THE CINCINNATI ZOO CRISIS: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS ON U.S. MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS’ FRAMING OF THE INCIDENT

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Abstract

On May 28, 2016, a child fell into the Gorilla World exhibit at the Cincinnati Zoo, where he encountered a seventeen-year-old 450-lb gorilla named Harambe. When Harambe failed to exit the enclosure, the Cincinnati Zoo’s Dangerous Animal Response Team shot and killed the gorilla to prevent further interaction between him and the child. As a result, the public responded with outcry and condemnation, which continued for months after the incident’s occurrence. Through a conventional qualitative content analysis, this thesis analyzes how national U.S. media organizations’ online articles framed the incident and how those frames propelled the controversy among the public. More specifically, this thesis identifies the sentiments and frames used to portray the gorilla and his actions, the child and his actions, and the options of whether to tranquilize or kill the gorilla. One of the most significant findings of this study reveals that the media’s frames exposed several contradictory messages sent by the Cincinnati Zoo to the public, which most likely fed the on-going controversy. From a theoretical perspective, this illustrates how media frames can influence the public’s opinion on a given case, while from a practical standpoint, such findings allowed for the development of recommendations on how to prevent such controversies. More specifically, this thesis recommends that communication practitioners assert the organization’s mission statement in messages, ensure that messages align with the mission statement, clarify desirability of the organization’s action over other possibilities, and address all aspects of the situation. Overall, this thesis provides one instance of how the media can use framing to influence the public agenda.

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Introduction

Background Information

On Saturday, May 28, 2016, a four-year-old boy climbed into the Cincinnati Zoo’s Gorilla World enclosure and was approached by one of the zoo’s gorillas, a 17-year-old 450-pound silverback gorilla named Harambe. According to the Cincinnati Zoo, zookeepers called Harambe to leave the enclosure, but the gorilla did not respond, approached the child, and began “violently dragging and throwing the child” (“Cincinnati Zoo devastated…,” 2016, para. 3). Based on the gorilla’s size and actions, the Cincinnati Zoo determined that the gorilla posed a threat to the child and, as a result, shot and killed him.

On the day of the incident, as well as during the incident’s aftermath, the Cincinnati Zoo utilized three primary means of communication to address the public’s comments and concerns: press releases, a press conference, and an FAQ webpage. A total of six press releases were published on the Cincinnati Zoo’s website over a span of six weeks. The first of these press releases appeared on the day of the incident and the last was posted several weeks later to announce the re-opening of Gorilla World. In addition to these press releases, one press conference was held with zoo Director Thane Maynard at the zoo, and one webpage was published with answers to the public’s most frequently asked questions about the incident. The following provides a summary of each press release, the press conference, and the FAQ webpage.
Press Releases:

On May 28, 2016, the day the incident occurred, the Cincinnati Zoo published its first press release addressing the case. This brief press release recounted the incident: The 4-year-old boy was described as having “climbed through a public barrier” and fallen into the gorilla exhibit (“Media update…,” 2016, para. 1). With the child in the enclosure, zookeepers called the gorillas out of the exhibit. While the two female gorillas responded and exited the enclosure immediately, Harambe, the male gorilla, did not. The press release proceeded to explain that, with Harambe remaining in the enclosure, the situation had become “life-threatening” and required the zoo’s Dangerous Animal Response Team to kill him (“Media update…,” 2016, para. 1). To further support the Dangerous Animal Response Team’s decision, zoo Director Maynard stated, “The Zoo security team’s quick response saved the child’s life” (“Media update…,” 2016, para. 2). Maynard also described the death of the gorilla as a “huge loss” and added that the zoo’s “thoughts and prayers are with the family and little boy” (“Media update…,” 2016, para. 2). The press release also acknowledged that the child was “alert” and sent to the Children’s Hospital and Medical Center, as well as that the zoo would remain open, but that Gorilla World would be “closed until further notice” (“Media update…,” 2016, para. 4).

The following day, May 29, 2016, the zoo published a more detailed, follow-up press release. The press release began by stating that the zoo was “…in mourning and trying to process…” the gorilla’s death (“Cincinnati Zoo devastated…,” 2016, para. 1). A statement from zoo Director Maynard was also included, reiterating that the “…child’s life was in danger and a quick decision had to be made…” Maynard also quickly addressed the rebuttal and told readers that tranquilizers were not an option because they
“…do not take effect for several minutes…” (“Cincinnati Zoo devastated…,” 2016, para. 2). The press release also noted that both the zoo staff, Cincinnati Fire Department, and Dangerous Animal Response Team were present at the scene of the incident, as well as that the child was now “okay” and had been released from the hospital (“Cincinnati Zoo devastated…,” 2016, para. 5). The press release concluded with a statement that the Gorilla World’s barrier had been regularly inspected by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), that the breached barrier successfully served its purpose for 38 years, and finally, that the barrier would be investigated “…for the safety of our visitors and animals” (“Cincinnati Zoo devastated…,” 2016, para. 7).

On June 1, 2016, the zoo published its third press release, which included a brief statement that focused less on the incident itself and more on moving forward. This press release acted as a response to those who “…asked how they can help gorillas in the wild” (“Honoring Harambe,” 2016, para. 1). In response to these queries, the zoo mentioned its support of the Mbeli Bai Study in the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park and expressed that, in “honor of Harambe,” people could donate to this cause (“Honoring Harambe,” 2016, para. 3). The zoo also included multiple others links on how to support gorilla conservation, such as through recycling cellphones or adopting a gorilla (“Honoring Harambe,” 2016).

The following day, June 2, 2016, the zoo published another press release focused on the reassessment and improvement of Gorilla World. The zoo began by stating that in the 38 years Gorilla World was open, “[o]ver 43 million people have safely enjoyed…” the exhibit (“Cincinnati Zoo plans to reopen…,” 2016, para. 1). The recent incident with
Harambe was described as the exhibit’s first “breach” of safety and a call for reevaluation, which resulted in a new 42” high barrier “with solid wood beams at the top and bottom with knotted rope netting” (“Cincinnati Zoo plans to reopen…,” 2016, para. 1, 3). Zoo Director Maynard described the improved barriers as an illustration of the zoo’s “sustained commitment” to meeting the Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ (AZA) standards, a commitment which the zoo ensured the Gorilla World exhibit reflected over the past 38 years (“Cincinnati Zoo plans to reopen…,” 2016, para. 5). Kris Vehrs, the Interim President and CEO of the AZA, was also quoted saying that the organization would make a stronger effort to prevent situations like the Cincinnati Zoo case from occurring again in the future (“Cincinnati Zoo plans to reopen…,” 2016).

Several days later, on June 7, 2016, the zoo published a press release announcing the re-opening of Gorilla World. Zoo Director Maynard was quoted saying, “I see today’s reopening as the symbolic start of a healing process for our staff…” (“Cincinnati Zoo’s Gorilla World…,” 2016, para. 2). After this statement, the press release illustrated the grief the zoo staff and volunteers had been experiencing by explaining that, it was not until the re-opening of Gorilla World, that these individuals viewed the exhibit and its gorillas “for the first time” since the incident (“Cincinnati Zoo’s Gorilla World…,” 2016, para. 3). A description of the improved barrier was also included: it is now “taller” and includes a “knotted rope netting and surveillance cameras” (“Cincinnati Zoo’s Gorilla World…,” 2016, para. 4). The press release also mentioned that the other gorillas were doing fine, as well as that the zoo would be “redoubling its efforts to support wild gorilla conservation” (“Cincinnati Zoo’s Gorilla World…,” 2016, para. 6).

On June 16, 2016, the zoo published its final press release regarding the incident.
This press release took the form of a letter to the local community, written by zoo Director Maynard on behalf of the Cincinnati Zoo. Maynard placed blame on the “social media age” for “the typhoon of international criticism and finger pointing” resulting from the incident (“An open letter…,” 2016, para. 2). Nevertheless, Maynard thanked those in the local community, including “southwest Ohio, northern Kentucky, and southeast Indiana,” for their “concern” for the Cincinnati Zoo and its staff as they coped with the loss of Harambe (“An open letter…,” 2016, para. 3). Maynard then reasserted the zoo’s partnership with gorilla conservation efforts, such as the Congolese conservationists and the Wildlife Conservation Society, parties both involved with the conservation efforts in the Nouabalé-Ndko National Park. Maynard also iterated the importance of zoos in promoting animal conservation. Finally, Maynard added that the zoo would be expanding Gorilla World in order to “double the size” of the enclosure and improve the visibility of the gorillas for visitors (“An open letter…,” 2016, para. 7).

Maynard’s press release stands apart from the other press releases because in his letter, Maynard implemented a negative sentiment. All of the press releases, prior to this one, utilized a more neutral sentiment by remaining more factual. For instance, the press release published before Maynard’s letter, addressed the re-opening of Gorilla World and the updates made to the enclosure’s barrier (“Cincinnati Zoo’s Gorilla World…,” 2016). These updates were all factual, and therefore, the press release remained neutral. In contrast to that press release, Maynard’s letter took on a much more personal tone. Moreover, Maynard did not merely state the facts, but asserted his opinion that the incident had been magnified by the public. As mentioned previously, Maynard explained that he felt the “social media age” played a significant role in popularizing the case (“An
open letter…,” 2016, para. 2). By blaming others for the incident, Maynard used a negative tone in his press release. However, Maynard took a very different approach in his conference with the press.

**Press Conference:**

On May 30, 2016, the zoo held a press conference at which Maynard spoke for about thirty minutes. A majority of the conference included information shared in the zoo’s written press releases. For instance, within the first five minutes, Maynard addressed the loss of the gorilla but stood by the zoo’s decision to shoot him: “Naturally, we did not take the shooting of Harambe lightly, but that child’s life was in danger” (WLWT, 2016). Maynard also referred to Cincinnati Fire Department’s official report, which he said stated that “this child was being dragged around, his head was banging on concrete” (WLWT, 2016). In addition to describing the incident, Maynard answered the press’ questions, which covered the following topics: First, Maynard recounted the incident in greater detail, particularly the thought process behind why the Dangerous Animal Response Team dispatched Harambe. Maynard also acknowledged that the other gorillas did not witness the incident and had not been significantly impacted. In addition, Maynard established that he found the barrier adequate, but that it would still undergo evaluation and improvement before Gorilla World would reopen. Finally, Maynard directed conversation to the future by discussing what would happen to Harambe’s remains.

**Webpage:**

In addition to publishing press releases and holding a press conference, the zoo created a webpage dedicated to answering the public’s frequently asked questions about
Harambe. This webpage consisted of five sections:

- FAQ
- About Harambe
- Talking to Children about Harambe
- Honoring Harambe: How to Help Gorillas
- Gorilla Conservation

The “FAQ” section answered questions, such as “What happened at Gorilla World on May 28, 2016?” and “Why didn’t the Zoo use a non-lethal option?” (“Harambe FAQ,” 2016, para. 1, 11). The “About Harambe” section provided readers with background information about Harambe, including his previous residence at the Gladys Porter Zoo and later transfer to the Cincinnati Zoo, at which he was placed with two female gorillas for “social interaction” (“Harambe FAQ,” 2016, para. 27). The “How to Talk to Children about Harambe” section included information about how to explain death to a child. Finally, the remaining two sections, “Honoring Harambe” and “Gorilla Conversation,” addressed how the public could contribute to gorilla conservation and included links on how to donate to the Mbeli Bai Study, collect cellphones to recycle, and adopt a gorilla. These links were also included at the top of the webpage, along with a link to zoo Director Maynard’s letter.

Overall, the Cincinnati Zoo’s press releases, press conference, and FAQ webpage demonstrate the zoo’s effort to provide factual information about the incident to the public. From the day of the incident and onward, the zoo willingly shared details about what happened on May 28th, why the decision to dispatch the gorilla was made, and what changes would be made to the enclosure as a result. Moreover, all three types of
communication efforts illustrate that the zoo maintained a factual tone of voice and consistent standpoint on the case, with the exception of zoo Director Maynard’s letter. While Maynard included much of the same information in his letter as in the press releases, his letter also included some statements that carried a negative sentiment. Nevertheless, even in his letter, Maynard stood firmly by the zoo’s overall message that the right decision was to end the gorilla’s life.

**Theoretical Framework**

Although the Cincinnati Zoo took the traditional approaches to communicating its decision, Harambe’s death was one of the most heavily discussed controversial stories of 2016, which could potentially be attributed to the role of agenda setting in media coverage. In the *agenda setting* process, “an issue on the media agenda determines how the public agenda is formed, which in turn influences which issues policymakers consider” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 8). In this way, the media agenda influences what issues the public becomes concerned with and how the public feels about those particular issues. In turn, the public agenda influences the policymakers’ agendas. If one considers the Cincinnati Zoo case, for instance, the media agenda may be animal rights, perhaps specifically zoo animal rights. If the media influences the public to be concerned with zoo animal rights, then zoo animal rights will become a part of the public agenda. Once this happens, the public agenda will influence that of the policymakers. Once zoo animal rights are on the agenda of policymakers, these policymakers can pass laws to improve zoo animal rights. Thus, through agenda setting, the media can have a substantial impact on society, and there are several methods through which the media can achieve this goal, one of which is called framing.
Framing theory, often simply referred to as framing, posits that the media utilizes the “construction of messages and meanings...to influence key publics important to an organization” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 205). In other words, once the media has a topic on its agenda, the media uses frames, or specific portrayals, to “shape” the public’s interpretation of a given story on that topic (Hallahan, 1999). For example, as mentioned, zoo animal rights may be on the media agenda, and when the story of the Cincinnati Zoo case arises, the media may portray that story in such a way as to influence the public to be concerned with zoo animal rights. For instance, the media may frame the gorilla as innocent in order to influence to the public to have sympathy for the gorilla, which likewise may influence the public to potentially have more concern for zoo animal rights. Creating specific images to drive the overall agenda, like the innocent gorilla to drive sympathy for zoo animals overall, is a specific process that occurs during framing called priming.

Priming is the process through which “knowledge is...organized in human memory in cognitive structures or schemas” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 208). In simpler terms, a media organization’s frames can prime a person to develop an understanding of a given situation by influencing how he or she categorizes that information in his or her brain. Using the same example as before, the media may frame the gorilla as innocent. This frame may prime the public to categorize all gorillas as innocent, and potentially all other zoo animals as well. Thus, the media’s use of this frame primes the public to see zoo animals as in need of support and prepares them to accept the media’s agenda of

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1 Hallahan (1999) describes schemas as “constraints on the arrangement and interpretation of situations and events” that “have been conceptualized as categories (hierarchical structures), as prototypes (idealized representations of objects within particular classes), and as scripts (expected scenarios for events)” (p. 208).
supporting zoo animal rights. In this way, priming is the deepest layer of the agenda
setting process and the final step in driving the media agenda forward to result in societal
change. Taking the process of agenda setting into consideration, one can see how the
media may have played a significant role in how the public interpreted the Cincinnati Zoo
case, which is why this study sought to explore the role of framing in this controversy.

Statement of Problem

In an attempt to prevent controversy, as soon as the incident with Harambe
occurred, the Cincinnati Zoo made an immediate effort to communicate with the public.
In fact, the zoo was very forthcoming with details regarding its decision to shoot the
gorilla. As explored in the Background Information section, the Cincinnati Zoo released a
total of six press releases, held a press conference with zoo Director Thane Maynard, and
created a “Harambe FAQ” (2016) webpage. These communication efforts sought to
justify the zoo’s decision for killing the gorilla, as well as to explain how the zoo would
proceed now that the incident had occurred, such as how the barrier surrounding the
Gorilla World exhibit would be improved and how Harambe would be commemorated.
Unfortunately, when witness Kimberley O'Connor released footage of the incident
(TomoNews US, 2016), members of the public from around the world were able to
witness a portion of the incident and draw their own conclusions about how the situation
should have been handled. As a result, despite the Cincinnati Zoo’s efforts to
communicate that the gorilla was killed in order to ensure the child’s safety, the zoo’s
decision was met with outcry and condemnation from much of the public.

According to polls by The Denver Post and NJ.com, while most of the public felt
that the zoo had the right to kill the gorilla (62.24%, 1,246 votes; 62.77%, 263 votes),
over a quarter of voters felt that the gorilla should not have been killed (37.76%, 756 votes; 37.23%, 156 votes) (The Jersey Journal, 2016; Peart, 2016), which accounts for the sizeable number of individuals who protested the zoo’s decision. Protests started at the Cincinnati Zoo itself. Only two days after Harambe’s death, protestors arrived at the zoo with signs, some of which read “‘R.I.P. Harambe,’ ‘Because his life mattered’ and ‘In loving memory, Harambe’” (McPhate, 2016, para. 14). On the same day, many protestors returned to hold a candlelight vigil for the gorilla as well (Owsley, 2016). In addition to these protests and candlelight vigils at the zoo, others were held at other zoos across the country. Some protestors, however, took to the Internet to boycott the zoo’s decision. For example, Sheila Hurt (2016), a Cincinnati resident, started an online petition on Change.Org called “Justice for Harambe,” which accumulated 517,883 supporters within one week. Likewise, a Facebook group, also titled “Justice for Harambe,” was created and garnered over 100,000 members. Subsequently, the hashtag #JusticeforHarambe quickly became a trending topic worldwide and resulted in the creation of memes sporting the same phrase, or similar phrases, acknowledging the gorilla’s death. Remarkably, such responses from the public failed to subside and continued for months, swelling into a massive communication crisis for the zoo.

