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ENG 110 H4  
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### American Values/Codes Essay

When I think of America, many things come to mind. Beyond bald eagles and “freedom” written in bold letters on the flag, I also think of some not so pleasant things in our culture. I think of a health-focused nation that consumes massive amounts of calories every day from major fast food chains. I think of a nation that spends a huge amount of money on the business of death and funerals, when we don’t need to. I think of a nation that is so consumed in capitalism that we don’t even question whether or not we are being humane and making informed moral decisions on what we eat. Sometimes even we do think about it we continue with our harmful actions out of convenience. David Foster Wallace explores the lobster market and how lobsters are eaten in his piece *Consider the Lobster*; Michael Pollan gives a narrative of the fast food industry in America in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*. Jessica Mitford gives a persuasive argument into the usefulness of the role of the funeral director in *The American Way of Death Revisited*. Mortician Caitlin Doughty gives her thoughts about her business in a podcast through NPR. Author and anthrozoologist Hal Herzog gives an overview on the thinking of our diets and eating animals in *Animals Like Us*. All of these pieces prove how closely food is tied with American culture and values. They point out facts we like no ignore like how we have moral disagreements on our actions but do them anyway. They comment on how the role of consumerism is diminishing our ability to question our actions. We are encouraged to question our values and think critically for ourselves.

**Comment [1]:** I am going to adjust it towards consumerism.  
- I will add transition sentences  
- I will take away authors/make works cited  
- add conclusion

**Comment [2]:** I feel like saying health focused and then saying consumes massive calories is kind of counteracting the other. Aren't we not a health-focused nation? The than that I like this first part to you intro

**Comment [3]:** I like the repetition, it flows nicely!

**Comment [4]:** Are you using all of these texts? I haven't read further as of writing this comment, but I would suggest maybe picking just Wallace and two others so you don't feel overwhelmed and your writing doesn't become all quotes. Another thing to think about is showing at some connection between the writing before you say "all of these pieces." I would try to make it a little less listy.

**Comment [5]:** potential spelling/grammar error

**Comment [6]:** Sort of a run-on thought, maybe try to condense these sentences

A theme that Wallace explores throughout *Consider the Lobster* is that in many situations humans may be aware that something they are doing could be potentially harmful or gruesome, yet they continue to do that thing. Each year at the lobster festival, the people of Rockwell do not consider how the lobster may be in pain from being boiled alive. They just know that they earn most of their revenue each year from tourists that visit to try lobster. Or if they have considered it, they may have simply brushed it aside or put a lid on the pots with the lobsters in it so they don't have to see them writhing in the water. I love lobster, and when I think about how we cook them I feel bad for them, and yet I continue to eat lobster every summer. I can recognize that a lobster would clearly prefer to not be in the boiling pot, and that I am probably causing them a lot of pain for me to eat them, but I do it anyway. This idea extends to *The American Way of Death Revisited*, when Mitford takes the reader through the process of embalming a dead body. It includes details like removing the blood and organs and filling it with embalming fluid, and sewing the mouth shut and putting cosmetics on the face and body to make the corpse look more alive. Many people embalm their loved ones unaware of the gruesomeness of the procedure and do not bother to ask the funeral director what it actually entails. More people are becoming aware of the procedure, but still continue to embalm their loved ones. In both of these examples, our need for traditions makes us unable to say no to what our culture in America has normalized, even if we become aware of how it may not be okay. We continue to eat lobsters because it is a food that symbolizes New England and has for generations. For many towns, most of their income comes from tourists visiting in the summer months wanting to eat lobster. For embalming, we don't even ask to provide details into the procedure because it is assumed that embalming is an easy and noninvasive procedure. In both of these examples, we continue to do the action that is harmful out of convention in our culture and convenience in our lives.

Comment [7]: Swap these two sentences?

Comment [8]: do you have a reason why? or maybe thought about why we/you do this?

Comment [9]: Good thought

The theme of consumerism and how it shapes our views in our culture is closely related to our decision making. Americans are completely caught up in the idea of consumerism. As a nation, we value being fit and eating healthy. However, the fast food industry has convinced us to eat an immense amount of unhealthy fast food because we like the taste and because it is quick and cheap. (put Pollan quote here?) The fast food industry has us fooled into thinking that it is okay for our bodies to eat this food, and that there are safe ingredients in the food. In reality, most of the ingredients I can't even pronounce. Americans may know that fast food is not necessarily healthy for you, but we do not consider that it could be potentially harmful to us. Consumerism seeps its way into the lobster market as well. Lobsters were once considered low-class food, and it was only eaten by poor people and prisoners in jail. Because demand began to increase in the 1840s, now the lobster is considered a delicacy, and is expensive, especially in areas other than New England. The drive of consumerism caused the lobster to go from inmate food to a posh meal. Consumerism has trickled its way into every market, including the death market.

