elvis from before he went into the service,” but rather “a kind of watered down Elvis” who seemed over-commercialized and uninspiring.35 Elvis continued to enjoy commercial success, but he would never again achieve the iconic status that he held between 1956 and 1958. By this time, however, the attention of young Americans—and even Europeans—had shifted to a new figure who could assume the mantel of a cultural icon: John F. Kennedy.36

At his inauguration, Kennedy praised the “young Americans who [had] answered the call to service,” pleading with the new generation to “ask what [they] could do for [their] country.” As Klaus Fischer observes, “On that day, millions could watch a remarkable historical contrast on their television sets: the outgoing president representing the conservative 1950s, and the youthful and vibrant Kennedy, the incoming president representing the [youthful] 1960s.”37 John F. Kennedy’s immense popularity among the baby boomers was a reflection not just of his appeal as a refreshingly young politician among an aging Washington elite, but also of the baby boomers’ desire to adopt him as a cultural icon for their generation.

34 Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 78
35 Ibid. 29
36 In A Hero For Our Time, Ralph Martin explains: “Europe was looking for a young hero to electrify it. Chancellor Adenauer was past eighty, and Macmillan, Krushchev and De Gaulle were also older men. Now a new generation of Germans waited for Kennedy in Frankfurt, with excitement and great expectations, and he told them what they wanted to hear. This point was made more dramatically in Berlin, where more than two million people were waiting to give him the most tumultuous reception of his life. The mood was of contagious combustion.” Ralph G. Martin, A Hero for Our Time (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1983). 487
37 Fischer, America in White, Black and Gray. 74
In 1965, archivist Bill Adler compiled a book of letters that young Americans had sent to Kennedy over the course of his term as president. The collection reveals that young people tended to view Kennedy less as a politician—or even a world leader—and more as a cultural icon, a figure that could embody their own youthful spirit. One boy expresses his relief that “we finally have a President who isn’t a square.” The boy does not comment on Kennedy’s leadership and throughout the letter rarely mentions Kennedy’s role as President. He does, however, note that “all the kids in my class think you are a real swinger, and that’s cool.”38 Another girl observes how Kennedy “has done more for the teenagers than any other President,” the reason being “that you can remember what it is like to be a teenager because you were a teenager not so long ago yourself.”39 One hopeful young girl thought that “it would be keen if [Kennedy] would come to our spring dance as my date.” In some ways, these letters demonstrate more about the generation that admired Kennedy than about Kennedy himself. To these youth, Kennedy was far more than a president. He was a role model, a man in a position of power who was still young enough for the young generation to identify with him. In his book, Can’t Buy Me Love, Jonathan Gould writes:

For teenagers, who were old enough to have tasted the drama of the 1960 election and the ensuing Cold War crises in Berlin and Cuba, John F. Kennedy was an idealization of unparalleled versatility, a man who himself seemed to move at will between the worlds of youth and maturity. It was an idealization brought to them, moreover, in the format they knew best, for Kennedy was nothing less than the preeminent man of television in his day. He brought the charismatic aura of stardom to politics.40

39 Ibid. 54
Sadly, Kennedy’s reign as a cultural icon for youth would be short lived; in November of 1963, he was assassinated during a parade in Dallas. While his death is frozen in memory for people of all generations, it was particularly painful for the baby boomers, who grieved not only for the death of their President, but also for the death of their hero. Kennedy had embodied the spirit of their generation in a way that few other figures could, and to those who looked up to him as a generational hero, his death was traumatic. However, within two months of Kennedy’s death, a new figure–four, in fact–would arrive who could assume his role as a generational icon.

When they rose to international stardom in 1964, the Beatles presented four young figures who could assume the mantel of cultural icons. They were young, charismatic, and, in the eyes of teenagers, had acquired a level of success that could legitimize their exalted status. Furthermore, like Kennedy, they were old enough to be looked up to as heroes, yet young enough to seem like a part of the young generation. As one fan recalls, “For me and for a lot of people like me, the Beatles represented models of a sort.” Another exclaimed that, “at last, our generation had a quartet of idols!” From a slightly different perspective, an Australian journalist explained that “when Beatlemania happened in Sydney and in Australia, there was a generation just yearning to be united in their rebellion against old age,” and that “Beatlemania was an attack on the gerontocracy that ruled Australia.” While this journalist perhaps

\[\text{\footnotesize \text{\cite{41} Ibid. see page 217.}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{\cite{42} Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 46}}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize \text{\cite{43} Marc Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter: An American Generation Remembers the Beatles (Ann Arbor: Greenfield Books,1982). 89}}\]
exaggerates the rebellious intent of the young people who celebrated the arrival of the Beatles, he does manage to articulate that, for these fans, the Beatles were more than just celebrity musicians.

In the eyes of the baby boomers, the Beatles were icons who could represent the voice of their generation on an international stage, and for nearly three years, the Beatles would hold this position in a way that had never been achieved by a pop star. The values and expectations of the baby boomers would, however, evolve over the course of the 1960s, forcing their icons to either change with them or forfeit their lofty status.

**An Evolving Generation**

The 1960s were a decade in which youth experienced a rapid and occasionally explosive transformation, not just in America, but all around the Western world. As historian Leonard Stevenson describes, “The changes in society and culture during the 1960s were so pronounced that many academics [consider] the period [to be] one of social revolution.”

An examination of how youth evolved over the course of the decade provides a fascinating perspective into why the Beatles were able to endure past the point of being a teenybopper fad and emerge as one of the most revered musical groups of the 20th century.

Over the past forty years, youth culture of the 1960s has often been romanticized to the point of historical inaccuracy. Films such as *Austin Powers.*

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Forrest Gump, and Across the Universe—which used a soundtrack of Beatles songs to paint the story of the 1960s—have given false representations of how most baby boomers actually experienced the 1960s. The truth is that the 1960s were a divisive decade, even among young people, and not every young American or European shared a common experience. As Paul Lyons, author of “Class of ’66”, bemoans, “My students tend to assume that baby boomers, with few, if any, exceptions, went to or wished to go to Woodstock, protested against the Vietnam War, and engaged in the rites of passage, including drug experimentation, of the hippie counterculture.”

While this romanticized history of the 1960s cannot withstand a proper historical analysis, there were, however, certain elements of the 1960s youth culture that had an enormous impact on mainstream society, which was ultimately shaped and affected by the often-romanticized fringe cultures.

In 1966, Time magazine declared the baby boom generation as its ‘man of the year,’ noting that they “[were clearly] a new kind of generation [that possessed] a unique sense of control over their own destiny.”

The baby boomers that came of age in the mid 1960s were entering a world that lay on the brink of major social and political change, and over the course of the decade, even mainstream youth would turn to a variety of outlets—whether political, spiritual, or musical—to define their role in the decade’s often divisive atmosphere. While it would be inaccurate to suggest that every baby boomer became highly politicized and disenchanted with their parents’ generation, it is fair to suggest that nearly all baby boomers were affected by the experimentation of their peers.

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46 Gillon, *Boomer Nation*. 75
A climate of rapid political change was one force that mobilized youth in the 1960s. In America, the civil rights movement would be the first episode of national unrest to unfold before the eyes of the baby boomers. Although many baby boomers were too young to have had an impact on the movement when it first aroused national interest in the early 1960s, they could watch the marches and protests on television, where horrific footage of police brutality against non-violent protesters was often broadcast on the national networks. They also watched as white students not much older than themselves protested on college campuses, organizing rallies like the ones at the University of California, Berkeley in 1964. As Victor Brooks describes, “even before Boomers were exposed to the social ferment of the campus of the late sixties, these students could see an era of change coming that would make their collegiate experience different than that of their older siblings.”

The escalation of the war in Vietnam, particularly the implementation of the draft, was the main catalyst that brought many of the baby boomers into the fray of political unrest. When President Johnson initiated the draft in 1965, many young Americans all over the country began to protest what they perceived to be a pointless and unjust war. Organized demonstrations broke out in cities and on university campuses throughout the nation, and, as Arthur Marwick notes, even “the millions of students who would never themselves take part in a demonstration or a sit-in [tended to] sympathize with many of the aims of the student radicals.” In addition to serving as a catalyst for youth protests, the war also solidified, for many, the divide between

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47 Brooks, *Boomers*. 150
48 Marwick, *The Sixties*. 535
the baby boomers and the older “Establishment.” Furthermore, the anger spurred by the war spread beyond the borders of the United States.

As Warwick observes, “Vietnam became the great universal issue, binding together protests within America over race, poverty, consumerism, and alleged repression of student freedoms, and providing a focal point for youth and anti-establishment protests throughout the European countries.” Over the middle part of 1968, young people around the Western world, particularly in France, Italy, and Germany, rose up in protest. While the circumstances of each uprising were complex and do not lend to broad generalizations, it is fair to suggest, as Paul Ginsborg does in his book, A History of Contemporary Italy, that “at the heart of the student movements lay an irreverent anti-authoritarianism” that was, in nearly all cases, energized by the war in Vietnam. Arthur Marwick insists that even if the conflict of Vietnam was not necessarily the central issue for the uprisings, it was, “in all four countries, the topic which generated the most anger and energy, brought most protesters together, and gave the greatest scope to violent extremists.” Political protest–spurred in large part by the war in Vietnam–was certainly an important outlet for youth in the 1960s; however, it was not the only outlet that had widespread appeal.

Beginning in the mid 1960s, thousands of young Americans and Europeans began to experiment with a variety of counterculture movements, the hippie movement being the most widespread and influential. This movement, and the frills

49 Ibid. 535
51 Marwick, The Sixties. 535
that came with it, were a very real outlet that many young Americans—and later Europeans—turned to as a mode of expression and as a way of distinguishing themselves from “the dominant ‘straight’ world: the Establishment.”52 The counterculture’s impact on youth culture was profound, and was, according to Marwick, “The most international of all the phenomena associated with the sixties.”53 The reason that the counterculture had such a wide influence was, in part, because it was something that could be explored by anyone, regardless of his or her commitment to its underlying cause. As Paul Lyons notes, “Some [were] more comfortable with the cultural aspects of campus rebellion, as counterculture experimentation did cut across antiwar feelings.”54 In essence, young people could experiment with certain aspects of the counterculture without committing to a change in lifestyle or political views.

Recreational drugs were one aspect of the counterculture that millions of young people could and did explore as they came of age in the mid 1960s. Marijuana was a deeply ingrained element of the counterculture that literally spilled into the mainstream.55 Whereas in 1964, 400,000 Americans experimented with marijuana for the first time, in 1968, 2,256,000 more Americans joined these ranks.56 The drug was so accessible that users did not necessarily need to involve themselves in the counterculture in order to gain access to it. In fact, Arthur Warwick estimates that, in 1967, there were only 200,000 young Americans who fully embraced the hippie

53 Marwick, The Sixties. 481
54 Lyons, Class of ’66. 82
55 Steverson, "Drug Culture."
counterculture, a number that pales in comparison to the more than two million who were experimenting with the drug. Of course, marijuana was not the only drug to become popularized in the mid-1960s.

Psychedelic drugs, such as LSD and psilocybin mushrooms, also rose in popularity during the mid-1960s. Encouraged by Harvard professor Dr. Timothy Leary to “tune in, turn on and drop out,” many young people, particularly university students, began to experiment with psychedelic drugs. Steve Gillen notes that “by 1966, over one million Americans had experimented with LSD.” A more revealing statistic from the British Journal of Addiction shows that in 1968 alone, 418,000 Americans tried LSD for the first time. Again, such widespread experimentation with the drug demonstrates that the psychedelic experience was not just a reserve of the counterculture fringe, but rather was something that could affect mainstream youth as well. As Marwick observes, “The late sixties was the first era in which almost everyone in certain age groups, and in certain professions, had at least some contact with [psychedelic] drugs.” Even without experimenting with psychedelics, young people in the 1960s could still observe how the drug was affecting others around them. This was particularly true in the realm of fashion, which underwent a rather psychedelic transformation of its own during the latter part of the 1960s.

Under the influence of Twiggy in ‘Swinging London’ and the hippie counterculture in America, fashion, even in the mainstream, began to evolve with the decade. As fashion scholar Kathleen Ryan describes, “the industry became

57 Marwick, The Sixties. 488. This French study–not undertaken by Arthur Marwick–surveyed the number of Americans who had embraced the hippie lifestyle by dropping out of school or leaving their jobs to join utopian communes.
58 Gillon, Boomer Nation. 83
decentralized, with ‘outsiders’ producing influential trends that were largely inspired by the counterculture.” For young girls, Twiggy, a model once described as the “teenage idol of 1966,” helped to popularize the mini-skirt, a fashion statement that challenged the moral standards of those parents who were appalled to see their daughters wearing such revealing clothing.\(^{60}\) For men, the mid-1960s saw the convergence of the Mod and hippie styles, a combination that produced “floral prints, vivid colors and patterns, and accessories such as fringe and floppy hats.”\(^{61}\) Again, this trend was not just an American phenomenon. As Mark Donnelly describes, “The psychedelic, flower-power imagery was imported to Europe from the United States, and provided the dominant aesthetic of the later sixties.”\(^{62}\) The evolving styles in fashion were perhaps the most visible transformations of the 1960s; but of all these transformations, the most universal was in the realm of popular music.

As Todd Gillen describes, “Music emerged during the 1960s as the language of the Boomer generation, establishing its identity and distinguishing it from its elders. The new music expressed the pent-up frustration and utopian idealism of the young in a language that most adults could not understand.”\(^{63}\) Throughout the 1960s, hundreds of new musical groups emerged as leading figures for their generation, crafting music that could speak to their continually evolving tastes and interests.

In 1962, Bob Dylan emerged from the folk clubs of Greenwich Village, not just as an immensely talented songwriter and lyricist, but as a young figure who could speak to the interests and concerns of his generation. In 1963, the Beach Boys

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\(^{60}\) Marwick, *The Sixties*. 466
\(^{61}\) Rising, "Hippies."
\(^{62}\) Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*. 124
\(^{63}\) Gillon, *Boomer Nation*. 83
surfaced as the leading musical icons of surf culture, a Californian youth movement that glorified sun, surf, and sleek cars. As the decade evolved and the baby boomers developed, new artists emerged who could speak to their changing interests. The Rolling Stones, who at certain points rivaled the Beatles in popularity, became known as the rebel band of the British Invasion. And in 1968, Creedence Clearwater Revival would practically provide the soundtrack to the anti-Vietnam movement, while Jefferson Airplane sang about the hallucinogenic effects of psychedelic drugs. But throughout this tumultuous, evolving decade, no band had an appeal that was as consistently universal as did the Beatles.

