

The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez Reaction Paper

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GCN 617: NOS Crisis Intervention Strategies For Trauma And Abuse

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April 5, 2023

My thoughts on Pearl Fernandez as a person concur with the scholar Wendy Smith (The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez, 2020) that Pearl struggled with a lot, every day, all day. Pearl went through a lot of trauma, starting in her childhood, that was never processed or healed. She was diagnosed with many disorders, and there was no treatment record throughout the series. All of that certainly impacted her parenting skills. She could only give what she had: hurt and trauma. Her idea of the outside world as dangerous and her potential victimization did not allow her to see Gabriel's need for protection, as she was never protected.

It is hard to know Isauro Aguirrez's true motives for treating Gabriel as he did with the limited information given in the series about him. However, it seemed like he was a codependent person. His emotional, psychological, and behavioral conditions may have developed due to his prolonged exposure to and practice of a set of oppressive rules (Wegscheider-Cruse, 1984, as cited in (Beattie, 2023) imposed by Pearl. Her family described her as the abusive one. They reported her to be controlling with her boyfriends, making them do what she wanted or not she would leave. They also reported that she was abusive and would often hit and scratch him, even in front of others.

Ultimately, the system failed Gabriel at different levels. The social workers, given that Gabriel was locked in a cabinet during one of the visits, never requested to see him, fully trusting the parent's words even though their visit was due to potential abuse against the child. In addition, the supervisor never asked the social workers if they saw the child and never requested them to return. Other workers from different departments could have intervened but did not because their shift was almost over, and they wanted to impress someone else, which shows their lack of commitment to genuinely helping the children in need. Lastly, whoever oversees all those people failed Gabriel too.

If I were Gabriel's therapist, I could use play therapy to provide him with a safe space to talk about everything that happened in his house, observe all visible bruises, and include all observations in my notes. After his session, I also could have contacted his teacher and the social workers involved in the case to hear their perspectives on Gabriel's situation and assess the level of abuse and neglect. Then, after calling Child Protective Services (CPS) to make a report, I could follow up with them for updates or even visit their physical building with all documentation I had and talk to someone in person to ensure they would take care of Gabriel.

Among many other things that could have been done differently, the caseworkers could have been more diligent in their evaluations of Gabriel's family and removed him from that environment, especially after multiple reports of suspected abuse. Following CPS's guidelines and maintaining accurate documentation are two things that could have been done differently. CPS provides a guide for its caseworkers, giving them directives on their responsibilities and essential information that must be written in their intake paperwork, including detailed information about alleged maltreatment. The guide also includes the social workers' code of ethics, which explicitly states their duty to act on behalf of clients who cannot make informed decisions. Furthermore, they must take reasonable steps to safeguard the interests and rights of those clients (NASW, 2021, as cited in DePanfilis & Salus, 2003).

The first quarter of the third episode of the series was dedicated to giving the viewers Pearl Fernandez, Gabriel's mother's background. Growing up, her father was in and out of jail, and her mother used to hit her so much that she believed her mother hated her. Pearl was also a victim of sexual abuse by a gang, which lasted for two days. She started drinking alcohol and using heavy drugs by the age of nine, ran away from her home at eleven, and stopped attending school between thirteen and fourteen years of age. Likely as a consequence of so much trauma,

her brain development was impaired, and she developed a depressive disorder, possible personality disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. She also dealt with an eating disorder and a limited intellectual capacity. Needless to say, she was mentally ill.

Isauro Aguirre, Pearl's boyfriend, was not reported to have any mental illnesses. But on the other hand, he was described as a nice man who was compassionate, caring, and patient with the older people he cared for. Those facts are summed with the reports against Pearl as being abusive and manipulative in her relationships and Isauro's apparent codependency; it is hard to know if he was also mentally ill or evil.

At the conclusion of the series, anger and sadness were prevalent among the emotions I felt. Gabriel's case happened in 2013, and the trials in the proceeding years revealed the system's brokenness and desperate need for repair to function as intended. Yet, five years after Gabriel's death, another little boy died in a shockingly similar manner in the same area where Gabriel used to live, under the watch of the same system that failed Gabriel. It is outrageous and raises even more questions about the system's integrity. After all the exposure to a series of failures from the system, what were they doing during the five years post-Gabriel's death that they still did not have the time to reevaluate its functioning and change? How could such horrendous acts happen again? When will it change? All of those questions go unanswered, but Gabriel's history certainly impacted me as a person and emerging counselor. It opened my eyes to the importance of advocating for the most vulnerable and never underestimating the possibility of abuse. As a future mental health counselor to me, Gabriel's case highlighted the vitality of thorough assessments, documentation, reporting, and follow-ups. A child's life could be at risk, and we could help save them.

References

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