

Psychology: How We Show Up: Community Psychology & The Stories We Tell | The 2026 Kathy Dwyer Marble '63, MAT'65 Seminar

Faculty: Misha N. Ailsworth '16, Assistant Professor, Psychology

Week One: July 5 – 11, 2026

Schedule: Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

Location: Kennedy Hall, room 105

“Everything worthwhile is done with other people.”

Mariame Kaba, 2019

Dear Student,

Welcome to our course, How We Show Up: Community Psychology & the Stories We Tell. I am looking forward to working with you this summer.

My name is Misha Ailsworth, and I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology. I am also affiliated with the Africana Studies and Research Center and the American Studies Program. I am a second-generation Cornellian: my mother was a Human Development major ('88), and growing up, Cornell was woven into the fabric of how I understood education, possibility, and belonging. When I enrolled as an undergraduate in the Department of Human Development, I was stepping into a place that had long been part of my own story. Cornell has played a significant role in my identity formation and my sense of community. After completing my B.S. here, I earned my M.S. and Ph.D. in Community Research and Action at Vanderbilt University. My research focuses on the role of social contexts and cultural narratives in shaping adolescents' identity development and mental health. I am particularly passionate about centering youth voices in the research process itself, because I believe the people most affected by a community's challenges are often its most insightful experts.

That conviction, that the personal is always also social, is the beating heart of this course. And it is why I am so excited to share community psychology with you.

What This Week Is About

Community psychology sits at the intersection of developmental psychology, education, sociology, and social action. Unlike fields that focus primarily on individual minds or behaviors in isolation, community psychology insists that we cannot understand a person without understanding the contexts that surround them: their neighborhoods, their schools, their families, their social movements, and the broader structures of power and history in which all of these are embedded.

Over five intensive and engaging days, we will explore this field together. We will begin with its foundations: how community psychology emerged in the 1960s as a discipline committed not just to studying human experience but to transforming it. We will examine key theoretical concepts: identity, ecological context, sense of community, empowerment, and well-being. We will wrestle with real-world case studies, including the climate crisis in Hawai'i and examples of desire-centered, community-rooted research with marginalized groups. We will look at how researchers work alongside communities, not on them, and what it means to do research that is both rigorous and liberatory.

And throughout it all, we will keep returning to you. One of our central projects this week will be developing a personal narrative, a piece of reflective writing in which you map your relationship to the communities that have shaped you, articulate your values, and consider how community psychology's frameworks illuminate your experience.

A Word About Our Community

I hope that you will leave with a sense that the questions you have been carrying about where you belong, how you relate to the groups you are part of, and what kind of person you want to be are deeply intertwined with the rich field of community psychology.

Mariame Kaba reminds us that everything worthwhile is done with other people. That is not just an inspiration for this course; it is its organizing logic. Community psychology holds that the spaces and places we inhabit are never neutral: they either support or constrain our development, our honesty, our willingness to take intellectual risks. I am committed to making our classroom one of the former. To that end, our time together will be grounded in four shared agreements:

- 1. Respect and Inclusivity are our Foundation.** Every person in the room brings a distinct history, set of identities, and way of knowing. We honor that by engaging with care, using language that acknowledges difference without diminishing it, and treating each contribution as worthy of genuine attention.
- 2. Cultivate a Judgment-Free Environment.** This is a space for thinking out loud, sitting with uncertainty, and changing your mind. We are all in process. Questions that feel unformed, perspectives still taking shape, and honest uncertainty are welcome here.
- 3. Embrace Curiosity and Active Participation.** The ideas we engage with come alive through dialogue, and your voice is part of what makes that possible. Come ready to ask, to push, and to be surprised.
- 4. Contribute to a Supportive Environment.** We are building something together over the course of this week. That means showing up for each other: listening with generosity, making space for voices that have not yet spoken, and recognizing that the quality of our collective inquiry depends on each of us.

Before we meet, I invite you to sit with the questions that anchor our week: *What does community mean to you? What communities do you belong to? How have these communities shaped how you see the world, what you value, and how you understand yourself?* You do not need an answer yet. Just hold the questions. We will work through it together. I look forward to meeting each of you on July 5th.

With warmth and anticipation,

Misha N. Ailsworth '16

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology | Cornell University