Between 1965 and 1970, the Beatles would grow, mature, and experiment alongside the baby boomers. Not only would their music evolve, becoming more complex, more refined, and increasingly experimental, but their appearances and worldviews would change as well. The Beatles would prove to be as capable at setting trends as they were at following them. As the folk music revival gained prominence by the middle part of the decade, the Beatles would respond by producing heavily folk-influenced music. As Ravi Shankar brought the sitar and North Indian classical music into the Western hemisphere, the Beatles would be the first to popularize it. And as an increasing number of young people experimented with psychedelic drugs, the Beatles would not only try the drugs themselves, but would also write music that could express—or even accompany—the psychedelic experience. Over the course of the decade, the Beatles quite literally grew up with the baby boomers, and, vice versa, the baby boomers grew up with them.
Conclusion

The generation of youth that came of age in the 1960s was unique. Set apart from preceding generations not only by demographics, but also by attitudes, consumer habits, and values, the baby boomers would, throughout the 1960s, have a considerable impact on the societies in which they grew up. In this chapter, I have tried to outline some of the more unique and transnational qualities of the baby boom generation, particularly those that are relevant to the generation’s relationship with the Beatles.

First, more than any former generation, the baby boomers were a distinguishable community of youth that, over the course of the 1950s, emerged as an influential consumer market. As a result of an economic boom and the development of advanced target advertising, the baby boomers learned—or were taught—to identify a niche in their generation’s community based on the products that they purchased and by the programs they followed on television and radio. As I will illustrate in chapter two, the Beatles would play into the generation’s tendency to use consumer habits as a method of self identification by presenting not only catchy music, but also a unique and distinguishable identity that could be embraced, copied, and even purchased.

Second, as a community of young people, the baby boomers identified figures with some form of power who could serve as cultural icons for their generation. Though many scholars have assumed that Elvis Presley was the first figure to emerge as a cultural icon for his generation, it is important to note that the baby boomers were too young to identify with Presley. John F. Kennedy was the first figure to assume the role of a cultural icon for the baby boomers, and his death in November of
1963 opened the door for a new figure to take his place. As I will demonstrate in chapter three, the Beatles would be the next icons for the baby boomers.

The final aspect of the baby boom generation that pertains to this project is their growth and evolution throughout the 1960s, the decade in which they collectively came of age. As I have illustrated, the experience of the baby boomers in the 1960s was the product of both their unique qualities as a generation as well as the events that shaped the social, economic and political landscape of the decade. Throughout the decade, the baby boomers would turn to a variety of outlets to define their role in the tumultuous and often divisive events that were unfolding around them. Among these outlets, music was perhaps the most universal. In the fourth and final chapter, I will demonstrate how the Beatles, more than any other musical group of the 1960s, continued to respond–either advertently or not–to the ever-evolving tastes and demands of the baby boom generation. Over the latter half of the decade, the lives and music of the Beatles would closely parallel the experiences of the baby boomers. Because of this parallel growth, the generation’s profound interest in the group and its music endured even after the explosive phenomenon of *Beatlemania* had faded.
II. Presenting the Product

“The Beatles were something we could covet as our very own.”

—Paula Myers (Beatle Fan)64

It is common practice in Beatles scholarship to begin an analysis of the group with a description of their music. But music, in the context of the outbreak of Beatlemania, was just one component of the group’s appeal. It was a fundamental component, to be sure, but it was not the only feature of the group with which the baby boomers identified so strongly. Image—the Beatles’ marketed aesthetic qualities—was another key component, and for a generation of youth raised as part of the first real teenage consumer market, the Beatles, more than any other musical group, offered a product that managed to combine music with an alluring aesthetic brand. From their collarless suits to their floppy mop top hair-dos, the Beatles presented an image and a style that was unique, refreshing, even trendsetting. It was an identity that could be admired by most, copied by some, and purchased by those who really wanted the entire package.

The Beatles combined their unique image with a performance style and energy that was, at least initially, unmatched by most of their peers. They were

64 Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 48
captivating on stage, both as a group as well as individually, and each Beatle presented his own unique style and delivery, enhancing the overall presentation of the band. True showmen, the Beatles knew that making a visual show was equally as important to their success as the music itself. However, before launching into a discussion of the Beatles’ aesthetic presentation, it is crucial to distinguish between how they appeared before their manager, Brian Epstein, cleaned up their image and how they appeared after.

When the band formed, first as the Quarry Men, then as John Lennon and the Silver Beetles, and finally as The Beatles, they presented themselves as Rockers, a sub-culture of British youth that could perhaps be compared to 1950s greasers in America. Until 1962, when Epstein agreed to manage them, this was the image the Beatles presented, and it is not irrelevant or unimportant, for they garnered an impressive reputation and fan base during this time.

With tight leather jackets and pants, short hair greased back with excessive amounts of hair tonic, and shiny leather boots, the original incarnation of the Beatles hardly resembled the group that became an international phenomenon in 1963. They were rebels, and at least in appearance, a part of the Rocker tradition that was “the first to combine aggression with a style that was borrowed from the hoodlums of American cinema.” The Rocker image also extended to how the band presented itself and behaved on stage. According to their own testimonies—as well as oral histories from Brian Epstein—the band did everything in its power to live up to the Rocker standard of carefree rebelliousness. As Epstein recalls, “They smoked as they

65 See photos, page 56. Figure A
67 Dylan Jones, Haircults: 50 Years of Styles and Cuts (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1990), 30
played, ate chicken on stage, and talked and pretended to hit each other, turning their backs on the audience and laughing at private jokes.”

While this image is certainly noteworthy, considering the wide appeal they had amongst the Rocker crowd early in their career, it is not the image that pertains to this chapter, which focuses on the hysterical, international response to the band. This response did not begin in earnest until late 1963, well after the band was signed and cleaned up by Brian Epstein. My study of the Beatles’ appeal as public figures and performers will focus on how they appeared after their transformation, when their popularity skyrocketed to the point of mass mania. This was the image that fuelled their acceptance in the mainstream and attracted the baby boomers in such massive numbers.

**A Visual Stimulation**

The packaged product of the Beatles included more than just music. At the height of their fame, the Beatles could be purchased in the form of a magazine, a bobble-head doll, a brand of bubble gum, or even as clothing. As one fan remembers, “I bought all the Beatles books and magazines, wore their t-shirts all the time, and even began collecting their bubble gum cards, which I still have.” These products, which established the Beatles as one of the first merchandisable boy bands, could only have existed because of the Beatles’ image, which combined a unique physical appearance with a jarring sense of fashion and style.

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69 Berman, ed. *We’re Going to See the Beatles!* 92
In their outward, physical appearance, the Beatles presented an odd, yet strangely marketable, paradox: they were remarkably similar when viewed as a cohesive unit, sometimes to the point that the uninformed press could not tell them apart; yet when viewed as individuals, removed from their collective identity, the Beatles were equally as captivating, thus providing their fans with a dual lens through which they could be admired.\textsuperscript{70} Examined individually, as many of their young fans did, each Beatle was capable of projecting, on the sole basis of aesthetic characteristics, a unique personality: John Lennon, the wily and carefree; Paul McCartney, the handsome cherub; Ringo Starr, the goofy and loveable; and George Harrison, the dark and mysterious.\textsuperscript{71} With little knowledge of the Beatles’ real personalities, both the print media and fan magazines lunged at the opportunity to present not just one, but four separate characters—or products—to a market that was eager to embrace all of them.

\textit{Melody Maker}, a widely read British entertainment magazine, and \textit{Mersey Beat}, a local Liverpool magazine, would often print entire articles that focused on a particular Beatle, steering their interviews to emphasize the marketed persona of that Beatle. In October of 1963, \textit{Mersey Beat} began an entire series of separate papers entitled “Mersey Beatle,” a unique section of the magazine that was “strictly devoted to your favourite Beatle.” And \textit{Melody Maker}, the British equivalent of \textit{Variety} or \textit{Rolling Stone}, would often devote entire columns in which an individual Beatle

\textsuperscript{70} Gould, \textit{Can't Buy Me Love}. Though Gould is not the first to describe this paradox, his description of it is by far the most evocative and accurate.

would offer his opinion on recent record releases.\textsuperscript{72} Both magazines would accompany these articles with a large, smiling picture of that Beatle.

Perhaps as a result of this focused media attention on the Beatles as individuals, many fans who were first introduced to them in 1963 or 1964 recall that their earliest visual impressions of the group were of individual Beatles rather than the Beatles as a group. As one fan remembers, “I had never heard of the Beatles when they arrived in America, and my friend showed me a picture of them that she had clipped from a newspaper. I can still see this photo in my mind’s eye: from left to right were John, Ringo, Paul and George walking down the street. I thought John was especially cute.”\textsuperscript{73} These early visual impressions and connections with the Beatles played into the baby boomers’ tendencies as consumers by encouraging them to claim ownership of a particular Beatle. As another fan recalls,

I remember going to a store near where we lived, and to our joy there was the album \textit{Meet the Beatles} on display. We loved their long hair. They looked so cute and very similar on the cover photo of the album. That was the beginning of a long love affair with the Beatles, George in particular. George was my favorite!\textsuperscript{74}

Other reactions were more profound, demonstrating that these early visual connections with an individual Beatle could manifest themselves in powerfully evocative ways. “As I watched him sing and saw his pictures in fan magazines,” remembers one fan, “I felt myself torn with emotions for Paul McCartney. I wanted to see Paul and feel his presence and look at him forever.”\textsuperscript{75} These recollections illustrate how these young fans used the individual, visual identity of each Beatle as a

\textsuperscript{73} Catone, ed. \textit{As I Write This Letter.}, 42
\textsuperscript{74} Berman, ed. \textit{We're Going to See the Beatles!} 41
\textsuperscript{75} Catone, ed. \textit{As I Write This Letter.}, 18
foundation for their connection to the band as a whole. Indeed, that the Beatles were marketed both as a cohesive group and as four distinct characters encouraged their fans, especially the adolescent girls who enjoyed collecting snippets and pictures of their favorite Beatles, to claim one of them as her own. This feeling of ownership—even entitlement—contributed to the powerful bond these fans shared with the band.

The other side of the paradox, however, is that while the strength of the Beatles’ individual identities certainly enhanced the band’s appeal, it was the group’s image as a collective unit that was featured most prominently and that had an even stronger impact on the baby boom generation as a whole. “What made The Beatles particularly attractive,” remembers one fan, “was that all four of them were like four parts of one person.” When viewed as collective unit, the Beatles offered a few distinct qualities that made them particularly appealing to this generation of fans: their clean-cut and ordinary physical features; their lack of overt sexuality; and finally, their unique sense of fashion. These characteristics provided a means by which their fans, as well as the media, could identify with them on a purely aesthetic level.

Unlike pop stars such as Elvis Presley or Frank Sinatra, the Beatles were ordinary in their physical appearance. They were neither tall, strikingly handsome, nor in any way imposing. Rather, they were cheery and innocent, and, to any passer-by, could well have passed for four university students. As one fan recalls, “What clinched it for me was the novel look of the four faces on that picture sleeve: just boys, green around the ears.” The Beatles’ perceived innocence proved to be one of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. 130}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. 41}\]
their most endearing qualities, particularly to the parents whose teenage daughters were attending the shows. As two elderly women outside of a Beatles concert in Toronto proclaimed, “We think they’re marvellous, just marvellous; just decent, clean-cut boys, and there’s not many of those in this country!”

Brian Epstein had no reservations about showcasing their clean cut image and worked hard to make sure that this image was maintained, both on and off-stage. “I first encouraged them to get out of leather jackets,” he recalled, “and after a short time I wouldn’t even allow them to appear in jeans. After that I got them to wear sweaters on stage and eventually, very reluctantly, suits.” From 1963 to 1965, nearly every photograph of a Beatles public appearance showed the group dressed in jackets and ties.

In another departure from stars such as Frank Sinatra or Elvis Presley, the Beatles were rarely portrayed as being overtly sexual. As a point of comparison, photographs and album covers of Elvis Presley reveal a domineering sexual figure. The cover of the soundtrack to his second film, Loving You, shows him gazing into the camera, perhaps not menacingly but certainly not innocently. Photographs of his performances often captured him bent over the microphone, hips and neck cocked forward, eyes glaring into the screaming faces of his fans and admirers. He was an undeniably sexual figure, and critics often despaired at his almost exaggerated sexual displays. “Elvis, who rotates his pelvis, was appalling,” wrote Ben Gross of the Daily News. “He gave an exhibition that was suggestive and vulgar, tinged with the kind of

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79 Roylance, ed. The Beatles Anthology (Book). 73
animalism that should be confined to dives and bordellos.” Despite this kind of negative criticism, Presley’s publicists made no real effort to hide his very prominent sexuality; photographs and promotional shots continued to exhibit his overtly sexual image.

The Beatles, on the other hand, were rarely captured with sexually suggestive expressions—whether on their album covers, in publicity photos or in magazines. Rather, they tended to peer cheerily into the camera, assuming expressions of joy, excitement, or simple confusion. The images, taken out of context, could almost be mistaken for high school or college mug shots. The cover of their first album, *Please Please Me*, showed the four boys—none of whom was much older than twenty—peering innocently over a staircase railing. They are not glaring menacingly, but smiling invitingly. A few scholars, including Angela McRobbie, have suggested that this form of innocent, mock-sexuality was precisely what the baby boom ‘teenyboppers’ sought in a male idol. As McRobbie notes in her book, *Feminism and Youth Culture*:

The teenybop idol’s image is based on self-pity, vulnerability, and need. His image is of the young boy next door: thoughtful, pretty and puppy-like. In teenybop cults live performance is less significant than pinups, posters and TV appearances. The Beatles did not make an issue of their own sexual status; they did not, despite the screaming girls, treat the audience as their sexual object.

The Beatles’ innocent, clean-cut image fits perfectly into McRobbie’s concept of a “pretty and puppy-like” idol, one that smiles rather than glares, and does not

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81 Roylance, ed. *The Beatles Anthology (Book)*. 75, various photographs.
82 See photos, Fig B.
83 Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000). 72
intentionally present himself as an object for sexual fantasy. The Beatles presented
themselves plainly, like blank slates to be filled in by the sexually active and creative
minds of their fans, who could then play an active, and occasionally competitive, role
in singling out their favorite Beatle.

The Beatles’ natural, clean-cut, and non-threatening presentation was just a
part of what made their image so appealing to the baby boomers. Their appearance
was aided by their sense of fashion, which proved to be as ironic as it was
marketable: collarless suits, ties, and pointed leather boots. In Can’t Buy Me Love,
Jonathan Gould demonstrates why Brian Epstein’s decision to make the Beatles wear
these now trademark collarless suits had such an enormous impact on their success—
particularly among British teenagers. As Gould indicates, this style was not
necessarily trendsetting, but rather played into an ongoing fad that had originally been
introduced by the Mods, a British youth sub-culture that arose at the end of the
1950s.84 As he describes:

The Mods sought not a retreat into the past, but a symbolic alliance with the
future. One part of their modernity was that they aspired to cosmopolitan
attitudes. This “Continental” look was a streamlined variation on conventional
men’s tailoring, including closely fitted suit jackets with slim lapels; narrow
cuffless trousers; pin and tab-collared shirts, and an overall preference for
smooth fabrics.

