

“Pica: No Shame in Understanding”

Many people know someone who habitually consumes ice, the skin on the insides of their cheeks, or their fingernails, but few know the term assigned to these behaviors. Characterized by developmentally irregular, compulsive consumption of non-food substances, such as ice, soap, hair, or rocks, Pica is most commonly diagnosed in children, those with intellectual disabilities, pregnant women, and people with vitamin deficiencies or anemia (Rajput et al. 1). Pica is incredibly unresearched as a feeding disorder and remains relatively unknown in wider society, but the stigma is nevertheless severe. Television programs, like TLC’s *My Strange Addiction*, showcase extreme cases of the disorder with ominous music and foreboding title cards to cause shock and vile distaste in their audience, all while mislabeling Pica’s symptoms as an addiction. Unfortunately, current media commonly frames Pica to convey perceived ignorance and invoke the stigma that people with Pica are unhygienic and unintelligent, encouraging the mockery of people struggling with Pica and humiliating those who wish to seek help. Combating the shame associated with Pica requires social and mass media platforming a combination of compassionate, comprehensive scientific research and personal stories of Pica, its effects, and recovery.

Pica’s rarity in popular consciousness, as well as scarce academic publications, leave it particularly vulnerable to being mislabelled as abnormal and repulsive, allowing for harmfully inaccurate information to become cemented in common understanding much easier than in other disorders. Meager information on Pica is especially concerning, as Pica is somewhat common in certain demographics. One 2018, child-based, German study revealed, “Out of the 804 children, a total of 99 participants (12.31%)” had engaged in Pica behavior, with “40 participants (4.98%)” experiencing recurrent behavior (Hartmann et al. 4). Likewise, a 2017 study in California on

pregnant, Hispanic women discovered that “Half of all participants (51.3%)” had experienced Pica, and that the behavior was commonly associated with iron deficiency and food insecurity (Roy et al. 1). However, Pica was only recently recognised as an all-ages eating disorder in 2013 with the publishing of the DSM-5; prior to this, Pica was labeled as a “feeding disorder of infancy and early childhood” (Michalska et al. 499). This can lead to Pica remaining undetected in adults, which can lead to serious health dangers, particularly in cases where toxic materials are ingested, or where Pica is caused by mineral deficiencies. Shame becomes another prominent factor: when little information is provided about Pica in adulthood, people feel alone in their struggles and fearful of social consequences for admitting to their behaviors. Pica is also uniquely vulnerable to anchoring bias, as the first information heard may be the only information a person receives for a long time. People who have heard Pica referenced as a disorder only in adolescents may belittle adults with the disorder, assuming they are childish and intellectually inferior. As such, medically accurate information that avoids infantilizing language or dehumanizing depictions of Pica is necessary to avoid further ostracizing an already underrepresented and exposed community.

Currently, portrayals of Pica rely heavily on unfounded stereotypes that those with Pica are ignorant about their bodies and lives, delegitimizing the compulsive nature of Pica and failing to address its real origins. TLC’s *My Strange Addiction* is most people’s primary, mainstream experience with Pica Disorder. Throughout its five year run, 32 of the 50 total episodes feature people exhibiting Pica behaviors, all following a similar format: the person’s behavior and past is documented, their family expresses concern, and a medical professional tells the person they need to stop their behavior or risk fatal injury (*My*). Coping strategies are seldom shown, and recovery is covered through brief text explaining the person’s reduced Pica behavior.

Ignorance is the most common theme, with people appearing shocked and distressed at what affects their behavior has on their body, such as Brea, who claimed to be unaware of the effects of eating sand, despite earlier complaining of tooth and stomach aches (“Loves” 15:27, 13:30). Such portrayals confirm biases held by outside audiences that people with Pica are naïve and incomprehensible. Even the name of the show itself implies Pica is a self-chosen deviant behavior that sufferers refuse to rectify, which is simply untrue. This unfortunate outcome is clearly outlined in the podcast “Let’s Get Mental”, the first show to appear when searching “Pica Disorder” in Spotify; its host, Cassidy Smith, uses invective, raving, “Like I would watch it on *My Strange Addictions* or something like that, I’d be like: ‘Why in the world would you want to eat a mattress?’ ... Weird, huh?” (1:57 - 2:26). Rather than promoting empathetic responses from outsiders, current media transforms those with Pica into oddities to be contemplated, bestializing them for their disorder.

