

**BSA South West Regional MedSoc Food, health and wellbeing (14 May 2021  
12.00-16.00)**

This four hour ZOOM event takes a paper/discussion format and will include research data, auto/biographical stories, music, poetry and more. Everyone welcome, bring your own tea/coffee/snacks...

There will be four speakers/performers – Julie Parsons, Clare Pettinger, Lucy Aphramor, Gayle Letherby – abstracts and biographies below.

**12.00 – 12.05** WELCOME – Tracey Collett and Gayle Letherby

**12.05- 12.55** “Even a dog wouldn’t eat it”, should we give ‘good’ food to ‘bad people and what can institutionalised food practices in prison teach us about wider everyday foodways?

**Julie Parsons and Lucy Vincent**

This presentation draws upon research and work in the field of prison food, which remains an under researched and poorly funded area. Drawing on research data and experience we argue that there is still strong evidence to suggest that the findings from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Prisons report for its ‘Life Inside’ series on ‘Food’ in 2016, have not been implemented. Significantly, that ‘the quantity and quality of the food provided [in prison] is insufficient, and the conditions in which it is served and eaten undermine respect for prisoners’ dignity (2016:13)’. Across the prison estate in England and Wales the idea that prisoners should be fed well runs counter to the notion of the prison as a place where prisoners should be punished. In this context, for the prisoners interviewed for Parsons’ research, ‘bad’ prison food was not unexpected. However, accepting that there are sections of the population undeserving of ‘good’ food, serves to maintain the marginalisation and alienation of the prison population from the ‘free community’ (HMIP, 2016:11). One of the key themes from both Parsons and Vincent’s work is that food matters, particularly in terms of health and wellbeing. In this presentation Parsons outlines some of the ways ‘enhanced status’ prisoners on placement at LandWorks counter the indignity of prison foodways and for some maintain a more health centred approach, despite the prevailing counter-culture of the prison regime that provides convenience pre-packaged and arguably unhealthy meals. Vincent provides a compelling case for the benefits of providing ‘good’ prison food drawing on a number of previous and forthcoming projects with her charity ‘Food BehindBars’ and work with a number of prisons.

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Prisons (2016) *Life in Prison: Food, a Findings Paper*, London: The Stationary Office

Parsons, J.M. (2020) Making time for food when ‘doing time’; how enhanced status prisoners counter the indignity of prison foodways, Special Issue of *Appetite* on Prison

**Biography:**

Lucy Vincent is the Chief Executive of Food Behind Bars, the UK’s only charity dedicated to transforming the food served in British prisons. After a career in journalism and hospitality, Lucy ventured into the world of prison food in 2016 after

reading the report from HM Inspectorate and feeling inspired to do something about poor quality prison food. Since then she has visited prisons nationally, worked in prison kitchens and delivered pioneering projects centred around the belief that wholesome and nutritious food can change lives.

### **13.00-13.50 "Undoing White Supremacy in and through Food and Wellbeing Discourse and Practice"**

**Lucy Aphramor and Malak Mayet**

What does a meaningful response to Black Lives Matter look like for a BIPOC, and a white privileged, food worker? In this presentation we explore ways in which everyday public health system messages about food, eating and wellbeing embed white supremacist thinking. We show how this ideology surfaces as neoliberalism, anti-fatness, anti-blackness and ableism in dietetic discourse and consider what this means for personal wellbeing and health equity. Drawing on practice and scholarship from health-justice we suggest alternative framings for our work that enable us to practice public health nutrition and dietetics from a liberatory position.

Malak is a queer, south Asian nutrition graduate, charity worker, and activist. During their undergraduate studies, they started a decolonise the syllabus campaign and researched institutional racism in UK obesity policy. They currently work in the charity sector for an organisation promoting global peace and security, as well as providing political education for marginalised students.

### **13.50 – 14.05 COMFORT BREAK**

### **14.05 – 14.55 Using song writing to responding to food issues during the COVID19 lockdown**

**Clare Pettinger**

COVID-19 has 'shone a light' on all that is precarious within our food and health system(s). The pandemic has been termed as a 'crisis on a crisis' (Taylor, 2020) because it has forced more people into food insecurity (Loopstra, 2020) and accentuated nutritional and health inequalities. Due to the trans-disciplinarity of our food matrix, I have often felt ill-equipped, both personally and professionally, to deal with its many complex facets – COVID-19 has heightened this sense of frustration for me.