Gould describes how Brian Epstein, who was particularly mindful of trends in youth
fashion, designed the Beatles’ image with the Mods in mind. As he argues, to British
youth, who were well aware of current fashion trends, the Beatles seemed to represent
a style that was nearing the peak of its popularity. However, what Gould does not

84 Stuart Hall, ed. Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain (London:
Routledge, 1993), 71
mention—and what takes his argument even further—is how the Beatles’ style appeared to those who were unfamiliar with the British Mods.

Even to American youth, the Beatles’ slim, collarless suits seemed hip, stylish, and even trendy.85 As one fan recalls, “Even if you could hardly hear the music, they were so unusual looking because they had these little suits on, and that in itself seemed unique.”86 For some—like this fan—the style was merely enticing; but for many others, the Beatles’ suit and tie image became something to emulate. Another fan remembers: “You wanted to dress like them, and by the end of February, 1964, all the guys had to have suits and Beatle boots, and I had to have that leather cap that John always wore.”87 For these youth, the fashion style was yet another part of the Beatles’ package, an image that could be mimicked with only a few simple purchases at their local department store. Of course, the suits and ties, charming as they may have been, were not the only aspect of the Beatles’ image that caught the baby boomers’ attention. The most jarring element of their image was their strange and seemingly alien hairstyles, which became one of the group’s most identifiable—and even marketable—traits.

Described by Life magazine as “goofy-looking,” the mop-top—essentially a long-haired bowl cut—not only distinguished the Beatles from their competing acts in Liverpool, but also provided a style that could be mimicked and consumed—in the form of cheap wigs—by their teenaged fans.88 More importantly, it provided the baby

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85 Their collarless suits were more in line with the trendy, modernist image than with formal dress.
86 Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 48
87 Ibid. 87
88 See photos, Fig. F.
boomers with the foundations for what would, in the late 1960s, become a more pervasive and even politically important hairstyle.\(^9\)

For almost a decade and a half following World War II, conformity in fashion and hairstyles had gone largely unchallenged, at least in the mainstream. As Victor Brooks explains in his book, *Boomers*:

Men’s hairstyles [in the 1950s] were almost as standardized as their clothes, the main variation being a choice between maintaining the close-cropped “combat cut” that had been required in the military service or returning to the longer prewar slicked-back hair held in place by large amounts of tonic or cream.\(^10\)

The mop-top style marked a break from the typical hairstyles of the 1950s and early 1960s, providing the baby boomers with a new fad that could visibly and symbolically distinguish them from their parents’ generation. Because the hairstyle literally mystified adults, teenagers recognized it as “something that we could claim as our very own.”\(^11\) The popularity of the mop-top was instantaneous in Britain, but caught on quickly in North America as well.\(^12\) Not long after the Beatles arrived in North America, “Beatle Wigs” were distributed to department stores throughout the continent, even in the French-Canadian province of Quebec, where Anglophone culture had rarely managed to have an impact.\(^13\) What was particularly striking about the social effect of the mop-top was that the baby boomers did not stop at wigs in their attempts to imitate the style. Charles Pfeiffer, a fan who was around twelve or thirteen when he first saw the Beatles, recalls his immediate reaction to the band: “I

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89 George Hunt, "Here Come Those Beatles," *Life*, Feb. 15th 1964. 25
90 Brooks, *Boomers*. 9
91 Catone, ed. *As I Write This Letter*. 40
was a boy with a crew cut, and I remember when they came on The Ed Sullivan Show [in February, 1964.] I turned around to my parents and said, ‘I’m growing my hair out.’”

In the months following the Beatles’ arrival on the international pop scene, many teenagers began growing out their own hair to lengths that had not been seen since World War I. By the summer of 1965, when the Beatles returned to North America—and when teenagers had had a few months to let their hair grow—a conflict over hair-length and decorum between teenage youth, their parents, and school principals, had become so widespread that it was finally deemed newsworthy. In July of 1965, *Life* magazine ran an article, “Big Sprout-Out of Male Mop-Tops,” its first of many articles addressing the fierce disciplinary reaction to the new hairstyle. To many adults, the mop-top seemed to confirm the largely unfounded fears of juvenile delinquency that had surfaced during the 1950s. As this article describes, “The coiffures…which owe much to the cult of Beatlemania…provoke sighs of admiration from girls [but] yet another chorus of growls from parents and high school principals, whose reactions range from resignation to rage.”

It would not be long before these reactions provoked a follow-up article, this one published in September, just as schools were getting back in session. “Long hair won’t get you excommunicated,” the article proclaims, “but if you happen to be a high school student it could very well get you kicked out of school.” An article from the 1965 fall issue of *Senior Scholastic* cited cases in Ohio, Wisconsin, Houston,

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94 Berman, ed. *We’re Going to See the Beatles!*, 73
95 Jones, *Haircuts*, 25
97 ________, “The Unkindest Cut for Student Moptops,” *Life*, Sept. 11th, 1965. 23
Virginia and New York, in which “Beatle cuts were being turned back at school doors under new grooming codes.”

Despite the high hopes among adults that long hair would simply fade away like the symptoms of a virus, this would not prove to be the case. An entire year after *Life* published its first article on the new fad, *Time* magazine took notice of how the fad was taking its toll on adults. In the article, the journalist marvels: “Deep in the psyche of many U.S. adults there lurks a triggering device that raises hackles whenever a boy with long hair passes by.” Long hair had somehow become ingrained into youth society and now carried a degree of symbolic defiance. Of course, it would not be until 1967 and the Summer of Love when long hair—much longer hair—became a mark of a serious counter-culture movement; but the mop-top was undoubtedly a precursor to this style.

The Beatles themselves were well aware of the impact that their unusual hairstyle had on both their fans and the media, seizing as many opportunities as they could to shake and jostle their hair or to joke about it. They even took care to work their hair into their act; in most early performances of “She Loves You,” McCartney and Harrison would belt a soundly “wooo!” at the end of the second verse, and all four Beatles would shake their heads wildly in unison, setting off audible waves of high-pitched shrieking from the audience. However, as one reporter from *Variety* magazine observed, “Their Romanesque haircuts are an undeniable novelty, but is

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98 Unknown, "Splitting Hairs over Moptops," *Senior Scholastic* 1965. 30
100 Bob Smeaton, "The Beatles Anthology (Film)," ed. Bob Smeaton (USA1994), Anthology 3, 00:18:30
that enough to flip the general wig?" The mop-top was certainly an attraction, but ultimately it too was just a part of what made their presentation so appealing to teenagers and adolescents. The Beatles were, first and foremost, stage artists, and a significant part of their aesthetic was embodied in their stage performances.

**A New Breed of Performance Artists**

Today, it would be difficult to imagine a major pop performance as being anything less than a multi-million dollar production, accompanied by elaborate stage set-ups, light shows and even pyrotechnical effects. But a Beatles concert was a surprisingly basic affair: a stage, a few spotlights, three amplifiers, and a minimal drum set. Nevertheless, the Beatles overcame the simplicity of their productions because they were showmen of unparalleled skill. As John Lennon himself recalls: “We were performers, in Hamburg, Liverpool and around the dance halls of England, and what we generated was fantastic when we played straight rock. There was no one who could touch us in Britain.” It was not just the volume of the Beatles’ music—which is often emphasized in biographies of the band—but their compact set lists, their seemingly boundless energy and enthusiasm, and their individual stage habits that made the performances so exhilarating for their fans.

A consideration of the Beatles’ average set-list from 1963 to 1965 helps to explain why a Beatles show was such an electrifying experience. Rather than displaying their versatility—as Elvis Presley often did by switching back and forth

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102 See photos, Fig. C.
between wishy-washy love ballads and fast-paced rock n’ roll—the Beatles stuck to what they did best: loud and rapid dance rock with a sturdy bass drum beat and a moving bass line, a recreation of the kind of set list that Chuck Berry or Little Richard would perform during the ‘golden era’ of rock and roll. At their first performance in North America at the Coliseum in Washington D.C., the Beatles rushed through an electrifying list of these twelve songs:

*Roll Over Beethoven*
*From Me to You*
*I Saw Her Standing There*
*This Boy*
*All My Loving*
*I Wanna Be Your Man*
*Please Please Me*
*Till There Was You*
*I Want to Hold Your Hand*
*Twist and Shout*
*Long Tall Sally*¹⁰⁴

For those who are unfamiliar with the music of the early Beatles, it should be noted that, of this set-list, only two songs, “This Boy” and “Till There Was You,” could be considered a relaxed song or a love ballad. The rest are loud, fast, bass-heavy dance songs.

This exciting set-list was performed in the short span of about thirty minutes, the standard length of a Beatles concert. Their unique ability to compact this kind of energy into such a short set came from their experience playing in the nightclubs of Hamburg, where, as John Lennon remembers, “We would play for eight hours and constantly find new ways of entertaining.”¹⁰⁵ George Harrison recalls how “[we] had

¹⁰⁵ Roylance, ed. *The Beatles Anthology (Book)*. 47
to learn millions of songs and be on for hours.” However, when the Beatles’ returned from Hamburg and began playing in the dance hall circuit in Britain, they were forced to reduce these marathon performances into a short, thirty-minute explosion of energy. For those who were fortunate enough to attend one of these concerts, the effect of the almost spastic performance was memorable. As one fan recalls, “The energy that the Beatles exuded from the stage was not to be believed.” This energy was not the product of the set list alone, as the Beatles’ behavior on stage was almost as captivating as the music itself.

The Beatles were remarkably talented stage performers with the rare ability to combine professionalism with a joyful penchant for stage antics. As one young girl recalled, “You could just see them radiate on the stage how great they were. It wasn’t just an afternoon pop band, not Rory Storm or Gerry and the Pacemakers, but something with the four of them—it was just watching them that made you say ‘this is going to go far!’” Conveniently, Gerry and the Pacemakers, another Liverpool group managed by Brian Epstein, and the closest related act to the Beatles, provide a key comparison to the Beatles as stage artists.

In terms of style and sound, Gerry and the Pacemakers were practically indistinguishable from the Beatles. They were enormously popular in Britain, had a significant impact in the States, and managed to compete commercially with the Beatles, if only in 1963. The 1963 UK singles charts reveals that, between the 11th of April and the 20th of June, Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Beatles each maintained

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106 Berman, ed. *We're Going to See the Beatles!*, 117
107 Ibid., 31
a number one hit for at least seven weeks.\textsuperscript{108} The Pacemakers were also capable performers and instrumentalists, and could easily hold their own in shows with the Beatles or with Chuck Berry, with whom they performed on his T.A.M.I-T.N.T. show.\textsuperscript{109} However, Gerry and the Pacemakers were not particularly exciting stage performers. They tended to stand frigidly in place, happy to entertain but going to no great lengths to present a visual circus act.\textsuperscript{110} Gerry Marsden, the lead singer, was typically the focus of attention and was the most entertaining figure to observe. Still, despite the fact that he was attractive and had a decent voice, he was not a captivating stage performer.

The Beatles, on the other hand, made a mockery of the stage, and always appeared to be enjoying themselves as much as their audience enjoyed them. “The things I remember about them,” one fan recalls, “were just their mannerisms–and how much fun they looked like they were having!”\textsuperscript{111} Onstage, their smiles were infectious and seemed never to fade throughout their performances. \textit{Time} magazine described one of their earliest performances as “slightly orgiastic,” noting particularly how “they clowned around–twisting, cracking jokes, and gently laughing at the riotous response they got from the audience.”\textsuperscript{112} A concert reviewer from \textit{The New York Times} noted “the hilarious and outrageous ad-libbing between number.”\textsuperscript{113} Even though the Beatles faced the same screaming crowds every evening, they still responded to the shrieks as if they were a novelty, occasionally tossing their hair to

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\textsuperscript{108} WWWK, "No.1 Uk Hit Singles."
\textsuperscript{109} Steve Binder, "Chuck Berry Hosts: Born to Rock, the T.A.M.I.-T.Nt. Show," (USA1965).
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Berman, ed. \textit{We're Going to See the Beatles!}, 71
\textsuperscript{113} Frederick Lewis, "Britons Succumb to 'Beatlemania',' \textit{The New York Times}, December 1st 1963.
\end{flushleft}
provoke a second and third wave from the fans. Gloria Steinem, writing for

*Cosmopolitan Magazine*, described their behavior: “Ringo [would] toss his hair, and a fresh wave of screams would go up. And Paul would just smile and look endearing.” Following their Hamburg club owner’s constant advice to “*mach shau, mach shau*,” the Beatles exerted so much energy on stage “making a show” that they were often left out of breath and struggled to announce the next numbers.115

Film footage of their now legendary show at Shea Stadium in August of 1965 demonstrates the raw physical energy that the band displayed for their audience. As Paul McCartney counts in the opening bars of “Twist and Shout,” he seems to bounce uncontrollably; and when the downbeat of the first measure finally arrives, all four Beatles lunge backwards, spiraling into a frenzy of twisting, writhing and shouting.116 They laugh giddily like children as the crowd roars at them, infectious smiles on all of their faces. Watching the scene unfold, it is no wonder why the Beatles, whose childlike glee seems to spread like a virus through the stadium, would have connected so easily with their young audience in the mere thirty minutes that they actually spent on stage.

The sheer diversity of their individual performing styles must also have contributed to the pleasure of watching them perform. Unlike the girl groups of the Brill Building and their competing acts from Motown,117 which often incorporated

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115 Smeaton, "The Beatles Anthology (Film)." Disc 1, 00:45:40
116 Ibid. Disc 4
117 The Brill Building, in Manhattan, housed a pop music machine that included writers, producers, and even sound engineers. Many of the songs for the famous non-Motown girl groups of the 1960s, including the Shirelles and the Crystals, were crafted in this building. Motown, based in Detroit, produced many of the African American girl groups.
uniformed choreography into their performances, the Beatles left choreography to chance. Each Beatle had a distinct way of conducting himself onstage, providing the audience with a myriad of viewing options and a more personal experience with each member of the band.

John Lennon stood awkwardly still with his own microphone at stage left, bobbing stiffly and equally at both knees to the rhythm of the music. His facial expressions were unchanging except for the occasional wink; his poor eyesight left him squinting to see anything at all. He hardly responded to the audience, marveling and observing rather than interacting. George Harrison, who stood in between Lennon and McCartney, was somewhat more dynamic than Lennon. When he wasn’t sharing the microphone with McCartney, Harrison would dance, gently tapping his foot, his facial expression alternating between total concentration and a kind of reserved glee.

