

VIEW to the U transcribed
Season 7: Without Further Ado; Episode #5
Professor Zoë Wool
Department of Anthropology
U of T Mississauga

[intro music fades in and out]

Zoë Wool (ZW):

I also am a total magpie; and see a shiny object, I'm like, "Oh, look. What's that about?"

I'm Zoe Wool, and I'm an Assistant Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology here at UTM.

And because everything is connected in the world, I'm really interested in kind of following those connections. So, that's how I ended up with a very sprawly research profile.

[theme music fades in]

Carla DeMarco (CD): **A sweeping scholarly smorgasbord**

Hello and welcome to *VIEW to the U*: An eye on UTM research.

I'm Carla DeMarco at U of T Mississauga. *VIEW to the U* is a monthly podcast that will feature UTM faculty members from a range of disciplines who will illuminate some of the inner workings of the science labs and enlighten the social sciences and humanities hubs at UTM.

On this episode of *VIEW to the U*, my guest is Professor Zoë Wool from UTM's Department of Anthropology.

On the new season called "Without further ado," I will introduce you to some of the new people from UTM's vibrant and ever-growing research community.

I have had very few researchers who cover as much ground in a research program as Zoë does, and as her opening quote describes it's driven by her broad interests and attention spanning to different ideas.

It actually reminded me of another podcast I heard recently, called *Decoder Ring* and their episode on "The Tootsie Shot." This is one of those familiar, iconic shots in film, of a crowded cityscape, typically New York City – where, coincidentally, Zoë hails from – and I think all the characteristics of the "Tootsie Shot" are represented in her scholarly body of work: the long-focus lens magnifies the subject at the centre of the study, there is typically a crowd, and that represents all of the research themes and collaborations she captures in her work, and lastly,

there is liveliness, and Zoë definitely brings levity to what can best be described as some pretty heavy topics.

Over the course of today's interview, Zoë talks about this range of work, which spans medical and sociocultural anthropology, and examines the harms of war and toxic burn pits that the US military use around the world, as well as her focus on disability and technology studies, queer theory, and feminist science studies.

Zoë also talks about how she got into this area of research in the first place, she imparts some words of wisdom for other people who are also just starting out at UTM, particularly students, what her strategies are for mitigating stress, and also some interesting little-known facts about her days prior to becoming an academic.

[theme music fades out]

Zoë Wool is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at UofT Mississauga.

She is also the Director of a newly launched feminist research space focused on experimental approaches to studying toxicity, waste and infrastructure across the social sciences and humanities. The [TWIG Research Kitchen](#) is based with Zoë in the Anthropology department at UTM, with additional support from UTM's Collaborative Digital Research Space (CDRS) and also the Critical Digital Humanities Initiative (CDHI).

She obtained her Master's and PhD at the University of Toronto, and did postdoctoral fellowships at Columbia University and Rutgers, before holding an appointment at Rice University for five years.

Zoë joined the faculty at UTM in 2020.

ZW: Most of my work is about the body, and not taking the body for granted. And I come at that as a medical anthropologist and sociocultural anthropologist. And in my work, I also draw on critical disability studies and on feminist science and technology studies or STS, and also queer theory; all of which together helps us think about the body as a social and historical object, rather than just as a natural object, and so the idea that we can't separate those things from each other, the natural aspect and the cultural aspect or historical aspect. And most of my work is more specifically about the way that war and post-9/11 ways of making war in the United States specifically produce harm, and the way that that harm lives in bodies.

And so, most of my ethnographic work as an anthropologist has been with injured US soldiers, both in the immediate aftermath of injuries, and also over the long term, and also with their family members and communities and folks who sort of support them. And to me, that is a kind of entry point into understanding harms of war making, both the kinds of harms that we usually associate with war, things like someone getting shot or blown up and having to go through rehabilitation, but also things that we tend not to think about as

direct impacts of war, like the long-term environmental effects of military intervention, and the way that those things are connected, not only to events of war, like particular battles, we might say, but also to longer historical processes that shape the way the war is made in the United States in the contemporary moment.

