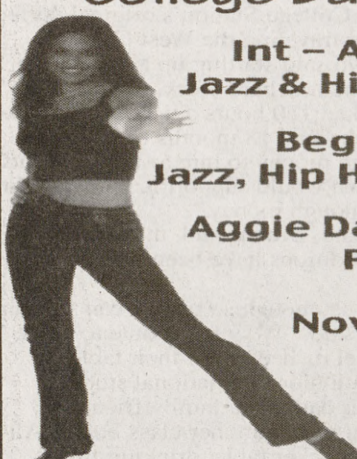


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# Close-knit crowd

Knitting gains popularity among a younger crowd

By Beverly Bundy  
KRT CAMPUS

Across the nation, a growing number of young women (and, yes, we tell it like it is, young men) are taking up long needles to emulate that fast Hollywood crowd.

That's right, needles . . . and yarn. Teens are learning to knit. "More and more young people are getting into the craft," said Tarie Williams, owner of Yarn Heaven in Arlington, Texas. In business for 10 years, Williams said that "more people who are 15 to 24 who've never been interested in Grandma's crafts are taking up knitting. It has become a lot more high-profile, and the kids are picking it up."

Two of the top instigators of this trend are girl-next-door actresses Julia Roberts and Sandra Bullock. Roberts was busted several years ago when paparazzi snapped her making a buy in a yarn shop. Bullock is a regular customer at Suss Designs on Rodeo Drive, buying yarn for her own projects. Both actresses are known to knit on the sets of their films while waiting for their scenes.

But it's not just these two celebs who are driving the trend to knit one, purl two. Cameron Diaz, Tyra Banks, Hilary Swank, Sarah Jessica Parker, Kelly Ripa and yes, even His Maleness His Ownself Russell Crowe, have been fingered as avid knitters. (See a "photo" of Crowe caught red-handed at [www.chicknits.com/russell.shtml](http://www.chicknits.com/russell.shtml).)

In addition to the stars who KIP (slang for "knit in public"), the fashion industry is doing its part in bringing needle-crafted apparel further into vogue. Last winter, live models minded their knitting in the Madison Avenue window displays of Barney's.

Long scarves, swung around necks more for a "wow" factor than warmth, are a hot accessory this winter. Long, thin boas knit with novelty yarns with names like "eyelash," "fluffy," "Furz" and "Zap" are a far cry from the lumpy putty-brown socks forced on children by grandmothers of generations past.

The Craft Yarn Council of America, an industry group that pays attention to such things, says these numbers, which it tracks, bear out the impression of a trend:

One out of three women knows how to knit or crochet. The number of women who knit or crochet increased from 34.7 million in 1994 to 38 million in 2000.

Since 1998, there has been a 400 percent increase in the number of women under 35 years old who crochet and knit.

Numbers are up in all demographics, in fact. Since 1998, there has been a 13 percent increase among women 35 to 44 years old; 18 percent among women 45 to 54 years old; and 10 percent among 55-to-64-year-olds.

Bonne Marie Burns, designer and proprietor of [www.chicknits.com](http://www.chicknits.com), one of the most popular knitting sites on the Internet, is one of those women of a certain age who has returned to knitting.

"I learned when I was young and then took it up again when I quit smoking," said Burns, a Chicago photojournalist. She started [chicknits.com](http://chicknits.com) two years ago as a hobby site, a gallery of tips and a "blog," an Internet journal of ongoing projects. Chicknits has become such a hot destination site (daily hits number in the thousands) that Burns has had to discuss increasing bandwidth with her server.

"About 50 percent of the hits are from colleges — Mount Holyoke, Yale, Stanford. I also get a lot from government offices — I'm not quite sure what's going on there.

"I see the site as a way of keeping the craft alive. I knit a lot in public — on the bus, in the doctor's waiting room — and I get asked a lot by a lot of kids under 25 to show them how to do it. I show them and then I give them the phone numbers for some knitting groups that they can go hang with.