Of the three front men, no one seemed to be having as much genuine fun as McCartney, who seemed incapable of doing anything but smile throughout the performance. He also had the most quirky and noticeable oddities in his performance style. When singing, his head seemed to shake like a bobble-head doll, his arms jerked backwards and forwards in rhythm with the music, and he would occasionally quit plucking his bass and shake around his left hand, seemingly conducting the audience in their madness. Even when he was not singing, McCartney remained as noticeable as whoever was, as he would lip-synch the words into his microphone, continuing to convulse his rather small frame in a twisting dance.

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118 Binder, "Chuck Berry Hosts: Born to Rock, the T.A.M.I.-T.Nt. Show."
119 Smeaton, "The Beatles Anthology (Film).", Anthology 3, “Washington Coliseum”
Ringo presented a peculiar case, because, as the drummer, he was not a member of the front line. However, Ringo’s drum set was often set up on a raised platform, sometimes six feet off the ground behind the front line, making him every bit as visible as the members of the front line. Ringo’s visibility enhanced the Beatles’ stage performances, for he was equally as charming onstage as any of the other front men. While he did not sing, except on occasion, and though he could hardly be considered one of the more dynamic drummers to have ever graced the stage, his joy just to be onstage was obvious and contagious. The cameramen and editors who controlled the broadcast of the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show took a particular liking to Ringo, often capturing his giddy smile in close-ups.¹²⁰

Each Beatle truly presented a unique performance, and a fan experiencing a Beatles concert could, at any point in the show, choose to admire either the group in its entirety or focus on an individual Beatle. Furthermore, no one looking at the band could have possibly concluded that it had a leader, and during an era in which most bands featured a prominent front man, this set the Beatles even further apart from their competitors.¹²¹ Most of the other local bands on the Merseyside—indeed many of the popular acts of the early 1960s—tended to feature one member of the band as its star performer with the other members assuming the role of backup musicians. Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders: all of these bands featured one star figure and a backup band. The

¹²⁰ As Inglis observes, during their performance on the Ed Sullivan Show, Ringo and Paul both received twice as many close-up shots as John and George. Ian Inglis, *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, ed. Ian Inglis (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006). 8
¹²¹ Although it was known in the press and among their more hardcore followers that John Lennon, who had first formed the band as the Quarry Men, was technically the band’s leader.
success of these bands would inevitably rest on the star power and talent of the leading figure.

In the case of the Beatles, no particular figure stuck out during their performances, and observers were forced to assume that each Beatle was contributing equally to their success. Not only was this of particular importance in the north of England, where working-class youth could admire the egalitarian nature of the group, but it was also beneficial to the teenage girls who enjoyed claiming individual Beatles as the objects of their romantic fantasies. The four Beatles on stage were really a quartet comprised of four, equally entertaining rock stars, each of whom could have been admired as potential front men for the duration of their show.

CONCLUSION:

The baby boomers were enticed by the Beatles’ unique image and performing style, which had a nearly universal appeal that transcended both national and cultural barriers, and that could seemingly fool adults into thinking that they were somehow more innocent than any previous rock group. Their presentation as a complete group and as four distinct personalities enhanced their marketability by allowing teenagers, particularly young girls, to enjoy the group’s image while singling out one Beatle as a favorite. Furthermore, the Beatles benefited from their natural, clean-cut image, assuming the roles of teen idols rather than sex symbols. This image broadened their fan base while loosening the reins of parents, who deemed the Beatles less threatening than previous rock groups. Finally, the Beatles offered new styles of
fashion and hair, both of which could be emulated or purchased by their malleable teenage followers.

The Beatles combined this image with an energetic, visually stimulating performance style that exuded an optimistic, youthful spirit that few of their competitors could replicate. Although their sets rarely lasted over thirty minutes, the Beatles were able to compress, by virtue of their training in the nightclubs of Hamburg, an unusual amount of energy into this short time span. They were also gifted stage performers who radiated an infectious joy for being in the spotlight. Finally, each Beatle had his own unique performance style, enhancing the overall presentation of the group.

This image and performing style contributed to the Beatles’ rapid rise to stardom, not just as performing artists, but also as cultural icons for their generation. In the following chapter, I will illustrate how the Beatles combined their image with an extraordinary group persona, allowing them to reach an iconic status among the baby boomers, one that few artists in the history of popular music have managed to achieve.
Figure A
The Beatles as they appeared before Brian Epstein forced them to clean up their image.
(The Beatles Anthology, Roylance)

Figure B
Album cover of Please Please Me, the Beatles’ first full-length LP
(The Beatles Complete Discography, Russell)

Figure C
The Beatles performing in 1963.
(The Beatles, Spitz)
Figure D
Departing London Heathrow for their first American tour
(The Beatles Anthology, Roylance)

Figure E
Stepping off the plane in Canberra, Australia
(The Beatles Anthology: Roylance)

Figure F
Showing off their M.B.E. awards in an official Buckingham Palace portrait.
(The Beatles: Spitz)
**Figure G.**

Joking with Ed Sullivan on the set of the Ed Sullivan show

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**Figure H**

The Beatles’ first press conference in America at the Pan Am terminal, JFK

*(The Beatles: Spitz)*
Figure 1

Rubber Soul

(The Beatles Discography: Russell)

Figure J

The Beatles in their psychedelic Sgt. Pepper outfits

(The Beatles Anthology: Roylance)
III.

Icons for a New Generation

“The Beatles were an amazing influence. However, it wasn’t just their music, but a package deal of the icon of the Beatles.”

—Jo-Anne McCormack

To the baby boomers who gathered at airports, town halls and public squares; who sat motionless in front of the television every night; and who spent their evenings devouring magazine articles, photographs, and records, the Beatles were more than just four musicians. To these fans, the Beatles were cultural icons that could represent the youthful spirit of their generation. Of course, the Beatles did not wield any real social or political power, but in the eyes of the baby boomers, the status of the Beatles was well above that of the average rock star.

The Beatles’ iconic status was first legitimized by their adoption as cultural representatives, initially for their city, eventually for their country. In Liverpool, the Beatles were revered, not just because their success represented a hopeful direction for the traditionally blue-collar city, but also because they retained their ties to the city—particularly its accent—even as they began touring nationally. As the Beatles’

122 Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 281
fame grew and they began touring internationally, they were soon adopted as cultural icons representing Great Britain. This elevated status, not to mention their constant audiences with various queens, prime ministers and presidents, proved to baby boomers around the world that these were figures to be celebrated and adored.

The Beatles were also revered because of their undeniably charismatic personalities. Their magnetism, charm, and humor enabled them to use mass media to connect with their young audiences in ways that their competitors could not. By endearing themselves both to the press as well as to entertainment figures such as manager Brian Epstein, producer George Martin and television host Ed Sullivan, the Beatles were thrust into the media spotlight, where they could project their natural wit and charm to millions of young viewers.

Finally, for their many female admirers, the Beatles served as sexual icons. The Beatles happened to arrive just as a massive population boom of young girls was reaching puberty; to these girls, the Beatles were more than just idols to scream at—although they often did so at eardrum-shattering volumes. The Beatles were the objects of their first romance, and the girls’ occasionally hysterical infatuation with the band was not just the product of groupthink, but also the expression of a real and powerful emotional bond.

The hysteria of Beatlemania can be effectively understood when it is viewed through the perspective of the young fans who idolized them. To these baby boomers, the Beatles were as important as Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra were to previous generations. They were cultural icons, and Beatlemania was, in part, a communal celebration for them.
The Beatles as Cultural Icons

The idolization of the Beatles began as a celebration of the city and culture they represented: Liverpool. But as the band grew in fame and their tours grew in scope, so too did the spectrum of cultures they could represent. At the height of their fame, the Beatles’ status seemed to be legitimized—if only in the eyes of the teenage baby boomers—by their adoption as glorified symbols of Britain. They were iconic figures that could be expected to appear one evening at a concert in front of 20,000 screaming teenagers, and the next morning greet the queen or dignitary of whatever country they were visiting. For baby boomers, the Beatles’ high social standing helped to legitimize their elevation to iconic status.

At the earliest stage, Beatlemania was an expression of a local pride in Liverpool, a city that held a distinct place in the hearts of Britons because of its long history as a major seaport, its location in the industrial north of England, and its fierce, blue collar pride. As historian John Belchem describes:

Outside the main narrative frameworks of modern British history, Liverpool's past has been characterised as different, the exception which proved the rule. In the north of England but not of it, Liverpool was and has continued to be highly distinctive, differing sharply in socio-economic structure, cultural image and expression, political affiliation, health, diet and speech from the adjacent industrial districts.123

Liverpool is to England much like New Orleans is to America. Geographically isolated yet situated alongside a major river, the Mersey, it is a pocket culture in the north of England. The city has benefited from centuries of immigration, particularly

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123 John Belchem, Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), xii
from nearby Ireland, and with its long history of blending multiculturalism with the blue collar ethic of generations of shipyard workers, Liverpool has engendered a population of “Liverpudlians” with a firm sense of local identity and pride.

As one would expect, young Liverpudlians were thrilled when the music movement known as the ‘Mersey sound’ began attracting attention from the rest of Britain, so much so that entire Merseyside magazines were founded and devoted to covering the new trend. The Beatles represented the apex of this local movement, and gave Liverpudlians the pride of having finally produced a musical icon that could rival those of London, the traditional magnet for successful British musicians. In addition to representing Liverpool’s culture and local pride, the Beatles could also take its distinctive accent around the nation.

The Liverpool accent, known as Scouse, was and continues to be a mark of both location and socio-economic status. It is an accent that symbolizes Liverpool’s working-class heritage. Allan Bennet, a scholar from Liverpool who often wrote about Liverpool localism, describes the peculiarity of the accent: “Instantly recognizable, the accent is the essential medium for the projection and representation of the local micro-culture, the 'scouse' blend of truculent defiance, collective solidarity, scallywaggery and fatalist humour which sets Liverpool and its inhabitants apart.” The Beatles, unlike many British artists, chose not to hide or discard their local accents. Rather, they exaggerated their accents, first to endear themselves to

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124 The Mersey sound developed from the convergence of two genres: skiffle, a blend of American roots music and northern English folk songs, and traditional rock and roll
125 *Mersey Beat* is an example of one such publication.
126 Like a Boston or Brooklyn accent, it is commonly heavier in working-class populations.
127 Belchem, *Merseypride*, 33
local audiences, and later to enhance their unique identity with national and international audiences.

Bob Houston, a staff writer at Melody Maker, noted how proudly the Beatles employed their Liverpool inflections: “How much of the Beatles’ success that is due to their Liverpool background, no one can really tell. But when you speak to the Beatles, the air thick with Liverpool tones, you can almost hear the Mersey [River] lapping on the Dingle shore.”128 Another story from Melody Maker recounted how “their Liverpool-accented announcements would come breathlessly through the speakers in the auditorium.”129 The Beatles themselves were well aware of the importance of maintaining their accents, both for Liverpudlians and for other Britons. As John Lennon described, “We were working class singers that stayed working class and pronounced it. Didn’t try to change our accents, which were looked down upon [by other Britons.]”130 Jonathan Gould notes how “John and Paul [went so far as to] exaggerate the Scouse inflections in their speech, as did many Liverpudlians who liked to play up the local dialect, especially in the presence of non-Liverpudlians.”131

The Beatles’ outward pride in their Liverpool roots extended beyond their accents, as they would often make references to their hometown during performances. A Liverpool fan writing to Mersey Beat bragged that “it is not a gimmick when the boys say ‘Up in the ‘Pool,’ as they were all raised here and still love it just as much as ever!”132 By accentuating their pride in Liverpool, the Beatles endeared themselves to their hometown fans, who felt a certain kinship with the band. Their loyalty was

130 Smeaton, "The Beatles Anthology (Film).", Disc 2, 00:22:30
131 Gould, Can’t Buy Me Love., 138
noteworthy; as Bill Harry of *Mersey Beat* described upon the Beatles’ homecoming from Hamburg in 1962, “few stars have received such a welcome reception, which indicates the unique following this group has on the Merseyside.” However, the sense of local pride for the band was never more pronounced than when the Beatles began garnering fame outside of Liverpool.

As the Beatles came closer to securing the record contract that would undoubtedly move them to London, their fans in Liverpool grew concerned that they might lose their grip on their band. In September of 1963, *Mersey Beat* ran an article entitled “Big Beatles Controversy,” in which local fans commented on whether or not it was fair for the Beatles to depart Liverpool. One fan lamented, “They are no longer our Beatles any longer.” Another fan, speaking to a local newsreel, cried into the camera, “The Beatles are Liverpudlians! They belong to us, they belong to the Cavern [Club]!” This sense of ownership and local pride for the Beatles demonstrates that, at a certain point, the band became as much of a cultural icon of Liverpool as they were a successful musical group. The crowds that gathered for their homecomings were not just there to see their favorite singers, but also to welcome back the figures who had represented Liverpool’s pride around the nation. However, as their fame grew and they began touring internationally, the Beatles came to represent more than just the pride of Liverpool.

Particularly as they moved from one nation of the British Commonwealth to the next, the Beatles were hailed as British icons. Their global success could not have

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134 Unknown, "Big 'Beatles' Controversy."
135 Smeaton, "The Beatles Anthology (Film).", Disc 1, 00:22:49. The Cavern Club was a hole-in-the-wall jazz club where the Beatles often performed from 1962-63.
come at a better or more desperate time for young Britons. Post-war Britain had yet to recover from the physical destruction of the German blitz and the demoralizing collapse of its empire. Paul McCartney recalls how the gloom of war managed to linger, both mentally and physically, in the minds and cities of post-war Britain. “Reminders of the war were all around,” he remembers. “We played on bombsites a lot and I grew up thinking the word bombsite meant playground.” Photographs, not just of Liverpool but also of many cities in northern England, reveal a dismal, gray setting that had yet to be rebuilt: empty concrete sockets where buildings once stood; abandoned houses with shattered roofs and windows.

Britain’s gloom was not just physical. The once glorious British Empire, over which the sun could never set, had fallen into a seemingly irreparable decay. The demise of the last remaining shred of the former empire, the British Commonwealth, was a recurring theme in the post-war decades, particularly in the British press. An article in the London Times on July 9th, 1964, lamented that “today, the Commonwealth has few formal links; and, whatever strength of its informal ties, it would be strengthened by new formal links.” The Royal Commonwealth Society also expressed their concern, their leader Lord John Hope declaring, “the time is ripe for a determined effort…to empty the resources and spirit of the Commonwealth to bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries.”

Emerging from this gloomy national climate, the Beatles gave Britons—particularly baby boomers who had never experienced the height of international British influence—a reason to feel patriotic.