ZW: One of the things I try to do in my work is connect; we often think about war as being very exceptional. We know where it is, we know when it is, we know who's involved in it. And a lot of my work is trying to push back against that, to ask us, "How is it that we, as people who may not be members of the military, we who may not be Americans, we who may be antiwar activists, how are our lives implicated in these forms of harm as well? And what kind of pressure might that exert on us as sort of citizens in the world?"

CD: And I just wanted to clarify though, in case people don't know, when you say ethnographic, it's my understanding that's a type of methodology where you're actually going into the community, and speaking with people directly about their experiences and things like that. Right?

ZW: Yeah. So, ethnography is sometimes described as deep hanging out; so it's a qualitative research method that anthropologists like to claim as our own, even though other people use it, too. And basically, it involves trying to kind of move back and forth between participating in a community and being an observer of that community, so that you can have some sense of people's everyday lives and experiences of the things that you're interested in. And hopefully, if you do it well, the questions that you go in with are slightly different than the questions you come out with. Because the idea is not to come up with a hypothesis and test the hypothesis so much; but to say, "I have a hunch about what's important about what's happening here," and then to allow that hunch to be transformed by the expertise of the people who you're working with.

So, when we're doing ethnography, we want to kind of defer our own expertise to the expertise of the people who we're trying to learn from, or the real experts; because we're kind of translating their everyday lives into a different form of knowledge, but they're really the experts.

CD: Thank you so much for that. And so, and I understand, and especially as you've wonderfully articulated, a lot of the topics that you cover in your research, that one is about the harms of war and its toxicity and effects on veterans. And I understand that you have two related books, including *After War: The Weight of Life at Walter Reed*, which was published in 2015. And you have a book project in the works about war and the logics of combustion. But I just wondered if you could speak a little bit more about this research in particular.

ZW: The work on toxicity is a relatively new stream for me. I've been doing that work, I guess since 2017, I would say. On the veteran side or the kind of war side of that work, I have a project together with a colleague of mine at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, Kenneth MacLeish. And we've also just brought in another colleague, Kali Raubii, who's also anthropologist at Purdue University.

ZW: And that project started as being focused on US military burn pits, particularly in Iraq; but these are giant garbage fires, basically. So, when the US military invaded Iraq and went into Afghanistan, as did the Canadian military, we set up these... And I say, we because I'm an American citizen. We set up these really, really big operating bases that had tens of thousands of people living in them. And they had no waste management infrastructure, and they produced a huge amount of waste.

So, a deployed US soldier produces about three times as much waste per day as their US counterpart would. And that waste comprises everything that you can imagine: so plastic water bottles, styrofoam meal trays, as well as e-waste from high-tech office buildings that are being established on these operating bases, as well as munitions that can't be used anymore, sometimes vehicles, uniforms that can't be used anymore, medical waste from the clinics and hospitals that exist on these bases; all of the stuff that was needed to create these bases, so empty paint cans, you've got batteries, and then of course you have all of the human waste that is being produced by 30,000 people. Right?

So, all of that waste gets collected into giant holes that are dug in the ground, doused in jet fuel, like a diesel jet fuel, and then set on fire. And those pits burned around the clock for years, until these incinerators got set up, and some of the waste could be incinerated rather than burned in these open-air pits. And these were pits that I had heard about from soldiers who I had worked with earlier on, when I was doing field work at Walter Reed, the US military hospital in DC.

As the war kind of went on, and as you had people who were coming out of the military and dealing with the effects of their military service on their bodies, one of the things that was surfacing was a really wide range of environmental illnesses that seemed to be connected to people's exposure to these pits. And that included everything from kind of complex neurological conditions and things like fibromyalgia, to soft tissue cancers to respiratory conditions.

And it was, in kind of veteran communities, this was quite well known and really widespread. Publicly, it was not something that people really knew about. And even within the Veteran's Health Administration, where a lot of veterans get their medical care, clinicians didn't really know about this.

And so, Ken MacLeish and I at Vanderbilt, we started this project that was sort about the difficulty of veterans getting diagnoses that would allow them access to care through the VA system. And that drew on a lot of my work in disability studies, which helps me think about the kind of double-edged sword of diagnosis. So, diagnosis is a tool that as lots of us know, can get you access to care; but also, diagnosis can stigmatize you, right, and kind of trap you into this sort of patient identity.