This communication crisis was a result of the disparity between the Cincinnati Zoo’s communication efforts and the public’s understanding of the incident. Therefore, this study sought to examine how the public came to disagree with the zoo’s decision, which likely occurred because of how the media framed the case, as noted in the Theoretical Framework section. Thus, each research question sought to explore the frames used by national U.S. media organizations to portray specific aspects of the
incident, which included (RQ1) the overall frames used (or the sentiments) to portray the case, (RQ2) the frames used to portray the gorilla and his actions, (RQ3) the frames used to portray the child and his actions, and (RQ4) the frames used to portray the options to tranquilize or kill the gorilla. Each frame was selected for analyses for a specific reason: The sentiments used to frame the overall case were analyzed because the sentiment of an article strongly influences what other frames a media organization will use. Likewise, the frames used to portray the gorilla and his actions, as well as the child and his actions, were analyzed because the gorilla and the child were the two individuals at the heart of the incident, and the portrayals of these two individuals likely influenced how the public interpreted the case. Finally, the frames used to portray the options to tranquilize or kill the gorilla were explored because if a frame supported one option over the other, that frame most likely influenced the public to support, or not support, the zoo’s decision.

Rationale of the Study

Due to the level of controversy surrounding the Cincinnati Zoo case, this thesis sought to explore how the controversy could have been prevented, if not significantly diminished. Moreover, this case was unique to the Digital Age, in that it went viral and was discussed worldwide on the Internet and social media because of witness Kimberley O’Connor’s footage of the incident. In other words, individuals who were not even present at the Cincinnati Zoo, during the incident, were able to experience it for themselves. Thus, exploring this case sets a foundation for better understanding and preventing future cases also unique to the Digital Age, especially as it relates to the influential role of the media in shaping public opinion. As mentioned previously, the media agenda likely drove the public to become so passionate about how the Cincinnati
Zoo resolved the incident. Therefore, in order to better understand how the public’s opinions of the Cincinnati Zoo case may have been shaped by the media through framing, a conventional qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify and analyze the sentiments and themes found within national U.S. media organizations’ online articles about the Cincinnati Zoo case. This method allowed for the in-depth analysis of the themes presented by the media, which allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of how the Cincinnati Zoo could have improved their communication efforts to prevent such on-going controversy. Furthermore, this detailed exploration allowed the researcher to explore a contemporary case of framing.

Specific Purpose

By providing an understanding of how national U.S. media organizations framed the Cincinnati Zoo case, this study also offers communication scholars and practitioners, particularly those involved in crisis communication, with one instance of how the media played a role in propelling conversation around a controversial topic, despite the organization’s communication efforts to diffuse it. The insights from this study also build upon framing theory by illustrating the media’s influence on the public agenda and opinion. In addition, this study provides public relations and crisis communication professionals with recommendations for what crisis communication strategies to avoid and implement in similar future cases. Likewise, communication professionals who specifically work with individuals or organizations involved with animals would benefit from these insights because zoos have experienced similar cases in the past, such as when a five-year-old boy fell into a gorilla enclosure at the Jersey Zoo in 1986, as did a three-old-boy at the Brookfield Zoo in 1996. Lastly, this study provides insights on how to
communicate similar ethical decisions to the public in the future.

The goals of the study led to the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

RQ1: What sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations when framing the Cincinnati Zoo case?

RQ2: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the gorilla and his actions?

RQ3: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the child and his actions?

RQ4: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the options of tranquilizing or killing the gorilla?

**Definition of Terms**

Several key terms are used frequently throughout this study and should be noted. The definitions of these terms have been modified from those created by other scholars and tailored to suit the context of this paper. The definitions are as follows:

- Media Organization: The *media* is defined as “the main means of mass communication […] regarded collectively” (“Media,” 2017), and an *organization* is defined an “organized structure” (“Organization,” 2017). Thus, a *media organization* is defined as an organized structure that produces products of mass communication.

- Article: An *article* produced by such a media organization is defined as “a non-fictional piece of writing forming part of a journal…or other publication, and
treating a specific topic independently and distinctly” (“Article,” 2017).

- **Sentiment:** A *sentiment* is defined as “what one feels with regard to something” (“Sentiment,” 2017), specifically what each media organization felt about the Cincinnati Zoo’s decision. Three types of sentiments were identified:
  - A *positive* article supported the zoo’s decision to kill the gorilla.
  - A *negative* article did not support the zoo’s decision to kill the gorilla.
  - A *neutral* article reported on the incident without bias.

- **Theme:** A *theme* is defined as a topic found within multiple articles.
Literature Review

Before analyzing the articles produced by national U.S. media organizations, one must understand what preconceived ideas the authors of such articles may hold about animal use and zoos, since the authors’ opinions of these topics likely influenced how they portrayed the Cincinnati Zoo case. Therefore, this literature review examines primary research studies that demonstrate the public’s attitudes towards animal use, which is the “wide range of different practices that involve humans using animals,” such as entertainment, personal decoration, and research (Knight, Vrij, Cherryman, & Nunkoosing, 2015, p. 2). In addition to primary research studies about animal use, this literature review includes primary research studies that examine zoos’ mission statements and how those mission statements are interpreted.

The Public’s Attitudes towards Animal Use: Science over Entertainment

When the Cincinnati Zoo published its press releases, held its press conference, and created an FAQ webpage, the zoo most likely published this information with the public in mind. Although this paper will not examine the public’s attitudes towards the Cincinnati Zoo case, the public’s attitudes toward animal use should be considered because those attitudes most likely affected the public’s attitudes regarding the Cincinnati Zoo’s treatment of Harambe. Moreover, the public’s attitudes towards animal use likely affected how the zoo, as well as the media, chose to communicate with the public about the case. Therefore, this section examined primary research studies that addressed the public’s attitudes towards animal use. The following research illustrates that the public is more likely to support animal use for research, classroom use, or food than for entertainment or personal decoration (Knight et al., 2015; Knight, Bard, Vrij, & Brandon,
These researchers lead surprisingly similar results, showing a general sentiment toward supporting animal use for animal experimentation and in the classroom, as supported by Knight et al.’s (2015) study. In this quantitative study, a convenience sample of 96 participants completed questionnaires, using the 7-point Likert Scale, to evaluate their attitudes towards animal use and BAM (belief in animal mind). Participants were 39.32 years old on average, and a majority were pet-owners (63, 65.5%), meat-eaters (85, 88.5%), and identified politically as “neutral” (56, 58.3%) (Knight et al., 2015). Once completed, Knight et al. (2015) coded the questionnaires and measured the internal consistency of each category using Cronbach’s alpha. Knight et al. (2015) also utilized Pearson’s correlations to determine whether there were any relationships between the participants’ attitudes and the types of animal use. As a result, Knight et al. (2015) found participants to be significantly more supportive of animal use for experimentation and classroom use than for entertainment, which was ranked as one of the least supported forms of animal use. Regression analyses were then used to determine the predictors of animal use, and with that, Knight et al. (2015) found that participants with lower BAM levels, who were male, meat-eaters, and lived in urban areas, were the most likely to support animal experimentation. Thus, Knight et al. (2015) found that the public was most likely to support animal use for experimentation and classroom use, which aligned with the findings in one of their previous studies as well.

In a previous study, Knight et al. (2010) found that the public was most likely to support animal use for experimentation and classroom use, which aligned with the findings in one of their previous studies as well.

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2 According to Knight et al. (2015), BAM (belief in animal mind) is the belief that “animals [have] mental capacities such as intellect, the ability to reason, and feelings of emotion” (p. 2).
support animal use for medical research and dissection, although this study further analyzed the beliefs behind these attitudes. While Knight et al. (2010) conducted three studies, this literature review will focus on Study #1. In this quantitative study, 163 participants completed two questionnaires in order to determine the average layperson’s attitudes and beliefs towards animal use. The participants completed an Attitude Questionnaire and a Beliefs Questionnaire, both which utilized a 7-point Likert Scale. Knight et al. (2010) then used ANOVAs and post-hoc analysis to measure the significance of the attitudes towards animal use, while Hierarchical Regression Analyses were used to determine which beliefs supported those attitudes. As a result, Knight et al. (2010) found that laypersons were significantly more supportive of animal use for medical research or dissection than for personal decoration or entertainment. Moreover, Knight et al. (2010) found that specific beliefs predicted a layperson’s attitudes towards animal use. For instance, the strongest predictor of support for animal use for medical research (46%) and dissection (38%) was “perceptions of choice,” which is the “belief in the existence of alternatives” (Knight et al., 2010, p. 256, 251). With this in mind, Knight et al. (2010) also noted that “the more people believe in the existence of alternatives to using animals, the less likely they were to support these animal use practices” (p. 256). Overall, however, Knight et al. (2010) found the public was most likely to support animal use for medical research and dissection. While this study examined the attitudes of laypersons only, their prior study compared the attitudes of laypersons to that of scientists and animal welfarists.

In this study, Knight et al. (2009) found that the attitudes of laypersons and scientists were more similar than one may expect: both groups were more likely to
support animal use for medical research than for other means. In this quantitative study, a convenience sample of 372 scientists, animal welfarists, and laypersons completed questionnaires in order to compare their attitudes towards animal use and their beliefs supporting those attitudes. The participants who represented scientists (155 of 372) were members of “organizations that promoted the use of animals in medical research,” while those who represented animal welfarists (159 of 372) were members of “organizations promoting animal welfare” (Knight et al., 2009, p. 467). The remaining participants representing laypersons (68 of 372) fit in neither of these categories. The participants completed questionnaires that used a 7-point Likert-type scale. Knight et al. (2010) then used Cronbach’s alpha to measure the reliability of the questionnaires, and Pearson correlations and MANOVAS were used to determine relationships between the attitudes and beliefs and evaluate covariates. After analyzing the data, Knight et al. (2009) found that the belief that “humans are superior to animals was positively correlated with support for animal use” (p. 470). With this in mind, Knight et al. (2009) found that scientists were significantly more supportive of animal use than animal welfarists. Scientists were also more likely to support animal use for medical research over personal decoration or entertainment (Knight et al., 2009). Thus, Knight et al. (2009) found that scientists, who were the most likely to support animal use, were most likely to support animal use for medical research. Prior to this study, Knight and Barnett (2008) also found that medical research was one of the most commonly accepted forms of animal use.

Knight and Barnett (2008) found that the public was most likely to support animal use for medical research and food. In their qualitative study, eight participants were recruited through snowball sampling to participate in in-depth interviews that would
examine their attitudes towards animal use. Of the eight participants, all were between 22 and 65 years old, with 4 being female and 4 being male. Each participant completed an in-depth interview, between 45 to 90 minutes, and their comments were recorded for later analysis. To analyze the data, Knight and Barnett (2008) transcribed the interviews and, then, applied open coding to the transcripts. Thereafter, Knight and Barnett (2008) identified “similarities, differences, and patterns” within the transcripts to identify themes and sub-themes regarding animal use (p. 34). As a result, Knight and Barnett (2008) found that most participants supported animal use for medical research and food, but opposed animal use for non-medical research. Furthermore, participants were more supportive of animal use “…when they believed the purpose to be necessary and beneficial to humans, and when no alternatives were available” (p. 34). In this way, Knight and Barnett (2008) found that the public is most likely to support animal use they find necessary, such as medical research and food. Likewise, in a previous study, Knight et al. (2003) once again found that medical research was one of the most accepted forms of animal use, but instead of food, found dissection to be the other most accepted form of animal use.

In a qualitative study, Knight et al. (2003) found that the public is most likely to support animal use for medical research and dissection. Seventeen participants both completed questionnaires and participated in-depth interviews, which explored their attitudes towards animal use. All the participants were between 22 and 65 years in age, with 9 being male and 8 being female. First, the participants completed a questionnaire that explored their attitudes toward animal use, and then, the participants partook in in-depth interviews to explore the beliefs behind those attitudes. To analyze the data, Knight
et al. (2003) transcribed the interviews and then analyzed those transcripts line by line using Grounded Theory. The data was then organized through “coding, noting, and categorizing” (Knight et al., 2003, p. 311). As a result, Knight et al. (2003) found high support for animal use in medical research and dissection, but low support for animal use for entertainment and personal decoration. Moreover, participants were most likely to support animal use when they “…perceived there to be no other choice other than using animals…” (Knight et al., 2003, p. 312). In other words, Knight et al. (2003) found that the public is most likely to support animal use for medical research and dissection.

While these studies did not necessarily deem the same results, they revealed that the public is more likely to support certain types of animal use than others. All five studies illustrated that the public is most likely to support animal use for scientific purposes, particularly medical research and dissection (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2003; Knight & Barnett, 2008). The public was also second most likely to support animal use for educational purposes, particularly dissection (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2003). On the other hand, the public was least likely to support animal use for non-medical or non-educational purposes, such as entertainment or personal decoration (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2003; Knight & Barnett, 2008). Three of the studies also revealed that the public was less likely to support animal use for any purpose if they thought alternatives were available (Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2003; Knight & Barnett, 2008). In other words, the public is most likely to support animal use when it seems necessary and alternatives are unavailable, but less likely to support animal use when it seems unnecessary and alternatives are available.
Understanding what the public deems as acceptable animal use is significant to
the Cincinnati Zoo case because it provides a basis for why U.S. media organizations
either supported, or did not support, the zoo’s decision to kill Harambe. For example,
research suggests that the public believes entertainment is one of the least acceptable
forms of animal use (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2003; Knight
& Barnett, 2008), while research also suggests that the public believes education is one of
the most acceptable forms of animal use (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010; Knight
et al., 2003). With this in mind, one U.S. media organization may perceive the zoo as a
form of entertainment, disapprove of Harambe’s residence there for that reason, and
therefore, blame the zoo for his death. On the other hand, another U.S. media
organization may perceive the zoo as an educational institution, approve of Harambe’s
residence there for that reason, and therefore, support the zoo’s decision to kill him. In
either situation, the media organization’s perception of animal use affected its perception
and coverage of the case, and therefore, comparing this research to the results allows for
a more in-depth understanding of why the media organizations produced the articles they
did.

The conclusions from this research, however, should be applied with the
following limitations in mind: Few studies have been conducted on the public’s attitudes
toward animal use. In fact, of the few studies that have been conducted, all have the
authors Knight and Vrij in common, which could create some biased results.³
Furthermore, since these studies were all conducted by Knight and Vrij, all were
conducted in one location: the U.K. In contrast to these studies, the Cincinnati Zoo case

³The only study in this section that Vrij did not assist with was the one by Knight and Barnett (2008).
occurred in the United States. Moreover, since these studies were all conducted at the University of Portsmouth’s Department of Psychology, these studies were produced over more than a decade, and as a result, some of these articles were produced less recently. While existent research on this topic is limited, as previously noted, this research demonstrated consistent results, such as that science is the most commonly accepted form of animal use by the public (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2003; Knight & Barnett, 2008). Nevertheless, further research should be conducted on this subject, particularly in the U.S.

Zoos and their Missions: How are Zoos Portrayed and Interpreted?

The public’s attitudes towards animal use can also affect their perceptions of zoos. In order to draw in the public, zoos must create an appealing image of who they are as an organization and what they intend to do with their captive animals. Zoos must clearly portray their intended image in their mission statements. Unfortunately, there is very limited research on zoo mission statements and what the public believes those missions to be. However, the existent research suggests that zoo mission statements focus on conservation and education (Braverman, 2011; Carr & Cohen, 2011; Patrick, Matthews, Ayers, & Tunnicliffe, 2007). Even less research exists regarding what zoo visitors would like zoos to prioritize, but that research suggests that zoo visitors feel zoos should prioritize caring for the animals at the institutions themselves and for those in the wild (Shaw, 2011; Yocco, Bruskotter, Wilson, & Heimlich, 2015).

Zoo mission statements focus on conservation and education. Although research on this subject is limited, conservation and education are the most prominent themes among zoo mission statements, as found by Patrick et al. (2007). In a quantitative
study, Patrick et al. (2007) evaluated 142 U.S. zoos and zoos with aquariums’ mission statements to identify the most common themes within them. These zoos, with and without aquariums, were selected from the list of 213 zoos accredited by the AZA (Associated of Zoos and Aquarium), located in the U.S., and that could provide a mission statement. Patrick et al. (2007) then analyzed these mission statements through a systematic network, in which themes were identified and broken down into smaller sub-themes. Patrick et al.’s (2007) results may not be generalizable, however, because no statistical significance tests were mentioned. Despite this, Patrick et al. (2007) identified a total of seven themes, and the two most prominent themes identified were education and conservation. More specifically, 131 mission statements mentioned education, 118 mentioned conservation, and 44 mentioned education in relation to conservation (Patrick et al., 2007). Likewise, Carr and Cohen’s (2011) study yielded similar results.

Carr and Cohen (2011) also identified conservation and education as primary themes in zoo mission statements. In a quantitative content and semiotic analysis, a convenience sample of 54 zoos with websites in English were analyzed in order to identify the images portrayed by these zoos and how they were advertised. These zoos were located worldwide, across the UK (10), USA (24), New Zealand (3), Australia (7), Canada (6), South Africa (2), China (1), and Singapore (1). For the content analysis, Carr and Cohen (2011) identified whether certain information was present or absent from the zoo’s website, as well as the quality and quantity of content presented on each zoo’s website. For the semiotic analysis, Carr and Cohen (2011) analyzed each zoo’s website homepage to identify the “primary image being portrayed” by the zoo (p. 15). Once again, however, these results may not be generalizable, as Carr and Cohen (2011) did not
mention whether statistical significance tests were applied to the quantitative data.

Nevertheless, Carr and Cohen (2011) found that zoos primarily “…identify themselves as conservation centers” (p. 28). For instance, 81.5% of the zoo websites portrayed themselves as aiming for animal conservation, and of those zoos, 68.4% of the zoos’ website sought funds for conservation. Furthermore, rather than focusing on educational programs, Carr and Cohen (2011) found that the zoos focused more on conservation education. These findings align Braverman’s (2011) essay that explains zoos’ motivation to appear like conservation centers.