Media also uses Pica as a form of mockery, minimizing Pica as a humorous, quirky character flaw rather than a serious eating disorder, and ultimately humiliating those who are genuinely struggling with eating compulsions. A prime example of this phenomenon is the 2003 film *Bruce Almighty*. One running gag in the narrative is of a young child who first eats glue and later eats glitter. Bruce’s girlfriend, Grace, sarcastically snarks, “God, I swear that kid is going to poop an ornament,” expressing little concern for his safety (*Bruce*). Once again invoking childish ignorance, this portrayal further stigmatizes Pica by dismissing the worrying health implications of eating non-food items. With children being exceptionally susceptible to Pica behaviors, it is unwise to trivialize the potential dangers to adult audiences. In a long-term study on eating disorders, in Portugal, “Pica presented the highest in-hospital mortality, with 9.1%,” an even greater rate than Anorexia Nervosa at 0.9% (Cruz et al.). Minimizing the health risks of Pica

egregiously convinces uninformed audiences that Pica is comical and repulsive, but relatively harmless, when in actuality it may be the most fatal eating disorder, if the study's findings are representative. Children, as well as adults, are at genuine risk of grievous injury from Pica behaviors, but misinformation prevents people from receiving life-saving interventions due to worries that they will be ridiculed for having Pica. In this way, humorous depictions are not only stigmatizing in how they mock Pica, but also deliberately malicious in their deadly, factitious teasing.

Fortunately, some destigmatizing strategies are already being employed by the media, such as factually addressing risk factors for Pica and relying on expert opinion for recovery, though more compassion and intelligence must be devoted to those with Pica to truly disassemble stigmas. Despite its numerous flaws, *My Strange Addictions* consistently presents environmental stressors that have led to the unhealthy coping behaviors when they are identifiable, rather than lying about Pica having no triggers. For example, one woman, Tempestt, who eats soap and detergents, was able to identify stress and fears of intimacy as triggers for her compulsions ("Woman"). By revealing the reasons behind Pica behavior, those with the disorder are humanized, and their behavior is rationalized to the audience, increasing empathy among viewers who have also experienced feelings of helplessness or relied upon unhealthy coping mechanisms. While the show only focuses on psychological factors, which does not encompass the entirety of cases, its efforts to explain the behaviors in a relatively non-judgemental and honest way is vital to fostering compassion. *My Strange Addictions* also relies on psychologists and medical professionals to speak about the technical aspects of Pica and its medical implications, lessening stigma by ensuring the accuracy of the provided information. In Tempestt's episode, Dr. Nicola Chung, who specializes in depression, anxiety, substance abuse,

and eating disorders at the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, is the person who calmly explains the harmful impacts of Pica, possible causes of Tempestt's behavior, and a plan for recovery ("Nicola", "Woman" 5:50 - 8:19). This respectful, professional approach must be further developed when addressing Pica Disorder and those affected by it, as it gives dignity to those with Pica, never once treating them as subhuman or irrational, while also helping them develop healthy coping mechanisms for the future. One of the coping mechanisms suggested is to keep a list of reasons to not consume non-nutritive substances, as well as talk therapy. Actual treatment plans are similar, using positive reinforcement and overcorrection procedures to discourage Pica behaviors (Chalker). If the media treats Pica in a respectful, medically accurate manner, the public will be encouraged to act the same, ultimately lessening the burden of admitting to having Pica by reducing the social stigma associated with the disorder.