136 Roylance, ed. The Beatles Anthology (Book), 17
The success of Beatles’ tours in America and Australia were sources of particular pride for young Britons, who watched the band arrive to a heroes welcome in both countries. British journalists boasted of the “crowds of ten thousand that waited to [greet] the Beatles when they arrived,” and the “farewell crowd of eleven thousand when the lads flew off.” Their manager, Brian Epstein, declared, “They [had] triumphed so completely in America” that he doubted whether “the excitement created by them could ever be matched again.” Words like “triumph,” “conquest,” and “heroes” littered the British news coverage of the Beatles’ tours in Europe, Oceania and North America, and even the photographs that accompanied these articles tended to show the Beatles back-dropped against iconic landmarks. An advertisement for Vox Sound Equipment that ran in Mersey Beat in 1964 showed a doctored image of the Beatles literally leaping over mid-town Manhattan.

The Beatles departed and returned to Great Britain from their numerous foreign tours to the screams of thousands of young Britons, who were proud to watch their fellow countrymen enjoy such worldwide success. Derek Taylor, a British journalist from the Daily Express who reported regularly on the Beatles, explains, “In England, by the autumn of 1963, they were much more than a pop group. They were now a major topic and were on the front page of everybody’s lives. You could not have a conversation in a pub or anywhere without talking about the Beatles. Life was going to be good now because we had the Beatles. Even miserable buggers—and

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139 See photos, Figures D and E
England’s never been short of them–quite liked them.”

As Brian Epstein described, even “the Royal Family, the wealthy and the great were captivated by the naturalness of the four young men and were all very proud of them.”

The pride in the Beatles’ foreign conquests was so great that, in 1965, they were made Members of the British Empire, an honor that had never been bestowed upon pop stars. A fan outside the gates of Buckingham Palace, where the ceremony took place, remarked: “To me they are young, vital, and give this country a kick and a lift, and my God we need it.”

The ceremony itself and the reaction of the crowds that gathered outside of the palace spoke to the nation’s deep pride in a group of four boys who had instilled an air of patriotism into a nation that had suffered tremendously both during and after the Second World War. The Beatles had become cultural and national icons, and were viewed as such not only by Britons, but also by those who greeted them in the many countries in which they toured.

In every country they visited, the Beatles were greeted, treated, and sent off like conquering heroes. Popular memories of their well-documented first visit to America can practically be narrowed down to one image: the four Beatles stepping off their Pan-American flight and waving incredulously to the crowd of nearly 3,000 that cheered for them from the international terminal at JFK in New York City.

They were merely in their early twenties, yet they conducted themselves like young royalty. Their heightened status as cultural icons was highlighted by the various

143 David Espar, Rock and Roll (South Burlington: WGBH Boston, 1995). “Shakespeares in the Alley”
144 Epstein, A Cellarful of Noise., 141
145 See photos, Figure F.
146 Smeaton, “The Beatles Anthology (Film).”, Anthology 4, (01:02:09)
147 Although the Beatles had been informed that one of their records had reached number one in America, they had no idea that full-fledged Beatlemania had leaked into America from Europe. They were indeed shocked to find the frenzy of fans that awaited them at JFK. Ibid. Anthology 1
welcomes they received as they arrived in each country. For instance, when Ed Sullivan introduced the Beatles at Shea Stadium in 1965, he bellowed to the already roaring crowd: “Honored by their country, decorated by their queen, and loved here in America, here are the Beatles!” One can confidently assume that no English act today would receive such an introduction. Indeed, the Beatles were hardly ever separated from the country and city that they represented, and were consistently referred to as “that English rock quartet” or “these youngsters from Liverpool.”

The Beatles’ status as foreign cultural icons was enhanced by their receptions on international tours. They regularly arrived to crowds of thousands and were often wheeled through the crowds like a float in a carnival parade. Ed Sullivan would recall that when he first saw the crowds greeting the Beatles at Heathrow airport in London, he “thought, at first, that the Queen had just arrived.” Newsreel footage of their arrival in Australia makes it hard to believe that at one point they actually went inside to play a concert. Stepping off the plane, stuffed koalas in hand, they waved to their adoring fans, who were excited by the chance to see their heroes and to welcome them into their country. They were put on floats and paraded through the streets of Sydney as the local police force struggled to keep the hysterical fans from launching themselves onto the parade vehicles. One young fan standing beside the road held up a sign that read, “HAIL THE CONQUERERS!” Newsreel footage archived by an Australian historical society shows extensive footage of the parade’s final stop. The Beatles were led by local dignitaries, press officers and military officials to a balcony

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148 Ibid., Anthology 5, (00:00:44)
150 Smeaton, "The Beatles Anthology (Film)."
that overlooked an enormous crowd, and as they perused the crowd, they waved, jested, and occasionally puffed their chests out in an unmistakably Mussolini-esque fashion.152

The Beatles’ status as cultural icons was enhanced even further by their regular and highly publicized audiences with various public officials. In nearly every country they visited, the Royal family, the current prime minister or the president would either greet them personally or send them a well-publicized greeting, as President Johnson did. Brian Epstein recalls in his memoir: “By 1964, it had become very fashionable to be a Beatles fan. Practically every senior citizen was clamoring to illuminate his name or industry with the name Beatles.”153 Public officials sought to bask in the reflected aura of the Beatles’ fame to gain popularity in the polls.154 The Beatles’ “ambassadorial” obligations could also create chaos; their visit to the Philippines ended infamously with the band being chased out of the country after sleeping through a scheduled public greeting with Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos.155

Ultimately, however, the Beatles’ iconic international image was not the only ingredient of Beatlemania. To explain the hysteria, one must consider two additional qualities that made the Beatles particularly attractive and noticeable to young people around the world. First, they were extremely charismatic, and through the use of mass media were able to project their magnetic personalities across national and cultural

153 Epstein, A Cellarful of Noise. 156
154 In England, it became commonplace for local mayors and officials to declare their support for the Beatles. One news writer reported that, “Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home could not get through his election campaign at Kinross without declaring to the electorate that he doted on the Beatles. The most unpopular politician is Edward Heath, a Conservative leader who was rash enough to announce that he didn’t think the Beatles spoke the Queen’s English.” Lewis, “Britons Succumb to ‘Beatlemania’."
155 Smeaton, “The Beatles Anthology (Film)."
boundaries. Second, despite the fact that they never flaunted their sexuality, the Beatles were viewed, by many, as sexual icons.

**The Beatles’ Persona: Charm and Charisma**

The Beatles’ ability to connect with fans of all ages, genders, and nationalities, can be attributed to the unique personality of the group. When assembled together, the four personalities of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr seemingly blended to form one persona. This persona was magnetic, endearing, and exceedingly funny. Conveyed through mass media, the Beatles’ persona helped them form a more personal connection to their fans than their competitors could ever dream of. Beatles scholars have occasionally overemphasized the role of mass media in their success, suggesting that new advents in television and radio contributed to their success with the various mediums.  

The truth, however, is that while every major artist had access to these technologies, no other artist used them as well as the Beatles. It was their collective personality that generated intense media interest, thereby thrusting them continually into the international spotlight.

In some ways, the Beatles’ charm stemmed from their ages and their immaturity. It is easy to forget that the Beatles were little older than twenty when they first gained international recognition. Their boyish behavior, both on and off the stage, was a constant reminder to their adoring fans that these young men were not much older than they were and that, like four Peter Pans, they were somehow refusing to grow up. They behaved like brothers, and even in the international spotlight

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156 See *Can’t Buy Me Love*, Jonathan Gould
continued to frolic and antagonize each other, endearing themselves to their fans and
to the media. At one of their first press conferences, Paul McCartney was attempting
to explain how the Beatles might change their act to be more appropriate for the
Royal Variety Performance in front of the Queen Mother, all while John Lennon
provocatively yanked at the back of his hair. McCartney giggled and swatted at
Lennon throughout the press conference, the footage of which would be the first that
many Britons would see of the new pop stars.\textsuperscript{157}

In addition to being charmingly juvenile, the Beatles were also uniquely
personable, and those who remember their first encounters with them tend to recall
similar first impressions. Brian Epstein, in his memoirs and in contemporaneous
television interviews, recalls his immediate impression of the Beatles at the Cavern
Club in Liverpool:

\begin{quote}
The Beatles were then just four lads on that rather dimly lit stage, somewhat
ill-clad, and their presentation left little to be desired. But amongst all that,
something immediate came over. I was struck not only by their music, but
their sense of humor on stage and, afterwards when I met them, their personal
charm.\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

Like Brian Epstein, George Martin recognized the Beatles’ “tremendous charisma,”
and knew that “that alone would sell them.”\textsuperscript{159} As he recalls, “When I met them it was
love at first sight. It wasn’t that they were great singers or great performers or great
songwriters. It was that they had enormous charisma, and they were the kind of
people that you actually felt better being with.”\textsuperscript{160} Captivated by their charm, George
Martin put aside his skepticism about the band’s original material— which did not

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoteref{157} Smeaton, “The Beatles Anthology (Film),.” Anthology 2, (00:46:25)
\footnoteref{158} Ibid., Anthology 1, (00:58:40)
\footnoteref{159} Ibid., Anthology 1, (01:02:40)
\footnoteref{160} Espar, \textit{Rock and Roll}.
\end{footnotes}
impress him—and agreed to be their producer. George Martin and Brian Epstein were, however, just the first in a long line of entertainment professionals who would be won over by the Beatles’ natural charm. Ed Sullivan, the host of the popular American talk show, The Ed Sullivan Show, was the next, and perhaps most important.

On February 9th, 1964, the Beatles appeared for the first time on The Ed Sullivan Show, performing for a television audience of over 70 million people, an industry record.161 The event was a milestone in the history of American popular culture, and millions of baby boomers still recall it as the first time they saw or heard the Beatles.162 Of course, Ed Sullivan did not book the Beatles just because they were charming. He booked them because they were successful and were drawing huge crowds in England. However, his decision to continue promoting them through repeated live and taped performances was not influenced by their commercial appeal alone.

Ed Sullivan was truly charmed by the Beatles, and his immediate affection for the boys was reflected in the way he presented them on air. He introduced them to America as “four of the nicest young men we’ve ever had on our stage,” and sent them off by declaring: “These youngsters from Liverpool, and their conduct here not only as fine professional singers, but as fine youngsters, will leave an imprint on anyone who’s met them.”163 Ed Sullivan continued this warm, working relationship with the Beatles, and when they returned to America the following year, Sullivan cheerfully agreed to introduce them to the roaring crowd at Shea Stadium.

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161 Gould, Can’t Buy Me Love, 156
162 For an overview of this event, see Ilson, Sundays with Sullivan.
163 Smeaton, “The Beatles Anthology (Film).” Anthology 3, (00:24:49)
The Beatles’ personal charm was crucial to their early success, as their ability to make positive first impressions routinely propelled them into a wider spotlight. However, once they were in that spotlight, it was their quick-witted senses of humor that allowed them to win over both the media as well as their young audience. As comedians, the Beatles were blessed with a comedic range that allowed them to connect with fans of all ages, from younger pre-teens to adolescents, and even adults.

To the youngest fans, the Beatles entertained with a kind of slapstick comedy that was undoubtedly influenced by the style of the Three Stooges. In both their television appearances as well as their feature films, *A Hard Days Night* and *Help*, the Beatles played impishly to their boyishness, enhancing their image as loveable idiots. However, as they demonstrated in countless press conferences and television appearances, the Beatles also had the versatility to appeal to adolescents and adults.

Adults, particularly members of the press, were entertained by the Beatles’ quick-witted, good-natured senses of humor. As one journalist who covered their first arrival in New York recalled, “The press was always ready to shoot down somebody big, and they were ready to shoot down the Beatles as well. But they were so funny and so cute; they were like the Marx Brothers, they were just really hilarious. Everyone in the press loved them immediately, and it came out in the press that way.”  

Broadcasts of the Beatles press conferences soon became as commonplace as broadcasts of their concerts; a five-minute 1964 CBS special on *Beatlemania* devoted half of its segment to an interview with the group, during which the four boys joked about their hysterical fans.  

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164 Espar, *Rock and Roll*. Episode Two: “Shakespeares in the Alley”  
Beatles sparred with the press, countering each ridiculous question with an equally outlandish response. Ringo Starr, pressed for his thoughts on Beethoven, casually responded: “I think he’s great…especially his poems.”166 To adults, the Beatles’ humor was a mark of wit and intelligence. But to teenagers, these snappy and occasionally defiant responses took on a different meaning.

For teenagers, the Beatles’ outrageous behavior in the spotlight of adult authority was awe-inspiring, even more so because they were somehow getting away with it. Using humor as a tool or simply as an acceptable mode of expression, the Beatles’ public appearances reassured their teenage fans that they had neither succumbed to the arrogance of stardom nor forsaken their youth and common roots. One fan recalled that it was “not just John Lennon’s wit, but also that he didn’t take himself seriously that made him my favorite once I saw him at the Beatles’ first press conference.”167 Another fan noted that “those who fell for the Beatles hardest recognized that their new found idols epitomized an affront to the established order.”168 One reporter from Melody Maker described a press conference at which “[The Beatles] were rough on a woman who suggested that they shouldn’t all be smoking, as they were setting a bad example for teenagers.” Lennon quickly replied, “We don’t set examples, and we love smoking, thank you very much!”169 Teenagers could only watch in awe as the Beatles found themselves in an increasingly public spotlight, meeting each new wave of exposure with an equally humorous or sarcastic response.

167 Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 75
168 Ibid. 79
When introducing the final song at the Royal Variety Performance—one of their first and few in front of a civil audience—John Lennon peered into the crowd and announced: “For our last number we’d like to ask your help. For the people in the cheaper seats, clap your hands. And the rest of you if you’d just rattle your jewelry!” As he stepped back from the microphone, Lennon gave a notably cheeky thumbs-up to the Queen Mother, who was seated high in the balcony. In a similar episode in Austria, the Beatles demonstrated how their defiant humor could cross cultural and even linguistic boundaries. As reporter Victor Spinetti recalled:

I was with them when they were standing on a balcony in Salzburg and there were thousands of Austrian kids below. The Beatles each put combs on their lips so they looked like Hitler and began screaming in German. And those thousands of kid laughed right back.170

Exuding a charm and a sense of humour that could transcend age, nationality, and gender, the Beatles were enthusiastically received as cultural icons for the baby boom generation. This kind of hero worship was not the only component of Beatlemania, but it was the component that involved millions of young people from both genders. Of course, there was another aspect of the Beatles’ iconic status that appealed more exclusively to girls.

The Sexuality of Beatlemania

To millions of baby boomers reaching adolescence in 1964, the Beatles were the most visible, famous, and accessible icons upon which they could focus their nascent sexual feelings. As I indicated in the preceding chapter, the Beatles were not overtly sexual figures; they did not dance, sing, or present themselves in a way that could be considered sexual. However, for many teenage girls, part of the mania surrounding the Beatles was indeed fuelled by a powerful and often novel sexual attraction to the band.