**Comment [10]:** I would definitely add some quotes in this paragraph

The funeral industry is a deceptive market that actively shies away from giving details about its services. A funeral director will use careful language to mask the fact that the embalming process is grisly. They will be so convincing that many families will not inquire about the procedure and if it is actually necessary. In reality, the embalming process is costly and is not necessary in most cases. Doughty says "my personal opinion is that we should be moving towards not embalming unless it's absolutely necessary because it is a chemical process and it can be an expensive process for the family...it doesn't really make sense to have this environmentally unfriendly, invasive procedure done"(SOURCE). The funeral business is so focused on making profit off of the grieving family members they have changed the way they

**Comment [11]:** You might be able to connect this with how the fast food industry always changes wording to make food seem healthier

talk to their customers to hide that they are talking about death, when in fact their business is death.

**Comment [12]:** This is a good paragraph, but i would elaborate on it

Critics of the consumerism argument would say that in some cases it may be better to be unaware of the untasteful things we encounter in our lives. They may say that ‘ignorance is bliss’. But I think that becoming aware of the possible moral issues that the action might face or the potential harm that it may cause you is extremely important. Becoming aware of the truth behind the issue makes us more informed. With the truth, we can actually make decisions on our own, and based on our morals.

**Comment [13]:** this is a good start to an idea, maybe just add some more quotes and evidence

As humans, we make decisions based on how we will be affected. We put ourselves first and consider other creatures to be below us, or at least on a different plane. Regarding animal rights, we have many hypocrisies surrounding our views about this, especially when we could be benefitted. Lobsters provide us economic benefits and gustatory pleasure, but they are prepared by being boiled alive. Fast food uses harsh chemicals and inhumane conditions for its animals so that the food can be kept fresh during transportation. We practice vegetarianism and don’t eat meat for many different reasons, whether it be moral obligation, or even religious, and yet we may still eat fish. How come humans can so easily bit into a burger, or eat a lobster without even considering if the animal they are about to consume was taken care of, given enough space to grow, or killed humanely? We are partial to our own pleasure even if it is at the cost of an animal. For many of us in America, we may have opinions on these matters, but we do not lean heavily to the side of humans or to the side of animals. These people are described by Herzog as “midders”, people who have considered both sides and have certain moral standpoints on the issue. I consider myself in the middle. I eat meat but I do not want the animal to suffer for my tastes, and therefore I try to minimize the amount I eat each day. I do not support animal testing

**Comment [14]:** Bite

**Comment [15]:** Maybe add an longer quote or more than just form herzog

on things like cosmetics, but I could justify killing mice for experiments to cure diseases like cancer. We usually like to have a definitive answer on issues, but I am content with falling somewhere in the middle of these ideas. It is important to be able to see both sides and consider them, and still have questions.

**Comment [16]:** Good job incorporating your own beliefs while keeping the flow of the paper

Something that Wallace does in his story is leave the reader with a lot of questions. While he poses many throughout his piece, at the end he sums them up. He says “Do you think much about the (possible) moral status and (probable) suffering of the animals involved? If you do, what ethical convictions have you worked out that permit you not just to eat but to savor and enjoy flesh-based viands...?... Do you ever think, even idly, about the possible reasons for your reluctance to think about it?” (510). The fact that even after explaining the story of the lobster fest and researching if lobsters can feel pain or not, Wallace himself still has broader, ethical questions that he poses to the reader. The same thing happens with Pollan, who at the end of his narrative says “what is it about fast food? Not only is it served in a flash, but more often than not it’s eaten that way too: we finished our meal in under ten minutes... The more you concentrate on how it tastes, the less like anything it tastes” (119). Both make the reader ponder whether or not we should be thinking deeply about these actions that seem so normal to us. There is always a limit to what people can ask each other. At some point each individual must think about it for themselves, and not rely on others to incite questions. Wallace and Pollan may also be hinting that there may not be a conclusion to reach on these issues. There certainly isn’t a right or wrong answer because it is people’s personal opinions. I am still changing my opinions on these issues and adjusting my views as I am becoming more informed about them.

**Comment [17]:** I would say essay

**Comment [18]:** I think this quote should be indented

**Comment [19]:** add more analysis before going into Pollan’s quote

**Comment [20]:** You have a really good start to the paper. I would definitely say that focusing on consumerism will definitely add an interesting angle. I would make sure that you only choose 3 authors because you don't seem to have room to add all of them. I would also add some more quotes just to either prove your point, or agree against. This way it is more a reflection of the text and not just your own thinking. Other than that, this is a great start and you have some really good ideas!