ABSTRACT: Whether the elements of a good marital relationship are universal is the question addressed in this case study of therapy with a couple who were culturally different from the therapist. The conflicts between the therapeutic strategies, which were based on a strategic therapy model, and the customs of the couple from a foreign culture, made it difficult to evaluate whether the therapist was on target with interventions. On one hand, therapists need to guard against being misled into believing that customs are cultural imperatives which never can be changed. On the other hand, they need to be aware of the impact and possible ramifications of challenging long-held, culturally-based beliefs and behaviors. The following case study details the dilemmas faced by a therapist working with an Asian-Indian couple who presented themselves as being bound by their cultural background and heritage.

Working with people who are culturally different from the therapist can pose complex problems in assessment and treatment. For example, the process of joining, which is so important in developing therapeutic relationships with patients, can be impeded by cultural differences in interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues, and in what to expect from a clinical encounter. Thus, the therapist may be uncertain whether s/he is connecting with the patients, due to difficulty reading their reactions. Other therapeutic problems can arise from the thera-
pist's being misled by cultural "masks" which people can use to defend actions which without the cultural overlay may be more clearly dysfunctional or harmful.

Working with couples who are culturally different presents to the therapist the challenge of understanding different models of marriage. One might presume that the relational elements necessary for a successful marriage are universal—or are they? Do the same therapeutic principles which work for marriages within one's own culture work with those from another culture?

The following case study details the author's work with a couple from a traditional Asian Indian background whose marriage was arranged by their respective families. They, particularly the husband, maintained their marriage was compulsory because divorce was virtually forbidden in their culture. The wife's family was very much against her leaving her husband, and told her that her doing so would bring shame upon the family. One could speculate that they may have been motivated by the fact they would have to support her and the children if she left her husband and returned to India.

The author chose to view the couple's relationship according to Haley's (1963) schema of the dilemma posed by the tension between the marital relationship's being compulsory and/or voluntary. Haley defined this dilemma as one of the formal themes of marriage. Relationships with spouses always are colored by a sense of obligation, because unlike other relationships, marriage is confirmed by social and legal contracts which restrict the partners' ability to leave on whim. But, are they staying together because they must or because they choose to? Marriage is neither completely compulsory nor voluntary; ideally there is a balance which allows the spouses to feel they choose to be together, yet makes it difficult for them to separate during difficulties. Defining the marriage as compulsory can function to allow the person to blame the marriage for his/her inability to change. For example, spouses may tell themselves they are staying together for the sake of the children, or because a divorce would upset the family, or because one spouse is ill and could not survive without the other. They say they would like to leave, but cannot because circumstances preclude their having any choice.

A compulsory marriage, said Haley, "is like that relationship between cell mates in prison" (1963, p. 120). The couple tends to tolerate one another, but remains always uncertain whether they would choose to be together if they were released. In this case, the couple had indeed defined their relationship as compulsory, but the wife upset the