ZW: So, the project started out as being about that. And we had some funding from a clinic within the VA that does focus on these kinds of illnesses. And as we continued to work, and we were doing interviews with veterans who were sick; some were very sick, some were not very sick, and also, other veterans who just had been around these pits.

I, in particular, was working with a lot of veterans who had been stationed at Balad, which is about 50 miles north of Baghdad, and had one of the biggest and most well-documented pits. It's not a surprise to everybody, I'm sure, that there was not a lot of environmental testing that was done about these pits. And the scant testing that was done, was done at Balad. We became really interested in questions about how these pits came to be in the first place.

So, what was all of this stuff that was being burned? How did it get there? Where did it come from? What were the logistical practices through which all of this stuff was arriving in Iraq, and how did it come to be that it was possible for this stuff to get there? And how did it come to be that it made sense to the US military to wage war in this particular way, when in previous eras, war was really waged in a logic of scarcity and austerity, rather than this kind of excess that we were seeing, excess and disposability.

And thinking about these material and historical aspects also led us to want to think about the ongoing effects of this toxicity that was produced from these pits, which released not only particulate matter, but dioxins, and all kinds of really toxic chemicals into the air and water. What is the ongoing legacy and effect of this in Iraq or in Afghanistan, in Egypt, in Syria, in all of the places that the US military operates these pits at various scales? Which also then leads us into thinking about, how can we rethink the nature of war violence, if we include this kind of environmental violence in our understanding of what constitutes the harms of war?

And so, that's where the work of our colleague Kali Rubaii becomes really important, because she is someone who's been doing ethnography since 2014, with displaced Iraqi farmers from Al-Anbar province in the east of the country, who have been displaced up to the north. And she kind of traveled with these farmers and their families between Kurdistan in the north, and Al-Anbar in the east, to kind of understand the way that they were reckoning with the transformed landscapes and ecologies that they were having to live in.

And so, now we're engaged in a project that tries to put these two different perspectives in conversation with each other; so the perspectives of these veterans and the perspectives of these Iraqis, and how can that help our us have a different understanding of what US military harm looks like, where it is, when it is, and who's accountable for it?

ZW: And I think this is something that's particularly important right now, because folks who may pay attention to US media may know that these burn pits are becoming more well-known in the US, in particular, because President Biden's son, Beau Biden, died of brain cancer. He was a veteran, and there is some evidence that suggests that his brain cancer is actually linked to his exposure to burn pits while he was overseas.

And so, there's been a lot more kind of public attention; and this public attention and the story that people are learning and re-circulating and telling about burn pits right now, is a story that entirely leaves out anybody but US veterans. So it's not a story that has any space for caring about or attending to Iraqis, Afghans, folks in other places where the US military has used these particular technologies of waste disposal.

And so, this is one of the things that I really like about my work as an anthropologist, as someone who's not a policymaker, as someone who's not inside any of the institutions that I study; is that I have the luxury of having a different perspective, and hopefully being able to intervene in those conversations, so that we can think slightly more critically and a little bit more broadly about what we should care about if we want to care about the legacies of US military violence.

CD: Yeah. That's just so overwhelming, because as you've outlined, these burn pits, it sounds like they do exist all over the world. Right? I couldn't help but think anyone who has spent any amount of time in a hospital knows about the waste that's produced there. And just even thinking about syringes and the medical gear that people have to wear that's protective, that at the end of the day, you can't really recycle any of that. And I've often wondered what is the right way to dispose of that kind of material?

ZW: Absolutely. Well, the answer is not to pour jet fuel on it and burn it. I can tell you that. We all are now having our own experience with this, because lots of us wear disposable masks or face shields or gloves. And there's some really interesting projects, actually, and folks who have been trying to track the forms of waste that COVID mitigation is producing. And we can see it. Last Earth Day, I went out with my kid, and we were picking up garbage in our neighborhood and in the park; and we were counting how many masks and pairs of disposable gloves we found over by Trinity Bellwoods Park. It was tons, tons. And if Balad had a full-service combat hospital, so people who were really severely injured, and many of whom would need to be evacuated out of Iraq, they would go to Balad and be treated there.

