

# Divorce and our national values

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## Journal Entry

The article 'Divorce and Our National Values' by Peter D. Kramer was published in 1997, but it looks at a social issue that still concerns us today. The high rates of divorce in the United States of America have invited a lot of sociological analysis but most argue that it is some form of an aberration. Kramer, on the other hand, insists that the increasing level of separation among American couples is the direct fallout of the value system and lifestyle that a majority of Americans collectively espouse. Kramer's argument is that contemporary emphasis on autonomy of the individual as the foundation of a good relationship is what causes more frequent break-ups. This emphasis may be in the form of the psychiatrist's advice, or may be reflected in classic American literature like Thoreau's *Walden*, or laws passed to make divorce harder, and so on.

Kramer goes against many contemporary psychologists when he argues this. For instance, Carl Rogers claimed in the 1970s that the best marriages actually increased 'self-actualization' of the individuals involved. In short, the greater the level of freedom and independence enjoyed by the partners, the 'better' the marriage. Kramer suggests that perhaps we should dismantle 'self-actualization' as the goal and replace it with another ideal: mutuality. Mutual happiness and care can be just as worthy and fulfilling a goal in marriage. Compromise may mean a certain degree of loss of selfhood, but it does not necessarily mean loss of happiness or fulfillment.

Another issue crops up at this point, related to gender. Kramer reveals how women are supposed to be naturally more compromising. We have been so socialized into believing these stereotypes that in relationships women often feel pressurized to be the pliant and compromising one. Since this is true for <https://assignbuster.com/divorce-and-our-national-values/>

a large part of the population, the kind of ideal of mutuality that Kramer proposes might just work out unfairly for women and perpetuate greater inequality in marriages. To counter this, Kramer suggests that by fully accepting mutuality and not expecting only women to inculcate it, we can work towards a value system which actually supports longer-lasting relationships instead of encouraging separation.