

FOOD MATTERS

Biopsychosocial Perspectives

Edited by

*Salman Akhtar and
Nina Savelle-Rocklin*



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*To my good friend Bharat Luthra whose restaurant,
Khajuraho, was my frequent hangout
during the mid-1990s, and to his wife,
Veena, whose biryani is to die for.*

SA

*For David, my “handsome wiz in the kitchen,” who patiently
and creatively adapts menus according to my mercurial tastes,
and my daughter, Kavanna, whose culinary flair is a
delight to both palate and soul. And for Ariel,
who has a taste for the unconventional.*

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Acknowledgments

We are thankful to the distinguished colleagues who have contributed original papers to this volume. Representing the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and gastroenterology, these international contributors (e.g., from India, Italy, Turkey, the UK, and the USA) have collectively given voice to novel and fresh conceptualizations pertaining to the seemingly plebian matters of food and eating. One of these contributors, Kelsey Leon, a young and upcoming professional, has also helped us in preparing the manuscript and has been of immeasurable assistance during the copyediting phase. We are grateful to her and, as always, to our wonderful publisher Kate Pearce for shepherding this project from the days of its conception to the final shape that is in your hands. This work would not have been without the help of all these individuals.

About the editors and contributors

Prachi Akhavi, MPhil, is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist currently engaged in private practice in New Delhi. As part of her training, she has worked in a variety of clinical settings, non-profit organizations, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, as well as the university clinic. She has worked intensively with young adults as well as adolescents. During her training, she worked with the Salaam Balak Trust and the Kilkari Rainbow Home for Girls, where the focus is on the mental well-being of adolescent girls. Alongside working directly with the residents, she also planned and executed workshops for the staff members and caregivers to facilitate holistic psychological well-being on the wards. She has worked closely with patients dealing with severe forms of psychosis and addiction at several in-patient and out-patient units, trying to evolve a psychodynamic approach within the hospital settings. She has also served as a psychotherapist at the Indraprastha College for Women as well as at Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University. She has worked extensively with students and facilitated several interactive sessions, seminars, and discussions around the issues of body-image, identity, sexuality, and intimacy. Her research interests are exploring the nature, organization, and functions of groups. Understanding the dynamics at

play within institutions as well as familial groups, she attempts in her clinical practice to bring together socio-historical and cultural nuances. She has collaborated with organizations working to generate awareness about Crohn's disease and colitis. Through her interactions with patients suffering from IBD and Crohn's disease, she has attempted to create safe, self-sustaining groups which can offer support and a sense of community to fellow patients. She has recently enrolled at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia for further psychoanalytic training.

Salman Akhtar, MD, is Professor of Psychiatry at Jefferson Medical College and a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia. He has served on the editorial boards of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, and the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*. His more than 400 publications include 105 books, of which the following twenty-two are solo-authored: *Broken Structures* (1992), *Quest for Answers* (1995), *Inner Torment* (1999), *Immigration and Identity* (1999), *New Clinical Realms* (2003), *Objects of Our Desire* (2005), *Regarding Others* (2007), *Turning Points in Dynamic Psychotherapy* (2009), *The Damaged Core* (2009), *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (2009), *Immigration and Acculturation* (2011), *Matters of Life and Death* (2011), *The Book of Emotions* (2012), *Psychoanalytic Listening* (2013), *Good Stuff* (2013), *Sources of Suffering* (2014), *No Holds Barred* (2016), *A Web of Sorrow* (2017), *Mind, Culture, and Global Unrest* (2018), *Silent Virtues* (2019), *Tales of Transformation* (2021), and *In Leaps and Bounds* (2022). Dr Akhtar has delivered many prestigious invited lectures including a Plenary Address at the 2nd International Congress of the International Society for the Study of Personality Disorders in Oslo, Norway (1991), an Invited Plenary Paper at the 2nd International Margaret S. Mahler Symposium in Cologne, Germany (1993), an Invited Plenary Paper at the Rencontre Franco-Americaine de Psychanalyse meeting in Paris, France (1994), a Keynote Address at the 43rd IPA Congress in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2005), the Plenary Address at the 150th Freud Birthday Celebration sponsored by the Dutch Psychoanalytic Society and the Embassy of Austria in Leiden, Holland (2006), the Inaugural Address at the first IPA-Asia Congress in Beijing, China (2010), and the Plenary Address at the Fall Meetings of the American