And Balad also had, aside from that, just a health clinic; so if people were feeling kind of under the weather, they would go there. So the medical waste from two pretty substantial medical facilities was being treated in this way. People who live rurally will be really familiar with garbage fires; or if you have a septic system, your garbage, your waste is staying in place.

ZW: And this is one of the things Max Liboiron, who's an indigenous environmental scientist, who's at Memorial University, they have this wonderful book called *Pollution is Colonialism*, which I would highly recommend to all of your listeners. And one of the things that they point out is that we have this fantasy that our waste kind of goes away, that it just vanishes when we can't see it anymore. And there's a particular idea about what land is, and who has access to land that is part of that imaginary; that somehow you can just appropriate land to be a sink for all of your waste, when it's not in your space anymore, it's kind of gone.

So, one of the ironies of people who have to handle their own waste, which could be soldiers, which could be farmers, right, which could be people who live rurally and don't have infrastructure that's connected in a way that ours is in Toronto, is that you don't really have that luxury actually, of imagining that your waste goes away. But the US military, it has this sense that that's not its problem; because it doesn't think about the knock-on effects of what it does. Right? So even as it's being confronted with this overwhelming amount of waste that is a product of all these decisions that have been made about how to wage war, it doesn't have to think about the fact that well, actually, a lot of people are going to get really, really sick in a few years, based on what we're doing right now, because they are focused on the mission at hand. And so, this kind of sense of living in an eternal present allows you to defer the consequences of what you're doing, or to defer thinking about the consequences of what you're doing.

CD: And you've already touched on a lot of these themes, but I find your work comes at this really interesting intersection of, and you've mentioned some of the history and the healthcare part, but also gender. And I just wonder if you can speak a little bit more about that sort of the tie-in with all of those themes.

ZW: Yeah, for sure. So, I often think historically, because even though I'm an anthropologist, I'm quite eclectic in my approach, very interdisciplinary. Although I work on the present, I'm very interested in asking, "How could it have been otherwise?" The present that we live in is the way that it is because of a series of historical contingencies. Right? And so, I often try to think comparatively with the past, which helps me understand how the present came to be the way it is, and also allows me to think about how it could be otherwise.

The questions around gender, gender is something that's really inescapable, period. But I would say particularly, if you're studying the institution of the military, not only in the US, but basically in any liberal democracy, if you're studying the national military, gender is going to be part of the conversation, particularly questions around masculinity.

And in my previous field work with injured soldiers who were going through this really protracted process of what we can gloss as rehabilitation, but which is really like a year's long process of stabilizing their bodies in a new form, after having been really seriously injured, mostly in Iraq, the folks who I was working with. Questions of masculinity are really at the forefront, both because of the way that normative ideas of masculinity are

deeply ableist, and so, there's this tension. Russell Shuttleworth, who's an anthropologist who works on disability, talks about this as the "dilemma of disabled masculinity." Right? So, if you're going to be a "real man," how do you do that in a body that's marked as disabled, or with a set of cognitive capacities that are marked as disabled?

ZW: So, this was something doing ethnography that I couldn't not pay attention to. The people who I was doing field work with were telling me and showing me how central masculinity and heterosexuality, and that intersection of heterosexuality and masculinity were to their understanding of recovery or rehabilitation. And one of the questions that I sometimes ask or kind of explain my I work through is to say, "What does the good life look like for soldiers after war in the contemporary United States?"

And one of the main answers to that question is heterosexual, nuclear family, living in a house of its own, a single generation house of its own, in a kind of comfortable middle class way. And so, the production or reproduction of masculine forms of embodiment is central to that. But we also can't understand those outside of the configuration of multiple bodies, which is to say, the achievement of masculinity in this context, isn't just about what a man can do with his body. It's also about having a wife and having sex with that wife, and having that sex be reproductive, and having a household that is classed in particular ways. So the centrality gender, I couldn't answer this question, "What does the good life look like after war for American veterans?" I can't answer that question without thinking about gender. I can't answer any questions about kind of rehabilitation or the aftermath of injury without thinking about gender.

And this is also where career theory comes into my work, because to me, understanding gender is about understanding this broad matrix of social norms that have to do not just with taking for granted what it means to be a man or what it means to be a woman, but understanding these things as relational categories, and things that need to be constantly reproduced. Right? So all of us, whether or we identify as queer or heterosexual or non-binary or whatever, we're all constantly engaged in reproducing our own position in this gendered and sexual matrix.