A few scholars have attempted to explain the phenomenon by suggesting that the Beatles arrived in the midst of a sexual revolution, one in which outward sexual expression was becoming more acceptable for female youth. In his book, *Understanding Rock n’ Roll: Popular Music in Britain 1955-1964*, Dick Bradley suggests that the 1960s were a decade in which teenagers were attempting to break free of the sexual constraints that had dominated the past two decades. He explains:

> It was widely perceived by the media, authors and educationalists of the 1950s and early 1960s that teenagers were heavily preoccupied with sexuality. The period between 1945 and the early 1960s was a period of particularly intense oppression of women in general, expressed in their exclusion from many sections of the national workforce.\(^\text{171}\)

Other scholars suggest that the Beatles were the trigger for a new form of sexual expression that manifested itself as *Beatlemania*. In “*Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun,*” feminist writer Barbara Ehrenreich argues that “to abandon control—to scream, faint, dash about in mobs—was, in form if not in conscious intent, to protest

the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture.” It was, she claims, “The first and most dramatic uprising of the women’s sexual revolution.”\(^{172}\) In her essay, Ehrenreich provides a sweeping account of *Beatlemania*; nonetheless, in regards to the phenomenon’s sexual component, she may be overanalyzing.

A slightly different perspective encourages us to look beyond the screaming and fainting—which was more of a behavioral phenomenon than a legitimate form of sexual expression—to a more simple reality: the Beatles happened to arrive on the international stage just as the largest boom of teenage girls in modern history was reaching puberty. The baby boomers born between 1948 and 1952, when the boom was nearing its peak, would have been between eleven and fifteen when the Beatles rose to stardom. As one such fan described, the Beatles were the first real sexual icons that “either greeted our adolescence or pushed us into it,” doing so in a way that was social, fun, and lighthearted.\(^{173}\) From this perspective, it is the average age of the fans rather than the societal implications of their behavior that best explains the hysteria.

The response of these girls was not perverse; rather, it was an innocent expression of a newly discovered romantic feeling, and screaming was just a way of vocalizing those feelings in a social setting. In some ways, what these girls experienced in the privacy of their own homes is far more revealing than what their public behavior seems to suggest. A collection of letters written to the Beatles in 1964 un masks an endearing innocence in the way these fans explored their attraction to the

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\(^{173}\) Catone, ed. *As I Write This Letter*. 18
members of the band. What the girls describe in their letters is much more than an uncontrollable urge to leap on their idols and tear out their hair—which they often did in front of the cameras. Instead, the girls express a more profound desire to let the Beatles guide them through the sexual and romantic confusion of their early teens. Because the Beatles presented themselves as blank slates, females ranging from pre-teens to teenagers could fantasize about their own, age-appropriate relationships with them.

Some girls did, indeed, use the Beatles to explore a very real sense of sexual discovery. “The effect the Beatles had on me,” one fan recalls, “was to push my already blossoming sexual awareness further along.” Another remembers that “my whole concept of love was derived from the emotions I felt as I watched them on television or saw their pictures in fan magazines. Going through puberty, we could feel our first sexual stirrings.” Occasionally, younger fans would use the letters as an excuse to mimic the more real sexual responses of their older friends and siblings. As Shirley D. of Lousiville, Kentucky, wrote to Paul McCartney, “I think you are very sexy and I don’t even know what that means.”174 Shirley’s handwriting, a chicken scratch that looks like it took ages to reach the page, suggests that she was no more than ten years old when she wrote the letter.

Other girls used the letters as a way of practicing what they thought were reasonable expressions of romantic infatuation. One wrote to her “darling, sweet, sensational, sexy George” that she had “kissed this letter 3,268 times,” and though “my lips are sore, I am still in heaven.” A few girls used their infatuation with the

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Beatles as a chance to size themselves up as romantic partners, as did one who
described herself to McCartney as “very sensitive and shy.” She insists that “I know
when to be quiet and when to be glad,” and that “I am just happy, fun loving, and
swinging.” In a somewhat sombering case, a girl pleads to her “adorable, sweet John”
that she had lost thirty pounds just to please him. She claims that Lennon was “the
inspiration for my diet and that instead of eating, I just sit and look at your picture.
Fat Phyllis is no more!”

When they were not the objects of romantic or sexual feelings, the Beatles
could simply fill the role of boyfriends—or male companions—when the girls had few
others to speak of. They could provide the fantasy of male company on command
and, unlike a real boy, the fantasy could be melded into whatever the girl wanted it to
be. When the fantasy was not sexual or romantic, it was “my dearest and best friend,”
a guide through the turbulence of adolescence. In many of the letters, the girls state
that they “grew up with the Beatles.” One girl recalls, “I was in love with Paul and he
was very real to me…somehow I still feel close to him. I may have lost the gee whiz
teeny bopper idolization, but I still have a feeling of caring about him and a deep,
deep affection.”175 This kind of tender, affectionate language reveals that these girls
were using the Beatles in a much more complicated way than their public hysteria
might suggest.

The screaming and the fainting were merely the modes of expression that
these girls used to project their emotions in a social setting. It may have been unusual,
as Barbara Ehrenreich notes, for young women to have behaved this way in this
particular era, but that does not necessarily mean that it was a conscious—or even

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175 Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 4
unconscious–effort to break away from the norm and initiate a feminist movement. Ultimately, this was just the natural reaction for millions of young girls who were reaching the complicated years of puberty and identifying four male icons that could guide them through it.

**Conclusion**

The celebratory atmosphere that greeted the Beatles wherever they went was, in many respects, a response to their elevated status as generational icons. The Beatles attained this status gradually, first by endearing themselves to their hometown fans in Liverpool, but soon after by being adopted as cultural symbols of Britain. The nature in which they were treated during their international tours, not to mention their regular audiences with state and royal officials, helped to legitimize their heightened status. Their natural charisma appealed to millions of teenagers around the world, who looked up to the band as cultural icons for their generation. And for female baby boomers, the Beatles provided a visible and accessible icon onto which they could project their nascent sexual feelings.

The Beatles’ exalted status, however, depended largely on their relentless touring and constant public appearances, both of which came to an abrupt halt in 1966. On August 29th, 1966, the Beatles appeared in their final concert, at Candlestick Park in San Francisco. After this concert, they confined themselves to the privacy of the recording studio, thus ending a nearly three-year reign as one of the most successful touring bands in pop music history. So what happened to these millions of *Beatlemaniacs* after their band left the public arena? Did *Beatlemania* just fade away?
The answer to this question depends largely on how we define *Beatlemania* in the first place. If it is defined rigidly as the public hysteria of screaming, fainting girls, then the answer must be yes. After 1966, with the exception of regular crowd gatherings outside the Abbey Road studios, this form of *Beatlemania* did eventually fade away. The problem with this definition, however, is that it does not acknowledge the continuing obsession with the Beatles’ lives and music, which refused to fade away even after the hysteria had passed. In addition to breaking industry records in album sales, the Beatles continued to generate considerable public interest, an interest that has managed to endure for over thirty years. This enduring obsession is, in many ways, an extension of *Beatlemania*. 
IV.

Beatlemania as it Endured

“Those were the best times. The Beatles were just a part of growing up.”

—Betty Taucher176

In mid 1964, the four Beatles sat down to an interview and were asked how long the fad surrounding them might last. John Lennon simply dismissed the question: “You can’t say. You can be big headed and say we’re going to last ten years, but as soon as you’ve said that you realize we’d be lucky if we last three months.” George Harrison ventured a more positive estimate, but with the same uncertain outlook: “It may be next week or it may be three years, but we’ll be in the business, either up there or down there, for another four years.” And Ringo Starr simply suggested that if Beatlemania were to end, he “always fancied owning a hair salon.”177 Knowing full well that pop phenomena rarely lasted more than a few years, the Beatles responded as sensibly they could. What they did not know, however, was that their popularity would ultimately defy the traditional expectations of a popular fad by enduring—in at least a few different forms—for over forty years.

176 Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 278
177 Espar, Rock and Roll. “Shakespeare in the Alley”
Even after the Beatles ended their career as performing artists in 1966 and resigned themselves exclusively to the studio, a significant number of their original teenybopper following refused to give up the notion of them as a quartet of innocent, mop-headed teen idols. Although the Monkees—a band that mimicked the Beatles’ image and style—had gained a significant following among the Beatles’ teenybopper audience, many of these fans never gave up their attachment to the Beatles. Whether by forming fan clubs, making pilgrimages to Liverpool, or even attending Beatles conventions, the teenybopper fans were able to maintain their devotion to the band. However, they would not be the only fans to carry the excitement for the Beatles through the 1960s.

In 1965, the Beatles released *Rubber Soul*, a complex album that marked a significant departure from their original style of teen pop music and attracted a new audience to their music. This audience was comprised of an older, more mature crowd of baby boomers who expected the level of complexity in popular music that styles such as folk rock had begun to offer. Throughout the latter half of the decade, the Beatles would evolve and mature, experimenting with nearly every musical style, from folk music to psychedelic rock, that became popular among this rapidly evolving body of youth. The Beatles would maintain their dominance in the market of 1960s popular music by consistently appealing to this audience.

Finally, because the Beatles evolved so much in parallel with the baby boomers, many among the generation would later view the band as an inextricable link to their youth. In this way, *Beatlemania*—defined, in this case, as an unaltering devotion to the band—was able to survive as an enduring legacy of the baby boom
generation. For millions of baby boomers, the Beatles remain etched into the memories of their youth. To this day, the baby boomers maintain their devotion to the band by routinely consuming new Beatles products, released either by the band’s living members or by other artists paying tribute to the band. Moreover, the baby boomers have been so committed to keeping the legacy of the Beatles alive that they have passed on the music of the Beatles to their children.

*Beatlemania*, in its most traditional form, did not last more than the three years that George Harrison so wisely predicted. However, the dominance of the Beatles in music and in popular culture did not completely fade away. The birth of this enduring legacy is the subject of this fourth, and final, chapter.

**Keeping the Heyday Alive: the Teenyboppers**

For thousands of Beatle-obsessed teenyboppers around the world, the end of the Beatles’ career as a teen-idol pop group was disheartening. Their new image and music were too experimental, too avant-garde. As one fan recalls: “I was heartbroken when they decided they weren’t going to tour anymore. When they got into their more advanced music, I liked it, but I don’t think I ever enjoyed it as much as I enjoyed the early Beatles, which was just so innocent.”\(^{178}\) For these fans, nothing that the Beatles would produce over the next five years could match the excitement of their early years as a pop group.\(^{179}\) But unlike the fans of most pop music phenomena,

\(^{178}\) Berman, ed. *We're Going to See the Beatles!* 217

\(^{179}\) Many of the youngest fans ended up switching loyalty to The Monkees, an American pop group that achieved considerable success by imitating the image and sound of The Beatles. While they did
the teenyboppers did not necessarily abandon Beatlemania; rather, these fans did everything in their power to keep Beatlemania alive. The desire to continue experiencing the excitement of Beatlemania was, in itself, enough to keep the young, teenybopper audience engaged in the world of the Beatles.

The most common method of keeping Beatlemania alive was through the creation of fan clubs. Using magazines, memorabilia, the feature films,\(^\text{180}\) and, of course, the Beatles’ music, the most devoted fans could gather in small groups and revel in the experience of Beatlemania, which to them never had to fade. As one fan recalls, “I started a Beatles fan club at my school. I was in 8th grade at the time, and [we would] collect these Beatles bubble gum cards, which I still have.” Another remembers how she would “buy a lot of the magazines that had Beatles things in them, tear out the Beatles things, and give the rest of the magazine to the girls who wanted the Monkees.”\(^\text{181}\) These magazines were a crucial component of Beatlemania’s resilience.

Even after the Beatles stopped touring, fan magazines devoted exclusively to the Beatles continued to provide in depth coverage of their musical, social, and private lives. The Beatle Book was one of the better-known publications, and it provided weekly updates on all four Beatles. One of their articles from 1969 reported urgently that “George [Harrison] had left University College Hospital in London a fortnight ago after an eight day stay during which he lost his tonsils.” Another reported, almost despairingly, that “after months of speculation, not one but two

\(^{180}\) Help and A Hard Day’s Night
\(^{181}\) Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 88
Beatles were married this month!"  These magazines provided a unifying forum for the fans who still clung to the early incarnation of *Beatlemania*. Additionally, they could be used to organize conventions at which hundreds of Beatles fans could gather to recreate the memories of *Beatlemania*.

Beatles conventions were—and continue to be—a unifying way for teenybopper Beatles fans to rekindle their excitement for the Beatles. As JoAnne McCormack, a former fan, recalls:

In 1967, I was 17, and I remember I told my parents I was going into the city to ‘a Beatle rally’ to protest the Monkees playing at the Warwick [Theatre]…We also had several Beatle rallies at Shea Stadium after they stopped touring. In ’67 we had a rally on August 23rd, which was [both] the anniversary of the second Shea concert and also of John and Cynthia Lennon. We’d hang around, sing Beatles songs, bring tape recorders and radios, and others would bring guitars. We’d go to gate B and stay there all day. And that’s where I met a lot of these other people, and we are still friends to this day.\(^{183}\)

Beatles conventions continue to meet in cities across the world, and tend to draw fans seeking to recreate the heyday of *Beatlemania*. One such fan admits, “I have a whole life that I allow to surface once every summer in Chicago when I go to Beatlefest.”\(^{184}\)

Footage from a 1985 BBC documentary on the Beatles depicts a gathering of at least 1,000 people at an American convention for Beatles fans. The fans, who range in age but who are mostly in their mid to late thirties, are participating in an almost comical call and response exercise with the emcee. Every time he shouts the name of one of the Beatles, the fans screech back the name in response. He makes his way through the band, and then leads the crowd in a rendition of the song, “We Love You

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\(^{183}\) Berman, ed. *We’re Going to See the Beatles!* 228

\(^{184}\) Catone, ed. *As I Write This Letter*. 25
Beatles,” a single released in 1964 by The Carefrees that peaked at thirty-nine in the Billboard Hot 100.\textsuperscript{185} At first glance, the scene is nothing but absurd—a thousand groupies caught in an endless cycle of pathetic hero worship. But when examined more closely, one notices that like the gathering of weekly churchgoers, these Beatles fans have come together not just to praise their former heroes, but also to seek camaraderie in their recreation of \textit{Beatlemania}.\textsuperscript{186} As one fan notes, “Beatles fans have always been close-knit, and with a network of friendships that has lasted a decade or more, the fan convention scene is still active and exciting.”\textsuperscript{187} Beatle birthdays provide fans with an annual occasion to come together and celebrate their love of the Beatles; one particularly committed fan in the former Soviet Union holds a series of parties every year, complete with a Beatles cover band, to honor each Beatle birthday.\textsuperscript{188} And every year on October 9th, fans gather at the Strawberry Fields Memorial site in Central Park to sing songs in honor of John Lennon’s birthday.

