

# movement

## Revisiting **Sexual Empowerment & Awareness** at Tennessee

This year we reached out to three former interdisciplinary honor students and campus leaders with close connections to the Department of Sociology and the UT Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program.

Through the campus student organization Sexual Empowerment and Awareness at Tennessee, Julie Edwards, Colleen Ryan, and Patrick Sonnenberg worked to foster a comprehensive and intellectual discussion on sex, sexuality, and relationships for the university and community. Their focus: Many Tennessee students receive abstinence-only education while in middle and high school, empirically proven to raise teen pregnancy and birth rates. They sought with faculty and students to support a more successful comprehensive sex education, which includes medically accurate, evidence-based, and age-appropriate information on a variety of sexual and reproductive health topics (e.g., contraception, consent, sexual and gender diversity, risk avoidance). Their work was always a fight, with a key annual event, Sex Week, a focus of statewide and often national political and media coverage.

Edwards, Ryan, and Sonnenberg remembered that time and how it impacts their current lives and career trajectories. All commented on how hard it was to go back and revisit those days, where threats of sexual violence (and now death threats for Edwards's job) were and are routine parts of their daily lives.

"I think about the work we did every day," said Edwards, Senior Advocacy and Organizing Manager for Planned Parenthood of Tennessee and North Mississippi. "I don't think we realized the guts it took to do that work before we knew what it was we were doing...to be undergraduates under attack for trying to have accurate information."

Ryan, a JD graduate of Belmont University College of Law, working in civil legal services and member of the LGBTQ alumni board at UT, commented that while pursuing other kinds of equity work, the effects of trauma persist in a lot of her life decisions.

"When we describe what we've been through, it sounds wild," added Sonnenberg, a graduate student in computational linguistics at Brandeis University, focusing on harm reduction in AI and Natural Language Processing.

Part of how they have processed those efforts and the trauma of their work is by connecting theory to praxis in their writing, organizational efforts, and daily lives. They still use course syllabi in training interns, doing legal work, and conducting research.

"Sociology gave me language and connections between understanding oppression and lived experience, and faculty to support us," Ryan said.

Commenting on the difficulties of continuing to do this work in their respective pathways, Sonnenberg said, "the struggle is what I am in and, realistically, my only hope is when I am with other organizers in community and solidarity, love and support, and trying to reproduce that on a larger scale."

"We underestimate the importance of community organizing as an academic enterprise," Edwards said. "We learned so much in our efforts. Good organizers are hope dealers. People need help and they need strong people to advocate for them. We are building a better world."



**JULIE EDWARDS**



**COLLEEN RYAN**



**PATRICK SONNENBERG**



## Latent Functions

MESSAGE FROM **STEPHANIE BOHON**,  
DEPARTMENT HEAD

Economics has long been labeled “the dismal science,” but sociology is often a close second. Having deep knowledge about how society works allows us to accurately predict the unintended consequences of many acts, and often those consequences aren’t pleasant. For example, when CBS News broke the story of rape, torture, and murder at the hands of US soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison in April 2004, sociologists shook their heads knowing that the infamous 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment had already told us what would happen under similar conditions. In June of this year, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and policy scholars predict that 26 states will now ban abortion. At the time of this writing, 13 states have already passed new, severely restrictive abortion policies, and more are surely to come. For sociologists, this is just the beginning.

While many Americans celebrated the Supreme Court ruling, seeing it as a hard-fought end to abortion in the United States, sociologists are deeply skeptical that the ruling truly signals an end to abortion. While abortion is likely to decline in the very short run, evidence from years of sociological study show that abortion rates are quite high in many countries, regardless of the legality of abortion. A recent report by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Human Reproduction Programme shows that as many as 68% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion in countries where all forms of abortion are completely illegal.

Furthermore, when India and China are removed from international data (because these two countries account for about 3 billion of the world’s 7.8 billion population), countries where abortions are illegal have higher abortion rates than countries with more permissive laws. In fact, about half of all abortions worldwide occur in the countries with the most restrictive abortion laws. A feature common across all nations where abortion is illegal is the presence of unsafe abortions.