While few studies have been conducted on this subject, Braverman (2011) wrote an essay from the perspective of zoo personnel, about how zoos organize their exhibits, animals, and other features in a specific way in order to portray a certain image. Braverman (2011) drew upon 35 in-depth interviews with zoo directors, curators, registrars, and designers to obtain insight into the image zoos attempt to portray and how. In conclusion, Braverman (2011) explained that zoos sell zoo-goers on their conservation efforts through “the visual display of animals,” as well as through exposure to “…sponsorship ads, signage that informs them about the zoo’s involvement in conservation and other signs that instruct them about how to…become part of the zoo’s conservation efforts” (p. 837). Regardless of if a zoo’s conservation efforts are as strong as these images portray, Braverman (2011) emphasized that zoos still seek to portray the image of being conservation centers and sell that idea to their visitors as well, which research suggests is exactly what zoo visitors want zoos to be (Shaw, 2011; Yocco et al., 2015).

*Zoo visitors feel zoos should prioritize caring for their animals and those in*
In her qualitative study, Shaw (2011) found that zoos’ mission statements typically reflected the same foci desired by visitors. To conduct this study, three questionnaires were verbally distributed and completed by zoo visitors to assess the public’s perceptions of zoo conservation. A non-random sample of 349 interviews were conducted at the ZSL Whipsnade Zoo and Marwell Wildlife, and another 156 interviews were conducted at Tring Natural History Museum for comparison. Shaw (2011) explored the data using frequency distributions, medians, percentages, and non-parametric tests. The non-parametric tests were, more specifically, used to analyze the differences between the questionnaires between sites. After analyzing the results, Shaw (2011) found that the top two priorities ranked by visitors, for what they believed zoos should be doing, are “caring for animals” and “educating the public about conservation issues” (p. 34). When compared to rankings based on 34 zoos in the UK, Shaw (2011) found that the zoos’ priorities matched that of the zoo visitors. Yocco et al. (2015), on the other hand, took a slightly different approach and analyzed which messages zoo visitors identified with most strongly.

Yocco et al. (2015) found that zoo visitors gave the highest rankings to biospheric statements, or statements that showed “concern for all living things” (p. 3). In this quantitative study, 298 visitors from two zoos completed questionnaires in order to determine the relationship between the zoos’ messages of environmental concern with the visitors’ concern for the environment. Yocco et al. (2015) used focal sampling to choose participants, in which the weekend visitors at the zoos were approached and asked to participate in the study, though under no obligation. Participants completed questionnaires that utilized a 7-point rating scale. About half of these participants were
male (142, 47.7%), while the other half were female (156, 52.3%). A majority of the participants were also either visiting the zoo for a second or third time that year (166, 42%) or zoo members (159, 40%). Chi square tests were then conducted in order to determine whether the results were statistically significant. As a result, Yocco et al. (2015) found that most of the visitors gave higher ratings to biospheric statements. Furthermore, zoo members, as well as those who visited the zoo four or more times a year, were most concerned with biospheric statements. As in Shaw’s (2011) study, zoo visitors expressed that zoos should show concern for the animals at the zoo, but also for the animals and environment outside of the zoo.

While there is little research on how zoos portray themselves, and how zoo visitors would like to see zoos portray themselves, the existent research indicates that conservation is the most prominent theme among zoo mission statements and what zoo visitors desire to see in zoo mission statements (Braverman, 2011; Carr &, Cohen, 2011; Patrick et al., 2007; Shaw, 2011; Yocco et al., 2015). The zoo mission statements focus on conservation efforts and education, particularly educating the public on conservation (Braverman, 2011; Carr &, Cohen, 2011; Patrick et al., 2007). One study demonstrated that zoo visitors are most likely to support these efforts (Shaw, 2011), while another study demonstrated that zoo visitors simply desire for zoos to show concern for all living things (Yocco et al., 2015). Overall, zoos are most likely to receive approval from the public if they emphasize their conservation efforts and demonstrate that they care for animals, both in captivity and in the wild.

Understanding that conservation and education are the most common themes among zoo mission statements, and that zoo visitors approve of these mission statements,
provides a baseline for what image and actions the public expects from zoos. These expectations most likely played a significant role in how the public perceived the Cincinnati Zoo case. Likewise, the U.S. media organizations’ understanding of what a zoo stands for, as compared to what they believe a zoo should stand for, most likely played a role in how they perceived the case. For instance, research suggests that zoos portray themselves as standing for conservation (Braverman, 2011; Carr & Cohen, 2011; Patrick et al., 2007), while it also suggests that zoo visitors desire zoos to have this mission (Shaw, 2011; Yocco et al., 2015). With this in mind, if a U.S. media organization perceives zoos as standing for conservation and expects zoos to do so, then the organization may have experienced mixed messages from the Cincinnati Zoo when the zoo chose to kill one of its animals. Moreover, this organization most likely would have disapproved of the zoo’s decision to kill Harambe. In this way, this research will play a role in understanding why U.S. media organizations may or may not have supported the zoo’s decision.
Methodology

This study was a conventional qualitative content analysis that sought to identify the sentiments and frames used by national U.S. media organizations in their online articles about the Cincinnati Zoo case between May 28, 2016 and June 5, 2016. The following section provides a thorough explanation of why this method was selected, as well as other specific information about this study’s research design, units of analysis, coding of categories, and verification process.

Overview of Qualitative Methodology

When conducting a study, one must select either a quantitative or qualitative research method. A qualitative approach was selected over a quantitative approach for this study because the research questions focus more on exploring the narrative than numerical data (Jones & Kottler, 2006). Exploring the narrative allowed the researcher to not only identify the sentiments and themes used by the national U.S. media organizations to frame the Cincinnati Zoo case, but to examine those sentiments and themes in great detail. This would have been limited by a quantitative approach. According to Jones and Kottler (2006), a quantitative method can be defined as a research method focused on “reducing characteristics to…numbers, and then using the numbers to identify relationships among the characteristics” (p. 9); whereas, a qualitative method focuses on “in-depth exploration” and on the “verbal descriptions of the characteristics being investigated” (p. 10, 11). In other words, while the quantitative method seeks to identify relationships among characteristics, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to investigate the narrative’s relationship “between tellers and listeners” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 125), which in this case, was the U.S. media
organizations’ relationships with their readers.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: What sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations when framing the Cincinnati Zoo case?

RQ2: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the gorilla and his actions?

RQ3: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the child and his actions?

RQ4: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the options of tranquilizing or killing the gorilla?

**Research Design**

After selecting the qualitative approach over the quantitative approach, a specific qualitative research method was selected: a qualitative content analysis. A qualitative content analysis was selected because it “focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Thus, this method allowed the researcher to thoroughly examine the text within each article to determine how the U.S. media organizations communicated their frames to the public. More specifically, a conventional content analysis was selected because little pre-existing research exists on subjects like the Cincinnati Zoo case, and a conventional content analysis allowed for the researcher to evaluate the data without using “preconceived categories,” which allowed for “new insights to emerge” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). In other words, this method
allowed researcher to identify the themes after analyzing the data, rather than placing the data into preconceived categories.

**Units of Analysis**

This study’s research questions sought to identify the frames and sentiments used by media organizations to portray the Cincinnati Zoo case. In this way, the artifacts selected for this study needed to directly address the Cincinnati Zoo case, within a reasonable time frame, in order to ensure that the artifacts expressed an immediate reaction to the case. Thus, the artifacts were collected using purposive sampling, or the collection of artifacts “known to possess a particular characteristic under investigation” (Reinard, 1998, p. 268). To ensure that the artifacts possessed specific characteristics, criteria for inclusion and exclusion were established:

- **Criteria for Artifact Inclusion:** The artifacts selected for inclusion were online articles written by national U.S. media organizations about the Cincinnati Zoo case produced between May 28, 2016 (the date of Harambe’s death) and June 5, 2016 (one week after Harambe’s death).

- **Criteria for Artifact Exclusion:** Articles produced directly by the Cincinnati Zoo, such as the press releases on its website, were excluded. Likewise, articles including direct interviews or statements from figures of the animal world, such as Jane Goodall, Jack Hanna, and Frans De Waal, were excluded. Excluding these articles ensured that the national U.S. media organizations’ views were being expressed in the articles rather than the zoo’s. However, the zoo’s press releases, zoo Director Maynard’s press conference, and the “Harambe FAQ” webpage have been included in
the Background Information section of his paper for context.

With the inclusion and exclusion criteria established, the online articles were collected through a search using the U.S. edition of the Google “News” tab (www.google.com/news). Between February 14, 2017 and March 1, 2017, the researcher utilized the search terms “Cincinnati Zoo” and “gorilla’s death,” which yielded 23,800 results. Because of the vast number of articles resulting from the search, articles were collected until the researcher met saturation, or when common sentiments and themes became apparent. As a result, a total of 240 articles were reviewed before reaching saturation, and 206 of these articles were eliminated during the collection process: 108 did not comment directly on the Cincinnati Zoo case, 56 did not fall within the specified date range, 29 were from a local or international media organizations, and 13 were repeats. Only 34 articles met the inclusion criteria and were collected for analysis.

**Analysis of Artifacts**

Once the artifacts were collected, the artifacts were analyzed using an artifact analysis sheet, which can be found under Appendix A. To develop this instrument, the researcher listed out all four research questions. Then, the researcher developed additional, more specific questions that pertained to each research question, with framing theory in mind. Framing theory considers how the author frames the language in a given artifact, or presents information in a specific way, as to “construct [a specific] social reality for audiences and thus give [specific] meanings to words and images” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 222). Thus, the word *frame* in each question asked the researcher to look at how the author of each artifact portrayed, or illustrated, the given subject in order for his or her audience to interpret that subject in a certain way. With this in mind, the researcher
collected the data by completing an artifact analysis sheet, by hand, for each article. Following the directions listed at the top of the artifact analysis sheet, the researcher answered each question as thoroughly as possible, noting quotes and examples for potential inclusion within the Results section. The researcher also used a separate analysis sheet for each artifact to clearly separate data collection.

After collecting the data by hand, the researcher compiled and organized the data by creating an Excel sheet, which allowed for simpler data comparison. The Excel sheet included each article’s title, author, and date; the name of media organization; the type of media organization; a link to the article; and a column for notes regarding each RQ (1-4). Once completed, the researcher began identifying themes. Starting with the first research question, the researcher compared the answers for each artifact in the RQ1 column and made note of any re-occurring themes. The researcher then repeated this step for the remaining RQs (3-4). Finally, the researcher compiled the data categorically, as noted in the Coding of Categories section, and included a detailed description of these themes in the Results section of this paper. Moreover, it should be noted that, throughout the analysis process, the researcher consistently referred back to the original artifacts to ensure that the data was accurate.

**Coding of Categories**

Three different items were coded during this study: (1) the types of media organizations, (2) the artifacts’ sentiments, and (3) the artifacts’ themes. As mentioned previously, because this study was a conventional qualitative content analysis, the researcher did not develop “preconceived categories,” but instead, allowed for “new insights to emerge” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). Therefore, with the exception of
the sentiments, the types of media organizations and themes were identified during the analysis. After the researcher collected the 34 artifacts, she identified six categories that the national U.S. media organizations fit into, which were coded as the following:

- **A legacy site** is a site created by a traditional media organization that originally delivered news in print, as either as a magazine or newspaper, long before the creation of the Internet (Kane, 2015).

- **A cable network news site** is a site created by a cable network television channel, or channels “…transmitted by cable subscribers” (“Cable television,” 2017); such channels usually use their sites to disseminate online versions of the news they televise.

- **A Millennial site** is similar to that of a legacy site, but it was developed more recently and reports on topics that interest the Millennial generation, which can be defined as individuals born between 18 and 34 years old, as of 2015 (Fry, 2016).

- **A trending site** reports on trending topics, which can be defined as topics that “…generate a large amount of social media activity over a short time span…” (“Trending,” 2015).

- **An entertainment site** reports on stories about the entertainment industry, or the industry of film, music, and other related careers.

- **An aggregator site** is a site “…that aggregates information or content, esp. relating to a single subject, from multiple online sources and presents it in a coherent form” (“Aggregator,” 2017).

Once these types of media organizations were identified, the researcher coded
each artifact into one of three preconceived categories: positive, negative or neutral\(^4\). The researcher then created a chart illustrating what types of media organizations identified with which sentiment, which can be found under Appendix B. In addition to coding types of media organizations and sentiments, the researcher coded the artifacts for themes. To do so, the researcher created a chart for each RQ and organized the identified themes using the sub-questions from the artifact analysis sheet. These charts can be found under Appendix C, D, E, and F.

**Verification Process**

Trustworthiness plays a significant role in research, specifically in how “an inquirer persuade[s] his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The quantitative method is often preferred over the qualitative method because many believe a quantitative study will produce more trustworthy results through its use of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that the qualitative research method can provide the same level of trustworthiness through the four qualitative equivalents of verification: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Therefore, the following section illustrates how this study met Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four equivalents of verification.

**Credibility**

Credibility is the qualitative equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), the purpose of credibility is “to carry

\(^4\) The definitions of positive, negative, and neutral can be found under Definition of Terms, under the Introduction section.
out the inquiry in such a way…to be credible…and, second to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied” (p. 296). Shenton (2004) explains that a qualitative study can enhance its credibility by following certain provisions. Based on Shenton’s (2004) recommended provisions, this study obtained credibility through weekly debriefings with an academic advisor, peer scrutiny of the study by said advisor and a thesis reader, reflective commentary by the researcher, a detailed description of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and examination of previous research.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the qualitative equivalent to external validity in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1986) explain that transferability is “to know something with high validity about Sample A, and to know that A is representative to the population which the generalization is to apply” (p. 297). In this way, transferability is similar to generalizability, or how the results of a given study could be applied to similar populations or data. Shenton (2004) also explains that certain information should be included in a study to ensure that another researcher could analyze the same, if not similar, data in a future study. Of Shenton’s (2004) recommended inclusions for transferability, this study includes information on how the data was collected, how much and what kind of data was data collected, and when the data was collected.

**Dependability**

Dependability is the qualitative equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Shenton (2004) describes dependability as the process of explaining the study in enough detail for “a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same
results” (p. 71). In other words, a study obtains dependability by including enough information to potentially be replicated. Based on Shenton’s (2004) criteria for qualitative dependability, this study could be replicated because it includes a detailed description of this study’s research design, execution process, artifact selection, and data analysis process, as well as an evaluation of this study’s limitations.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the qualitative equivalent to objectivity in quantitative research and is considered an important step in the researcher’s self-auditing process. According to Shenton (2004), confirmability ensures that “the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants [or data], rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (p. 72). Shenton (2004) then asserts that the researcher must take certain steps in order to ensure that a given study obtains confirmability. Of the steps mentioned by Shenton (2004), to obtain confirmability, this study includes an audit trail that acknowledges why the methods of choice were selected over others, notes the potential weaknesses of the method of choice, and includes multiple charts in the Appendices that illustrate how the artifacts were coded into themes.

**Developing the Results**

After establishing the four qualitative equivalents of verification, the researcher developed the Results section. In this section, the researcher was able to explore the themes noted in Appendices C through F in greater detail. This detailed exploration fostered the development of the Theoretical and Practical Implications noted in the Discussion section. The following section includes thorough illustrations of each of the themes portrayed by the analyzed U.S. media organizations through quotes and examples.
Results

RQ1: What sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations when framing the overall Cincinnati Zoo case?

Sentiment plays a significant role in how a media organization frames a topic. For articles about the Cincinnati Zoo case, each article’s sentiment determined how the incident would be portrayed. To be more specific, a positive article, which supported the zoo’s decision, may have portrayed the gorilla as dangerous and the child’s injuries as significant. In other words, identifying the sentiment of an article allows one to understand its overall frame. To compare the sentiments of artifacts about the Cincinnati Zoo case, the artifacts were designated as either positive, negative, or neutral. The following conclusions were drawn after analyzing the artifacts with RQ1 in mind:

- A majority of the artifacts were neutral.
- Artifacts maintained neutral sentiments by including statements for and against the zoo, through factual reporting, or by entirely re-directing the readers from the case.
- Positive artifacts supported the zoo through explicit statements and framing.
- Negative artifacts opposed the zoo by focusing on the animals involved, over the people.

A majority of the artifacts were neutral. Of the 34 artifacts, 22 were neutral, while the remaining 12 artifacts were either positive (6) or negative (6). A majority of the neutral artifacts were produced by legacy sites (9), such as the New York Times, The Washington Post, and Time magazine. Cable network news sites (7) were a close second and included sites such as CNN, CBS News, and Fox News. The remaining neutral
artifacts (6) were produced by sites that fell under one of the following categories: Millennial, trending, entertainment, or aggregator sites. The most common methods employed to remain neutral were: (1) including statements from both sides of the case to remain unbiased, (2) factually reporting on the incident to avoid making any opinionated statements, and (3) re-directing readers to related topics to avoid commenting on the incident itself.

Some articles remained neutral by including statements for and against the zoo. Most of these articles illustrated support for the zoo’s decision through quotes from zoo Director Thane Maynard. However, these articles also illustrated support for those opposing the zoo’s decision through quotes from sources such as animal activist groups or petitions. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, included statements from sources with opposing views, zoo Director Maynard and PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals). While Grinberg’s (2016) article initially appeared to lean towards supporting the zoo by including several quotes from zoo Director Maynard, who defended the zoo’s decision to end the gorilla’s life, Grinberg also quoted PETA, which not only opposed the zoo’s decision but captivity altogether: “[C]aptivity is never acceptable for gorillas or other primates” (Grinberg, 2016, para. 26). By including quotes from both sides, Grinberg (2016) did not support or oppose the zoo’s decision. Likewise, Olsen (2016), for PBS, also quoted Maynard defending the zoo’s decision, “Looking back, we would make the same decision. The gorilla was clearly agitated. The gorilla was clearly disoriented” (para. 8). While Olsen (2016) included Maynard’s pro-zoo argument, Olsen was also sure to include a quote from an individual who questioned the zoo’s decision,

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5 Definitions of site types can be found in the Methodology section, under Coding of Categories.
Jane Goodall. Goodall commented, “It looked as though the gorilla was putting an arm round the child…” (Olsen, 2016, para. 10), which suggested that killing the gorilla may not have been necessary. By sharing both Maynard’s and Goodall’s views of the situation, Olsen (2016) remained neutral.