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Sureyya Iscan, PhD, earned her MA in Educational Psychology and her PhD in Developmental Psychology at the Ankara University School of Psychology in Turkey. She went on to earn a second MA and PhD in Clinical Psychology at the Fielding Graduate University of Santa Barbara.

She was a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Michigan and at the Austen Riggs Center, followed by a fellowship in psychoanalytic research training at the Yale Child Study Center and Anna Freud Center. She is also a graduate of the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute. She is the Associate Director for Psychotherapy Education at UMass Chan Medical School and also Faculty at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute and Advance Psychotherapy program. She was the recipient of the Paul B. Barreira Teaching Award in 2016, 2019, and 2020. She has published several research articles in the area of psychodynamic psychotherapy and psychotherapy outcomes.

Alan Michael Karbelnig, PhD, practices psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and couples therapy in Pasadena, California. He earned two PhDs, one in counseling psychology from the University of Southern California in 1986, and a second in psychoanalysis from the New Center for Psychoanalysis (NCP) in 1996. Shortly thereafter, he was Certified in Psychoanalysis by the American Psychoanalytic Association which later bestowed upon him the status of a Supervising and Training Psychoanalyst. Dr Karbelnig is also Board Certified in Forensic Psychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology. He founded, serves on the Board of Directors of, and teaches at Rose City Center—a not-for-profit psychoanalytic psychotherapy clinic serving the economically disadvantaged in the Los Angeles area. An award-winning teacher, Dr Karbelnig lectures locally, nationally, and internationally including in Beijing, China, and in Delhi and Ahmedabad, India. He also enjoys scholarly writing, having so far published thirteen articles and three book chapters. His debut book, *Lover, Exorcist, Critic: Understanding Depth Psychotherapy*, is due to be published by Phoenix in 2023.

Kelsey Leon, MSc, earned an undergraduate degree in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh and an MSc in Medical Anthropology from University College London. She returned to the Philadelphia area in 2021 where she now works as a patient care technician at Bryn Mawr Hospital, a suburban hospital in the Philadelphia area; a wound care navigator at Prevention Point Philadelphia; and with Community Action Relief Project, a mutual aid and harm reduction

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Clara Mucci, PhD, received the degree of Dottore di ricerca from the University of Genoa, Italy, and a PhD from Emory University in Atlanta. She is a full professor of clinical psychology at the University of Chieti, Italy, and a practicing psychoanalyst. A member of the SIPP (Italian Society of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy), she is also a trainer and supervisor for the Italian Society for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis-Sándor Ferenczi, Italy. She retrained in clinical psychology and psychotherapy after having attained the rank of full Professor of English Literature and Shakespeare Studies, a field in which she has published extensively. As part of her specialization in personality disorders, she was a fellow at the Institute for Personality Disorders in New York, directed by Otto Kernberg. Most recently, she has published three books: *Beyond Individual and Collective Trauma* (2018), *Borderline Bodies: Affect Regulation Therapy for Personality Disorders* (2018), and *Resilience and Survival: Understanding and Healing Intergenerational Trauma* (2022).