Globally, more than 25 million abortions are performed a year by someone who lacks the skills to perform the procedure and/or in an environment that does not meet minimal medical standards. Unsafe abortions are the third leading cause of death for women of child-bearing age, worldwide. These trends suggest that restricting abortion in the United States will not end abortion, but it will likely increase maternal death. Researchers at the University of Colorado estimate that statewide abortion bans will result in a proliferation of unsafe abortions coupled with the inability to terminate pregnancies with multiple complications. They estimate the impact to be a 24 percent increase in maternal deaths, with the most devastating effects experienced by Black women. Indeed, even before the overturn of *Roe*, states with the most abortion restrictions had a 7 percent higher rate of maternal mortality than states with fewer restrictions, according to a study in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The study of the predictors and consequences of fertility, fertility intentions, contraceptive demand, and abortion at both the national- and individual-level has long been an important sociological area of inquiry. Fertility scholars who I know are scrambling to capture this important moment; most are facing the future with pessimism. Still, they are quick to point out that the overturn of *Roe* is happening after forty years of decline in US abortion rates. The 2016 US abortion rate is less than half the 1980 level. This is largely attributable to advances in contraception, greater access, and better use, and these trends are likely to continue. In the United States, it is also unlikely that all states will ban abortion. Abortion was legal in several US states prior to the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and it is likely to remain so. Nonetheless, we still expect a recent and marked increase in maternal death in the next few years, and if our predictions are borne out, it will be a cold comfort.

## Williams Named William T. Grant Scholar

For the first time in the history of the department and the university, the William T. Grant Foundation has named **Deadric Williams**, assistant professor of sociology, one of five members of its newest class of William T. Grant Scholars.



“I am honored to be selected as a W. T. Grant Scholar,” he said. “This award will not only help broaden my theoretical and methodological skills via personalized mentorship but also accelerate my research program in new and exciting ways.”

The program supports the professional development of promising researchers in the social, behavioral, and health sciences who have received their terminal degrees within the past seven years. Williams is a family sociologist with expertise in family theory and analyses of stress and health among couples.

“In family sociology and demography,” said Williams, “I want to grapple with race and racism. I want to change the narrative of how scholars are talking about racial stratification in poverty and discover a way of looking at the world very differently, by incorporating history and policymaking as shaping our contemporary circumstances.”

In three phases, Williams’s study aims to assess the dynamics of poverty over time through a lens of race and racism; elucidate how individual and family characteristics, racial inequalities in life chances, and tract-level racialized space maintain racial stratification in poverty; and examine whether and how racial inequalities may moderate the effects of individual and family characteristics on poverty.

“To me,” said Williams, “being a part of the University of Tennessee means that I have an academic home where scholars are doing similar work that I’m doing. It is an inclusive academic environment and such a dynamic campus with so many scholars doing cutting-edge work.”

## Presser Receives UT Chancellor’s Grant for Faculty Research

**Lois Presser** received a UT Chancellor’s Grant for Faculty Research. This grant program helps faculty develop strong applications for extramural funding, especially via course release. In spring 2023, Professor Presser will prepare a proposal for a Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation Distinguished Scholar Award, for a project titled “Mobilizing Outbursts: Unsaid Messaging and Public Violence Over COVID-19 Mask Mandates in the United States.”



## Dahms Receives 2021 Senior-Level Excellence in Teaching Award

Each year, the UT College of Arts and Sciences recognizes tenured and tenure-track faculty excellence in teaching by presenting both junior- and senior-level teaching awards. Professor **Harry Dahms** received the 2021 Senior-Level award.



If you have ever wondered if you are living in *The Matrix*, Dahms’s classes are for you. Indeed, for many years he has taught a popular First Year Studies course on *The Matrix* Trilogy and Social Theory. It is one of several intriguing courses he teaches on theorizing society, which include Sociology of Science Fiction; Control, Utopia, and Democracy; American Exceptionalism; Planetary Sociology; and Prejudice, Ideology, Modernity. Generally, students dread taking required theory classes, but students rave about Dahms’s courses and his ability to bring clarity to complicated texts.

As one student wrote: “I feel I was given a perfect understanding of conceptualizing theory.”

## Wall Serves as American Bar Association Visiting Scholar

In April 2022, **Tyler Wall** received a Visiting Scholar position from the American Bar Association. The American Bar Foundation is an independent scholarly research institute committed to social science research on law, legal institutions, and legal processes. Its research community consists of leading scholars in the fields of law, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, history, and anthropology.



During his ABF residency, Wall spent several weeks at the ABF offices in Chicago working on a book manuscript, co-authored with Bill McClanahan, under contract with Haymarket Books. The volume takes a deep dive into the “moral economies” of police power as observable in contemporary “police culture.” As a conceptually-driven, interdisciplinary, and theoretically-informed project, Wall writes “we aim to take seriously how a moral economy of cruelty undergirds the political economy of police as traceable in the cultural and aesthetic worlds of US policing over the last few decades of deep capitalist crisis, and of course a burgeoning Black Lives Matter and police abolition movement.” So, despite “police violence” routinely being justified by the law as rational, controlled, and proportional, the book demonstrates how this logic of justification so central to liberal thought (i.e. “the reasonable officer”) breaks down in drastic ways once we peer into the abyss of policing’s collective fantasy life. The project, then, sets out to track the moral economies of what Primo Levi called “useless violence” as they appear, and are often curated by police themselves in text, images, fashions, and various cultural artifacts.