Unlike Olsen (2016) and Grinberg (2016), Oritz (2016) and CBS News focused less on whether the gorilla should have been shot and more on whether the Gorilla World enclosure was adequate. These articles remained neutral by quoting both sources that supported and did not support the enclosure’s adequacy. Like Olsen (2016) and Grinberg (2016), quotes from Maynard were included to support that the enclosure was adequate, while quotes from other sources were included to support the opposing argument. Oritz (2016), for NBC News, included statements from opposing sources, zoo Director Maynard and zoo design consultant Michael Graetz. In support of the zoo, Oritz (2016) quoted Maynard claiming that the zoo went “above and beyond safety requirements” (para. 20), but in opposition to the zoo, Oritz (2016) quoted Graetz arguing, “We have to consider the safety of the animals as well as the people” (para. 23). In this way, Oritz (2016) offered both sides of the argument and remained neutral. Likewise, a CBS News article included statements from opposing sources, zoo Director Maynard and The Associated Press’s Michael Budkie (“Police investigating circumstances…,” 2016). In support of the zoo, CBS News quoted Maynard saying that the zoo “…remains safe for its 1.6 million annual visitors…,” but in opposition to the zoo, CBS News quoted Budkie’s opposing argument that “[t]he (zoo’s) barrier obviously isn’t sufficient to keep the public out” (“Police investigating circumstances…,” 2016, para. 8, 12). Once again, by including both sides of the argument, CBS News also remained neutral.
Not all articles included quotes from Maynard to support the zoo’s decision, however. Katzowitz (2016) and Fox News, for instance, quoted President Donald Trump. In addition to quoting President Trump, Katzowitz (2016) and Fox News quoted petitions to represent those who opposed the zoo’s decision as well. For example, Katzowitz (2016), for *The Daily Dot*, included President Trump’s support for the zoo’s decision by paraphrasing President Trump’s belief that “…he didn’t think the zoo had a choice before shooting Harambe…” (para. 6). At the same time, Katzowitz (2016) was also sure to include the opinions of those on the opposing side by including quotes from the “Justice for Harambe” petition and a Care2 petition⁶. The Care2 petition, in particular, sought to “close the gorilla exhibit ‘for the safety of the public and the animals’” (Katzwotiz, 2016, para. 2). In this way, Katzowitz (2016) did not take a side by including both President Trump’s belief that the zoo did the right thing and the Care2 petition’s call for further action from the zoo. Almost identical to Katzowitz (2016), Fox News also quoted President Trump and the “Justice for Harambe” petition. Fox News quoted President Trump supporting the zoo’s decision with his statement: “It’s too bad there wasn’t another way” (“300k sign petition calling…,” 2016, para. 6). On the other hand, Fox News quoted the “Justice for Harambe” petition to represent the opposing side: The petition called for “the [child’s] parents [to be held] responsible,” (“300k sign petition calling…,” 2016, para. 3). While this quote from the “Justice for Harambe” petition did not call for action from the zoo, it opposed the zoo through its call for the child’s parents to be held responsible for the gorilla’s death. Thus, by including President Trump’s support of the zoo, and the “Justice for Harambe” petition’s opposition to the zoo, Fox

⁶ Care2 is a site on which Internet users can create online petitions.
News did not take a side and remained neutral.

The “Justice for Harambe” petition was also used by Time magazine to represent the side opposing the zoo’s decision. However, Time magazine included another source to support the zoo’s decision, witness Kimberly O’Connor. Alter (2016), for Time magazine, quoted witness O’Connor, who recorded the viral video of the case, describing what was left out of her video: “What you don’t see is the way he pulled the boy up the wall” (para. 3). In this statement, O’Connor pointed out that the situation was even more dangerous than her video may cause one to perceive. In contrast to O’Connor’s statement, Alter (2016) mentioned the “Justice for Harambe” petition and explained that the creators of this petition were made up of individuals who were “…questioning whether the situation was dangerous enough to warrant killing the gorilla, after video emerged of the animal appearing to protect the boy” (para. 2). In other words, while Alter (2016) quoted O’Connor stating that the gorilla appeared dangerous, she also included the views of those who questioned whether the gorilla was as harmful as some believed.

While Alter’s (2016) article, and the previously mentioned articles, showed both sides of the argument through quotes from various sources, Bailey (2016) and Encarnacao (2016) solely quoted animal experts to explore both sides of the case. For instance, Bailey (2016), for the Inquisitr, remained neutral by including statements from animal experts who supported and opposed the zoo’s decision, such as animal behavior expert Gisela Kaplan, primatologist Jane Goodall, zoo Director Maynard, and Gladys Porter Zoo’s Director Jerry Stones. At the beginning of the article, Bailey (2016) prepared us for her examination of both sides of the case by saying: “While some animal experts support the decision to kill the gorilla, others are questioning the action…” (para.
3). Bailey (2016) went on to quote these experts, without favoring experts from either side, which allowed her to maintain a neutral sentiment. Similarly, Encarnacao (2016), for the *Boston Herald*, included a stream of quotes from Debra Curtin, president and founder of the New England Primate Conservancy. While Encarnacao (2016) only included one animal expert, Curtin represented both sides of the case by explaining the pros and cons of each side. Curtin even stated that “…it’s always a tough call to place blame when something like this happens…” (Encarnacao, 2016, para. 2). In this way, Encarnacao (2016) avoided taking a biased stance by including quotes from an individual who did not promote either side of the case more than the other. Other articles, however, took a different approach than quoting a multiplicity of sources.

**Some articles utilized factual reporting to maintain a neutral sentiment.**

Instead of including statements from individuals or groups that supported or opposed the case, these articles included factual reports of the case, as well as quotes from more reputable sources, like witnesses, police reports, and 911 phone calls. For example, an online-only *Washington Post* article included witness O’Connor’s footage of the incident, which allowed the reader to make his or her own interpretation of the case. The footage was also accompanied by a brief factual paragraph about the case, which included statements such as, “A 3-year-old fell into an endangered gorilla’s enclosure…The gorilla…was shot by zoo staff in order for rescuers to reach the boy” (“Gorilla drags 3-year-old…,” 2016, para. 1). While this statement offered commentary on the video, it merely stated what happened during the incident, allowing *The Washington Post* to remain neutral. Likewise, Hautman’s (2016) article for *US Weekly* included similar factual statements to that of *The Washington Post*. For example, Hautman (2016) also
noted that “…a zoo employee shot and killed the gorilla” (para. 3), as well as other factual statements like, “The boy was immediately transported to Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center” (para. 5). As with the statements made by *The Washington Post*, Hautman’s (2016) statements offered mere facts about the case, which allowed him to remain neutral as well.

Instead of merely describing what happened, as in *The Washington Post* article or Hautman’s (2016) article, CBS News, Chan (2016), and Hatchett (2016) included quotes from un-biased sources to illustrate what happened during the incident. For instance, CBS News includes sources such as the Cincinnati police reports and the child’s mother’s 911 call. CBS News included descriptions of the incident through the mother’s 911 call, such as, “He’s dragging my son! I can’t watch this!” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 13). Updates about how the child faired after the incident were also included through quotes from the police report, such as, “The child was alert and talking” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 6). By including this factual information, CBS News remained neutral. Chan (2016), for *Yahoo! News*, also included first-hand descriptions of the incident by quoting the child’s mother saying, in her 911 call, that her “…son fell in the exhibit…” (para. 5). Chan (2016) also included updates on the child’s family by reporting that the police department was “…considering possible criminal charges…” (para. 3). Once again, Chan (2016) also remained neutral through the inclusion of factual information. Likewise, Hatchett (2016), for *Complex*, provided a brief but factual update on child’s family post-incident, particularly that the child’s mother would not be receiving “reckless endangerment charges” (para. 1). By providing factual descriptions of the case, post-case updates, and quotes from witnesses, these articles avoided asserting
biased statements. Some articles, however, seemed wary of addressing the case itself and found addressing related topics to be the better option.

Some articles entirely re-directed the readers from the case to remain neutral. While CBS News, Chan (2016), and Hatchett (2016) focused on the facts surrounding the incident, the Chicago Tribune’s Editorial Board (2016), Howard (2016), and Nicks (2016) re-directed readers to other topics related to the incident. For instance, the Chicago Tribune’s Editorial Board (2016) began its article by immediately stating, “We’re not here to referee web flaming or to second-guess zookeepers’ actions. Let’s…examine…[t]he intense public outcry over this killing…” (para. 2). In other words, the Editorial Board (2016) did not side with the public, but merely discussed how the public’s “concerns over the treatment of animals” have become “mainstream” (para. 5). By doing so, the Editorial Board (2016) avoided commenting directly on the case and remained neutral. Likewise, Howard (2016), for NBC News, focused on the public’s reaction to the case and examined their greater concern for the gorilla than for humanity. Howard (2016) questioned if those who “…obsessed over whether the zoo made the right decision…” would have reacted as significantly to the 69 people being shot and killed in Chicago over Memorial Day weekend 2016 (para. 2). By shifting the article’s focus onto the deaths in Chicago, Howard (2016) remained neutral on the case itself. Nicks (2016), for Time magazine, also re-directed readers to the public’s reaction. More specifically, Nicks (2016) discussed how a mother and toddler became subjects of scrutiny for the public solely because they were witnesses to the case: “Apparently now just being adjacent to a viral news event is enough to stir up the blind rage of the Internet mob” (para. 1). Here, Nicks (2016) does not address the case itself but how witnesses were
affected, which allowed Nicks (2016) to remain neutral. Thus, the *Chicago Tribune’s* Editorial Board (2016), Howard (2016), and Nicks (2016) examined public’s reactions more than they examined the case, which prevented them from being biased.

In addition to the Editorial Board’s (2016), Howard’s (2016), and Nicks’ (2016) articles, Augustine (2016) examined the reaction of a specific member of the public: rapper Lil Scrappy. In an article for *Wet Paint*, Augustine (2016) re-directed readers to Lil Scrappy’s controversial response to the case: an Instagram video in which Lil Scrappy “…commented [that he] felt race—particularly the race of the child—had something to do with people seeking justice for the endangered species” (para. 3). By focusing on Lil Scrappy’s reaction to the incident, Augustine (2016) moved the reader’s attention away from the case itself and onto the topic of race. In this way, Augustine (2016) avoided commenting on the case itself and remained neutral.

While Augustine (2016), as well as the Editorial Board (2016), Howard (2016), and Nicks (2016), Bruilliard (2016) and Byrne (2016), re-directed readers to related topics about Harambe instead. For example, Bruilliard (2016), for *The Washington Post*, honed in on a statement made by zoo Director Maynard, in which he referred to the gorilla’s death as a “loss to the gene pool of lowland gorillas” (para. 1). In response to this statement, Bruilliard (2016) wrote a complete analysis on why the gorilla’s death would not necessarily affect the overall gorilla population. While Bruilliard’s (2016) article contributed to the ongoing conversation about Harambe, it did not offer an opinion on whether the zoo made the right decision and, therefore, was unbiased. Likewise, Byrne (2016), for *Vocativ*, also wrote article that contributed to the conversation surrounding Harambe. Instead of focusing on the case, however, Byrne (2016) focused
on how “[o]fficials took a sample of the gorilla’s sperm…” that would “…likely be preserved in liquid nitrogen alongside sperm from [other] endangered and rare species…” (para. 2). Although Byrne (2016) discussed Harambe, the focus of the article was not on the incident and instead on the future of the gorilla’s remains, which allowed Byrne (2016) to remain neutral. Thus, both Brulliard (2016) and Byrne (2016) remained neutral by focusing on topics relating to Harambe and the incident, instead of the incident itself. In contrast to Brulliard (2016) and Byrne (2016), some articles directly shared their opinions on the case to support the zoo.

**Some positive articles showed their support for the zoo through explicit statements.** In other words, Leigh (2016), Glanton (2016), *Rare*, and Shapiro (2016) directly shared with the reader their agreement with the zoo’s decision. For instance, Leigh (2016), in op-ed piece for *The Huffington Post*, expressed her personal upset with case in general. Upon first reading, Leigh’s (2016) article appears unbiased, but generally leans toward supporting the zoo. Leigh’s (2016) bias was most apparent when she said, “I don’t know if anything else less extreme could have guaranteed that kid coming out of this alive” (para. 5). Through this statement, Leigh (2016) expressed her opinion that the zoo made the right decision. In another op-ed piece, Glanton (2016), for the *Chicago Tribune*, was even more explicit about expressing support for the zoo’s decision. Like Leigh (2016), Glanton (2016) felt that the zoo had no other choice but to kill the gorilla: “I’ve watched it [the video footage] twice, and both times I reached the same conclusion: The ape had to die” (para. 1). Here, Glanton (2016) expressed that the zoo made the right decision because to her, no other option was viable. An article by *Rare* also supported the zoo’s decision, but included the opinions of animal experts to support this argument:
“[T]he zoo took the correct course of action in a crisis scenario, and animal experts agree” (“Experts agree that Harambe…,” 2016, para. 2). By including the opinions of animal experts, Rare provided stronger evidence to convince the reader that the zoo made the right decision. In contrast to Rare’s article, Shapiro (2016), for the National Review, moved beyond defending the zoo’s decision and identified errors in the opposing side’s argument. Shapiro (2016) ended his article by saying, “…let’s remember that our virtue-signaling about the death of a 450-pound gorilla to save the life of a small child isn’t virtuous at all—it’s a sign that our virtue has been twisted in ugly ways…” (para. 20). In other words, Shapiro (2016) felt it was wrong for the public to have more concern for the life of a gorilla than a human child and, thusly, supported the zoo’s decision to protect the child’s life. While Leigh (2016), Glanton (2016), Rare, and Shapiro (2016) directly shared their opinions with readers, other articles took a more subtle approach: framing.

**Some positive articles utilized framing to support the zoo’s decision.** As mentioned previously, framing is when an author “…construct[s] [a specific] social reality for audiences and thus give[s] [specific] meanings to words and images” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 222). In other words, to frame a narrative, an author uses specific language and highlights certain aspects of the story in order for the reader to interpret that story in a certain way. For example, Minutaglio (2016), for People magazine, initially seems to be factually reporting the case within her article, but rather, she strategically included quotes from specific sources to positively portray the zoo’s decision. Minutaglio (2016) quoted witness O’Connor describing the situation as “too traumatic to be on camera” (para. 13) and zoo Director Maynard explaining that “[t]he risk was due to the power of that animal” (para. 24). By using quotes that portrayed the gorilla’s interaction
with the child as dangerous, Minutaglio (2016) framed her article in support of the zoo’s decision. Likewise, Cahillane (2016), also for People magazine, took a similar approach and also quoted sources that favored the zoo’s decision: zoo Director Maynard and the child’s family. Cahillane (2016) quoted Maynard describing the gorilla as “acting erratically” and “disoriented” (para. 3), as well as the child’s family extending their “heartfelt thanks” for the zoo making “a very difficult decision” (para. 6). Once again, by including quotes that portrayed the incident as a life or death situation for the child, Cahillane (2016) demonstrated her support for the zoo’s decision. While Minutaglio (2016) and Cahillane (2016) framed the incident in favor of the zoo, other articles focused on the animals involved in the incident to express disagreement with the zoo.

**Some negative articles showed their disagreement with the zoo by focusing on the animals involved, rather than the people.** More specifically, Shrine (2016), Mudede (2016), Clark (2016), Shanahan (2016), and Jamieson (2016) focused on the well-being of the gorilla and made little to no mention of the well-being of the child. For instance, Shrine (2016) and Mudede (2016) even blamed the people involved for the death of the gorilla. Those involved included the zoo, the zoo visitors, the child, and the child’s family. For example, Shrine (2016), for The Huffington Post, immediately expressed his disagreement with the zoo’s decision by placing blame on those involved: “My position is simple. The death of this magnificent animal at the Cincinnati Zoo ‘Gorilla World’ exhibit was caused by the negligence of humans...” (para. 2). Shrine (2016) then reiterated that because of human negligence, we have “…one less endangered species gorilla in our midst” (para. 3). Here, Shrine (2016) disagreed with the zoo by explaining that it was not the gorilla’s actions that brought about his death, but the
actions of people. Additionally, Shrine (2016) did not mention the potential impact the gorilla could have had on the child. Likewise, Muced (2016), for *The Stranger*, was less explicit than Shrine (2016), but also placed blame on those involved for the gorilla’s death: The child “…enters and falls into the area that confines a gorgeous and young gorilla….The…gorilla unwittingly enters the last 10 minutes of his life. The zoo officials decide to end the confusion and tension with a bullet” (para. 1). Like Shrine (2016), Muced (2016) focused on the gorilla’s life and did not mention whether the child could have been harmed. In this way, both Muced (2016) and Shrine (2016) expressed an anti-zoo sentiment.

While Shrine (2016) and Muced (2016) placed blame on the people involved with the case, Clark (2016), for *Hollywood Life*, placed blame on a larger audience: anyone who supports captivity. Clark (2016) utilized the opinions of celebrities Pamela Anderson and Kaley Cuoco to bolster her case. For example, Clark (2016) quoted Anderson saying that she feels there should be a “ban [on] all zoos and aquariums” and that “[a]ll animals should retire to sanctuaries worldwide” (para. 2). By including Anderson’s statement, Clark (2016) persuaded readers to take responsibility for the death of the gorilla by no longer visiting zoos and aquariums and, instead, start a movement towards animal sanctuaries. Clark (2016) also quoted Cuoco expressing happiness that, at least, “…the amazing creature doesn’t have to live in captivity another day” (para. 3). Through Cuoco’s statement, Clark (2016) further emphasized both the importance of the gorilla’s life and the problem with captivity. In this way, Clark (2016) expressed an anti-zoo sentiment.

