

## Critique

Pica, an eating disorder that is very prevalent among blacks, particularly southern, rural, pregnant women, is a serious problem that has received inadequate attention among researchers. Lacey's analysis of the importance of this disorder is made clear in her article.

Pica generally refers to the ingestion of nonfood substances. Lacey points out that there has been little attention given to the causes and effects related to the ingestion of nonfood substances. The lack of copious studies in this area may be attributed to several factors, the most important being that pica is perceived as a problem indigenous to the black community and pregnant women. As a result, the problem has not been embraced by researchers. But, as Lacey suggests, "if professionals were to view data from a range of sources, they would find that individuals ingest various substances on a regular basis over varying periods of time and that all practitioners are not pregnant women."

Stereotypically, pregnant women crave weird, strange, or different types of food at inopportune times. What is more difficult to understand is that some black pregnant women have been said to crave nonfood items such as clay or dirt. Why? Lacey states in her article, that the theory of cultural basis, as put forth by Lackey, suggests that geophagia is culturally passed from generation to generation. Lacey's statement, "West Africans ate clay to make themselves (sick) and thus, unfit for slave trade," implies a very important message; blacks would have chosen to be sick rather than to be slaves! On the other hand, because blacks chose to willfully eat clay/dirt, medical practitioners saw no need to intervene, and therefore blamed blacks for this disorder.

Today, geophagia (clay/dirt eating) is still a serious problem among black women. And it is associated with sickness and death. Why then, do so many engage in its consumption? Lacey maintains that "it (geophagia or clay/dirt eating) is decreasing due to education, nutrition," and what she describes as "cultural alteration," which means the assimilation of black and rural southern people into "white and northern cultural styles."

Another disorder of concern is pagophagia, or ice eating, which is not all that unusual and should not be labeled as pica. Lacey points this out as being a paradox, "it is perhaps the most frequently experienced, yet it is the most 'normal' of the labeled substances of pica." In agreement with Lacey, pagophagia is very common and probably not harmful, since water is so necessary for the maintenance of the human body. None the less, one might tend to drink too much water at a particular time and may feel a little discomfort.

Lacey contends that most of the studies done on pica tended to treat it as a contemporary problem. Thus, pica is not treated as a serious problem or as a significant eating disorder. However, as Lacey suggests,

“understanding pica will require vigorous research and sensitive researchers who consider culture, race, and/or ethnicity as intervening variables rather than as end-stage ones.”

Phyllis Gray-Ray