And this is, gender, as we talk about in anthropology, is something that's achieved and ascribed. So, you do a lot of work to gender yourself, but also others have to kind of agree, or then there's friction. And when the body and the contours of the body, and the way that the body is read is kind of in question, which it is in the aftermath of injury, that's a place where you see this work happening really explicitly, this work around kind of producing gender and stabilizing gender.

And I think that the healthcare piece that's really relevant here, is the way that for soldiers, and this is certainly not just for soldiers or veterans, but really, really broadly as a long history of feminist scholarship will tell us, caregiving responsibilities are deeply gendered. In the paid caregiving sector, not only are they gendered, but they're also particularly raced. And so, understanding how these social and relational forms, these family forms, are part of stabilizing this new form of masculinity, also requires us to

attend to the way that caregiving gets gendered. And a lot of my work is about the way that the US military, as an institution, kind of redistributes its own responsibility to deal with the aftermath of its harms to women in particular, to the wives and girlfriends of soldiers and veterans.

ZW: And so, this kind of one, maybe small question, "What does the good life look like for veterans after war?" Or a small question of, "How do we stabilize someone for a future after they've been injured?" In order to really answer that question, we have to look at all of these things; they're all connected.

CD: That is so fascinating. And it does then lead me to my next question, because I just feel like you cover so much in your work that... How did you get into this area of research in the first place?

ZW: Yeah. So, there's a lot of origin stories that I could offer. One of them is that I kind of came to this work as a disgruntled anti-war activist. So, I had been involved in anti-war organizing here in Toronto when I was an undergraduate student before the United States invaded Iraq. And I thought we really had something going in February of 2003. There were hundreds of thousands of people, right, all around the world, marching in the streets, across generations; people who had never engaged in any kind of activism before or activism of that sort of in the streets sort. And then in March, when the US invaded Iraq, I thought, "All right. I don't want to put my energy here anymore." Because I think that kind of activism is super important; and I do do it still from time to time. But I decided that I wanted to be in a position where I could think more about the complexities of what was happening.

I think activism, or that form of activism anyway, really requires you to know what the answer is. You have to know what should happen and what shouldn't happen. I felt like I knew what should happen and what shouldn't happen. I thought everybody around me did also. And then when it didn't have the effect that I wanted it to, it switched me into a different mode of curiosity.

And so, as someone who was a US citizen also; I grew up in New York, and I had already moved to Canada. I moved just before 9/11, actually. And when 9/11 happened, I had this very strange experience. We all had very strange experiences; but my experience was both of being very concerned for my friends and family members who were in the city, but also seeing New York transformed into the most American place in the United States.

And I had always had, as the child of immigrants, I had immigrant on one side and first-generation American child of refugees on the other; I always had a strange relationship to American patriotism, and felt like New York had given me a way of being from New York, but not really being from America.

CD: Yeah.

ZW: And then, all of a sudden, I saw my city draped in American flags, hanging from the George Washington Bridge and the awning of every building, and on every bus and pizza box and coffee cup and every bodega window. And I was shook; and I thought, "I don't really know what's happening here, but I have some curiosity." And I also felt a kind of sense of the obligation. All of a sudden, I couldn't sort of run away from being American, but I had to kind of interrogate these forms of violence that were being done in my name.

And so, that sort of pushed me broadly into the space. I was thinking about American war making; and then really my trajectory from there, it was very much shaped in this ethnographic process. I entered the field at Walter Reed, my first field work; actually, my first field work was at a US military hospital in Southern Germany. But my first long-term field work was there in DC. I entered with a set of questions that were completely transformed by my experience of being there. So yeah, I also am a total magpie; and see a shiny object, I'm like, "Oh, look. What's that about?" And because everything is connected in the world, I'm really interested in kind of following those connections; so that's how I ended up with a very sprawly research profile.

CD: I really do enjoy hearing people's stories about how they got into their work. I almost think of it as people are interested in "how they met" stories.

ZW: Right.

CD: But I love hearing about people's research paths. That's a really interesting.