Eliminating the stigma of Pica Disorder is possible if creators on both mass and social media highlight the voices of the scientific community as well as those who experience Pica; combining human stories of resilience through Pica with precise medical information will not only incite compassion in unfamiliar audiences, but also show those suffering through Pica that they are not isolated in their experiences and that recovery is achievable. Social media is the easiest way to reach wide audiences in today's digital era, and already people with Pica have used it to their advantage. Aadhya Babu, a final year dental student who struggles with Pica, has used her YouTube channel to recount her journey with Pica. She regretfully admitted, "When [my dentist] asked me if I grind my teeth at night, I couldn't really tell her that this [Pica] was the reason [behind my enamel erosion] because I felt ashamed. And when I came back home is when I realized this is not something that's my mistake" (Babu 05:42- 05:53). Importantly, Babu never once claims she was unaware of the consequences on her body; on the contrary, as a dental

student, she knew full well what impacts her Pica behaviors would have on her teeth, proving to her audience that Pica is not a matter of ignorance and is truly a compulsion that cannot be helped. By explaining her own experience with receiving medical attention in the form of iron supplements and her journey through recovery, Babu assures her audience that Pica is not a person's fault or sole burden. Mass media has seen some improvements as well, though it still tends to stigmatize Pica. For example, the 2019 film *Swallow* examines Pica in a mature setting, using an adult, sophisticated character, Hunter, to tell of the uncontrollable nature of Pica Disorder. Depicting the struggles of Pica for a pregnant woman in an abusive situation and a traumatic past, Pica is never once minimized or made to be a joke. People's misunderstanding and incompassionate behavior play the villains, and while Hunter never fully recovers or receives clinically-accurate treatment, the beginnings of her recovery can be seen as she makes choices for her happiness, rather than for the pleasure of others and their expectations. However, the film is a psychological thriller, and therefore portrays Pica as graphic and horrific, even if it avoids blaming Hunter for her behavior ("*Swallow*"). One person with Pica, Kaiya Shunyata, prolifically summarizes the triumphs and failures of the film, thoughtfully regaling, "While *Swallow* helped me grieve and heal, it simultaneously took a toll on my psyche. I was given a means to cope through the loss of my father, but I also endured one of the worst relapses I've ever experienced." Future movies must also aim to show the necessity of compassion and avoid diminishing Pica, its etiology, or the intelligence of those with it, but films should also avoid graphically portraying Pica to increase shock value, as that may trigger relapses and unintentionally increase bias in squeamish audiences. Regardless, *Swallow* is much more earnest and contentious about Pica than past films and television programs, and indicates a trend towards increasingly factual portrayals of Pica.

Providing hope for those with Pica and decreasing media-spread stigma is a daunting but possible task, and as more information becomes available, reducing stigma will become evermore simple. The symptoms and behaviors of Pica are uncomfortable or humorous for many outsiders, which encourages the media to use extremes to increase shock value and viewership. While the past media has dehumanized those with Pica, recent media indicates a progression in Pica's portrayal. As the media continues to thoughtfully examine Pica's etiology, inaccuracies will decrease, and as more people with Pica speak on their experiences, accurate information will become dominant and catalyze compassion in outsiders. Pica is revolutionary in changing people's perceptions on what an eating disorder constitutes: unlike more commonly acknowledged eating disorders, Pica has nothing to do with weight or food items. Informing the masses on Pica will lead not only to less shame for those with Pica, but also a reframed understanding about mental health. Knowledge is expanding, and with it, disgust, shame, and stigma are beginning to disappear, not just for Pica, but for mental disorders as a whole.

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Cruz, Ana Margarida, Manuel Gonçalves-Pinho, João Vasco Santos, Francisco Coutinho, Isabel

Brandão, and Alberto Freitas. "Eating disorders—Related Hospitalizations in Portugal: A

Nationwide Study from 2000 to 2014." *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*,

vol. 51, no. 10, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2018, pp. 1201–06,

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Hartmann, Andrea S, Tanja Poulain, Mandy Vogel, Andreas Hiemisch, Wieland Kiess, and Anja

Hilbert. "Prevalence of Pica and Rumination Behaviors in German Children Aged 7–14

and their Associations with Feeding, Eating, and General Psychopathology: A

Population-Based Study." *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 27.11 (2018):

1499-1508.

"Loves Baby Wipes / Eats Sand." *My Strange Addictions*, season 4, episode 4, TLC, 20 Feb.