As 'The Singing Dietitian' I offer a light hearted yet critical auto-biographical/ethnographical approach to sharing socially impactful food stories. I have written songs that relate to my observations of our current (covid) situation, exemplifying the complex and often polarized nature of food issues across the socio-economic spectrum. Songs, it seems, hold story fragments that escape a temporal plot, and polar tension that co-exist (Douglas, 2016, P.2).

This session will appraise song writing as *my* creative response to the COVID-19 crisis. I will perform a song (box 1), and then critique it as a reflective process, a creative method and a potential tool for transformation, enabling expression, different forms of knowing and more awareness of health and social justice issues and activism (see Pettinger 2021).

*"I prove my sour-dough  
you carve your corned beef;  
and we are sitting here  
polarised,  
yet both desperate for relief....*

*...This moment brings us to  
our knees*

*This moment with family to  
please,*

*and a risk of diet-related  
disease Mortality"*

Box 1 – lyrics written for recent  
(Covid) food song (Pettinger 2020)

## **References**

Douglas K (2016) Song writing as reflexive practice: 'Breathing too loud' to 'signals & signs'. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 22: 779-784.

Loopstra R (2020) *Vulnerability to food insecurity since the COVID-19 lockdown* Preliminary report. The Food Foundation, Kings College London, ENUF

Pettinger C (2021 in press) A creative response to food issues during the COVID 19 lockdown: singing out the anger *Critical Dietetics* special edition (reflecting on a pandemic)

Taylor A (2020) COVID-19: latest impact on food. Blog by Executive Director of the Food Foundation <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-latest-impact-on-food/>

**Clare Pettinger** is a Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionist (Public Health) and experienced educator at the University of Plymouth. She is actively engaged in creative community research around food systems, poverty and social justice. She believes strongly that innovative approaches are required to tackle local (and global) health and social well-being challenges. Her current research is co-leading 5 year consortium food systems project '*Co-production of healthy, sustainable food systems for disadvantaged communities*' (funded by UKRI Strategic Priorities fund). She previously led the 'Food as a Lifestyle Motivator' (FLM) project, exploring creative methods to engage 'marginalized' communities in food activities to enhance their health, well-being and life skills. See link: [FLM project](#) See recent documentary film: [Food on the margins in Plymouth](#) (produced by Fotonow CIC, funded via [Creative Associates award from Sustainable Earth Institute](#))

Clare has a keen interest in evolving participatory creative and visual methodologies, and using this as 'knowledge mobilisation' to make research more engaging and accessible to diverse audiences

### **15.00- 15.50 Food Shortage and Food Sharing: auto/biographical reflections on lockdown (and before and beyond) issues and experiences**

#### **Gayle Letherby**

In this auto/biographical paper my focus is food shortage and food sharing during the UK Covid-19 lockdowns (and (briefly) before and beyond) of 2020 and 2021. I have been increasingly, and deeply, concerned about food poverty over the last few years and I have written several pieces about the response of both the political Right and Left to this issue, including letters to newspapers, blog entries and short fiction. The lean periods in my own childhood are relevant here. Although there was only a couple of short periods when I remember being without any food, mince and pea (heavy on the peas) curry was a regular tea-time meal during my teenage years as was bean stew (before it was popular) and the mackerel given to my mum by the fishermen to whom she sold cigarettes and copies of the local newspaper. Various free school meals scandals over the last few months – from MPs voting against free school meals to contracts being given to companies whose concern is more with making money than feeding hungry children – have, rightly, received much news coverage, although there is still little attention given to the relationship between food poverty and structural inequality. Close to home my own food experiences since the first lockdown in 2020 have been characterised by food sharing. For me, the last many months, have been, if not always easy, marked by many kindnesses, not least in terms of food provision, including my 'support bubble' friends who (on many occasions) have cooked and baked bread for me. In return I share food with them and also with a newer friend who lives in a tent near the coastline of the seaside town I live in. Here, drawing on my various writings I reflect on all these issues and experiences.

**Gayle Letherby:** I am Honorary Professor of Sociology at the University of Plymouth and Visiting Professor at the University of Greenwich. A sociologist, alongside substantive interests in reproductive and non/parental identities; gender, health and wellbeing; loss and bereavement; travel and transport mobility, gender and identity within institutions and food poverty, I have always been fascinated by research methodology, including auto/biographical, feminist and creative practices. I am also a trained civil celebrant, a volunteer and a political activist. For non-academic writing see <http://arwenackcerebrals.blogspot.co.uk/> and <https://www.abctales.com/user/gletherby>

**15.50 – 16.00 CLOSING REMARKS - Tracey Collett and Gayle Letherby**