Nina Savelle-Rocklin, PsyD, is a Los Angeles-based psychoanalyst specializing in eating disorders. She is the author of *Food for Thought: Perspectives on Eating Disorders* and *The Binge Cure: 7 Steps to Outsmart Emotional Eating*. She also co-edited (with Salman Akhtar) *Beyond the Primal Addiction*. She has written articles and book chapters on binge eating, bulimia, and mistrust as it pertains to eating disorders, as well as on the origins and fundamentals of psychoanalysis. She presented at the 2014 National Meetings of the American Psychoanalytic association and is regularly featured in podcasts, radio shows, print media, and online summits throughout the globe. She hosts *The Dr Nina Show* radio program on LA Talk Radio. She serves on the Board of Directors of RoseCity Center, a not-for-profit psychoanalytic psychotherapy clinic in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

Asmita Sharma, MPhil, is currently serving as a consulting psychoanalytic psychotherapist at Delhi Mind Clinic, a psychiatric facility in

New Delhi, as well as maintaining a private practice of adults and adolescent patients. Her areas of research include understanding the psychological states of incarcerated and under-trial female inmates. She worked with female inmates at the Tihar Prison Complex in New Delhi to understand the socio-cultural aspects of criminality. Her attempt was to bring together psychodynamic and feminist approaches in the rehabilitation of female inmates. During her training, she also worked at the low-fee university clinic where patients from varied marginalized backgrounds availed themselves of psychotherapeutic treatment, using both short-term and long-term models of psychodynamic intervention. She has worked in non-profit organizations in New Delhi dedicated to the care of homeless young girls. Collaborating with their primary caregivers within the organization, she curated models of interaction and intervention to facilitate creative expression and independent thinking in the young girls. She has worked with the middle-aged as well as the senior population suffering from long-term, chronic mental illnesses at the Tulsi Psychiatric and Rehabilitation Center, New Delhi, to introduce psychodynamic interventions into community mental health. She has also worked as a psychologist in ITL Public School where, apart from individual psychotherapeutic interventions for students, she also held workshops for the psychoeducation and sensitization of the teachers and other staff members. Aside from clinical work, she has worked as a guest lecturer at the Institute of Home Economics, and the Rajkumari Amrit Kaur College of Nursing at the Delhi University. Her paper “A psychoanalytic inquiry into the fundamentals of conflict and violence” has been published in the *Annual Academic Journal of the Psychology Department* (Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University). Some of the papers she has written and presented at various national and international academic conferences include “The politics of body, language and memory” (2016); “The stranger and the witness: Peering through the cracks of the dyad” (2017); and she has co-written and presented “The politics of laughter: A Deleuzian exploration” (2017). She is currently pursuing further training in psychoanalytic psychotherapy at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia.

Julian Stern, FRCPsych, is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst practicing in London. Having qualified in medicine in Cape Town, South Africa, he migrated to the UK in 1997 and trained for eight years in

psychiatry and adult psychology in the Maudsley Hospital in London, as well as the Lincoln Centre (now part of the British Psychotherapy Federation). At St Mark's Hospital, Harrow, he built up and, from 1995 to 2012, headed its unique psychological medicine unit for patients with gastrointestinal and colorectal disorders, and he was its consultant psychiatrist in psychotherapy. In 2010, he was appointed as a consultant at the Tavistock Clinic, and he has worked in the City and Hackney primary care psychotherapy consultation service (PCS), assessing and treating particularly complex patients, leading teachings and trainings, and providing consultations to GPs in primary care on complex patients. Dr Stern spearheaded the applications for national awards for the Tavistock's Primary Care Psychotherapy and Consultation Service (PCPCST), resulting in the team receiving the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Psychiatric Team of the Year Award (2013) and the BMJ Mental Health Team of the Year Award (2015). In 2016, he was appointed to the position of the Director Adult and Forensic Services in the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, a position he held until 2019. He is currently the visiting lecturer at the Tavistock Centre. Dr Stern has a particular interest in working psychotherapeutically in a medical setting as well as in the fields of personality disorders, eating disorders, and somatization. He has published and taught widely, with more than forty peer-reviewed publications in psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, gastroenterology, and psychiatry journals as well as in multiple edited volumes. He himself has co-edited the popular textbook titled *Core Psychiatry* (2000). He frequently presents his work nationally and internationally.