Another way that teenyboppers maintain their involvement with the Beatles is by making ‘pilgrimages’ to England–Liverpool in particular. As \textit{Time’s} Christopher Porterfield noticed in 1967, “The youngsters who were the original \textit{Beatlemaniacs} are older, and now [take] pilgrimages to the Beatles’ home town of Liverpool.”\textsuperscript{189} One such \textit{Beatlemaniac} insisted, “For true Beatles fans, a trip to Liverpool was a must.”\textsuperscript{190} While the Beatles were still together as a recording group, the purpose of the trip was,

\textsuperscript{186} This film footage can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpJEJLOLLUY
\textsuperscript{187} Catone, ed. \textit{As I Write This Letter}. 41
\textsuperscript{188} Leslie Woodhead, "How the Beatles Rocked the Kremlin," (USA2009).
\textsuperscript{189} Sawyers, ed. \textit{Read the Beatles}. 106
\textsuperscript{190} Catone, ed. \textit{As I Write This Letter}. 51
in part, to watch the Beatles as they came in and out of the Abbey Road recording
studios in London. Norman Smith, a recording engineer at Abbey Road, recalls how
“there were always hundreds of teenagers, mostly girls, around the studios. At one
particular session, I went into the control room, opened the door, and found two girls
hiding in the little room. The only way I could get them out was to grab them by the
hair.”¹⁹¹ Not every girl managed to get inside the actual studios; most tended to gather
in the parking lot outside. One of these girls, Paula Myers, recalls, “We would just
stand across the street, thinking about marrying Paul.”¹⁹²

After the Beatles formally broke up in 1970, the trip took on a different
meaning. Rather than attempting to meet or see the Beatles in person, the fans made
the pilgrimage so that they could follow in their hero’s footsteps. “It was during
[1970] that I traveled to England,” remembers one fan. “After the Beatles stopped
touring, it was decided among their fans that if the Beatles wouldn’t come to us, we
would go to them. By the time I made it to England, the Beatles had broken up, but
by then the fans had a place to meet: Apple [the Beatles’ record company].”¹⁹³ Even
today, Beatles fans continue to flock to Abbey Road Studios in London and to various
sites in Liverpool, hoping to walk in the footsteps of their idols. The “Liverpool”
region of England might not be placed at the top of most sightseeing lists, for baby
boomers, Liverpool exerts a strange and powerful lure.”¹⁹⁴ Recent data show that

¹⁹¹ Lysaght, The Beatles: An Oral History. 189
¹⁹² Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 243
¹⁹³ Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 51
nearly 600,000 Beatles tourists visit Britain each year, contributing around £20,000,000 to the visitor economy.\textsuperscript{195}

In addition to taking pilgrimages to England, attending a solo concert by one of the former Beatles was—and remains today—a way for former teenyboppers to indulge in their longing for \textit{Beatlemania}. As Illona Gabriel remembers, “George Harrison’s Bangladesh concert was kind of like a mini-Beatle concert, a little quieter, because you didn’t have all of them onstage. As far as greeting George when he came on stage, it was the same as it was for \textit{Beatlemania}—everyone on their feet, everyone screaming.” But Illona notes sadly that “once he started to sing, everyone would [just] quiet down and listen to the music.”\textsuperscript{196} Another fan, Penny Wagner, echoes Gabriel’s somewhat melancholy assessment of the solo concerts. “I saw Paul [McCartney] at the Milwaukee Brewers stadium, and it was totally different from the Beatles concerts.”\textsuperscript{197} For these fans, the solo concerts, while thrilling, could not replace a full-out Beatles concert. Of course, before 1980, the year in which John Lennon was assassinated, there \textit{was} always a chance that such a concert might take place. The desire for a reunion concert was ultimately so powerful that it gave birth to a myth of reunification, a never-ending stream of rumours that the Beatles might reunite for one more concert.

Shortly after the Beatles stopped touring in 1966, fan magazines such as the \textit{Beatle Book}—among thousands of others—began printing stories suggesting that the Beatles were organizing a reunion concert. As Jonathan Gould describes: “At regular

\textsuperscript{195} Taken from Report for Liverpool Culture Committee and the Beatles Industry Group, 2005. Figures sent electronically by archivist Lisa Coates at The Beatles Story Museum in Liverpool.
\textsuperscript{196} The Concert for Bangladesh (1972) was a fundraising concert at Madison Square Garden, organized by George Harrison and Ravi Shankar
\textsuperscript{197} Berman, ed. \textit{We’re Going to See the Beatles!} 253
intervals, prompted by the published comments of one or another, or by some promoter’s offer of an astronomical sum, the rumor would resurface that they were preparing to reunite.” ¹⁹⁸ These rumors served a purpose by keeping Beatlemania alive for those who “just kept hoping for a [real] Beatles concert.”¹⁹⁹ Even after the Beatles formally broke up in 1970, stories continued to surface suggesting that they might consider reuniting for an album or a concert.

The assassination of John Lennon, on December 8th, 1980, permanently shattered the dream. Lennon’s death was tragic in its own right, but for millions of fans around the world, his death also symbolized the end of the Beatles. Many of the letters and reflections of fans on the day after Lennon died disclose a sense of dual mourning. “Poor, poor John,” wrote Susan Moore of Port Talbot, Wales. “When I heard the tragic news, I cried and cried uncontrollably. Being born and bred in Liverpool, I grew up with the Beatles and the excitement of Beatlemania. We will all miss him.” Susan Moore was one of the thousands of fans around the world whose sadness for Lennon’s death was inextricably linked to her sadness that the Beatles could never make music again. Miss S. Solomons of London suggested that, “For those who grieve deeply, we should see as many Beatle people as possible getting together.”²⁰⁰ For these fans, the dream of a reunification was now over, but their devotion to the band was not.

Teenyboppers when the Beatles first arrived, these fans never gave up the Beatles as a group of pop idols, despite the fact that the band had abandoned this image and musical style by late 1965. Using fan magazines, conventions, and even

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¹⁹⁸ Gould, Can’t Buy Me Love, 604
¹⁹⁹ Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 250
²⁰⁰ Dean, ed. The Best of the Beatles Book, 245
travel as a way of maintaining their vision of the band as a group of pop icons, these fans continued to immerse themselves in a world of Beatlemania. To them, the Beatles’ reign as the dominant pop group of the era never had to end, contributing to the legacy of the band that continues to endure today. But as we know, the legacy of the Beatles extends beyond their contributions as a group of pop stars.

In 1965, the Beatles took a decisive turn away from the world of teen pop, emerging as innovators of a new style of music and models for a new kind of audience. As Time magazine’s Christopher Porterfield noted, “Now that the Beatles’ music is growing more complex and challenging, they are losing some of the younger teenyboppers, most of whom would rather shriek at predictably cute 1964-model Beatles.” However, Porterfield also realized that, “In exchange for the teeny-boppers, the new Beatles have captivated a different and much more responsive audience.”201 This new audience, still comprised of baby boomers, carried Beatlemania into the latter part of the decade in a different, yet equally powerful form.

The Beatles Grow Up

In late 1965, the Beatles released their fourth studio album: Rubber Soul. The album cover, a dark and brooding image, depicted the four Beatles peering downwards towards the camera. But this time they were not smiling. Their hair was considerably longer, and they looked older, more mature.202 They were no longer the “Fab Four,” the pop quartet that would smile, dance, and sing to the joyous,

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201 Sawyers, ed. Read the Beatles. 106
202 See photos, Figure I.
screaming crowds of fifteen-year old girls; rather, they were a new brand of artist. As one fan recalls, “With the cover alone, we saw the Beatles as the adults they were going to become.” Not only had their image changed, but their new music was astonishingly different than anything they had produced to date. From the folk-influenced ballad of “Norwegian Wood” to the introspective “Nowhere Man,” Rubber Soul was a significant departure from the fast, innocent dance music that comprised their earlier work.

Like the generation of baby boomers they played to, the Beatles were maturing and evolving. Over the next five years, they would continue to grow, producing one groundbreaking album after another. However, what it is so unusual about the way that the Beatles evolved—and what is so rarely mentioned in the existing scholarship on their evolution—is how closely the Beatles paralleled the growth of their generation. Some scholars have suggested that, like any musicians, the Beatles were simply influenced by what was most popular at the time. To a certain extent this is true; the Beatles followed the musical trends of the sixties like chameleons. Others, meanwhile, have insisted that it was the Beatles who set the trends, popularizing new genres of style and music that would otherwise have remained obscure. Ultimately, it was their bold, occasionally intentional, combination of leading, following, and popularizing that allowed them to evolve in step with their generation.

With the release of Rubber Soul in 1965, the Beatles effectively abandoned teen pop, emerging into a genre of “art music” that had recently been popularized by

203 Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 275
204 Paul McCartney John Lennon, Rubber Soul (London: Parlophone, 1965). “Nowhere Man” was released as a promotional single in the US, and was not included on the album.
the American folk music revival. Spearheaded by singer-songwriter Joan Baez, the folk music revival brought the aesthetic of traditional American folk songs back into the mainstream. Between 1960 and 1965, artists such as Peter, Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan, and Simon and Garfunkel broke into both the US and UK charts with hits such as “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “Sounds of Silence.” These songs, which often addressed controversial social and political topics such as the Civil Rights movement or the Free Speech movement in Berkeley, appealed to a more sophisticated audience, one that expected both musical and lyrical nuance in its everyday listening. The Beatles responded to the influence of folk music by imitating it in their own unique style. As musicologist Ian Marshall observes, “On songs such as ‘You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away’ [found on Help!] we can hear the influence of Bob Dylan. It was revolutionary in the mid-1960s for rock music to look inward so searchingly, to express emotions such as self-doubt or self-loathing, but [the Beatles] brought this self-searching dialogue into contact with the rock tradition.”

In what was viewed by many to be revolutionary, Rubber Soul combined the emotional nuance of folk music with the melodic and stylistic appeal of popular rock music. Songs like “Nowhere Man” and “The Word,” which, by common analysis belong to the genre of rock, also contained the youthful angst and the sense of urgency that folk music so often conveyed. Beatles scholars Guy Cook and Neil Mercer explain: “Whereas the communicative contexts evoked by their earlier songs tend to be conversation, argument, gossip or soliloquy, the later songs are often

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206 On the US release of Rubber Soul, these two tracks were replaced by “Its Only Love” and “I’ve Just Seen a Face,” both of which fit the descriptions I have provided for the songs on the UK release.
concerned with storytelling and philosophizing, and draw upon a wider range of
genres of communication, such as narrative, poem, or satire.”²⁰⁷ “Nowhere Man” was
a melancholy reflection of loneliness, and demonstrated the Beatles’ budding abilities
as lyricists.

The Beatles’ production had become more complicated as well. With more
money and time to spend in the studio, the Beatles refined their recording techniques,
using producer George Martin to a far greater extent than they had on previous
records. The result was a more textured sound, one that was no longer a reincarnation
of the band’s live performance, but rather a studio representation of its four
component parts.

This new incarnation of the Beatles did not fall on deaf ears, but rather on an
entire section of the baby boomer population that, until Rubber Soul, had been
relatively immune to the Beatles’ impact. “Initially I found the Beatles exciting and
interesting,” remembers one fan. “But I certainly could not have been described as a
Beatlemaniac. The fanatical stage of my interest developed when they turned from
rock and roll to more intellectually and philosophically interesting music.”²⁰⁸ Another
fan, Art Murray, recalls that the Beatles’ foray into more intellectually stimulating
music coincided with his freshman year of college: “The first time that I really
[changed my mind] about the Beatles was in 1965-66, at the beginning of my college
career. I knew Rubber Soul backwards, and was listening to it around people who
took that music seriously.”²⁰⁹ Rubber Soul attracted this new crowd in record
numbers. In the UK, Rubber Soul shot immediately to the top of the album charts–

²⁰⁸ Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 62
²⁰⁹ Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 222
simply replacing their previous album, *Help*—and stayed at number one for eight weeks. In the US, the album also went to number one, lasting six weeks in that position and selling nearly 1.2 million copies in the first nine days of its release.\textsuperscript{210}

The evolution, however, was still not over. The Beatles would continue to mature, and in 1966 and 1967 respectively, would release two albums, *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, each time demonstrating the extent to which they could parallel the baby boomers in their growth. In these albums—as well as in many of the singles that they released simultaneously—the Beatles began to explore certain aspects of the counterculture movements that had begun to sweep across America and Europe. Yet unlike so many other groups, the Beatles would manage to do this without ever sacrificing their commercial appeal.\textsuperscript{211}

The culture of drugs, particularly psychedelic drugs, was one element of the counterculture that the Beatles explored in their music. Interestingly, as with their foray into folk music on *Rubber Soul*, the Beatles’ exploration of “psychedelic rock” was not revolutionary to popular music. By the time the Beatles had begun to write about their experiences with psychedelics, a number of popular groups, including Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead, had already been producing psychedelic rock for at least a few months.\textsuperscript{212} However, because of the wide reach of their appeal—and the assured success of their albums—the Beatles would become known in many circles as the first to popularize the genre of psychedelic rock.

\textsuperscript{210} McAleer, *The Book of Hit Singles*.
\textsuperscript{211} The exception, as some may recall, was *Magical Mystery Tour* (1968), an independent film project that received disastrous reviews from the BBC. One critic of the film commented that Nevertheless, the album sold well in the United States, and delivered a few singles such as “I am the Walrus,” which would later be considered classics.
Revolver introduced the aural aesthetic of psychedelic rock in a jarring fashion. It begins with sound experimentation: an amplifier whirs to life, a guitar is tuned as the tape is played backwards and forwards, and a deep, nameless voice counts the two empty measures leading into “Taxman.” As the album continues, the songs drift in and out of a mode of sound experimentation and drug references. In “She Said, She Said,” John Lennon describes an evening during which the actor, Peter Fonda, apparently approached him under the influence of LSD and explained: “I know what it’s like to be dead.” In “Doctor Robert,” they sing the praises of a doctor who lets you “drink from his special cup” if “you’re down.” Although it is debated in Beatles scholarship whether or not this song refers to a real person, it is only logical to point out that Dr. Timothy Leary was, at the time of Revolver’s release, publicly extolling the virtues of LSD by encouraging people to “tune in, turn on, and drop out.”

The final track on the album, “Tomorrow Never Knows”, also makes a loose reference to the teachings of Dr. Timothy Leary, telling the listener to “turn off your mind, relax and float downstream, [for] it is not dying.” However, its explicit reference to LSD was not all that set it apart from the other, slightly more commercial tracks on the album. “Tomorrow Never Knows” was one of two songs on Revolver that experimented with the instrumentation and style of North Indian classical music, a genre and culture that was beginning to take hold in the West, particularly among the hippie counterculture.

