



Excerpt from “Building the Beatle Image”

By Vance Packard, *Saturday Evening Post*

March 21, 1964

What causes an international craze like the current Beatlemania?

Press agency can only swell a craze. To get one started you need to bring into fusion five vital ingredients.

Only three years ago it is doubtful that any observer of pop culture would have picked the Beatles to inspire madness on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1961 the Beatles affected a beatnik look. They wore black T-shirts, black leather jackets, blue jeans and disheveled hair. In one picture taken of them that year they scowled at the camera as good beatniks should.

Then along came Brian Epstein, an aristocratic-looking young Englishman who ran a record shop and soon became their manager. First he made them scrub, comb their hair and get into civilized clothing. Then little by little, by a combination of hunch, luck and design, he began exploiting the five ingredients that will create a craze.

First, the Beatles needed a symbol that would make them stand out in the people's minds, a symbol such as the coonskin cap that Walt Disney gave to his Davy Crockett creation. For a symbol it was decided to exploit their already overlong hair. The Beatles let it grow longer and bushier, combed it forward - and then had it immaculately trimmed. The result was not only eye-catching but evocative. Such hairdos were common place in the Middle Ages and the new coiffure suggested the ancient roots of England.

A second ingredient necessary for a craze is to fill some important subconscious need of teenagers. Youngsters see themselves as a subjugated people constantly exposed to arbitrary edicts from adult authorities... Rock 'n roll music, of course, annoys most parents, which is one of the main reasons why millions of youngsters love it. But the Beatles couldn't possibly hope to outdo Elvis Presley in appalling parents. Instead of open opposition, the Beatles practice an amiable impudence and a generalized disrespect for just about everybody. They succeeded, happily, in getting themselves denounced in some pretty high adult places. The Lord Privy Seal indicated his annoyance. And Field Marshal Lord Montgomery growled that the Army would take care of those mop-top haircuts if the Beatles were ever conscripted.

But the Beatles - under Mr. Epstein's tutelage - also have put stress on filling other subconscious needs of teen-agers. As restyled, they are no longer roughnecks but rather lovable, almost cuddly, imps. With their collarless jackets and boyish grins, they have succeeded in bringing out the mothering instinct in many adolescent girls.

The subconscious need that they fill most expertly is in taking adolescent girls clear out of this world... The Beatles have become peculiarly adept at giving girls this release. Their relaxed, confident manner, their wild appearance, their whooping and jumping, their electrified rock 'n roll pulsing out into the darkness makes the girls want to jump - and then scream...

A third ingredient needed to get a craze started - as Brian Epstein obviously knew - is an exciting sense of freshness. In an informal poll conducted through my offspring, who are at high school and college, I find that the fact that the Beatles are somehow "different" - something new in the musical world - made the deepest impression. Teen-agers feel they are helping create something new that is peculiarly their own. And as my 15 year-old expert (feminine) explained, "We were kind of at a lag with popular singers."

The delivery, if not the music, is refreshingly different with the Beatles. Surliness is out, exuberance is in. Sloppiness is out, cleanliness is in. Self-pity is out, whooping with joy is in. Pomposity is out, humor is in.

A fourth ingredient needed to keep a craze rolling once it shows signs of starting is a carrying device, such as a theme song. The carrying device of the Beatles is found in their name. It playfully suggests beatnik, but it also suggests "beat" -- and the beat is the most conspicuous feature of the Beatles' music. It is laid on heavily with both drums and bass guitar. When the screaming starts, the beat still gets through.

Finally, a craze can succeed only if it meets the mood of the times. England, after centuries of cherishing the subdued, proper form of life, is bursting out of its inhibitions. There has been a growth of open sexuality, plain speaking and living it up. The Beatles came along at just the right time to help the bursting-out process.