Thomas Wolman, MD, was born and raised in New York City, where he now lives after residing in Philadelphia, PA for forty-four years. He attended Johns Hopkins University and the Pennsylvania State University Medical College. Subsequently, he trained at the Philadelphia Psychoanalytic Institute where he taught in both the psychoanalytic and psychotherapy training programs. Until his move to New York, he held the title of Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Dr Wolman has written on Winnicott, Mahler, Kohut, and Lacan, and on issues pertaining to privacy, greed, and bereavement. He teaches a course on the history of psychoanalysis at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and has recently published a book, *The Erotic Screen: Desire, Addiction, and Perversity in Cinema* (2020).

Introduction

The double entendre embedded in our book's title *Food Matters*, says it all. On the one hand, food matters greatly to all of us since it is essential to sustain life. On the other hand, food matters are complex and wide-ranging; these include the relational scenarios extending from the baby at the mother's breast through childhood family meals and college days barbecues to romantic dinners of adult life and nutritional needs and restrictions of old age. Alongside food's psychophysical role throughout the individual lifespan is its actual and symbolic significance in communal bonding, continuity, and coherence. In the former realm, food, cooking, and eating are co-opted by unconscious agendas of sexuality, aggression, narcissism, and morality. In the latter realm, food gets involved in culinary ethnocentrism, nostalgic idealization of "lost recipes", monetary determinants of menu, and poignant as well as hyperbolic cinematic representations.

Our book addresses all these issues. It is divided into three major sections which, true to the book's subtitle *Biopsychosocial Perspectives*, are named "Mostly biology", "Mostly psychology", and "Mostly sociology"; the prefix "mostly" in these titles underscores that biology, psychology, and sociology are not surgically separable; overlaps and leakages

across such categories are ubiquitous and inevitable. The following thumb-nail sketches of these sections should give readers a sense of the smorgasbord of ideas that awaits them.

Part I: “Mostly biology” consists of two chapters.

The first chapter, titled “Food and health”, is authored by Kelsey Leon. It begins by surveying a collection of foods and dieting practices that promise to bring outstanding health and even more. These promises reach to their logical conclusion that superfoods and biohacking diets are an expression of a desire to exaggerate individual power. Next, the traditional idea of “healthy choices” is turned on its head, and clinical examples are provided to support this reversal. Whereas superfoods and biohacking overestimate the power of individual choice, these vignettes demonstrate that conspicuously “unhealthy” choices can also bring about healthy outcomes. At its core, this chapter aims to undermine the notion of “healthy choices” and gesture toward a more nuanced vision of what actually builds healthy communities.

The second chapter, by Julian Stern, is titled “Food and illness”. In this chapter, the relationship between food and illness is explored. After describing some of the ways in which food is represented in dreams, the chapter explores four types of illness in which the relationship between food and illness is often central: (i) physical illnesses where food intake and digestion are issues; (ii) when disease is so severe that one cannot manage to eat; (iii) eating disorders; (iv) severe psychiatric disorders. The rich case material shows the multitude of ways in which ingestion, withholding, bingeing, self-loathing, self-harm, and gradual improvements in self-care might manifest, and the corollaries in the therapeutic relationship between patient and psychoanalyst.

Part II: “Mostly psychology” has four chapters. They respectively address the relationship between food and sexuality, food and aggression, food and narcissism, and food and morality.

In the first chapter, Sureyya and Cuneyt Iscan explore the complex human experience around food and sexuality from the psychoanalytic perspective, using various theoretical models. A case vignette is provided to demonstrate the utility of psychoanalytic concepts in understanding psychological factors underlying complex behaviors around eating and sexuality. Concluding remarks highlight how feeding behavior is deeply

embedded in relatedness and relating, and how human sexuality and eroticism are interwoven in this nuanced relationship.