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Michalska, Aneta, Natalia Szejko, Andrzej Jakubczyk, and Marcin Wojnar. "Nonspecific eating

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Roy, Aditi, Elena Fuentes-Afflick, Lia C.H. Fernald, and Sera L. Young. "Pica is Prevalent and Strongly Associated with Iron Deficiency Among Hispanic Pregnant Women Living in the United States." *Appetite* 120 (2018): 163-170.

Shunyata, Kaiya. “My Battle with Pica, Alcohol Dependency, and ‘Swallow’.” *Lithium Magazine*, 12 Dec. 2020.

<https://lithiummagazine.com/2020/12/14/my-battle-with-pica-alcohol-dependency-and-swallow/>.

Smith, Cassidy, host. *Let's Get Mental*, episode 16. Spotify, Sept. 2019,

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0u3bzKsmwaXf5IVjvhkdM0?si=w9ki4MW9QMackHyf9Rn6Cw>.

*Swallow*. Directed by Carlo Mirabella-Davis, IFC Films, 2019.

“Woman Eats More Than 100 Bars Of Soap Every Year | My Strange Addiction.” *YouTube*, Mar.

28, 2021, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=a1rpr0Afhfg>.

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Babu, Aadhya. "Pica Disorder | My Experience and Recovery." *YouTube*, Oct. 8, 2020,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYt0V6kTJX0>.

Aadhya Babu is a final year dental student who has struggled with Pica due to an iron deficiency. Her information is credible as she provides personal accounts of Pica and how it has impacted her, as well as her journey through recovery. This source is primarily qualitative data, featuring anecdotes such as "Initially when I told my mom that I have discovered that I have something called Pica Disorder she looked at me very strangely and she could not believe that I have been doing this for a span of 1.5 years to 2 years. But I told her that I can seek help for this and this is not something that's happening because of something that I did" (6:14 - 6:34). This addresses the stakeholder of someone with Pica and features a primarily scientific lens to explain Pica and its effects on the body. This source best develops the thesis as it directly addresses the importance of having people with Pica share their experiences, as well as showcasing a non-stigmatizing representation of Pica.

*Bruce Almighty*. Directed by Tom Shadyac, Universal Pictures, 2003.

*Bruce Almighty* is a 2003 feature film directed by Tom Shadyac with a recurring joke centered around Pica. This provides a media example of how Pica has been used as a comedic device, as well as how the media infantilizes Pica and delegitimizes the dangers of the disorder. It features primarily qualitative data, showing a young boy eating glitter and glue, as well as the exasperated reaction of his caretaker. This addresses the stakeholder of those who interact with people with Pica, and develops the sociocultural lens by highlighting the apathetic and annoyed feelings of outside adults towards Pica in

children. *Bruce Almighty* relates to the thesis by exemplifying how Pica is commonly mocked with comedic devices, as well as how that can result in a lack of care in those who are not directly affected by Pica.

Chalker, Annette E. "The Psychopathology of Pica: Etiology, Assessment, and Treatment."

*Inquiries Journal* 9.02 (2017). <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1540>.

Annette E. Chalker has a Masters degree in Public Health from University of York in York, United Kingdom, and specializes in eating disorders. Her experience examining data about eating disorders and her degree in public health makes her sources reliable. This source is primarily qualitative data discussing possible causes for Pica, such as, "However in situations in which iron-deficiency anemia has occurred in an individual, glossitis can be a related consequence. Glossitis is the inflammation of the tongue, which can be presented as an enlarged tongue, pain in the tongue, or the slight change of color of the tongue. In order to address the associated discomfort, individuals can sometimes engage in pagophagia, which is the consumption of ice." She also discusses treatments for Pica, like, "the purposeful removal of reinforcing features and triggers associated with engaging in pica behavior..." This source focuses on the scientific lens to identify the etiology of Pica and how Pica can best be treated in a clinical setting, with some hints of a historical lens due to the antiquity of Pica in human society. This paper best addresses the thesis by pointing out key treatment options, which are typically left out of the media, while also showing there are numerous causes of Pica, not just the psychological ones that media favors.

