

It's Complicated

“When she was a little girl, she had to have everything arranged in her closet according to color and size.”

“She always seemed to take things much harder than others.”

“If he didn't get an A, he wouldn't speak for an entire day.”

These statements are typical of the type of observations made by the parents of eating-disordered individuals, sometimes decades later. We come into the world hard-wired to have certain personalities. These predispositions are then modified, altered, strengthened or sustained over time.

One's perceptions and reactions to events, both benign and traumatic, combined with his or her unique physiology, can contribute to the development of an eating disorder. Notice that I've made no mention of food, diets, or the media. It's not that those are not important factors; they are. The point is that eating disorders are complicated.

Predisposing factors such as personality type, grief and loss; precipitating factors, including puberty or going on a diet; and maintaining factors, e.g. anxiety management or fear of change, are all pieces of the puzzle. These are complex illnesses that require multi-faceted treatment strategies because every human being is complex. Let's not reduce a life-threatening psychiatric disorder to something as simple as “a diet gone awry.”