The second chapter, “Food and aggression”, by Nina Savelle-Rocklin, explores multiple definitions of aggression and explicates how food and aggression intertwine in our individual and collective psyches, beginning with the influence of fairy tales. The chapter deals with the complex nature of food as a symbolic representation of both the mother and the maternal relationship, as well as other relationships. In the discussion, the author highlights four ways in which aggressive conflicts are expressed and details how food is used to manage these conflicts. There is also a brief examination of the bio-psychological links between food and aggression.

The next chapter is authored by Asmita Sharma and Prachi Akhavi. It explores the relationship between food and narcissism by tracing its origins to the early mother–infant relationship and its complexities. This chapter argues that one’s relationship with food is complicated by the realization that the source of food—nourishment and pleasure—lies outside of oneself, and therefore poses the earliest threat to primary narcissism. The sensuality and aliveness of the mother during the act of feeding creates an enigmatic relationship with the food being consumed. This can result in a host of states reflective of both horror and reverence which manifests into various pathological and non-pathological responses toward food. Through an extensive discussion of these concepts, and a few clinical as well as non-clinical illustrations, the discourse attempts to lay out the complexities of our limitless hunger and limited appetite, and the negotiation between the two in sustaining our narcissistic illusions of internal and external abundance.

The final chapter of this section pertains to food and morality, and is authored by Clara Mucci. She stresses that food is always linked to the first source of nurturing for the subject which is the maternal body. Therefore, elements of pollution, excess, ambivalence, and defilement are easily projected on food as a part (a synecdoche) for the maternal origin that has brought us to life and still keeps us alive; these projections and prohibitions, with aversions and disgust, are the results of cultural and individually created projections in which superego instances play a major role. Examples from Shakespeare’s work are provided to

show how food and the woman's body are the depositories of cultural projections always at the verge of dangerous transgression and loathful prohibitions that are part of the culturally repressed of the time.

Part III: "Mostly sociology" has three chapters. The first of these pertains to money, the second to immigration, and the third to movies.

The chapter on money is authored by Alan Karbelnig and examines how projection, introjection, and identification influence our relationship with both food and money, focusing on how these processes converge in the restaurant industry. Addressing this theme from the perspective of two extreme ends of the restaurant industry—the three-Michelin-star restaurant the French Laundry and the ubiquitous McDonald's—the chapter explores our conscious and unconscious relationships to both food and money. Also delineated are the influence of these psychosocial forces on individual and cultural identity, as well as implications for social responsibility.

In the second chapter of this section Salman Akhtar explicates the multifaceted relationship between food and immigration. He discusses the mental pain resulting from the loss of familial cuisine and the disorienting anxiety caused by the encounter with unfamiliar recipes and edibles. The nostalgic idealization of one's "old food" and its cementing role in group cohesion are discussed. The dialectics of culinary transformation of the local culture by foods brought by immigrants, and the identity transformation of the immigrants by the new foods of their adopted lands, is also discussed.

In the last chapter of the section, the "meal" or the "feast" becomes the focus, chief symbol, and overall center of gravity of the movies discussed. In the first film under discussion, *Waitress* (2007), pies and pie-making forge human ties and psychical associations. These multiple meanings are embodied in the film's equation of "pie" and "baby". In *Babette's Feast* (1987), the emphasis is also on transformation of barrenness and infertility to fruitfulness via a celebratory feast. In both cases, the sharing of food reinvigorates the collective mentality, conceived in the one case as the denizens of a diner and in the other as a religious "conventicle".

While the net we have cast is wide and has captured much of what there is to know, understand, and "digest" about food, cooking, and eating, there remain areas that could have been included here. Chapters

based on such topics might have been titled “Food and politics”, “Food and law”, “Food and art”, “Food and poetry”, and “Food and climate”, to name but a few. Whether extending the scope of our book in such directions would have indicated academic integrity or intellectual gluttony is a question we leave our readers to mull over. Meanwhile, our hope is that they find the morsels of fresh knowledge we have served here not only tasty but psychically nourishing as well.