Cruz, Ana Margarida, Manuel Gonçalves-Pinho, João Vasco Santos, Francisco Coutinho, Isabel Brandão, and Alberto Freitas. "Eating disorders—Related Hospitalizations in Portugal: A

Nationwide Study from 2000 to 2014.” *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, vol. 51, no. 10, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2018, pp. 1201–06,

<https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22955>.

All authors are associated with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Porto in Portugal, and the *International Journal of Eating Disorders* is renowned for its rigorous peer review system and dedication to accurately presenting data on eating disorders.

Therefore, due to the medical expertise of the researchers and the rigor of the journal, this data is reliable. This study was primarily focused on quantitative data, such as, “Pica and psychogenic vomiting had the lowest LoS [length of stay] with a median of 5 days.” The study aimed to understand the demographics of those hospitalized with eating disorders, and was the first of its kind to include Pica, rumination disorder, and psychogenic vomiting in its research. As such, it had a scientific lens, wishing to uncover the raw data behind eating disorders. It propels the thesis by clearly outlining the dangers of Pica, as it was revealed to be the most deadly eating disorder examined, helping to disprove the myth that Pica is silly and harmless.

Hartmann, Andrea S, Tanja Poulain, Mandy Vogel, Andreas Hiemisch, Wieland Kiess, and Anja Hilbert. "Prevalence of Pica and Rumination Behaviors in German Children Aged 7–14 and their Associations with Feeding, Eating, and General Psychopathology: A Population-Based Study." *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 27.11 (2018): 1499-1508.

All of the authors have experience in medicine, and many specialize in pediatric care, psychology, and research. The journal, *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, is Europe's only peer-reviewed journal devoted only to youth psychiatry, and they have a

heavy focus on empirical data. Due to the medical and research backgrounds of the authors and the empirically-minded approach of the journal, this source is credible. Data was primarily quantitative, such as, “Correlations with symptoms of avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) were significant but small (pica:  $r=0.18$ , RD:  $r=0.27$ , both  $p<0.01$ ). Prevalence rates of recurring pica behavior were significantly increased if recurring RD was present (58.33%), and also vice versa (17.50%)” (1). This addresses the scientific lens, looking at the intersection between eating disorders as well as the prevalence of certain eating disorders among youth, while also addressing the stakeholder of young people with Pica. This propels the thesis by clarifying the surprisingly high prevalence of Pica in young people, adding weight to Pica’s stigma by indicating the large proportion of children affected.

"Loves Baby Wipes / Eats Sand." *My Strange Addictions*, season 4, episode 4, TLC, 20 Feb. 2013.

This source is an episode of *My Strange Addictions*. While not a peer reviewed source, it shows how media has added to the stigmatization of Pica, specifically through its painting of those with Pica as unintelligent. It features qualitative evidence, detailing Brea’s eating habits and describing how she began eating sand, as well as showing the concerns of her sister and medical professionals. The video focuses on the social and futuristic lens, showing the social ramifications of Brea’s eating disorder and her relationship with her sister, while also discussing what could happen to her teeth and stomach in the future should she continue eating sand. The source supports the thesis by showing how the media tricks audiences into believing that those with Pica are acting out

of sheer ignorance to the effects on their body, despite Brea's continued inability to stop snacking on nail files after learning what they are doing to her teeth.

Michalska, Aneta, Natalia Szejko, Andrzej Jakubczyk, and Marcin Wojnar. "Nonspecific eating disorders - a subjective review." *Psychiatria Polska*. 50 (3): 497–507 (2016).

doi:10.12740/PP/59217

All of the authors are associated with the Chair and Department of Psychiatry of the Medical University of Warsaw. Based on the medical background of the authors, it can be assured that their data is credible. Furthermore, the fact that it is compiling data from numerous peer-reviewed sources ensures that the full scope of research is being addressed. This source clearly outlines the lacking information on eating disorders which are not Anorexia and Bulimia, urging for greater research to be conducted. It has primarily quantitative evidence, such as, "1.3% of individuals being treated for eating disorders [11], 21.8% of persons with intellectual disabilities [12], 48% of autistic children [7] met the criteria for pica" (500). It examines the historical lens, compiling a history of Pica as a diagnosis as well as research done on it, as well as a scientific perspective, describing possible causes and common comorbidities. This aids the thesis by revealing how drastically limited research on Pica is, encouraging the necessity of comprehensive research on the disorder.

