Anthropologists have typically highlighted a symbol or cluster of symbols that they identify in their writing as a culture’s characteristic concept of self or person (e.g., Geertz 1984; Marriott 1976a, 1976b; Shweder and Bourne 1984), which they contrast with the Western concept of self. But the anthropologist frequently discovers in the field that informants provide inconsistent accounts not only of their culture, but also of themselves. In this paper, I argue that in all cultures people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly. At any particular moment a person usually experiences his or her articulated self as a symbolic, timeless whole, but this self may quickly be displaced by another, quite different “self,” which is based on a different definition of the situation. The person will often be unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies and may experience wholeness and continuity despite their presence.

The experience of wholeness is a semiotic process that has been explored by Fernandez in the context of religious movements (Fer-
nandez 1986), where he noted that movement participants use religious imagery selectively to organize certain experiences into what feels like a timeless whole, though the components are actually quite inconsistent. I argue that self-concepts are constructed and maintained by means of a similar process in all cultures, and that the presence of a particular self-representation, though experienced and projected as whole and timeless, may be quite fleeting. The inconsistencies in these projected selves may often be associated with inconsistencies within the cultural system itself, inconsistencies that may be most clearly observed during negotiation and argument among situationally located actors.

In this paper I contrast this theory of multiple selves with existing perspectives on the self that have been formulated by anthropologists and psychoanalysts. I demonstrate the ability of this multiple-selves perspective to illuminate aspects of field material that might otherwise go unexamined. Finally, I argue that this perspective on the self raises a set of questions that can form the basis for a research program into the relationship between culture and the self in both Western and non-Western cultures.

A MOMENT IN THE FIELD

The suggestion that people make rapid shifts among inconsistent self-representations might seem counterintuitive. But these shifts are so common in our everyday experience that they pass virtually unnoticed. Consider the following utterances of Shamim, a young Pakistani woman with whom I worked intensively during my field research. On this particular afternoon, Shamim and I were involved in a rather abstract discussion about the proper behavior of relatives. Unlike many of our conversations, this one was a form of "work": I was sitting with pen and paper in hand, recording her comments on Pakistani culture. After a moment of silence, during which I had been recording her previous statement, she suddenly said:

I am happy when I work. [Anthropologist: Why?] Because I feel that I am making progress. If I don't, I am just passing the time. [pause] [Anthropologist: What are you progressing toward?] If I work, I will get money to help my parents. If I get a Ph.D., I will help my society. I will be a good wife. I am not much of a religious person, but my religion is to make my parents happy. If we make our parents happy, they pray for us. God prefers the prayer of parents. They gave us birth, food, modern education. When my father's mood was off because I talked about Yusef,
I hoped that I would be able to sacrifice my feelings so that my parents can be happy. I will try to convince them but will try not to pressure them. Those who disobey their parents are not successful in life. When we were children, we didn’t know anything. They earn for us; they even deceive others for their children. My brother is bad in this way. He would not change clothes for Eid [a holiday] when my parents asked him to.

These comments reveal several distinct self-representations, namely a scholar striving for a Ph.D. and “progress,” a good wife, a good, obedient and grateful daughter, a good Muslim, a disobedient child, and, more subtly, a clever “politician” and, implicitly, a son. Although some of these representations are mutually consistent, others rest on inconsistent cultural concepts of person and relationship that are embedded within Pakistani culture. Shamim was experiencing considerable inner conflict at the time, and so was struggling to reconcile certain of these self-concepts because they were associated with incompatible goals that involved the necessity for immediate decision making. Her inner turmoil was linked to an ongoing, painful conflict with her parents over the choice of a husband. Despite this experience of overt conflict, Shamim appeared unaware of her several shifts in orientation over the course of approximately one minute of conversation. She displayed several shifts, not only in self-representations, but in her representations of others and in the organization of memories based on these representations.

Shamim’s remarks may appear to support the often-repeated claim by anthropologists that the experience of wholeness, continuity, and autonomy that we normally associate with the “self” is a culture-bound, Western notion that is not applicable to most non-Western cultures, where the self is experienced contextually and relationally (see Shweder and Bourne 1984). But I argue that this example, on the contrary, illustrates a universal semiotic process by which people manage inconsistency (see Labov and Fanshel 1977; Ewing 1987, for examples of American dialogue that reveal the same process). People construct a series of self-representations that are based on selected cultural concepts of person and selected “chains” of personal memories. Each self-concept is experienced as whole and continuous, with its own history and memories that emerge in a specific context, to be replaced by another self-representation when the context changes.

I am proposing a model of shifting selves that uses the concept of “self” in a highly specific way. In the course of recent anthropolog-
ical debates about the self, the concept of "self," so clearly stated by Hallowell (1955) to mean the awareness of oneself as a perceptible object, has become fuzzy. Psychoanalysts have contributed to the confusion, particularly since Kohut (1971, 1977) introduced self psychology to the psychoanalytic and anthropological communities. Cultural anthropologists have argued that "selves" are culturally shaped and infinitely variable. Kohut, in contrast, argued that every normally functioning, healthy adult has a bounded, cohesive self. While these two disciplines think their respective views are in conflict, they are, in fact, not talking about the same thing. Before we can understand why multiple selves appear in dialogue, I must clarify this terminological confusion.