While Clark (2016) placed blame on the people involved to express her anti-zoo
sentiment, Shanahan (2016) and Jamieson (2016) merely focused on the lives of the animals involved. For instance, Shanahan (2016), for The Boston Globe, did not comment directly on the case, but portrayed any mention of the gorilla’s death in a negative light. Shanahan (2016) described the zoo as having “killed a rare gorilla” and referred to the gorilla as “critically endangered” (para. 1). Such phrases emphasized the importance of the gorilla and why he should not have been killed, thusly illustrating Shanahan’s (2016) anti-zoo sentiment. Furthermore, while Jamieson (2016), for People magazine, also did not directly comment on the case itself, Jamieson (2016) expressed that she did not support the zoo’s decision by pointing out a potential problem that could result from the gorilla’s death: depression for the other gorillas. Jamieson (2016) cited Dr. Penny Patterson, The Gorilla Foundation’s co-founder, president, and director, saying, “I would expect that the bond was pretty close and the females…will need some emotional support” (para. 6). With this statement, Jamieson (2016) emphasized the importance of the other gorillas involved and provided a reason to disagree with the zoo’s decision.

In conclusion, RQ1 asked what sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the overall Cincinnati Zoo case. Analyzing the artifacts with this question in mind revealed that most (22 artifacts, ~65%) U.S. media organizations framed the case using a neutral sentiment. In contrast to the majority, just over one third (12 artifacts, ~35%) of the U.S. media organizations framed the case using a positive (6 artifacts, ~18%) or negative (6 artifacts, ~18%) sentiment. Several themes arose in how these U.S. media organizations conveyed these sentiments. For example, to maintain a neutral sentiment, U.S. media organizations either included statements for and against the zoo, used factual reporting, or re-directed the readers from
the case. Similarly, some U.S. media organizations maintained a positive sentiment through explicit statements and framing, while other U.S. media organizations maintained a negative sentiment by focusing on the animals involved, rather than the people. To explore these sentiments more deeply, however, RQ2 through RQ4 further break down the portrayals of those involved and zoo’s decision.

**RQ2: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the gorilla and his actions?**

Identifying the sentiment of each article provided insight into the overall frames utilized by the U.S. media organizations. However, this study seeks to gain a more in-depth understanding of the frames used by each organization. Therefore, the specific portrayals of the key individuals involved in this case, and their actions, by each media organization were identified as well. For the Cincinnati Zoo case, the key individuals were the gorilla and the child because while other individuals witnessed the incident, the heart of the incident was the encounter was between the gorilla and the child. This section, in particular, focused the national U.S. media organizations’ portrayals of the gorilla. As demonstrated by the following analysis, the sentiment of each artifact was strongly tied to how each media organization perceived and portrayed the gorilla’s role in the incident. The following conclusions were drawn after analyzing the artifacts with RQ2 in mind:

- Harambe was framed as a well-behaved gorilla growing up.
- The most prominent theme was the gorilla first helping and then hurting the boy.
- The second most prominent frame was portraying the gorilla as only dangerous.
- Some articles used the statements of public figures to portray the gorilla as helping the boy.
Some articles framed Harambe as a well-behaved gorilla growing up. This positive image of Harambe’s upbringing was most often portrayed by citing Jerry Stones, the director of the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas, where Harambe was born and raised. In fact, Stones raised Harambe from birth and was even the one who “cut Harambe’s umbilical cord” (Glanton, 2016, para. 19). Furthermore, according to the articles reviewed, was particularly close to the gorilla. In an article by CBS News, Stones described Harambe as a friendly, non-threatening animal: “He was a character. He grew up to be a beautiful, beautiful animal, never aggressive and never mean” (“Police investigating circumstances...,” 2016, para. 25). In addition to Stones’ description of Harambe’s personality, CBS News mentioned Stones’ close bond with the gorilla by noting that Stones “…took Harambe home with him and let him sleep in his bed as a baby” (“Police investigating circumstances…,” 2016, para. 26). In this way, CBS News offered a strategic rationale behind the frame portraying Harambe as non-violent. By describing Stones’ close relationship with Harambe as a baby, CBS News framed the gorilla as a sweet and gentle gorilla, without explicitly describing the gorilla as such.

Bailey (2016), for The Insquisitr, also mentioned Stones’ relationship with Harambe. In the Inquisitr article, Stones offered further insight by commenting on Harambe’s potential to inflict danger. Bailey (2016) paraphrased Stones, saying that “he was in tears when he learned of the gorilla’s death” (para. 20), which implies that Stones felt significant loss from the gorilla’s death. Despite this mention of grief, Stones was also quoted saying that, “The child was in danger. It’s a tragic set of circumstances that left a beautiful young gorilla in a situation that was foreign and ultimately ended up being dangerous for him” (para. 21). With this statement, Stones acknowledged that the gorilla
put the child in danger, but also acknowledged that the child coming into contact with the gorilla put the gorilla in danger as well because he was in a new, uncomfortable situation. In this way, Bailey (2016) framed the gorilla as one who meant a lot to his former keeper, but also as a potential threat to the child, since the child was a foreign object to the gorilla. In contrast to Glanton (2016), CBS News, and Bailey (2016), other articles took the approach of framing Harambe as a both gentle with the child and as a potential threat.

Some articles framed the gorilla as first helping and then hurting the boy. As can be observed from witness O’Connor’s footage, the gorilla initially appeared to be helping the boy, performing actions such as helping the boy stand up, but then, the gorilla’s actions change drastically and he begins dragging the child through the water (TomoNews US, 2016). These contradictory actions from the gorilla played a significant role in stirring up the controversy over how the situation should have been handled. The gorilla’s gentler actions may cause one to believe that the gorilla would not have significantly hurt or killed the child, but the gorilla’s more aggressive actions may cause one to believe otherwise. Illustrating both the gentle and aggressive sides of the gorilla was the most prominent theme found within the articles, although the articles took a variety of methods to do so.

One way in which the two sides of the gorilla’s behavior was depicted was through first-hand accounts from witnesses. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, paraphrased witness Kimberley O’Connor explaining her initial reaction to the gorilla’s encounter with the boy: “At first, it looked like Harambe was trying to help the boy…He stood him up and pulled up his pants” (para. 13). In contrast to this, Grinberg (2016) also quoted O’Connor’s later realization that “[i]t was not a good scene,” the gorilla
“aggressively” handled the boy, and “really wasn’t going to let him get away” (para. 16). Through these statements, Grinberg (2016) illustrated both Harambe’s gentle and threatening actions. Likewise, Alter (2016), for *Time* magazine, also quoted O’Connor, who described the situation as “too traumatic to be on camera” (para. 3). O’Connor also noted that the gorilla was “treating the little boy like a Raggedy Ann doll” (Alter, 2016, para. 3). In the same article, witness Deidre Lykin also noted the gorilla was being “violent,” but also felt “the gorilla was still trying to protect” the boy (Alter, 2016, para. 4). In this way, Alter (2016) framed the gorilla as both handling the child with care and acting dangerously. CBS News quoted police reports (based on reports from witnesses) and the child’s mother. The report offered a variety of perspectives from supporters and critics of the zoo. CBS first cited the police report, in which the police stated that “witnesses said the gorilla initially appeared to be protecting the child” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 15). In contrast to the police report, CBS also referenced the child’s mother’s 911 call, in which she stated, “He’s dragging my son!” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 13). Thus, CBS News framed the gorilla as helping the child at first, but then hurting him.

While Grinberg (2016), Alter (2016), and CBS News portrayed the gorilla as both hurting and helping the child through only eye-witness accounts, Olsen (2016) and Austrew (2016) described the opposing sides of the gorilla’s behavior through both eye-witness accounts and their interpretations of witness O’Connor’s footage. For instance, Olsen (2016), for PBS, reviewed O’Connor’s footage of Harambe in his article and took it upon himself to describe the gorilla’s actions. Initially, Olsen (2016) described Harambe as being gentle with the boy, claiming that he seemed to be “genuinely trying to
protect and possibly soothe him” (para. 2). However, Olsen (2016) also added Harambe’s more dangerous actions, such as that the gorilla then began “grabbing the child by the leg and dragging him rather violently” (para. 3). In this way, Olsen (2016) described both the gorilla’s caring and dangerous actions. Likewise, Austrew (2016), for Cosmopolitan, took it upon herself to describe Harambe’s gentle side, noting that gorilla “seemed to protect the child before appearing to tug on the back of the boy’s pants” (para. 5). To describe his more dangerous side, however, Austrew (2016) cited the Cincinnati Fire Department’s report, which stated “the gorilla was violently dragging and throwing the child” (para. 5). Through her review of the footage, and account from the Cincinnati Fire Department, Austrew (2016) illustrated both the caring and dangerous sides of the gorilla as well. Olsen (2016) and Austrew (2016)’s articles, however, were not the only ones to portray both sides of the gorilla’s behavior through second-hand accounts.

Fox News and Rare conveyed the opinions of public figures to portray the gorilla as both helping and hurting the boy. One of the most commonly quoted public figures used to illustrate the opposing actions of the gorilla was President Donald Trump. For instance, Fox News paraphrased President Trump saying that “he was amazed at how gentle the gorilla was with the boy,” but also that the gorilla could have “killed the child in a split-second” (“300k sign petition calling…,” 2016, para. 6-7). In this way, although President Trump described the gorilla as handling the boy with care, he also acknowledged the gorilla’s ability to hurt the boy. Likewise, Rare directly quoted President Trump’s initial observation that “…the way he [the gorilla] held that child it was almost like a mother holding a baby” (“Experts agree that Harambe…,” 2016, para. 12). However, once again, President Trump also acknowledged that the situation
“…looked pretty dangerous” and that the zoo “…didn’t have a choice” (“Experts agree that Harambe…,” 2016, para. 13). Thus, while President Trump compared the gorilla’s behavior to that of a mother, he also implied that if zoo had not taken action, the child may not have survived. Nevertheless, some articles did not show the gorilla’s gentle side at all.

**Some articles portrayed the gorilla as only dangerous.** Illustrating the gorilla’s threatening behaviors was the second most prominent theme found throughout the articles, which was most commonly portrayed by citing zoo’s perspective on the case. For example, Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly*, quoted the zoo’s website, which stated that the “quick response saved the child’s life” (para. 3). In other words, by including a quote from the zoo that described the decision to kill the gorilla as a life-saving decision, Hautman (2016) implied that the gorilla’s actions endangered the child. Other articles directly quoted Cincinnati Zoo’s Director Maynard, such as Cahillane (2016) for *People* magazine. In Cahillane’s (2016) article, Maynard stated, “He [Harambe] was acting erratically, he was disoriented…It’s due to his strength, that’s where the danger was” (para. 4). With this statement, Maynard did not describe Harambe as intentionally hurting the child, but acknowledged the gorilla’s potential to inflict harm upon the child and, therefore, implied that Harambe was dangerous. On the other hand, Shapiro (2016), for *The National Review*, quoted Maynard commenting directly on Harambe’s actions: “The child was being dragged around. His head was banging on concrete” (para. 4). By including Maynard’s explanation of how Harambe was handling the child, Shapiro (2016) framed the gorilla as dangerous.

The zoo director was not the only witness quoted to illustrate that the gorilla
behaved dangerously. Chan (2016), for *Yahoo! News*, portrayed the gorilla’s violent actions by quoting the child’s mother. The child’s mother, who witnessed the incident, stated in her 911 call: “There is a male gorilla standing over him…He’s dragging my son. I can’t watch this” (Chan, 2016, para. 5). By including this statement, Chan (2016) included a description of the gorilla’s dangerous actions, but she further implied the gorilla’s dangerous actions by including an illustration of how much fear the gorilla’s actions instilled in the boy’s mother.

While a majority of the articles quoted the zoo or witnesses to illustrate the gorilla’s dangerous actions, Cahillane (2016), Hautman (2016), Byrne (2016), and Shapiro (2016) took it upon themselves to interpret O’Connor’s footage of the incident and describe Harambe’s dangerous actions. For example, Cahillane (2016) described Harambe as having “grabbed the boy and carrying him around the enclosure” (para. 3). While this description of Harambe’s actions makes him appear less violent, Cahillane (2016) still described concerning behavior from the gorilla. Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly*, was a bit more explicit in his description of Harambe’s actions: “He [the boy] was then picked up and dragged around by a 400-pound, 17-year-old male gorilla” (para. 2). In this description, Hautman (2016) clearly portrayed the danger the child was in by using the word “dragged.” The word “dragged” was also used by Byrne (2016), for *Vocativ*, to describe the gorilla’s actions: Harambe “dragged the boy through shallow water in a moat,” while “onlookers feared the boy wouldn’t make it out alive” (para. 5). By including language that implied that the boy may not have lived through the incident if the gorilla had survived, Byrne (2016) framed the gorilla as extremely dangerous. The word “dragged” appeared a third time in Shapiro’s (2016) article for *The National*
Review. Shapiro (2016) described how the gorilla “grabbed the boy by the ankle and dragged him through the water” (para. 4). Through Cahillane’s (2016), Hautman’s (2016), Byrne’s (2016), and Shapiro’s (2016) descriptions of the gorilla “grabbing” or “dragging” the boy around the enclosure, the gorilla’s behavior was framed as dangerous. Some articles, however, focused on the gorilla’s gentle behavior.

Some articles portrayed the gorilla as helping the boy through public figures’ statements. Kaley Cuoco and Jane Goodall, for instance, offered their interpretations of the case, most likely based on O’Connor’s footage of the incident. For example, Clark (2016), for Hollywood Life, quoted Cuoco’s reaction to the footage: Cuoco said, “If you watch the footage, you see this gorgeous animal holding that child’s hand” (para. 3). By describing the gorilla as holding the child’s hand, Cuoco created a nurturing image of the gorilla, which makes the reader believe the gorilla was helping the boy. Likewise, Shrine (2016), for The Huffington Post, quoted Goodall describing the gorilla as kind to the child: “…it looked as though the gorilla was putting an arm round the child” (para. 5). Like Cuoco, Goodall painted a nurturing image of the gorilla. In fact, Goodall went as far as to compare the gorilla’s behavior to that of the gorilla involved in the Brookfield zoo incident: Harambe was “…like the female who rescued and returned the child from the Chicago exhibit” (Shine, 2016, para. 5). By comparing Harambe to a gorilla who was gentle with a child, and returned the child to the zookeepers, Goodall implied that Harambe may have done the same and, in this way, portrayed Harambe as helping the boy.

In conclusion, RQ2 asked what themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the gorilla and his actions. While several themes arose in how the
U.S. media organizations portrayed the gorilla and his actions, these themes overlapped. For example, the gorilla was predominantly framed as first helping and then hurting the child. The second most prominent frame, however, portrayed only the gorilla’s dangerous actions, while other articles only included public figures’ statements that described the gorilla’s gentler actions. Several articles also framed the gorilla as having been a well-behaved gorilla growing up. While the portrayal of the gorilla and his actions are a significant part of how the case was portrayed by the U.S. media organizations, the portrayal of the child and his actions are just as important to consider, since the child was also at the heart of the incident.

**RQ3: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the child and his actions?**

As illustrated by the analysis of RQ2, several themes could be identified in how the gorilla and his actions were framed. For example, some articles portrayed the gorilla as helping the child, others portrayed the gorilla as hurting child, and finally, most articles portrayed the gorilla as first helping the child and then hurting him. Similar to their portrayal of Harambe, several themes could be identified in how the child and his actions were framed, such as how the child entered the enclosure, how much danger he was in, and how much he was affected by the incident. It should be noted that the analyses offered in RQ2 and RQ3 are intertwined because some of the statements used to describe the gorilla’s actions were also used to illustrate the level of danger the child was in. In this way, the following analysis further illustrates that the portrayal of those involved affected the overall sentiment of each article. The following conclusions were drawn after analyzing the artifacts with RQ3 in mind:
The child was predominantly framed as entering and then falling into the enclosure.

Some articles blamed the child’s parents for the child’s entering the enclosure.

Other articles blamed the zoo for the child’s entering the enclosure.

The boy was also framed as in danger, injured, and having visited the hospital.

**Most articles described the child as entering and then falling into the enclosure.** Although there were a variety of interpretations as to how the child entered the enclosure, a majority of the articles described the child as intentionally entering the enclosure by crawling over the barrier and then falling into the moat in the enclosure. For example, CBS News stated that “a boy…had entered its [the gorilla’s] exhibit,” but then asserted that “the boy fell” into the exhibit ("Police investigating circumstances…,” 2016, para. 10). With this statement, CBS News clearly noted that the child was attempting to enter enclosure by climbing through the barrier, but also used the word “fell” to describe how the child found himself in the enclosure. Grinberg (2016), for CNN, took this one step further and described the boy as having “climbed through a barrier and fell some 15 feet to a shallow moat” (para. 11). While Grinberg (2016) described the child as having “fell,” the child was described as intentionally climbing through the barrier. In an article for PBS, Olsen (2016) used almost identical wording to describe that the “boy climbed over a barrier and fell into a gorilla exhibit” (para. 1). Here, Olsen made it clear, once again, that the child began entering the enclosure himself, but eventually “fell” into it. Finally, Oritz (2016), for NBC News, provided the most detailed explanation of how the child entered the enclosure: The “3-year-old boy slipped underneath the barrier, pushed through brush and tumbled 10 feet into the enclosure…”
By noting that the child also had to push through brush to enter the enclosure, NBC News makes it clear that the child made a significant effort to find himself with the gorilla. While CBS News, CNN, Grinberg (2016), and Olsen (2016) took it upon themselves to describe how the child entered the enclosure, other articles used witnesses to attest to these efforts.