*My Strange Addictions*, seasons 1-5, TLC, 2010-2015.

*My Strange Addictions* was a 5 season long program on TLC, aimed at showcasing those with "strange" habits. Most episodes featured Pica, though it was never named throughout the show's run. While not a scientific source, it does show the most prevalent and longest-running example of Pica in mainstream media, as well as the biases said

media spread. It relied on qualitative evidence, documenting the eating habits of those on the show as well as the reactions from their family, friends, and medical personnel.

Commonly, those with Pica were twisted to appear ignorant or repulsive. The show focused on the social lens, examining how Pica impacted the relationships of the person struggling with it, while also featuring aspects of the futuristic lens by indicating future consequences of Pica behaviors. This show proves the thesis by showing how the media has consistently framed Pica in a negative, frightening light.

“Nicola M. Chung, PhD.” *Florida International University*, 7 Jan 2019.

<https://medicine.fiu.edu/about/faculty-and-staff/profiles/psychiatry-and-behavioral-health/nicchung.html>.

The Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine of the Florida International University is reliable in its description of Nicola M. Chung as Assistant Professor, as well as describing her credentials, as they would not want to hire someone unqualified in psychology. It is qualitative in nature, listing her previous works and awards, like the “University of Miami Fred and Helen Flipse Annual Award - 2013” and the “Research Society on Alcoholism Student Merit Award - 2000.” This addresses the stakeholder of psychologists, as it explains why Chung is qualified to speak about Pica and adds credibility to her treatment suggestions on the show *My Strange Addiction*. This propels the thesis by stressing the importance of including medical professionals in the discussion around Pica, while also showing how trained professionals are best suited to give medical advice and information.

Rajput, Neha, Keerthana Kumar, and Khayati Moudgil. "Pica an Eating Disorder: An Overview." *Pharmacophore* 11.4 (2020).

The authors are all medical professionals, with two focusing on pharmacology and one focusing on surgery. *Pharmacophore*, the journal the paper is published under, is peer reviewed and focuses on Pharmaceutical and Medical Science, which ensures all of the provided research is accurate. This study is primarily qualitative, explaining different types of Pica behavior and their prevalence, such as how “Pica is widespread in western Kenya, southern Africa and India. It has been recorded in Australia, Canada, Jamaica, Wales etc. In certain nations such as Uganda, India, and Iran, etc., soil may be purchased for consumption” (2). This source focuses on the scientific and cultural lenses, examining which demographics are most likely to experience Pica and what cultures and environments can increase the likelihood of engaging in Pica behaviors. This source supports the thesis by providing background information on Pica, as well as proving Pica is not a disorder seen only among children or one that is caused by only one factor.

Roy, Aditi, Elena Fuentes-Afflick, Lia C.H. Fernald, and Sera L. Young. "Pica is Prevalent and Strongly Associated with Iron Deficiency Among Hispanic Pregnant Women Living in the United States." *Appetite* 120 (2018): 163-170.

Each of the authors was associated with public health in some caliber, with Young also having experience in Anthropology. *Appetite* is a peer reviewed journal focusing on cultural, social, psychological, sensory, and physiological influences on food, meaning information can be trusted as valid due to the rigor of testing and the experience of the authors. The study was mainly quantitative, with results such as, “Pica during the current pregnancy was significantly associated with higher TfR [transferrin receptor] concentrations (OR: 1.29; 95% CI: 1.11, 1.51) indicative of low iron stores and greater food insecurity (OR: 1.20, 95% CI: 1.03, 1.40).” Focusing on both the scientific and

economic lenses, the study points out evidence of low minerals in the blood as a source of Pica, as well as food insecurity caused by low income. This source supports the thesis by revealing the high prevalence of Pica among certain communities, as well as providing empirical information on some of the causes of Pica.

