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## **A ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN THE CASE OF EATING DISORDERS**

According to statistics, 10,200 deaths each year in the United States are the direct result of eating disorders, which equates to one death every 52 minutes. Overall, 5% of the population struggle with this condition. Additionally, anyone – regardless of age, race, gender, or sexual orientation – can be at risk. To effectively treat and prevent the spread of eating disorders among future generations, it is crucial to understand the underlying causes of these illnesses. This study demonstrates a connection between emotions and eating disorders, as confirmed by scientific evidence.

The American Psychiatric Association states that the most common types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder, and other specified feeding or eating disorders. Each type can be a very serious condition affecting the physical, psychological, and social functioning of a person. Generally, eating disorders are associated with preoccupations with food, weight, and body shape, as well as anxiety about eating or the consequences of eating certain foods. A person diagnosed with an eating disorder may engage in restrictive eating, avoidance of certain foods, binge eating, purging by vomiting or laxative misuse, or compulsive exercise. These destructive types of behavior can become compulsive in ways that resemble addiction.

Scientists first started to hypothesize why certain people are prone to eating disorders in the 1960s. In his book 'Emotional Intelligence,' the renowned psychologist Daniel Goleman describes research that aimed to answer this question. The research involved more than 900 female students in grades seven through ten at an affluent high school in the suburbs of Minneapolis. The data confirmed that problems in the emotional sphere – particularly the inability to understand and control one's feelings – are a significant cause of eating disorders. Additionally, a cause-and-effect chain

was identified through prospective studies. This chain starts with the societal pressure on girls to be thin, as thinness is often seen as a symbol of female beauty. Long before adolescence, many girls already worry about their weight. However, the research in Minneapolis showed that this factor alone is not enough to explain why some people eventually develop eating disorders.

Daniel Goleman also references the studies of Gloria Leon, a psychologist at the University of Minnesota. Gloria Leon states that most children quickly learn to recognize their own feelings and the signals that their bodies send. This is a fundamental aspect of emotional learning, and studies have shown that a lack of these skills is a reliable predictor of developing an eating disorder over the course of several years. For some patients, food becomes a habitual way of self-soothing to cope with an overwhelming mix of emotions. However, this behavior typically conflicts with societal beauty standards, which can contribute to the development of eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder.

According to Gloria Leon, the most effective treatment is a course of corrective therapy aimed at helping patients develop the emotional skills they lack. After completing therapy, people with eating disorders tend to have a better understanding of their emotions and can choose healthier ways to calm themselves without relying on harmful eating habits.

## References

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