In addition to the CBS News’, CNN’s, Grinberg’s (2016), and Olsen’s (2016) descriptions of how the child entered the enclosure, several witnesses were also quoted describing the child as intentionally climbing into the enclosure. For example, Nicks (2016), for *Time* magazine, noted that witness “Brittany Nicely was visiting the zoo with a small group of people…[when] [s]he witnessed the child…slip into the gorilla enclosure…” (para. 3). With this description of the child’s actions, Nicks (2016) implied that Nicely witnessed the child sneak into the enclosure. Likewise, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, quoted witness O’Connor describing how she saw the child enter the enclosure: “I don’t think it was as easy as standing up and falling in. He actually had to climb under something, through some bushes and then into the moat” (para. 19). In Grinberg’s (2016) article, O’Connor’s statement addressed the rebuttal, in which some may argue that the child simply fell into the enclosure, but maintained the argument that the child had to make a significant effort to enter the enclosure. As in Oritz’s (2016) article for NBC News, O’Connor noted that the child had to push through brush to get into the enclosure. In addition to describing how the child got into the enclosure, some articles noted that O’Connor witnessed the child expressing the desire to enter the enclosure before doing so.

Several articles included O’Connor’s observation that the child appeared
interested in entering the enclosure before the incident occurred. In Alter’s (2016) article for *Time* magazine, O’Connor said, “I heard him [the child] say, ‘I wanna go [into the enclosure]!’ and the mom was like, ‘No, you’re not!’ […]” (para. 4). While O’Connor’s statement did not describe how the child entered the enclosure, it implied that the child elected to enter the enclosure on his own accord. Minutaglio (2016), for *People* magazine, also included the same quote in her article, as well as another quote in which O’Connor claimed that she heard the child say he “wanted to swim with the gorilla” (para. 1). Minutaglio (2016) also quoted an additional witness, Deidre Lykins, who noted that “the little boy ‘literally flopped over the railing’” (para. 7). By including both O’Connor’s quote, which described the child expressing interest in entering the enclosure, and Lykins’ quote, which described child falling into the enclosure, Minutaglio (2016) further reinforced that the child crawled over the barrier and then fell into the enclosure. While these articles placed blame on the child for doing so, others placed blame on the child’s parents for allowing the child to do so.

**Several articles blamed the child’s parents for the child’s entering of the enclosure.** While most of these articles portrayed the child as entering the enclosure himself, they also noted that if the child’s parents had kept better watch of him, then the child may not have entered the enclosure in the first place. For instance, Glanton (2016), for the *Chicago Tribune*, questioned the roles of each of the child’s parents in the situation: “Perhaps the mother of four is unfit because she took her eyes off of one of her kids for a few seconds...And of course, let’s not let the dad off the hook. He has a criminal past...” (para. 3). Here, Glanton (2016) does not explicitly place blame on the child’s parents, but she does insinuate that the parents could be at fault by illustrating that
the mother may not have been paying close enough attention to the child and that the father was from a questionable background, which implied that he could be irresponsible. Other articles more explicitly placed blame on the parents. For instance, Olsen (2016), for PBS, noted that “…some [were] blaming the parents of the boy for not keeping better tabs on him” (para. 3). With this statement, like Glanton (2016), Olsen (2016) noted that some people felt that the parents were not paying close enough attention to the child’s whereabouts. In addition to mentioning that the parents could be at fault, some articles described how the public expressed their anger towards the parents for being irresponsible.

Some members of the public felt so strongly that the child’s parents were at fault that they created petitions calling for the child’s parents to be held responsible for the gorilla’s death. For example, in a Fox News article, the signers of the “Justice for Harambe” petition felt that the child entered the enclosure because his parents were not keeping a watchful eye on him: “…the tragic death of the 17-year-old male western lowland gorilla was directly caused by parental negligence” (“300k sign petition calling…,” 2016, para. 2). However, this petition called for more than blame to be placed on the parents: This petition sought to “…encourage the Cincinnati Zoo, Hamilton County Child Protection Services, and Cincinnati Police Department [to] hold the parents responsible” (“300k sign petition calling…,” 2016, para. 3). By noting that the signers of the petition wanted legal action to be taken against the parents, Fox News illustrated how distressed members of the public were by the parents’ potential negligence. Likewise, Katzowitz (2016), for The Daily Dot, demonstrated that placing blame on the child’s parents was popular among many members of the public. The “Justice for Harambe”
petition, according to Katowitz (2016), within “…the first 24 hours after…[the incident]…garnered more than 140,000 signatures” (para. 1). Katowitz (2016) then stated that 465,000 had signed the petition as of the day the article was written, which was four days after the incident. While Fox News and Katowitz (2016) mentioned petitions calling for the child’s parents to be held responsible, other articles described the investigation of the parents that took place.

The signers of the petition were not the only ones who questioned whether the child’s parents were at fault for the death of the gorilla: The Cincinnati police department held an investigation to determine the parents’ role in the incident. While no charges were brought against the family, Augustine (2016) and Byrne (2016) mentioned the investigation and, by doing so, illustrated that even the police were concerned that the parents may have been at fault for the incident. For example, Augustine (2016), for Mirror, noted that “…the child’s family is currently under investigation to determine whether charges can be brought forward in Harambe’s death” (para. 10). By noting that the child’s family was being investigated, Augustine (2016) acknowledged that the parents’ role in the incident was questionable enough to be investigated by the police. However, as noted in Byrne’s (2016) article for Vocativ, the “…Cincinnati police have already concluded their investigation into the actions of the boy’s parents ‘‘without recommending charges’ against the boy’s mother” (para. 6). Once again, while neither of the parents were charged for negligence, Byrne’s (2016) mention of the investigation suggested potential blame on the parents. Additionally, Byrne (2016) described the family as a “focus of an investigation related to the incident” (para. 10), which further implied that the police were looking at the child’s parents as potential causes for the
incident. However, the child’s parents were not the only ones blamed. Others expressed concern that the zoo was not ensuring that the enclosure met safety standards, as the child was easily able to surpass it.

**Other articles placed blame on the zoo for the child’s entering the enclosure.** Olsen (2016), Encarnaco (2016), and Glanton (2016) expressed that the enclosure should have been designed well enough to prevent the child from having entered the enclosure in the first place. The public placed blame on the zoo for failing to ensure that the enclosure was impenetrable by zoo visitors, particularly children. Olsen (2016), for PBS, noted this by explicitly acknowledging that some “…have blamed the zoo for negligence in the exhibit’s design” (para. 5). Encarnaco (2016), for the *Boston Herald*, made a similar comment and noted that “…there has to be some fault placed with the zoo...something is not right with their enclosure that the child was even able to get there...there should have been some structure there to make sure somebody couldn’t get to that moat” (para. 3). With this statement, Encarnaco (2016) reminded readers that the zoo should have not only considered how to keep the animals in, but how to keep the people out of the enclosure. With this in mind, Glanton (2016), for the *Chicago Tribune*, also added, “Maybe the zoo should rethink those natural habitats and keep gorillas in cages” (para. 3). Like Encarnaco (2016), Glanton (2016) implied that the zoo could be held responsible for the incident because they did not ensure that the enclosure would keep people out of the habitat. In other words, the zoo may have needed to consider the danger the animals could have posed to the people if the people got into the enclosure, as described in the following articles.

**Several articles described the boy as in danger.** While the following articles
took a variety of approaches to describe that the child was in danger, most illustrated this through quotes from zoo Director Maynard and the zoo’s website. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, quoted Maynard explicitly stating that “the boy was in ‘imminent danger’” and “a quick decision had to be made” (para. 2-3). Here, Maynard implied that if a decision had not been made immediately, then the child would have been significantly injured or died. Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly*, included a similar quote from the zoo’s website, which stated that the “quick response saved the child’s life” (para. 3). Once again, the zoo implied that if the gorilla had not been shot, the child would have died. By including quotes that illustrated the incident as a life or death situation, both Grinberg (2016) and Hautman (2016) illustrated that the child was in grave danger. In addition to describing the incident as a life-threatening situation, Shapiro (2016), for the *National Review*, quoted Maynard describing why the situation was dangerous for the child: “The child was being dragged around. His head was banging on concrete…” (para. 4). By including a quote that described how the gorilla was injuring the child, Shapiro (2016) provided readers with an image of how much danger the child was in. Cahillane (2016), for *People* magazine, quoted a similar statement from Maynard: “He [the gorilla] was acting erratically, he was disoriented…It’s due to his strength, that’s where the danger was” (para. 4). Here, Maynard first commented on the gorilla’s dangerous behavior, which implied that the gorilla could hurt the child, but he also mentioned the gorilla’s strength, which implied the gorilla’s potential to hurt the child. Thus, by including a quote describing the gorilla’s potential to inflict damage, Cahillane (2016) further demonstrated the danger the child was in. While these articles quoted Maynard and the zoo acknowledging the danger the child was in, other articles quoted
child’s parents.

CBS News, Alter (2016), and Cahillane (2016) implied that the situation was dangerous by describing how thankful the child’s family was for ending the gorilla’s life. For instance, CBS News noted that “[t]he boy’s family has expressed gratitude to the zoo for protecting his [the child’s] life” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 17). With this statement, the family implied that the child could have died if the zoo had not decided to shoot the gorilla. The mother even thanked the zoo for making the decision to end the gorilla’s life to ensure her child’s safety. Alter (2016), for Time magazine, also quoted the child’s mother’s Facebook post: “Accidents happen but I am thankful that the right people were in the right place today” (para. 7). By expressing their gratitude, the child’s mother further demonstrated that the child was in danger. In addition to the child’s mother’s Facebook post, Cahillane (2016), for People magazine, included another statement of gratitude from the child’s family: “We extend our heartfelt thanks for the quick action by the Cincinnati Zoo staff” (para. 6). Once again, the family’s appreciation for the zoo taking action implied that the child was in significant danger. In addition to the family, some of the article’s authors acknowledged that the child was in a life or death situation.

Glanton (2016) and Leigh (2016) took it upon themselves to describe how much danger the child was in based on their interpretation of the footage of the case. For example, based on witness O’Connor’s footage, Glanton (2016), for the Chicago Tribune, described how she viewed the gorilla’s potential to hurt the child: “Maybe the gorilla wouldn’t have intentionally killed the child. But think of the damage he could do just playing around” (para. 18). Like Maynard, Glanton (2016) acknowledged that the
situation was dangerous because of the gorilla’s strength. Similarly, Leigh (2016), for *The Huffington Post*, also implied that the gorilla had much potential to hurt the child: “The fact that nothing happened to that child is such a miracle, and I can’t even imagine how blessed that mom (and dad) must feel” (para. 8). Like Glanton (2016), Leigh (2016) noted that while the child survived, he may not have because of the gorilla’s strength. Leigh (2016) also echoed that she would have also expressed gratitude, like the child’s parents did, because of the direness of the situation.

**Some articles noted that the child was injured.** While several articles described that the child was in danger, many also explained how much damage the gorilla actually inflicted upon the child. However, the descriptions of the child’s injuries ranged from specific to vague, and the types of injuries mentioned also varied. For example, CBS News paraphrased the police, who stated that the child “…had scrapes to his head and knee” (Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 5). Hatchett (2016), for *Complex*, on the other hand, did not mention these scrapes and instead noted that the child “only suffered a concussion and a few minor injuries” (para. 3). While the scrapes were not mentioned in Hatchett’s (2016) article, the scrapes could fall under the few minor injuries mentioned. Most articles, however, opted to remain vague when describing the child’s injuries.

Some articles merely noted that the child was injured. For instance, Olsen (2016), for PBS, noted that “[d]espite this rough treatment, the boy seems to have walked away from the incident with few injuries” (para. 2). With this statement, Olsen (2016) told readers that the child was affected by the incident, but not as brutally as some may have expected. In contrast to Olsen’s (2016) article, Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly*, described the child as being more significantly impacted: “A close call. A seriously injured 4-year-
old boy is expected to recover after he fell into a gorilla enclosure…” (para. 1). While Hautman (2016) did not describe any specific injuries, Hautman (2016) cited the incident as a “close call” and the child as “seriously injured,” which implied that the child’s life was significantly threatened by the incident. In contrast to Hautman (2016), CBS News did not mention that the child was injured, but acknowledged that the child had survived the incident without significant injuries by quoting a police report which noted, “The child was alert and talking” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 6). While the descriptions of the child’s level of injuries varied, many articles acknowledged that the child was injured enough to require a hospital visit.

Some articles noted that the child visited the hospital. The child’s trip to the hospital was described in detail by some articles, but very vaguely by others. For example, Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly*, was very specific, noting that “[t]he boy was immediately transported to the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, where it was determined that his injuries were ‘non-life threatening’” (para. 5). Hautman’s (2016) statement informed readers of which hospital the child visited specifically, as well as that the child’s injuries were not too significant. Other articles did not mention the name of the hospital, but also mentioned that the boy was not significantly injured. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, noted that the boy was “…released unhurt from a Cincinnati hospital…” (para. 8). By using the word “unhurt,” Grinberg (2016) portrayed the child as free of injuries.

Some articles did not even mention whether the child was injured, but acknowledged that the child had visited the hospital and was fine after the fact. For instance, Alter (2016), for *Time* magazine, also noted that, “The boy is reportedly out of
the hospital and doing well” (para. 7). While Alter (2016) did not state whether the child was injured, she noted that the boy had been released from the hospital and had recovered. Likewise, according to CBS News, “the boy’s family has said he is doing well at home after being treated at a hospital Saturday evening” (“Cops hand in Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 5). CBS News’ statement further implied that the child had to recover by describing him as having been “treated,” but like Alter (2016), also acknowledged that the child did eventually recover. Cahillane (2016), for People magazine, further iterated that the child had visited the hospital and recovered by citing child’s family saying that, “The boy is ‘doing just fine’ said the family in a statement. He was released from the hospital Saturday night” (para. 10). Overall, Alter’s (2016), CBS News’, and Cahillane’s (2016) mention of the child’s trip to the hospital further supported that the child was negatively affected by the incident.

In conclusion, RQ3 asked what themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the child and his actions. Three themes arose for who was to blame for the child’s entering the enclosure: The most prominent theme implied that the child entered and fell into the enclosure on his own accord. The remaining articles either blamed the child’s parents for the child’s entering the enclosure, or blamed the zoo for not ensuring that the enclosure would prevent a child from entering the habitat. In addition to how the boy entered the enclosure, several articles framed the child as in danger, as well as mentioned that the child was injured and, as a result, was sent to the hospital. Now that the portrayals child and his actions, as well as the gorilla and his actions, have been analyzed, the portrayals of the zoo’s options for how to handle the situation should be considered.
RQ4: What themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the options of tranquilizing or killing the gorilla?

Understanding how each U.S. media organization portrayed the child and his actions, as well as the gorilla and his actions, plays a significant role in understanding the overall frames used by each organization. Having gained a deeper understanding of the various frames deployed, as reviewed in RQ2 and RQ3, how the media organizations’ framed the options to kill or tranquilize the gorilla should also be considered. Most media organizations supported one of two options: killing or tranquilizing the gorilla. With this in mind, the option which a given media organization supported often highly influenced that organization’s sentiment of choice (positive, negative, or neutral). The following conclusions were drawn after analyzing the artifacts with RQ4 in mind:

- The most prominent “pro” of killing the gorilla was to save the child’s life.
- The most prominent “con” of killing the gorilla was losing the gorilla’s life.
- Very few articles mentioned the option to tranquilize and fewer mentioned other options.

**Most articles cited killing the gorilla as a life-saving decision.** Regardless of the sentiment of a given article, most articles acknowledged that killing the gorilla would guarantee that the life of the child would be saved. However, the degree to which killing the gorilla was considered necessary ranged from article to article. In other words, these articles ranged from being uncertain to very certain that the gorilla’s death was necessary. For instance, Nicks (2016) and CBS News expressed that they felt the gorilla’s death ensured the child’s safety. Nicks (2016), for *Time* magazine, noted that “zoo officials [had] to shoot and kill the animal out of fear for the child’s safety” (para. 2). By using the
phrase “safety,” Nicks (2016) implied that the gorilla could have injured the child, but this term instills less fear in the reader than words like “saved.” Likewise, in two other articles, CBS News described the action as a choice to “protect the child.” In the first article, CBS News described “…the animal [as] being shot to death to protect the child” (“Police investigating circumstances…,” 2016, para. 1), and in the other article, CBS News used the word “protect” once again, saying, “The zoo’s dangerous animal response team shot and killed the gorilla within 20 minutes [of the encounter] to protect the boy” (“Cops hand Cincinnati…,” 2016, para. 17). Like Nicks (2016), CBS News lets the reader know that the child could have been injured during his encounter with the gorilla, but the word “protect” makes the reader less concerned for the child’s life because “protect” implies that the child may have only been injured had the gorilla not been killed.

While Nicks (2016) and CBS News acknowledged that the gorilla could have injured the child, Grinberg (2016), the Chicago Tribune’s Editorial board (2016), and Brulliard (2016) described the incident as life-or-death situation. In other words, some articles implied that the child’s life would have ended, if the gorilla had not be killed. The following articles, in particular, used the word “save” to emphasize the direness of the situation. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, noted that the “gorilla [was] killed on Saturday to save a boy” (para. 1). By using the word “save,” Grinberg (2016) lead readers to believe that the gorilla’s death was the only option that would guarantee the child’s life because “save” often indicates that one was rescued from a life or death situation. Likewise, Chicago Tribune’s Editorial board (2016) described “[t]he shooting of Harambe the gorilla [as an action] to save a 3-year-old boy” (para. 1). Like Grinberg
(2016), the Editorial board (2016) used the word “save” to illustrate that the child’s life was at stake. Similar to both Grinberg (2016) and the Editorial board (2016), Brulliard (2016), for *The Washington Post*, described the gorilla as “fatally shot to save a toddler’s life” (para. 1). While Brulliard (2016) had more sympathy for the gorilla, using the word “fatally” to emphasize the loss of the gorilla’s life, Brulliard (2016) also used the word “save” to demonstrate that the child may have died if the gorilla had not been killed. Some articles, however, took a more personal approach to expressing that shooting the gorilla was the best option.