ZW: Yeah. Sometimes sociologists, or maybe even more psychologists... And I do have friends in both of these fields, so hopefully they won't disinvite me from coffee for saying this; but often, they have this term called "mesearch". Right? Which is like, "I'm researching this thing because it's about me." And I think, to a certain extent, of course, all of the questions we ask are questions about ourselves, or that are interesting to us because of our own positionalities. But I think anthropology, we tend to be less explicit about that often; or we bring our positionality into our research in different ways. And often, we are outsiders to the communities that we research, which can often be very problematic. But usually... I remember hearing a psychologist describe how their research started, and it was because back when Netflix used to deliver you DVDs, they were very curious about why the envelopes were red; and that was the point of origin for their research. So, yeah.

CD: That's interesting. And so, we talked a little bit about this offline, but you are new to UTM; and I think you officially started during the pandemic. And so then, we aren't yet fully all back to full operation on the campus. But I'm just wondering what you're most looking forward to when regular life resumes, actually on both campuses, because I know it's not quite the same on the UT campus downtown as well. So, what are you most looking forward to?

ZW: Yeah. As we were kind of chatting about before we started recording, I really am looking forward to bumping into people, just not having to be quite so intentional about every conversation that you have, or every meeting that you have. The opportunities to just kind of realize that you work with other people, or that other people are part of your life; and that's my colleagues who are other professors, but also the awesome staff and admin folks who support the work that we do, who we couldn't do our work without them. I also, I don't know the name of the person who cleans my office. I don't have a relationship with that person, and that bothers me. So I want to be there when someone comes in to take out my trash, so I can find out where they are, and what their working conditions are like, and if I'm putting things in the right place to make their job okay. So I'm looking forward to all of that.

I'm looking forward to also being on the campus. I did my PhD a long time ago at the University of Toronto, and I did a lot of TA-ing at UTM, and there's all these amazing new buildings, and the campus is completely transformed. And I look forward to kind of just walking around, and seeing the campus kind of move through the seasons, getting a better understanding of how the campus is situated in the city of Mississauga, what its relationship is to the people around there. Right? Yeah. I'm really looking forward to that.

I loved my students last year, but I do not enjoy teaching online, and I will much prefer to be in the room with my students. I also hope very much, that when we go back to something like regular operation, we manage to maintain some of the forms of accessibility that the online Zoom-averse introduced some people to. But I hope that we find ways to maintain the kind of flexibility that allowed people to participate in ways that felt safe for them when we come back in person. And I'm looking forward to figuring out how to do that for my students, with the University, with my department; because it ain't easy.

CD: Yeah. And there's so much to be said for those sort of, what you alluded to, the spontaneous conversations. But I just, I think there's so many times where I've heard people say, maybe even they developed their research question around having a kind of offline conversation with someone outside of their department that they happened to bump into on campus.

Or I think about even my own; I started at UTM in 2006, but I used to have this little office that was right near a parking area, what they used to call the North Building. But sometimes researchers would come by after they had parked their car, and they'd say, "Oh, I had such a hard time finding a parking space." Or they'd talk about the weather or something. But then it's like, "Oh, I need to ask you a question about my SSHRC." And so, it's just like, we don't, you don't get that right now.

ZW: Yeah. Yeah.

CD: Yeah.

ZW: And I think it's really hard, to the extent that we want to think of our ourselves as a community in any way, by which I mean, people who are kind of bound together by a set of shared responsibilities. It's very hard to enact that when you're actually physically so disparate, because some of the things like... I know UTM and the whole University now, is invested in becoming carbon neutral in the next decade or so. And to understand us as people who have particular responsibilities because of the land that we occupy, environmental responsibilities, responsibilities to indigenous communities who are custodians of our lands, and also who are part of our communities. It's hard to do that when you're not actually engaged in the same material experience.

So, I am looking forward to that, and I hope that we take it as an opportunity to be very intentional in a different way; to be more aware and thoughtful about the material impact that we have in the world, and how we help or harm the people around us. And so, hopefully we can all take that opportunity; because I think one of the things the pandemic has showed us, is that when we are thoughtless about these things, we end up really retrenching and re-establishing patterns of inequality that can be deadly. And I think all of us can agree that that's not cool, and we would like to bend the arc in a different direction. And this is a chance for us to do that, I think.