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214 Roylance, ed. The Beatles Anthology (Book). 256
215 Lytle, America’s Uncivil Wars. 215
216 Beatles, Revolver.
George Harrison, who took a particular interest in Indian music and culture, had tried to use Indian instruments on the Beatles’ previous album—the song “Norwegian Wood” (Rubber Soul) featured sitar mirroring the vocal melody—but on Revolver the style assumed a dominant position on two songs. Both “Tomorrow Never Knows” and “Love You To” use complete Indian orchestrations—including the use of tabla and drones—to achieve the spiritual effect of classical Indian music. Again, however, we find that the Beatles were not the first or only band to explore this genre. As Peter Lavezzoli explains in The Dawn of Indian Music in the West:

Although there is no question that the special relationship between George Harrison and Ravi Shankar would elevate Indian music and culture to mainstream consciousness, Harrison was not the first rock musician to be inspired by the sitarist from Benares. [Rather], David Crosby and Roger McGuinn of the Byrds [were] the first rock musicians to assimilate the improvisational language of Indian music. And as it happens, they would be the ones to introduce George Harrison to Ravi Shankar’s music.217

The Beatles’ experimentation with Indian classical music was, it seems, just another way that the band was growing and exploring in parallel with those around them. What set the Beatles apart, however, was their ability to deliver something new and experimental in a way that was still accessible and enjoyable.218 In response to Revolver, Lavezzoli admits that “few other musicians were so daring and yet so enormously popular at the same time.”219

The Beatles succeeded in their experimentation, in part, because they never gave up the sense of pure optimism that characterized their earlier work. Even on

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218 Revolver enjoyed tremendous success, spending seven and six weeks at the top of the British and American album charts, respectively.
219 Lavezzoli, The Dawn of Indian Music in the West. 147
Revolver, they produced songs that contained the catchy, melodic structures of their pop hits, songs such as “Here, There and Everywhere,” “And Your Bird Can Sing,” and “Good Day Sunshine.” Furthermore, the areas that they explored were not out of touch with the interests of their baby boomer audience, many of whom were exploring much of the same territory simultaneously. As one fan remembers, “Their music blended into each year of my life; from the early good times rock and roll to their reflections of youth culture, drug culture, and Eastern religion.”220 It was not just their music that was changing in parallel with the generation; even their appearances began to mirror the psychedelic fashion trends that became popular in the late sixties.

By the time the Beatles released Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band in 1967, they had physically transformed themselves into poster children of the late 1960s. With long, flowing hair, multi-colored psychedelic garb, and even moustaches, the Beatles’ images were clearly being shaped by the era in which they lived. Again, the Beatles were not necessarily the trendsetters, as even the decision to grow moustaches—which actually began when McCartney grew one to cover up a scar—was, as Ringo Starr admits, “Just part of being a hippie.” Starr recalls that “it was as if we were going through a metamorphosis, [but really] that was just the sixties coming to the fore.”221 John Lennon agreed with Starr that the Beatles were just a visible part of a much more general trend. “Pinpointing who did it first doesn’t work,” he insists. “We were just a part of whatever the sixties was. We were the ones chosen to represent what was going on ‘on the street,’ but it could have been anybody

220 Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 38
221 Roylance, ed. The Beatles Anthology (Book). 236
else.”

Certainly it could have been anyone else, but as Lennon notes, it was the Beatles who were constantly in the public eye. So naturally, many baby boomers attributed their own fascination with the hippie culture to their awe of the Beatles.

“They called 1967 the Summer of Love,” remembers Cathy McCoy-Morgan. “Then the Beatles came out [on Sgt. Pepper] with all their psychedelic garb, and I happened to be wearing the same stuff. However it was, I went the whole way with them, and it just seemed that their changes were mirroring my life.”

Like McCoy-Morgan, many baby boomers simply learned to view the Beatles as trendsetters, even if the band was just following the same trends that they were. As one fan recalls, “For me, the Beatles represented models of a sort. But it was more than just a musical statement; they had a lot to do with how you visualized how you were going to look.” Of course, it is likely that these fans could have first seen the long hair or psychedelic clothing on their next-door neighbor—not to mention a member of Creedence Clearwater Revival or The Grateful Dead. But because it was the Beatles who were in the public eye and who seemed to have covered the entire gamut of the 1960s experience with them, it was only natural to think of them as the only true models. The Beatles even ventured into the world of activism—albeit in a comically commercial way.

Shortly after the release of Sgt. Pepper, the Beatles took part in a worldwide television broadcast for which they were asked to air an original work with an internationally understandable message. The song they chose as this message was

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222 Ibid. 237
223 Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 228
224 Ibid. 226
“All You Need is Love.” As one might expect, the Beatles came under some scrutiny when they made such a blind leap into the politics of peace, love, and flower power, and more than a few critics found their attempt at a political message uninspiring. Ellen Willis, writing for Rolling Stone, responded: “The Beatles have found it necessary to define themselves politically, but they have little insight into their situation. Instead, they take refuge in self-righteousness, facile optimism, and status mongering.” However, despite their shortcomings as eloquent activists, the Beatles still managed to strike a chord among millions who found the song to be both inspiring and soothing. It seemed to fit in with the general trend of “flower power” music that was pouring out of the Bay Area during the summer of 1967, and was an instant commercial success. Alongside Scott McKenzie’s hippie anthem, “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair),” “All You Need is Love” reached number one in both the US and the UK charts.

Throughout the 1960s, the Beatles found a way to explore nearly every aspect of the decade’s rapidly evolving youth culture, from the emergence of folk rock to the hippie counterculture, and even to political activism. Of course, the Beatles were not the only band to touch on these various themes; the 1960s will forever be remembered as one of the most fertile decades in the history of popular music, if only for the sheer quantity of influential music that it produced. But the Beatles’ dominance in that era was unwavering, and their popularity truly never subsided.

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225 The chorus of “All You Need is Love,” which simply repeats the song’s title again and again, was perhaps the songs deepest and only message.
226 David Brackett, ed. The Pop, Rock and Soul Reader (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 236
227 McAleer, The Book of Hit Singles, 119
Even after they broke up in 1970, the legacy of their music and their contributions to popular culture continued to endure.

**An Enduring Legacy**

Although only two of its members, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, are alive today, the Beatles’ history and music continue to have an indescribable influence on modern culture. A 2000 article from the website of the Recording Industry Association of America describes the Beatles’ current impact on the music market:

More than 40 years after their formation in Liverpool, England, The Beatles catalog continues to sell at a brisk pace. Six albums climbed the multi-platinum ladder in July, led by "The Beatles," which jumped to the 18 million mark. Better known as "The White Album," it is one of the seven highest certified albums of all time. ‘Without question, The Beatles remain one of the most influential bands in rock and roll history,’ said RIAA President and CEO Hilary Rosen. ‘Their music simply transcends generations.’ In addition to "The White Album," "Love Songs" climbed to 3 million, "Revolver" jumped to 5 million, "Magical Mystery Tour" is now certified at 6 million and "The Beatles 1962-1966" and "The Beatles 1967-1970" now stand at 14 million and 15 million, respectively. These upgrades bring their total to 113.5 million units.229

Not only does their music continue to sell in record numbers, but in a span of five years–from 2005 to 2010–the Beatles provided the inspiration for three major entertainment projects: “Love,” a 2006 Cirque de Soleil production based on the story and music of the Beatles; “Across the Universe,” a 2007 feature film that used Beatles’ songs as way of portraying the evolution of the 1960s in America; and finally, “Rock Band: The Beatles,” a 2009 video game in which players use remote-

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229 Jonathan Lamy, "Beatles Continue to Dominate," Recording Industry Association of America.
controlled instruments to play individual tracks from up to forty Beatles songs. The success of these projects highlights two important aspects of the Beatles’ legacy: first, that the baby boomers continue to feel such a powerful connection and loyalty to the Beatles that they are compelled—as if under a trance—to purchase almost every Beatles product that comes onto the market; second, and more interestingly, that the baby boomers have succeeded in passing on the Beatles legacy to their children.  

The baby boom generation continues to appreciate the Beatles because they literally grew up with them. To many baby boomers, the Beatles were like surrogate family members, accompanying them as they grew up in the 1960s. Looking back on the Beatles in retrospect, many boomers tend to echo each other’s observations of parallel growth. Mary Anne Laffin, quoted in We’re Going to See the Beatles, observes how “[the Beatles] were such an important part of my life, every single part of my life. I felt like I grew with them as they grew.” Others mirror Laffin’s observation, only flipping the statement to suggest that, rather than the generation having grown up with the Beatles, the Beatles grew up with them. “They had a song for everything it seemed,” remembers one fan. “With everything they did, they seemed to stay one step ahead. In the end they were much more than a musical group. They were the voice and expression of an entire generation of young people that loved them.”

In reality, it does not matter whether the generation followed the band or the band followed the generation. What matters is that they developed in parallel with

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230 The Beatles have, since 1970, released dozens of compilation albums and anthology projects, including a 2009 re-release of all their original albums. The majority of these projects have been enormously successful.

231 Berman, ed. We’re Going to See the Beatles! 276

232 Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 7
each other. As Jim Rugano notes, “When they came out, we were young kids and they were teenybopper idols. But as we were growing up and maturing, they were too. Their transition from boys in a band to adults in the outside world [occurred] at the same time that we were making our own transitions. The timing was phenomenal.” For millions of baby boomers, the Beatles provided the soundtrack to their youth, from adolescence to young adulthood. And for a generation that has had a particularly difficult–and occasionally comical–struggle to let go of the glory of its youth, the music of the Beatles continues to provide a living link to that era. The baby boomers will likely never give up the Beatles, and their legacy will almost certainly continue until the baby boomers die out. However, the baby boomers are not necessarily the only generation to be carrying the torch of the Beatles legacy.

The echo boomers–as this generation is known–have also inherited this legacy. A 2010 survey of 120 students at Wesleyan University revealed that over 82% of the students considered the Beatles to be one of the five most influential bands of all time. 20% considered the Beatles to be one their five favorite bands. More importantly, 61% of the students were introduced to the Beatles by their parents before they had even reached their teens. Certainly the music could not have been passed down if it were not good; however, these responses demonstrate the degree to which the baby boomers insisted that the legacy of the music be passed on.

Beatle fan Linda Cooper brags, “My son could sing “Help” before he knew a nursery rhyme!” Another fan, Deborah McDermott, explains, “To this day, I’m proud

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233 Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 275
234 Daniel Charness, "Beatles Survey of 120 Wesleyan University Students," in Microsoft Excel (Middletown2010).
of the fact that my daughter considers the Beatles her favorite group.”²³⁵ And one man admitted that “I enjoyed a three hour car trip with a twelve year old by listening to our favorite Beatles songs.”²³⁶ Even those involved in the production of Rock Band: The Beatles agreed that they were excited to introduce a new way to pass the music of the Beatles on to a new generation. Van Toffler, the executive producer at MTV, noted that “many of us have been part of a generation that has enjoyed an enduring love affair with the Beatles, and now we’re looking to extend that love affair for future generations to enjoy.”²³⁷ Described on GamesInformer.com as a “a phenomenal and loving tribute to the Beatles,” Rock Band was a commercial success, receiving mostly positive reviews and selling 550,000 copies in its first four months of release, and 1.7 million copies worldwide.

The Beatles legacy continues to endure, in part because the baby boomers have refused to give up the band they grew up with, but also because they have been persistent about passing the Beatles’ music on to their children. Of course, it is impossible to say whether the Beatles’ music will survive yet another leap in generations, but it seems as if the music itself has a quality of timelessness that allows it to be passed easily from generation to generation. As Beatle fan Leslie Barrett describes, “I started listening to their albums with my daughter when she was 12 or 13—and when my son was 12 or 13 he became interested in them as well.”²³⁸ Like J.D. Salinger’s Catcher in the Rye, whose main character, Holden Caulfield, has the power to connect with youth of almost any generation, the Beatles’ music may become a rite

²³⁵ Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 267
²³⁶ Catone, ed. As I Write This Letter. 22
²³⁸ Berman, ed. We're Going to See the Beatles! 268
of passage for adolescents, whose transition to adulthood will likely be accompanied by at least a small bout of *Beatlemania*. 
The Beatles struck a chord in their generation, producing a legacy that has now endured for over forty years. In addition to creating timeless music that has crossed generations, the Beatles presented their audience with a product that could seemingly fulfill almost every aspect of their lives. They were a commodity that could be admired, mimicked, and purchased. They were cultural icons, charismatic heroes who could uphold the pride of their nation and heritage while simultaneously reaching out to youth around the world. For a booming population of teenage girls, the Beatles were their first male idols and the objects of their fantasies. Finally, and most importantly, the Beatles were malleable. As the generation around them grew up and matured, so too did they, producing music and transforming their image in synchrony with the evolving interests and concerns of their audience.

As perfectly matched as the Beatles were for their generation, Beatlemania could not have happened without an exceptional musical product. The Beatles were exquisite songwriters, and the trans-generational appeal of their music speaks to its quality. However, music alone cannot account for the explosive nature of the Beatles’

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239 Ibid. 272
success. Throughout the 1960s, hundreds of artists contributed music that was at least comparable to theirs, and in the forty years since the Beatles retired, hundreds more have continued to create exceptional music that has also withstood the test of time. But still, no other musical group has engendered the massive social hysteria that characterized Beatlemania or left such a lasting legacy. This is why I chose to examine Beatlemania from the perspective of the generation that was so affected by it.

Ultimately, my analysis of Beatlemania is not intended to stand on its own. The story of the Beatles is truly complex, and as Brian Epstein himself admitted, an explanation of the phenomenon cannot be reduced to one factor. A generational analysis is but one part of a much larger and more complicated explanation for the Beatles’ success. Certainly this analysis, even when combined with the existing scholarship on the Beatles, does not complete the Beatles’ story. For instance, while many scholars have acknowledged the business savvy of Brian Epstein—and even written about it at length—there are still very few comprehensive studies of his contributions to the Beatles success. Epstein was a crucial figure in the Beatles story, and half of my own observations of the Beatles owe to Brian Epstein’s unmatched skill as a public relations liaison. This is one of many aspects of the Beatles story that scholars have yet to explore in depth, and I have no fear that this kind of scholarship will continue to be generated as it always has.

The Beatles continue to fascinate millions of people around the world. For some, they are an enduring link to their past; for others, they are a trans-generational bond. Millions more just like the sound of their music. However it endures, the
Beatles’ legacy will likely continue to impact generations to come. If this project has accomplished nothing else, it has at least illuminated the perfect storm that can occur when just the right band meets just the right generation of youth.
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