While most articles stated their opinion from the third-person point-of-view, Glanton (2016) and Leigh (2016) shared their opinion that the gorilla’s death saved the child’s life from the first-person point-of-view. For example, Glanton (2016), for the *Chicago Tribune*, explicitly stated, “The ape had to die” (para. 1). Later in the article, Glanton (2016) told readers why she felt this way: “Maye the gorilla wouldn’t have intentionally killed the child. But think of the damage he could do just playing around” (para. 17). With this statement, Glanton (2016) acknowledged that the gorilla may have only hurt the child, but as in Grinberg’s (2016), the Editorial board’s (2016), and Brulliard’s (2016) articles, Glanton (2016) expressed that the gorilla’s death was the only way to guarantee that the child would survive his encounter with the gorilla without being injured, or killed. In a similar vein, Leigh (2016), for *The Huffington Post*, expressed her opinion that the gorilla’s death was necessary: “I am sorry that a gorilla got shot. I don’t know if anything else less extreme could have guaranteed that kid coming out of this alive” (para. 4). Here, Leigh (2016) was even more explicit than Glanton (2016) and used the word “guaranteed” to show readers that the gorilla’s death was the only way to ensure
the child’s protection. Nevertheless, Leigh (2016) and Glanton (2016) were not the only individuals to share this opinion.

While Leigh (2016) and Glanton (2016) expressed their personal opinions that the zoo’s decision saved the child’s life, Hautman (2016) and Olsen (2016) cited the zoo and zoo Director Maynard to illustrate this opinion. For example, Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly* magazine, quoted the zoo’s security team, who stated that the “quick response saved the child’s life” (para. 3). By describing the zoo’s “quick” decision as what “saved” the child’s life, the zoo’s security team implied that the child may have been killed otherwise. Like the zoo’s security team, Director Maynard maintained the same stance. Olsen (2016), for PBS, quoted Maynard bolstering the zoo’s decision: “We did not take the shooting of Harambe lightly, but that’s child life was in danger…you can’t take a chance with a silverback gorilla” (para. 8). While Maynard did not explicitly state that the child may have died, if the gorilla had not been killed, Maynard did imply that the child’s life, or at least well-being, was at risk. In this way, by quoting both the zoo’s security team and Maynard, Hautman (2016) and Olsen (2016) further supported the opinion that shooting the gorilla saved the child’s life. Despite these articles describing that the gorilla’s death prevented the possibility of the child being killed, several media organizations expressed greater distress for the loss of the gorilla’s life.

**Several articles recognized the con of killing the gorilla: losing the gorilla’s life.** While most articles expressed that the death of the gorilla guaranteed the child’s safety, many articles also acknowledged that this protection came at the cost of an endangered gorilla’s life. The zoo and Director Maynard were cited by several articles to illustrate that deciding to kill the gorilla was not an easy decision and that the gorilla’s
life was great loss for the zoo and his species. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, quoted Maynard describing this loss, “We are heartbroken about losing Harambe, but a child’s life was in danger and a quick decision had to be made” (para. 3). With this statement, Maynard told readers that the zoo was deeply saddened by the gorilla’s death, despite there being a significant reason behind that loss. Likewise, CBS News cited Maynard describing the zoo staff as feeling “very emotional” after the incident (“Police investigating circumstances…,” 2016, para. 28). By describing the zoo staff as “heartbroken” and “emotional,” Maynard illustrated that the zoo staff was significantly impacted by the death of the gorilla on an emotional level. Maynard, and the zoo’s team, were also quoted noting factual reasons as to why the gorilla’s death was a loss.

While Maynard acknowledged the emotional aspects of the gorilla’s death, he and the zoo’s team also described the impact of the gorilla’s death on the western lowland gorillas’ population. For instance, Hautman (2016), for *US Weekly* magazine, quoted the zoo’s security team saying, “We are all devastated that his tragic accident resulted in the death of a critically endangered gorilla. This is a huge loss for the Zoo family and the gorilla population worldwide” (para. 3). Here, the security team reminded readers that the gorilla was a part of an endangered species and, therefore, implied that the loss of an endangered male gorilla would negatively impact the gorilla population. The security team’s statement further implied that if the gorilla’s species had not been endangered, the decision to kill the gorilla may have been easier, since the loss of his life would not have affected a limited gene pool. Likewise, Glanton (2016), for the *Chicago Tribune*, provided readers with more details as to why this the gorilla’s death would negatively impact the gorilla population: She noted that “…western lowland silverback gorillas like
Harambe [are] critically endangered—fewer than 100,000 are in existence” (para. 21). In other words, because Harambe was a male gorilla, and likely to be used for breeding in the future, Glanton (2016) implied that his death would minimize in-captivity breeding efforts to increase his species’ population. Similarly, Brulliard (2016), for The Washington Post, quoted Maynard, who specifically described the gorilla’s death as a “loss to the gene pool of lowland gorillas” (para. 1). She also noted that, “Most media reports…mentioned that western lowland gorillas, of which Harambe was one, are critically endangered” (Brulliard, 2016, para. 1). Unlike Hautman (2016) or Glanton (2016), however, Bruilliard (2016) spent a majority of her article explaining that the gorilla’s death may not have significantly impacted the endangered lowland gorilla’s population, since Harambe’s offspring would have most likely only impacted the small in-captivity population of western lowland gorillas.

While most articles described the death of the gorilla as a loss to the species, or merely as a loss to the zoo alone, some authors used specific language to convey the tragedy of the gorilla’s death. For instance, Fox News described the incident as a “tragic death of a 17-year-old old male western lowland gorilla” (“300k sign petition calling…,” 2016, para. 2). By describing the gorilla’s death as “tragic,” Fox News expressed that the gorilla’s death was a significant loss, and, by mentioning the type of gorilla, implied that his death was also a loss to the gorilla population. Shanahan (2016), for The Boston Globe, commented on this loss as well but was more explicit: “This weekend’s shocking events at the Cincinnati Zoo, where zookeepers shot and killed a rare gorilla” (para. 1). By using the word “rare,” Shanahan (2016) once again reminded readers that the gorilla was a part of an endangered species and a loss to that species’ population. Shanahan’s
(2016) statement also further implied that the rarity of a western lowland gorilla was a deciding factor in whether he should have been shot. In other words, if Harambe had been a more common gorilla, the decision of whether to shoot him may not have been as difficult. While Brulliard (2016) did not focus on the loss of the gorilla to his species’ population in this statement, Brulliard (2016), for The Washington Post, described the gorilla as having been “fatally shot to save a toddler’s life” (para. 1). Here, Brulliard (2016) noted that the child’s life was saved, but by using the word “fatally,” repointed out that the saving of one life resulted in the loss of another. Overall, Brulliard (2016), Shanahan (2016), and Fox News expressed that the gorilla’s death was an unfortunate. With this in mind, Jamieson (2016) explained further how these unfortunate circumstances could have impacted the zoo.

Jamieson (2016), for People magazine, provided another reason as to why the gorilla’s death was a loss, besides that his species was endangered. As mentioned previously, Jamieson (2016), quoted Dr. Penny Patterson, co-founder, president, and director for The Gorilla Foundation, who expressed that the gorilla’s death could have impacted the gorillas that were closest to him: the gorillas that lived with him at the Cincinnati Zoo. Dr. Patterson told People that “[t]he remaining gorillas living at the Cincinnati Zoo will need emotional support following the tragic death” of the gorilla (Jamieson, 2016, para. 1). More specifically, Dr. Patterson described that the gorillas may have experienced depression following the gorilla’s death (Jamieson, 2016). Thus, Jamieson (2016) illustrated that the gorilla’s death was not only a loss on a larger scale—to his species’ population—but on a smaller scale—to the gorillas who shared his home at the zoo. Other articles, however, offered a potential option for how this loss could have
been avoided: tranquilization.

Only a few articles mentioned the option to tranquilize. Most of these articles quoted zoo Director Maynard explaining that the zoo considered the option to tranquilize. However, within the same articles, Maynard also refuted this option by addressing the potential problems that may have arisen if the zoo had attempted to tranquilize the gorilla. For example, Grinberg (2016), for CNN, paraphrased Maynard saying, “Tranquilizers may not have taken effect in time to save the boy while the dart might have agitated the animal, worsening the situation” (para. 2). In other words, the dart may have disgruntled the gorilla and caused the gorilla to harm the child more. Cahillane (2016), for People magazine, provided a direct quote from Maynard, in which he provided a more specific image of what he felt would have happened if the zoo used a tranquilizer dart: “The idea of waiting and shooting it with a hypodermic was not a good idea…That would have definitely created alarm in the male gorilla. When you dart an animal, anesthetic doesn’t work in one second, it works over a period of a few minutes to 10 minutes. The risk was due to the power of that animal” (para. 2). With this statement, Maynard explained that the tranquilizer may not have incapacitated the gorilla quickly enough for him to stop hurting the boy. Moreover, the tranquilizer dart may have caused the gorilla to become more alarmed, which would have only further aggravated the situation. In this way, neither Grinberg (2016) nor Cahillane (2016) described tranquilization as a feasible option for dispatching the gorilla because, according to them, it would not have guaranteed the child’s safety. In addition to tranquilization, Olsen (2016) offered a few other suggestions for how the gorilla could have been dispatched without being shot.
One article mentioned options beyond tranquilization. While most articles focused on the two options mentioned by the zoo—shooting or tranquilizing the gorilla, Olsen (2016), for PBS, quoted two individuals who specialized in gorillas and suggested other means for dispatching the gorilla. For instance, Olsen (2016) quoted Ian Redmond, chairman of the Gorilla Organization (a gorilla conservation group), who stated: “Was a lethal shot the only option? No, I don’t think so. You could have offered the gorilla more fruit than he could ever normally imagine in one sitting and then the boy would have become less interesting…” (para. 6). In this statement, Redmond implied that the zoo was not prepared with options other than shooting or tranquilizing the gorilla. In place of these options, Redmond suggested that the zoo could have provided something more interesting for the gorilla, such as food, and drawn him away from the child. Some may suggest, however, that the screaming public would have still distressed the gorilla. With this in mind, Olsen (2016) also quoted primatologist and Emory University professor Frans de Waal, who said he:

…can’t help but wonder what would have happened had the public been moved out of the way, and also the veterinary and security staff would have been held back, so that only animal care staff familiar to Harambe would have been left around. Under such circumstances, calm might have returned and, who knows, the child might have been left unharmed. (para. 17)

Like Redmond, de Waal suggested that the zoo may have been unprepared for such a crisis. De Waal reminded readers that there was no attempt to remove the public from the scene of the incident, which de Waal felt may have calmed the gorilla and perhaps changed the course of the entire situation. By quoting both de Waal and Redmond, Olsen
(2016) illustrated that other options may have been available but were not tested.

In conclusion, RQ4 asked what themes were used by national U.S. media organizations to frame the options of tranquilizing or killing the gorilla. A majority of the articles expressed an opinion of whether the gorilla should have been shot and cited a reason to support their side of choice. With this in mind, the most prominent theme supporting the decision to kill the gorilla was to save the child’s life. On the other hand, the most prominent theme against killing the gorilla was the loss of the gorilla’s life. Very few articles mentioned options other than killing the gorilla, and the few that did predominantly focused on the option to tranquilize, an option which was also ruled out within the same articles.
Discussion

This study analyzed national U.S. media organizations’ online articles about the Cincinnati Zoo case to investigate how the media may have propelled the controversy surrounding the incident forward. This study’s qualitative approach allowed for a detailed analysis of these articles, building on the limited literature available. Previous research addressed the public’s general attitudes and beliefs towards animal use, the most prominent themes of zoo mission statements, and how the public interprets those mission statements. Understanding how these attitudes, beliefs, and expectations affected the media organizations’ framing of the Cincinnati Zoo case provides communication practitioners with some explanation for how the zoo’s communication strategies failed to prevent, or at least quell, the controversy’s longevity. Therefore, the following section addresses how media organizations’ framing of the Cincinnati Zoo case propelled the controversy forward and what the zoo could have done differently to garnered support from more media organizations.

Crossovers between the Media Organizations’ and Zoo’s Messages

While the Cincinnati Zoo case resulted in controversy, not all of the surrounding press was negative. The analysis of RQ1 revealed that a majority of the media organizations displayed a neutral sentiment towards the case, which implies that some of the zoo’s communication strategies were successful in preventing at least some negative press. This may be due, in part, to the ample amount of material the zoo provided for media organizations to reference to when covering the story. In fact, analyses of all four RQs revealed areas in which media organizations cited the zoo’s communication efforts. The analysis of RQ1 revealed that one of the most common ways media organizations
maintained a neutral sentiment was by including statements for and against the zoo, and one of the most commonly cited sources, in support of the zoo, were the zoo’s communication efforts. Similarly, the analyses of RQ2 and RQ3 revealed that media organizations often cited the zoo’s communication efforts to describe the gorilla’s dangerous actions and how those actions could have put the child at risk, while the analysis of RQ4 revealed that media organizations often cited the zoo’s communication efforts stating it was difficult to kill the gorilla because he was endangered, as well as that tranquilization was considered but not implemented. Through the zoo’s ample communication efforts, media organizations were able to include both the zoo’s side of the story, as well as others’ opinions on the case. In this way, the zoo’s communication efforts successfully influenced some media organizations to produce neutral articles over negative articles, which subdued the potential for some controversy arising from the public.

The zoo’s communication efforts also prevented negative press by influencing the themes presented by media organizations. The analyses of RQs 2 and 4 revealed that some of the most prominent themes presented by the media organizations reflected the zoo’s stance on the incident. For instance, the analysis of RQ2 revealed that the media organizations’ most prominently framed the gorilla as (1) first helping and then hurting the boy or (2) as intrinsically dangerous. In the first theme, media organizations described the gorilla’s unpredictable behavior, which supported the zoo’s stance that since gorilla’s next move could not be determined, the gorilla had to be killed to protect the child. In second theme, the media organizations described the gorilla purely as a threat to the child’s life, which reflected the zoo’s stance that the gorilla’s behavior had become “life-
threatening” and, thusly, needed to be dispatched (“Media update…,” 2016, para. 1).

Similarly, the analysis of RQ3 revealed that most media organizations framed the child as having climbed over the barrier and fallen into the exhibit, as well as in danger, injured, and having visited the hospital. These themes reflected the zoo’s stance on how the child entered the exhibit and that the gorilla endangered him, and while the zoo did not mention the child’s injuries, also reflected its acknowledgment that the child was sent to the hospital. Because the themes presented by the media organizations reflected the zoo’s stance on the incident, the zoo’s communication efforts successfully garnered some support from the media organizations, which likely encouraged some support from the public and diffused some controversy. Regardless of the zoo’s successful communication efforts, the analysis also revealed several ways in which the media organizations encouraged controversy.

**How the Media Organizations’ Frames Propelled the Controversy**

One way media organizations may have encouraged controversy among the public was by misinterpreting the Cincinnati Zoo’s mission. The analysis of RQ1 revealed that the media organizations using a negative sentiment predominantly focused on the well-being of the gorilla and, more specifically, that his being in captivity may have been one of the factors leading up to his death. These media organizations’ negative attitudes towards the zoo, or captivity in general, could be attributed to how they perceived the purpose of zoos. Research indicates that one of the least accepted forms of animal use is entertainment (Knight et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2003; Knight & Barnett, 2008) and that the public is less likely to support any form of animal use viewed as unnecessary (Knight et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2003; Knight & Barnett,
Thus, these media organizations most likely interpreted the purpose of the Cincinnati Zoo as a place of entertainment and, as a result, viewed the gorilla’s placement at the zoo as an unnecessary form of animal use. By framing the zoo as a place that unnecessarily holds animals captive, the media organizations painted a negative picture of the zoo and swayed the public towards holding an anti-zoo sentiment, thusly pushing controversy forward.

The media organizations may have also pushed the controversy forward by addressing aspects of the incident, which were unaddressed by the zoo. While the Cincinnati Zoo addressed the gorilla’s dangerous actions, the analysis of RQ2 revealed that the media organizations most prominently framed the gorilla as performing both dangerous and gentle actions: These media organizations portrayed the gorilla as both helping and then hurting the boy. By describing the gorilla’s contrasting actions, the media organizations exposed two controversial issues: (1) Since the zoo did not acknowledge the gorilla’s gentler actions, the zoo must have left out details of the incident in order to bolster their argument that the gorilla should have been killed, and (2) because the gorilla’s actions were difficult to determine, it must have also been difficult to determine whether it was necessary to end the gorilla’s life. In this way, the media organizations both diminished the zoo’s credibility and pointed out that killing the gorilla may not have been necessary, which likely sparked further controversy around how the situation should have been handled and increased the public’s likelihood to not support the zoo.

In addition to pointing out that the zoo left out details regarding the incident, the media organizations also encouraged controversy by pointing out that the zoo
contradicted its own mission by killing an endangered animal. The analysis of RQ4 revealed that the most commonly noted negative aspect of ending the gorilla’s life was the loss of the gorilla’s life itself, particularly because he was an endangered western lowland gorilla. It should also be noted, however, that this loss was most often pointed out by media organizations opposing the zoo’s decision. These media organizations most likely disapproved of the zoo’s action because the zoo killing an endangered animal contradicted their expectation of a zoo to conserve, and promote the conservation of, endangered species. Research indicates that most zoo mission statements promote conservation and conservation education (Braverman, 2011; Carr & Cohen, 2011; Patrick et al., 2007), and the public is most likely to accept zoo missions with such messages (Shaw, 2011; Yocco et al., 2015). While the Cincinnati Zoo’s communication efforts mirrored this research, which included mention of its support for conservation efforts like Mbeli Bai Study in the Nouabalé-Ndoko National Park (“Honoring Harambe,” 2016), killing an endangered gorilla sent an opposing message, that preserving the life of an endangered animal was not its priority. Thus, the Cincinnati Zoo sent mixed messages to the media organizations and, thusly, caused some of them to disapprove of the zoo’s decision. By pointing out this contradiction, the media organizations exposed a flaw in the Cincinnati Zoo’s messages to the public, which most likely encouraged the public not to support the zoo as well.