CD: Yeah. Absolutely. And then, I wondered, for others who are just beginning their own paths at UTM, this includes students, faculty, staff. Do you have any sort of strategies or words of advice when it comes to embarking on a new adventure?

ZW: Yeah. This is an interesting question. I think for students, I would say, really take advantage of the opportunity that you have in the three or four years that you're at U of T, to do things that you will not have a chance to do when you are out in the workforce in a more dedicated way, I guess. I think, even though lots of our students are in the workforce while they're teaching or have caregiving responsibilities of a variety of kinds, being forced to protect your time for thinking, you won't have that again. You won't have an outside institution forcing you to protect your time to pursue your own interests, things that you're passionate about. And so, I would say to students, to really try to take advantage of that.

And of course, there are pragmatic things that you need to think about, if you want to be an engineer or you want to be a teacher. But also think about what are the things that you're interested in that you might not have an opportunity in the future to have dedicated space to think about, and find the people who can help you think about those things.

And then also, to remember that when you're being a student, you're not just consuming content; but you are engaging in a set of learning practices, and to kind of be aware of that. You're not just receiving information, but it's an active thing. And if you don't like the way it is, you can change it, and to borrow from the tech world, take it as a bit of an incubator for thinking about the kind of person you want to be in the world; this is a little microcosm for you to kind of experiment with.

ZW: And for the rest of us, I would say, go slow. This is something that I feel really grateful to have had the opportunity. I was at Rice University as an Assistant Professor for five years before I came here. And one of the things that I realized that had a kind of do over when I started here, and I thought, "Oh, I want to quiet my magpie self a little bit. And instead of saying yes to all of the amazing opportunities, to say, 'Let me go slow. Let me try to get a sense of the lay of the land before I jump into things.'"

Because often when we say yes to everything, we end up wasting our own energy and wasting the resources that we have access to; not because we're being wasteful, but because we didn't know we could do it a more efficient way or a more inclusive way. And so, to really take the opportunity to be thoughtful about how we spend our time and energy.

And I think a lot about something that Audre Lorde, a black feminist poet and activist and scholar says, that, "We need to be careful to ensure that our urgencies reflect our priorities." So if you have a set of priorities for how you want to live your life, when you're in a new place, and you have a lot of opportunities coming at you; or when, say, you're in the middle of a pandemic, and it feels like everything is an emergency, it's very easy to make these kind of snap decisions, or to say and do things that actually aren't in line with those priorities that you have, or that you're trying to get clear on. And so, I think there's a lot of amazing opportunities that are available for those of us who are starting at UTM. And yeah, so my suggestion would be go slow.

CD: Yeah. That's great advice; because the new season is meant to be an introduction to some of our new researchers and people on campus, if there's anything about you that you would like to share aside from being a magpie, but maybe some little known fact about you or your hobbies that people might find interesting.

ZW: I was thinking about this. You sent me these questions, and I was like, "What to tell?" I thought maybe the best thing to tell would be that I almost got kicked out of high school.

CD: Oh?

ZW: That I very nearly did not graduate high school. And it was bonkers to me; someone in the difficult period of my adolescence. I had many therapists, and one of them said to me, "You know what? Just wait until you get to graduate school." And I was like, "What are you talking about? I'm not even going to finish high school." But she was totally right. And I almost got kicked out of high school because I had a bunch of learning disabilities that I didn't have the kind of right scaffolding around. I was engaged in a lot of activities, but they were not the activities that I was being evaluated on.

So, it wasn't that I was like a slacker. Right? I just had other things that I thought were more important that I needed to be doing. And it was true, that once I got kind of toward the end of my undergrad, and certainly into graduate school, I realized, "Oh, I can engage all of my curiosities in a more wide-ranging way, and find some fellow travelers to do that with me." And it was really wonderful when I did that.

ZW: So, there's no necessary lesson there; but I think as a person who's been by many accounts, very successful as an academic, I think I kind of owe it to people to let them know that I almost got kicked out of high school. I managed to sneak by algebra with a D, because my wonderful high school teacher, Miss De Luca, allowed me to do extra work over the summer.

CD: That's great. And my last question... And I'm sure that your research and starting a new position have kept you quite busy over the past two years while we've kind of been sidelined; but was there anything that you watched or read or listened to, or anything that maybe helped get you through some of the darker days of the pandemic?