### Brown Serves as Visiting Scholar at the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research

Michelle Brown spent the summer in Scotland studying efforts to challenge criminalization and punishment and develop more meaningful forms of accountability, safety, and community building. She gave public lectures, seminars, and community workshops, while meeting and working with faculty and graduate students from the University of Glasgow, Strathclyde, and Edinburgh.

She also built an ongoing set of connections to Scottish organizations and groups led by activists and formerly imprisoned people working to challenge punitiveness, including The Coalition Against Punishment Scotland, GalGael & Govan Free State, Inquest, Voices Against Punishment, and Vox Liminus/Unbound.



### Henricks Serves as Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Essen, Germany

During Casey Henricks' time as a Fellow at the KWI (Kulturwissenschaftliches) Institute for Advanced Study in Essen, Germany, he worked on his second book manuscript tentatively titled *Chicago on the Take: Ticketing and Towing in the City of Collision* (under contract with Russell Sage). The project centers our current moment where we are witnessing two sweeping changes in a reconstitution of government under late capitalism, including punishment reform that increasingly welcomes "civil" penalties in the form of cash payment that are backed by lurking threats of coercion on the one hand and intensified financialization where the state mimics predatory business strategies in ways that deepen private pockets on the other.

He provides us with two amazing photos: One is Kasey posing like Friedrich Engels in front of his boyhood home in Barmen. It is about 18 miles from where he lived with his family during his stay and 30 miles from Köln where Freddy (Engels) first met Karl (Marx). The "Engels-Haus" is where Engels completed his first major work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. And among the things on display at the house is the second picture, a hand-written draft of The Manifesto penned by Marx himself.



Read more about UT sociology online. [sociology.utk.edu](http://sociology.utk.edu)

### The US in the Globe & the Global in the US: A View from the Southeast Periphery



We are most excited to announce that Global Studies hired Prashanth Kuganathan as the first Global Studies Postdoctoral Fellow. Kuganathan spent the previous year as a postdoctoral teaching associate in UT's anthropology department. His research examines the role that the English language plays in postcolonial and postwar northern Sri Lanka. His first book project based on his dissertation *Remaking Lives in Northern Sri Lanka: Migration, Schooling, and Language in Postwar Jaffna*, investigates the impacts of state policies pertaining to language and religion on Tamil and Muslim minority populations in the context of the brutal civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2009. He also is interested in the lives of people in the Jaffna peninsula who have experienced firsthand the devastation of violence and displacement during the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009).

Our lecture series on "The US in the Globe, the Global in the US: A view from the Southeast periphery" continued for a second wonderful year of talks – mostly virtual, but kicked off in-person by Brandon Byrd on *The Black Republic: African Americans and the Fate of Haiti*. Other Zoom talks, mostly available on our YouTube Channel, include Madeleine Fairbairn on *Fields of Gold: Financing the Global Land Rush*; Salvador Santino Regilme on *Aid Imperium: US Foreign Policy and Human Rights in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia*; Mimi Sheller on *Haitian Histories, Haitian Futures*; and Zuoyue Wang on *Chinese American Scientists and US-China Relations*.

The GLBS Club had a vibrant year with monthly meetings, including discussion of the conflict in Afghanistan and research on the Global Cowboy or the globalization of country music, as well as internship and social events. The club and program also had an outdoor showing of *The New Corporation: The Unfortunately Necessary Sequel* and received approval to purchase our own equipment for future outdoor film showings. Club President Lily Hardwig graduated and received the Outstanding Graduate in Society and Culture concentration award while Vice President Caleigh Rozmenoski won Outstanding Graduate in Politics and Economics concentration.





## Well of Strength Helped Vossler Finish Degree

by Alexandra Szmütko

**Christine Vossler** is a recent PhD graduate of the UT sociology department, having defended her dissertation on narrative dimensions of sexual harassment this summer. She currently works full-time as an administrator in the Haslam College of Business and stays busy lecturing for the department in criminology as an adjunct lecturer in criminology while also raising her young daughter. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Vossler resumed her doctoral studies after several years away. Her path to finishing the PhD while juggling the additional responsibilities of full-time work and family life is an inspirational story of perseverance, drive, and excellent time management.

Vossler attributes her return to the department in part to a period of self-reflection during the isolation of the early days of the pandemic. Looking deep within, she found a well of strength, motivation, and self-confidence that spurred her desire to finish her degree. Knowing the journey would not be easy, she committed her downtime to reading and writing, being sure to take advantage of the times of day where she felt the sharpest mentally. A relentless focus on developing knowledge and expertise in her field was also crucial in maintaining motivation.

