

**Pulitzer Ethics Project “Harambe: Literally Dead Yet Ethically Still Roaring”:
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What some are calling an inhumane and unjust killing of a 17-year-old rare silverback gorilla named Harambe was an absolutely massive issue in media and arguably one of the most popular topics in all of 2016. Twitter and Facebook blew up so much the **Cincinnati Zoo had to close their official pages**. Organizations around the country did things in honor of this gorilla. **Slogans**, even **hash-tags** were created that took over social media. A **petition** was even started as well.

The public's outcry caused an effect on the media's coverage. This is an ethical issue in journalism because should a journalist conform and allow public opinion to influence the coverage of an issue? Or, is this a conflict of ethics, ethics that tell journalists to take a look at the broader issue as a whole. The latter may result a **loss of viewership**, while the former may result in the **misdirection of the public**.

This was the public's opinion: Once social media blew up in what **USA Today** called an "international social media-driven firestorm," millennials spewed their views out. They created **memes**, some of which are shown below. **Some** called for the child to be removed from the parent's custody. **The public** scrutinized the parent's pasts. People **damned** the human race. **Death threats** were made on social media towards the mother. Elena Wiessman from **the Daily Caller News Foundation reports** "5% of Americans would vote for Harambe the dead gorilla as president."

This was the reality: The gorilla had to be put down or else it would have or severely harmed the child. **Naham reports** that the silverback could've been tranquilized, but **animal expert Jeff Corwin said** "it can take upward of 10 to 15 minutes" for the gorilla to be sedated. This is **far too long** when a child's life is at stake.

The public's opinion was addressed over reality. The public favors entertainment over information. Antonio Pitocco, a millennial twitter user actively involved with Harambe says "journalists saw that the majority of the public was angry about Harambe's shooting and they reported it in a way

that favored that idea." This is the basis for unethical journalism. The other side is bias from media's ownership. Albert DeAngelo, a national radio programmer, says "they [the news outlet] tell them [their audience] what they want to hear. Each news outlet will try to put a lean on whatever they're reporting for their core audience, so it will be swayed to whatever ideals their core audience is leaning towards." This is why it is of the absolute utmost importance for journalists to uphold their ethical (and moral) codes as to counteract the bias brought by owners. Ricky Pollitt, a journalist for *The Daily Times*, says a journalist's job is to "write the facts, regardless on how you feel." These news outlet owners are, what DeAngelo calls, "all about money."

Ethically, these news outlets should have covered both sides, but the more popular stance to take will make more money rather than explore the issue in depth without bias and **risk losing ratings** and/or money.

Media and journalists often overlook the effect they have on the parties involved. **A family lost their son to an alligator** while vacationing in Florida at Walt Disney World. The public **swung** at that like a piñata. The media are too concerned with getting the story broken while completely disregarding all care to the people involved in those stories. It is a journalist's ethical responsibility to protect them, or at least not make it any worse.

"The bottom line to this all is money. Money, Money, Money." DeAngelo says, "It's all **ratings**. It's all about **money**. How much money can we make." Pollitt provides insight as to why: "young reporters are more pure minded" but with older reporters, "it's about getting clicks, it's about making money." The public's opinion is what makes money. *Money is the root of all evil*. Today's media outlets see success as how much of the audience they can reach and persuade, and how much revenue they can generate. By having this mindset, an outlet will do whatever it takes, swaying viewpoints, channeling their coverage, and choosing a specific outcome favorable to their viewers. Is this ethical? *Absolutely not*. As much as the public may *want* to hear about something, and as much as news outlets want to

make money off of that, it is the journalist's ethical and obligatory duty to inform them about what they *need* to hear.

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