Shunyata, Kaiya. "My Battle with Pica, Alcohol Dependency, and 'Swallow'." *Lithium Magazine*, 12 Dec. 2020.

<https://lithiummagazine.com/2020/12/14/my-battle-with-pica-alcohol-dependency-and-swallow/>.

Kaiya Shunyata is a Staff Writer for Obscur Media and Lithium Magazine, who has a focus in pop culture and Pica. Not only do their struggles with Pica allow him to address accuracies and flaws within the movie *Swallow*, which he reviewed for Lithium Magazine, they also help show that people with Pica are intelligent and capable, helping alleviate stigma. This source is primarily qualitative, addressing his realities of Pica, like, "I knew it was wrong and that I was hurting myself, but I was doing so by my own hand. For the first time in the year, I felt in control over my life. With every piece of lead or paint or sand that went down my throat, I felt alive." This addresses the lens of an adult with Pica, as well as someone who has experienced a relapse due to media portrayal, which is an unspoken majority among those with eating disorders. It focuses on the cultural lens by examining how the media describes and portrays Pica, as well as the ethical lens by implying the harmful impacts media portrayals can have on those with Pica. This source propels the thesis by showing the double-edged nature of media portrayals, while also showing the importance of the voices of those with Pica.

Smith, Cassidy, host. *Let's Get Mental*, episode 16. Spotify, Sept. 2019,

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0u3bzKsmwaXf5IVjvhkdM0?si=w9ki4MW9QMackHyf9Rn6Cw>.

Cassidy Smith is a podcast host with self-described “mental health problems” who focuses on discussing varying mental health conditions. Smith is not a professional, but her podcast is vital in showing the unfettered biases of the masses upon watching media representations of Pica, showing exactly how poor portrayals of Pica lead to repulsion in outside audiences. She uses mainly qualitative evidence, some of which is disingenuous, like her inaccurate assertion, “And, this can also be classified as an addiction. I mean, it makes sense if you think about it, ‘cause these people are, like, OCD and all this stuff” (3:00 - 3:14). This addresses the stakeholder of people without Pica who interact with Pica only through media, and features the sociocultural lens, showing how people without Pica discuss and demean those with the disorder due to cultural misrepresentations. This propels the thesis by clearly demonstrating how media leads to stigma within uninformed audiences, proving the necessity of accurate medical information within the media and compassionate representations of Pica.

*Swallow*. Directed by Carlo Mirabella-Davis, IFC Films, 2019.

*Swallow* is a French-American film directed by Carlo Mirabella-Davis in 2019 which focuses on the struggles of Hunter, who develops Pica due to her pregnancy, her husband’s neglect and the trauma of her childhood. This is an example of a modern media representation of Pica, which tackles the topic in a mature manner, but while also utilizing some stigmatizing tactics due to being a psychological horror film. It uses primarily qualitative data, showing Pica behavior, like eating marbles, as well as

psychological examples, abuse and trauma, why someone may develop Pica. This addresses the lens of someone with Pica, and focuses on the environmental lens, pointing out what environmental factors can lead to Pica, as well as the ethical lens, showing the humanity of Hunter and her struggles. This propels the thesis by showing improvements in representation, indicating a positive trend in how media talks about Pica and using some techniques that can be further built upon to increase compassion in audiences.

“Woman Eats More Than 100 Bars Of Soap Every Year | My Strange Addiction.” *YouTube*, Mar. 28, 2021, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=a1rpr0Afhfg>.

This source is from an episode of *My Strange Addictions*. While not a peer reviewed source, it shows how media has added to the stigmatization of Pica, as well as some of the things media has done well in the past. It features qualitative evidence, showing Tempestt’s eating habits and describing her past, as well as featuring the knowledge of psychologist Nicola Chung. The video focuses on the social and futuristic lens, showing the social ramifications of Tempestt’s eating disorder in her familial relationships, while also discussing what could happen to her in the future should she continue her behavior. The source supports the thesis by showing how the media dramaticized Pica, but also how it has done well in seeking medical professionals and the etiology of Pica in the program.