When asked what advice she would give to students in similar situations, particularly women juggling responsibilities of grad school, work, and family, Vossler noted that attention to personal energy levels is very important. Though she certainly advises working every day, she believes that short bursts of work can be productive. She also suggests taking breaks or switching to other tasks such as housework when motivation and energy are lower. Overall, putting in consistent hours during the day allowed Vossler to enjoy evenings with her family, and free time felt like a reward rather than a guilty distraction from dissertation work.

Vossler believes that her experience in sociology has been an extremely positive force in her everyday life. By her estimation, she is a more sympathetic and socially engaged person because of her studies, and she is interested in continuing to explore the impact of narratives, and the institutions that create and promote them, on the lives of others.

“Most of all,” she quips, “becoming a sociologist has made me keenly aware that I don’t know a lot more than I do know.”

## UT Sociology Celebrates Long History with SSS

by Stephanie Bohon

On April 6, 2022, many members of the Department of Sociology gathered in Birmingham, Alabama, to attend the 85th annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society (SSS). What made this year’s meeting special was that it was presided over by SSS President and UT Department of Sociology Head Stephanie Bohon. Several graduate students and faculty came to the meeting to network, present their papers, and hear the Presidential address, “Nefarious Invisibility: Places to Hide in the Production of Sociological Knowledge.”

UT sociology has a long history with “the Southern.” Founded in 1936, the Society’s seventh president was William E. Cole, who presided over the Southern in 1942. Cole joined UT’s Department of Sociology in 1933 and served as head for 29(!) years from 1936 to 1965. Cole was a Fellow of the American Sociological Association and the author of several books including *Urban Society* (1958) and *The Elderly in America* (1977).

In 1995, UT sociology’s second SSS president was Tom Hood, professor emeritus. Hood is a scholar of collective behavior and social movements who is a renowned expert on the work of Erving Goffman. In addition to serving as SSS president, he also served as Executive Office of the Society for the Study of Social Problems from 1990 to 2009.

In addition to electing three UT sociologists as president, the SSS has also recognized many of our faculty with major awards. In 2015, Jon Shefner received the SSS Distinguished Lectureship Award in recognition of his excellence as a scholar and lecturer. In 2021, Kasey Henricks received the SSS Junior Scholar Award for significant contributions to the field of sociology by an early-stage scholar. Both Hood and Bohon have also received the SSS Martin Levin Award for distinguished service to the society.



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VISITING FELLOW SPOTLIGHT:

**Eva Mulder**

by Alexandra Szmütko

**Eva Mulder**, our visiting fellow for the 2022-2023 academic year, joins us from the Netherlands for a postdoctoral research appointment with Lois Presser. Mulder, who holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Groningen and a master’s and PhD in victimology from the University of Tilburg, studies how victims and other parties make sense of and narrate victimization and harm experiences.

Mulder’s dissertation work focused on how social and identity factors influence reactions to hearing others’ stories of sexual victimization. Her interest in stories of harm, specifically within the subfield of narrative victimology, led her to Presser, who served on Mulder’s dissertation committee. When Mulder was awarded a prestigious Dutch research grant, she arranged to do her one-year fellowship here in the department under Presser’s advisement. Presser and Mulder are collaborating on research about the sensemaking and

communication of forms of contested harm, and they are recruiting for a study in which participants will converse about experiences of microaggression.

Mulder’s work has explicitly emancipatory aims. In performing her dissertation research, she hoped her project would address an insufficiency in awareness of what nonconsensual sex looks like as well as acknowledge less “clear-cut” experiences of sexual violence that many women face. In her ongoing work with Presser, she seeks to boost understanding of the subtle harms that marginalized people experience and connect these experiences to larger patterns of social inequality and structural oppression.

Mulder is new to both the US and the formal discipline of sociology, and she has found surprises within both realms. She notes that hearing about issues like gun control and recent developments in abortion rights in the US has been

shocking. However, she has been pleased by the activist bent of the department and the seeming willingness of faculty to engage in value-laden scholarship in the face of these challenges.

After her year in Knoxville is finished, Mulder hopes to continue with research and scholarship. She hopes to help broaden the aims of victimology, using constructive inquiry that is oriented toward building openness and connection between people. She is also invested in interdisciplinary and cross-institutional work, and she plans to connect with those outside of academia to enhance the meaning and impact of victimological work. Ultimately, Mulder believes deeply in the possibility of social change through, in her words, “the co-creation of new and better truths.” All of us in the department are thrilled at the opportunity to work alongside and learn from her during her time in the US.

**Department of Sociology**  
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Learn more at [bigorangegive.utk.edu](https://bigorangegive.utk.edu).



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