ZW: I have been watching many things. I think the thing that was actually the most important to me, I need to exhaust myself physically almost every day, or I will lose my mind. And I really prioritize that, so I've been running since graduate school in a kind of casual way. And I started doing that more in a more dedicated way. That became very important to me.

And when I moved here, I got to have the wonderful experience of running through the winter, which I had never done before. And also, had some wonderful friends here who introduced me to the Halton Conservation Area. And I'm a member there now, and get out there to go walk around in nature whenever I can, particularly in the winter. I get very cold. I have this Raynaud's Syndrome thing, so the blood stops circulating to my fingers and my feet, and it can be very painful; but I suit up and I get out there.

As I said, I grew up in New York, and I don't think about myself as a kind of nature-oriented person. I'm most at home in a dense urban environment. But the kind of quiet, calm, stillness, physical exertion that I realized I really needed that, to kind of counterbalance sitting at this desk morning, noon, and night. And even though things are a little bit more open now, I still try to maintain some of those practices, and make sure I get outside for a walk every day.

ZW: And when I can, I take meetings on the phone instead of on Zoom, so that I can go for a walk while I'm having a meeting. I think it's a great way to think when you're moving around and in the open air. And that's something that I think I did before, but now has become really a kind of survival strategy to me. Even if it's just a zip around the block for 10 minutes between meetings, I try to get that in.

CD: Yeah. I can very much relate to that, totally. I need green space, and I try to get those walks in, too; so I think that's really important. And just the break from the screens.

ZW: Yeah.

CD: Yeah.

ZW: Big time. Also, I would say napping; I never used to be a person who could nap. And we live in a world that really tells us that if you're not busy constantly, if your schedule has

any white space in it, you're not being as productive as you could be. And one of the things that I have really learned from disability community and activism, is that that is some BS. That will get you killed, is what that will do. So, you've got to take some time to rest when you need to rest. And I'm now a big advocate of napping.

CD: That's great. Yeah. I have to work on that. But I think even sometimes if you just lay down and close your eyes for 10 minutes, whether you're actually mapping or not, there is still some value to just that. Some people meditate; but I feel like even just shutting down and closing your eyes for 10 minutes is restorative.

ZW: Yeah.

CD: Right?

ZW: Absolutely. I bet you are good at it, Carla, I think you are. Because you know it's important, and even... You don't have to be sophisticated about it or expert about it. I think you don't want to turn meditation or relaxation into a competitive process; but yes, lie down, and close your eyes for 10 minutes. It's not going to throw you off your productivity track from the day; and actually, it's probably going to help you with your goals.

CD: Here, here to that. I just want to thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today. I know you're really busy, and it was just nice to get a chance to hear about your work, and get to know you a little bit better.

ZW: Thanks, Carla. It was a pleasure to chat with you.

[theme music fades in]

CD: I would like to thank everyone for listening to today's show.

I would especially like to thank my guest, Professor Zoë Wool from the Department of Anthropology at UTM for being so generous with her time and for telling me about her research.

I am definitely heeding her advice about slowing down, taking the time to think and reflect more, and though I can't say that I have yet adopted napping, I am definitely trying to carve out time to take short breaks throughout the day just to step away from the computer. I feel I am definitely starting out 2022 off on a better foot.

I also want to give a shout-out to *Decoder Ring* podcast and its host Willa Paskin, who aims to 'crack cultural mysteries.' I have found this show to be a joy, and "The Tootsie

shot” was a great inspiration. I highly recommend this podcast, and that particular episode is a good entry point.

If you are a new researcher at UTM, please get in touch with me! I would love to meet as many people from our campus’s research community as possible.

Also, if you can take the time to rate the podcast in iTunes, it helps others find the show and hear more from our great UTM researchers.

And this year marks the 5-year anniversary for *VIEW to the U*! With roughly 50 tracks, over 22,000 downloads, and everyone’s support, it feels very celebratory. I am eternally grateful to the researchers who participated and those who have supported me – you know who you are! A heartfelt thank you.

Lastly, and as always, thank you to Timmy-two-tone for his tracks, tunes, support!

Thank you!

[theme music fades out]