The media organizations also exposed that the zoo does not necessarily regard an animal’s life as highly as a human’s, which may have fueled some negative reactions from the public as well. In the Cincinnati Zoo’s communication efforts, the zoo expressed that killing the gorilla would guarantee the best outcome for the child. However, the
analysis of RQ4 revealed that some media organizations discussed the other option explored by the zoo: tranquilization. Nevertheless, this option was most often referred to by citing the zoo and, therefore, was also quickly refuted. Olsen (2016) was the only author to discuss options other than tranquilization, but neither of these options were addressed or attempted by the zoo. The only option attempted by the zoo, besides shooting the gorilla, was calling the gorilla out of the enclosure (“Media update…,” 2016). The limited research available suggests that zoo visitors most highly rank zoo mission statements that show “concern for all living things” (Yocco et al., 2015, para. 3). Taking this into consideration, by choosing the action that protected the child’s life, the zoo showed concern for him, but by exploring few options that would protect the gorilla’s life, the zoo did not show much concern for the gorilla. Because the zoo prioritized the child’s life over the gorilla’s life, the zoo contradicted the media organizations’ expectation for a zoo to show concern for all living things. This likely diminished the media organizations’ support for the zoo and, in turn, diminished the public’s support for the zoo as well, further fueling controversy among the public.

Implications

As illustrated, some of the media organizations’ frames aligned with those utilized by the Cincinnati Zoo, but many frames also played a role in propelling the controversy forward. With the latter frames in mind, the following section explores the theoretical and practical implications that can be gathered from this study. First, the theoretical implications section illustrates how this study further supports the agenda setting paradigm of framing. Then, the practical implications section provides communication practitioners with recommendations for how to prevent their organizations from
Theoretical Implications

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the role of agenda setting in media coverage by exploring how national U.S. media organizations’ used framing to influence the public’s opinion of the Cincinnati Zoo case. According to Dearing and Rogers (1996), the “salience on the media agenda tells viewers, readers, and listeners ‘what issues to think about’” (p. 8). In simpler terms, the media agenda highlights what it believes are the most important issues and how those issues should be perceived, which was exactly what the media did with the Cincinnati Zoo case. The analyzed media organizations played a role propelling the controversy around the incident through frames that magnified the Cincinnati Zoo’s communication errors. By analyzing the sentiments and themes used by these media organizations, the researcher identified five specific errors that the media magnified: (1) the disparity between the zoo’s messages and mission statement, (2) the unexplained contradiction between the zoo’s mission statement and decision to kill an endangered animal, (3) the zoo’s failure to address all aspects of the incident, (4) the zoo’s lower regard for an animal’s life than a human’s, and finally, (5) the zoo’s failure to explore more than two potential responses to the situation. Despite Cincinnati Zoo’s traditional attempts to communicate with the public about the incident, the media organizations’ frames re-directed the zoo’s attempt to quell the situation and provided the public with several potential concerns regarding how the incident was handled. In this way, through the analysis of the media organizations’ frames of the Cincinnati Zoo case, this study illustrates how media organizations can influence the
public’s perception of a given case.

**Practical Implications**

Understanding how media organizations may have aided in propelling the controversy around the case, as well as which of the zoo’s communication strategies were successful, allows for the development of recommendations for how to better handle crises like the Cincinnati Zoo case. Therefore, the following section offers recommendations, based on this information, for how to prevent, or at least quell, extended controversy from surrounding such a case in this future. The recommendations provided apply most strongly to this case, as well as to similar animal related crises, such as the Jersey Zoo case or Brookfield Zoo case. However, these recommendations could also be applied to other non-animal related crisis communication situations that require an organization to frame messages about a given an incident to the public.

**Assert the organization’s mission statement in messages.** To prevent confusion, and to ensure that the media understands the purpose of the organization involved in the case, the organization’s mission statement should be incorporated into its messages. In the Cincinnati Zoo case, some media organizations potentially misinterpreted the zoo’s reason for having a gorilla in captivity, perceiving the zoo as a place of entertainment instead of as a place of conservation. If the zoo had made this clear in more of its messages, the zoo may have improved the media organizations’ chances of understanding the zoo’s purpose and garnered more support from them. However, including the organization’s mission statement in messages is futile if the other messages conveyed do not align with that mission statement.

**Ensure that messages align with the mission statement.** If an organization
takes an action, or makes a statement, that does not align with its mission statement, an 
explanation for this discrepancy should be provided. In the Cincinnati Zoo case, by 
killing an endangered western lowland gorilla, the zoo contradicted its mission to support 
the conservation of this species. By not acknowledging this discrepancy, the zoo lost 
credibility and, thusly, also lost some media organizations’ support for its decision. 
However, if the zoo had addressed this discrepancy and provided an explanation for it, 
the zoo would have maintained its credibility and may have garnered more support from 
media organizations. Likewise, the organization should ensure to account for other 
discrepancies found within the case, such as why the zoo only felt there were only two 
potential options for how situation could have been handled.

**Clarify desirability of the organization’s action over other possibilities.** Once 
an incident has occurred, the organization involved has made specific decisions on how 
to handle the situation, which must be explained. With the explanation for why those 
decisions were made, however, the organization should also explain why other courses of 
action were not taken. In the Cincinnati Zoo case, the zoo mentioned the option of 
tranquilization and explained why this option was not selected. However, no other 
options were explored, and one media organization made note of this. If the zoo had 
explored one or two other options as well, the zoo would have appeared more prepared to 
handle the situation, obtained more credibility, and further quelled controversy around 
how the situation was handled. However, if no other scenarios were available, this should 
be noted as well to illustrate that the organization thought the crisis through and, 
therefore, bolster the organization’s credibility. In addition to addressing all scenarios, 
however, an organization should also be sure to address all aspects of the incident itself.
**Address all aspects of the situation.** A situation often becomes controversial when it is unclear how the situation should have been handled. In this way, when an organization explains such a situation to the public, all details of the scenario must be laid out and addressed as clearly as possible. In the Cincinnati Zoo case, the gorilla’s actions, which were most often described by the media organizations as both gentle and aggressive, made the situation more difficult to interpret. The zoo addressed the negative aspects of the gorilla’s actions, but did not address the gorilla’s more positive actions. However, if the zoo addressed both sides of the gorilla’s actions, possibly explaining why the gorilla’s negative actions outweighed the positive actions, then the media organizations may have better understood why the zoo made its decision, despite the gentler actions displayed by the gorilla. In this way, the zoo would have quelled potential controversy surrounding the gorilla’s contradictory behavior.

**Limitations**

Although this study provides insight into how organizations can prevent the swelling of controversy around a given crisis, this study also presents several limitations. Most of these limitations can be attributed to the method selected for this study: a conventional qualitative content analysis. While a qualitative content analysis allowed for a detailed exploration of the articles produced by U.S. media organizations about the Cincinnati Zoo case, this type of analysis provides results specific to this case only. In other words, since these results are qualitative in nature, they are more difficult to generalize because they cannot be tested for potential bias. Additionally, while this study identified the frames used by U.S. media organizations to portray the Cincinnati Zoo case, this qualitative content analysis does not offer any findings about whether these
frames actually affected their intended audience. A different research approach would need to be taken in order to determine the effectiveness of these frames.

In addition to the method of choice, the nature and parameters of this analysis presented limitations to this study. While this study analyzed the sentiments utilized by the U.S. media organizations, this analysis took a limited approach in doing so. Although a multiplicity of viewpoints were presented by the artifacts, the nature and parameters of this analysis required that the viewpoints of the authors be economized. Therefore, the multiplicity of viewpoints were condensed to positive, neutral, and negative, and each artifact was placed into the sentiment category in which it best fit. Thus, this study offers a downsized cataloguing of these sentiments. Future analysis should further subdivide these sentiments, however, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the roles of these various viewpoints in the Cincinnati Zoo case.

**Implications for Future Research**

Through a conventional qualitative content analysis, this study analyzed how U.S. media organizations framed the Cincinnati Zoo case and how those frames may have propelled the case forward, which provides an example for communication scholars to further understand how the media can use frames to perpetuate a crisis and influence the public’s agenda and opinions, as well as how communication practitioners should approach their communication efforts in order to help prevent their organizations from experiencing an on-going controversy like this one. Approaching this case with a conventional qualitative content analysis allowed for the in-depth exploration of the media organization’s frames of the case. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the limitations, the economy of this paper prevented the researcher from breaking the viewpoints down
beyond positive, negative, and neutral. In this way, a larger qualitative content analysis should be conducted to further subdivide and analyze these viewpoints. This would allow for a researcher to further explore the nuances of these frames and their potential impact the public’s opinions of this case.

While this study offers an in-depth understanding of the frames used, it does not measure the effects of these frames. Thus, further research should be conducted to understand how much these frames impacted the public’s opinion of the Cincinnati Zoo case. A quantitative content analysis should be conducted on these frames to determine the level at which these frames impacted the public’s understanding of the Cincinnati Zoo case, as well as to provide a clearer answer as to whether those frames attributed to the drawn-out controversy around the case. In this way, the researcher could investigate how much framing influenced the public to continue discussing this particular controversial topic. If the impact is significant, this study would open the gateway for further investigation regarding how framing affects what controversial topics society focuses on.

**Conclusion**

This thesis illustrates that when an organization experiences a crisis, the appropriate communication strategies must be implemented, or the crisis may evolve into an on-going controversy among the public, which could result in significant reputation damage. The Cincinnati Zoo case, specifically, demonstrates that media organizations will re-frame the information communicated by the organization experiencing the crisis and potentially magnify the errors found within them. From this case, communication practitioners should conclude that contradictory messaging fuels controversy and should be avoided. Likewise, all details of the incident should be addressed immediately by the
organization to avoid problematic re-framing from secondary sources. While this study offers some insight on how to protect organizations from receiving negative reactions from the public, such as that experienced by the Cincinnati Zoo, more research should be implemented to gain a deeper understanding of how to address cases like this in the future.
Appendix A

Artifact Analysis Sheet

Instructions

Use the following questions to analyze each artifact. Answer the first question, for instance, “What sentiment (positive, negative or neutral) did the U.S. media organization use to frame the gorilla and his actions? Then, answer the questions directly beneath that question to go into further detail.

Artifact Analysis Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: What sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations when framing the overall Cincinnati Zoo case?</th>
<th>What sentiment (positive, negative or neutral) did the U.S. media organization use to frame the overall Cincinnati Zoo case?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• If the U.S. media organization used a positive sentiment, how was case framed to portray it that way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the U.S. media organization used a negative sentiment, how was case framed to portray it that way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the U.S. media organization used a neutral sentiment, how was case framed to portray it that way?</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>RQ2: What themes were used by U.S. media organizations to frame the gorilla and his actions?</th>
<th>What themes arose in the U.S. media organization’s framing of the gorilla and his actions?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Did the U.S. media organization frame the gorilla’s personality as known before the incident? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did the U.S. media organization frame the gorilla’s relationship with zookeepers or other staff? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did the U.S. media organization frame the gorilla’s size or potential to inflict injury? If so, how?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did the U.S. media organization frame the gorilla as helping the boy in any way? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did the U.S. media organization frame the gorilla as acting violently towards the boy in any way? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did the U.S. media organization frame the gorilla as responding to the boy in any way? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### RQ3: What themes were used by U.S. media organizations to frame the child and his actions?

| Question |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| What themes arose in the U.S. media organization’s framing of the child and his actions? |
| • How did the U.S. media organization frame the child’s level of safety? Was the child endangered by the situation or not? |
| • How did the U.S. media organization frame the child’s injuries, or were the injuries left unmentioned? |
| • How did the U.S. media organization frame how the child got involved in the incident? Did it blame the child for ending up in the enclosure? |

### RQ4: What themes were used by the U.S. media organizations to frame the options or tranquilizing or killing the gorilla?

| Question |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| If mentioned, what themes arose in the U.S. media organization’s framing of the options to tranquilize or kill the gorilla? |
| • How did U.S. media organization frame the potential pros of tranquilizing the gorilla over killing him, or did it not mention any pros? |
| • How did the U.S. media organization frame the potential cons of tranquilizing the gorilla over killing him, or did it not mention any cons? |
| • How did U.S. media organization frame the potential pros of killing the gorilla over tranquilizing him, or did it not mention any pros? |
| • How did the U.S. media organization frame the potential cons of killing the gorilla over tranquilizing him, or did it not mention any cons? |
| • Were any other options mentioned? |
Appendix B

Coding Sheet 1 – RQ1

RQ1: What sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations when framing the overall Cincinnati Zoo case?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Media Organization</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legacy site</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable network news site</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennial site</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trending site</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment Site</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregator Site</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Coding Sheet 2 – RQ1

**RQ1:** What sentiments (positive, negative, or neutral) were used by national U.S. media organizations when framing the overall Cincinnati Zoo case?

*Over-arching Question: What sentiments (positive, negative or neutral) did the U.S. media organizations use to frame the overall Cincinnati Zoo case?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the U.S. media organizations used a positive sentiment, how was case</td>
<td>• Some articles showed their support for the zoo through explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framed to portray it that way?</td>
<td>statements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some positive articles utilized framing to support the zoo’s decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the U.S. media organizations used a negative sentiment, how was case</td>
<td>• Some negative articles showed their disagreement with the zoo by focusing on the animals involved, rather than the people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framed to portray it that way?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the U.S. media organizations used a neutral sentiment, how was case</td>
<td>• Some articles remained neutral by including statements for and against the zoo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framed to portray it that way?</td>
<td>• Some articles utilized factual reporting to maintain a neutral sentiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some articles entirely re-directed readers to remain neutral.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Coding Sheet – RQ2

RQ2: What themes were used by U.S. media organizations to frame the gorilla and his actions?

*Over-arching Question:* What themes arose in the U.S. media organizations’ framing of the gorilla and his actions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did the U.S. media organizations frame the gorilla’s personality as known before the incident? If so, how?</td>
<td>• Some articles framed Harambe as a well-behaved gorilla growing up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the U.S. media organizations frame the gorilla’s relationship with zookeepers or other staff? If so, how?</td>
<td>• Few, if any, articles mentioned the gorilla’s relationship with zookeepers or other staff, and most mentions were of his relationship with Jerry Stones, which was primarily discussed in how he was framed during his growing up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the U.S. media organizations frame the gorilla’s size or potential to inflict injury? If so, how?</td>
<td>• The gorilla’s size and potential to inflict injury was often used in conjunction with describing whether the gorilla was hurting or helping the boy and, therefore, no specific themes arose out of this question alone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Did the U.S. media organizations frame the gorilla as helping the boy in any way? If so, how? | • Some articles framed the gorilla as first helping and then hurting the boy.  
• Some articles portrayed the gorilla as helping the boy through public figures’ statements.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Did the U.S. media organizations frame the gorilla as acting violently towards the boy in any way? If so, how? | • Some articles framed the gorilla as first helping and then hurting the boy.  
• Some articles portrayed the gorilla as only dangerous.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Did the U.S. media organizations frame the gorilla as intentionally or unintentionally hurting the boy? If so, how? | • Few, if any, articles described whether the gorilla intentionally or unintentionally hurt the boy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
RQ3: What themes were used by U.S. media organizations to frame the child and his actions?

*Over-arching Question: What themes arose in the U.S. media organizations’ framing of the child and his actions?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did the U.S. media organizations frame the child’s level of safety?</td>
<td>- Several articles described the boy as in danger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the child endangered by the situation or not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the U.S. media organizations frame the child’s injuries?</td>
<td>- Some articles noted that the child was injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were the injuries left unmentioned?</td>
<td>- Some articles noted that the child visited the hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the U.S. media organizations frame how the child got involved in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the incident? Did they blame the child for ending up in the enclosure?</td>
<td>- The child was predominantly framed as entering and then falling into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Some articles blamed the child’s parents for the child’s entering the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Other articles blamed the zoo for the child’s entering the enclosure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ4: What themes were used by the U.S. media organizations to frame the options of tranquilizing or killing the gorilla?

*Over-arching Question:* If mentioned, what themes arose in the U.S. media organizations’ framing of the options to tranquilize or kill the gorilla?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did U.S. media organizations frame the potential pros of tranquilizing the gorilla over killing him, or did they not mention any pros?</td>
<td>• Few, if any, articles touched on the pros of tranquilizing the gorilla.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the U.S. media organizations frame the potential cons of tranquilizing the gorilla over killing him, or did they not mention any cons?</td>
<td>• Of the articles that mentioned tranquilization, the noted con was that it may have aggravated the gorilla and, thusly, increased his likelihood to hurt or kill the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did U.S. media organizations frame the potential pros of killing the gorilla over tranquilizing him, or did they not mention any pros?</td>
<td>• The most prominent “pro” of killing the gorilla was to save the child’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the U.S. media organizations frame the potential cons of killing the gorilla over tranquilizing him, or did they not mention any cons?</td>
<td>• The most prominent “con” of killing the gorilla was losing the gorilla’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were any other options mentioned?</td>
<td>• Only one article mentioned options beyond tranquilization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Biography

Candace Saunders-Grewe was born on August 13, 1993 in Santa Ana, California. In 2015, she completed her Bachelor of Arts in English, with a concentration in creative writing, at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. At Radford University, Candace graduated at the top of her class and was selected as the English Department’s 2014-2015 Dean’s Scholar. In addition, she received the Who’s Who Among Students award and was inducted into multiple honor societies, including Sigma Tau Delta (International English Honor Society), Phi Kappa Phi (Honor Society), and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. Shortly after graduating with her bachelor’s degree, Candace began pursuing her Master of Arts in Communication, with a concentration in public and media relations. While working on her degree, she worked in the field of education. Candace currently lives with her husband, Gabe, in Colorado Springs, Colorado.