"In college dorms, knitting is like a virus — one person will knit and then it spreads to 10 more people in the dorm."

Sarah Bourassa, a 20-year-old University of Oklahoma sophomore, is one who has caught the bug.

"I'd say half of the people on my floor at school knit," said Bourassa, at home in Arlington for winter break.

"I mostly knit scarves in the school colors with thick, fuzzy yarn that I get at Wal-Mart. We are poor college students, after all." Bourassa said knitting is relaxing, and something she can do with her hands while she's watching TV and "not studying." In fact, the resident adviser in her dorm threw a knitting party during



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

"In college dorms, knitting is like a virus — one person will knit and then it spreads to 10 more people in the dorm," said Bonnie Marie Burns, a Chicago photojournalist.

final exam week. And the hobby isn't contained to the residence halls. Bourassa says lots of students cart their knitting along to class.

Stephanie Winland, 25, is another new knitter. Despite her job (she's the national director of the Knitting Guild of America, a nonprofit organization that organizes seminars, classes and conventions for knitters), she has just recently taken up yarn and needles and is working on her first sweater.

"I think there are a couple of things that are driving the trend," said Winland. "One is the cocooning, that people are staying at home. And second, the yarns are so wonderful now — the new yarns are not at all like the acrylic stuff. . . . Even if you're a beginner, you can make something that looks like you know what you're doing because of the yarns."

Yarns like Opal, a speckled variegated thread that when knit in a garment appears to create patterns of stripes or swirls, are popular among the young and hip. Pashmina cashmere, a light yarn that calls for a small needle, is another nouveau offering. Go, a sport cotton/acrylic German yarn, is popular for turtle-neck sweaters that aren't turtle-neck-hot — perfect for climates like Texas and Florida.

These yarns aren't cheap, however. The Knitting Guild's Winland points out that mohair is \$9 to \$12 a skein, and an average sweater calls for about 10 skeins — making it a \$100 project. And labor is not included.

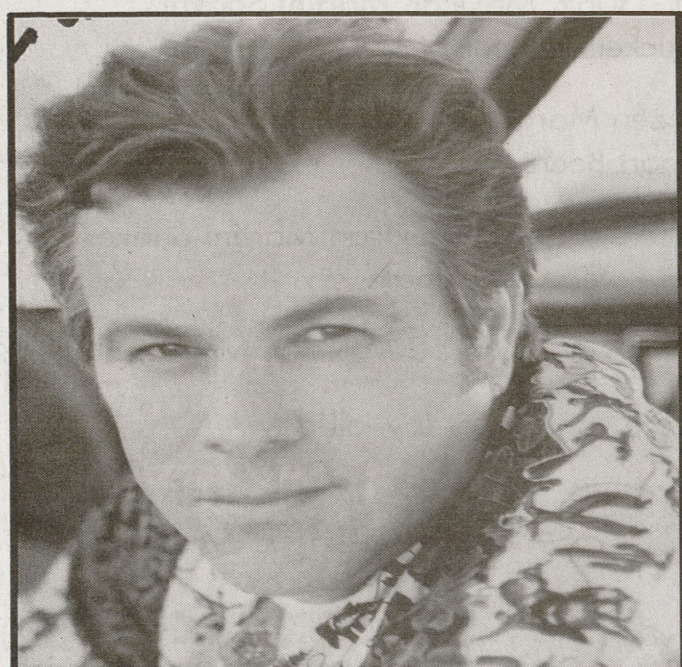
"But the cost doesn't seem to matter," she said. "When you're finished, it's a unique item. And the process is really relaxing."

"It's something I look forward to — when I get home and can sit down and knit. It's very relaxing," Winland said.

And for a lot of young knitters, it's something their mothers don't do. Perhaps because of the women's movement, knitting has been in the closet for the past couple of decades.

"I think women are comfortable knitting, now," said [chicknits.com](http://chicknits.com)'s Burns about the group she calls "born-again" knitters. "It's not anti-feminist — we're free enough to enjoy these things now."

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