THREE PSYCHOANALYTIC DEFINITIONS OF SELF

The task of determining whether anthropologists and psychoanalysts are actually talking about the same thing is complicated by the fact that there is no general agreement among psychoanalysts, much less among anthropologists, about what the self is. Amid all the terminological confusions among psychoanalysts, however, there would seem to be three fundamentally different uses of the word, a distinction among which may also clarify anthropological thinking on the subject.

In the most general sense, which also prevails in the everyday world of discourse (e.g., Self magazine, which encompasses articles on how to improve your complexion, how to get along with your spouse, and how to get ahead in the business world), "self" encompasses the physical organism, all aspects of psychological functioning, and social attributes. Hartmann (1958, 1964), concerned with clarifying psychoanalytic usage of the term, pointed out that prior to Freud's development of the structural model of the mind (1923), the Ich (or ego) should be translated as the "self," in this general sense of one's own person. Hartmann retained this nonpsychological usage, differentiating it from the "ego," which stands in relation to the superego and the id in Freud's structural model.

Hartmann further differentiated self from self-representation, and defined the latter to mean merely one kind of mental content. This idea of self-representation as a kind of mental content constitutes the meaning of "self" in its second sense. The concept was elaborated by ego psychologists and object-relations theorists (see especially
Sandler and Rosenblatt 1962). The self-representation from this perspective is a part of the contents of the ego, which is formed out of identifications with significant others during the course of development. Self-representations may be either explicit and conscious or implicit and outside of conscious awareness. Since anthropologists are talking about symbols, otherwise known as “collective representations,” the culturally shaped “self” that is the object of anthropological study can, in my opinion, most clearly be understood in this sense, that of self-representation.

Finally, “self” in the third sense, that used by Kohut in his self psychology, is that of a supraordinate, primary psychic constellation, the center of experience and initiative and the main motivating agency (Curtis 1985:343). Kohut makes no distinction between self-representations based on a fabric of memories and the self as a center of initiative (self as actor), in contrast to the ego psychologists, who distinguish the contents of the ego from its functions. Kohut characterized the “cohesive self” in the following way:

Once the self has crystallized in the interplay of inherited and environmental factors, it aims towards the realization of its own specific programme of action. . . . The patterns of ambitions, skills, and goals; the tensions between them; the programme of action they create; and the activities that strive towards the realization of this programme are all experienced as continuous in space and time—they are the self, an independent centre of initiative, an independent recipient of impressions. [Kohut and Wolf 1978:414]

Kohut argued that a cohesive, bounded, and autonomous self emerges during the course of normal development. I would argue, along with anthropologists such as Geertz and Marriott, that it is Kohut’s definition of the self, with its assumption of the self as a bounded, autonomous entity, that is most infused with culturally shaped biases about self-experience and is thus least useful for anthropologists studying the self in other cultures.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE SELF

Recent studies by anthropologists of the “self” are grounded in a relativist paradigm which, if not altogether denying the existence of universals in human experience, is intended to demonstrate that there is much less that is universal than we might have supposed. Such studies (e.g., Geertz 1984; Marriott 1976a, 1976b; Rosaldo 1983, 1984; Shweder and Bourne 1984) identify concepts of the self
or person as they exist in other cultures. As a foil to their studies of
the self in other cultures, anthropologists have tended to identify the
concept of an autonomous, cohesive, bounded self as the Western
concept of self, suggesting that this idea of a cohesive self is merely
the outcome of our Western spatial categories and individualism.
According to Geertz, for instance:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less inte-
grated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emo-
tion, judgement, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively
both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is,
however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of
the world’s cultures. [1984:126]

This formulation of a Western concept of self is remarkably consis-
tent with Kohut’s idea of the cohesive self. Kohut’s assumption—that this notion of self, which stresses its boundedness and auton-
omy, is the universal normal adult mode of being in the world and
relating to others—has been the object of attack from anthropolo-
gists.

Given that anthropologists are reacting to Kohut’s ethnocentric
model of a universal autonomous “self” as the standard for normal
development, it is not surprising that certain anthropologists have
argued that even the functioning of the “self” (not just the represen-
tations of it), as well as an associated structure of emotional expe-
rience, are culturally organized. Marriott, for instance, has argued
that Indian ideas of the person contrast with a Western notion of
self. He argues that, in contrast to Westerners, Indians maintain
highly porous interpersonal boundaries and assume that the consti-
tution of the person is fluid, with one’s substance being partly al-
tered by one’s transactions in the world (Marriott 1976a; see also
Rosaldo 1984). Relativist positions such as this imply that human
experience is so radically variable that psychoanalytic models of the
mind and self are inapplicable to individuals of other cultural tra-
ditions (see, for example, Roland 1988). Such an argument might
be reasonable if the Kohutian self could be identified with both the
culturally constituted self-representation that the Westerner has
and also his or her acting, experiential core. But, as we have just
seen, semiotically constituted concepts of self (what Hartmann
called “self-representations”) are quite distinct from pre-reflective
self-experience (“self” in the Kohutian sense). The confusion be-
tween these two concepts typically found in anthropological explo-
 ration not only undermines their cross-cultural comparisons, but also can lead to misinterpretation of evidence about the nature of self-representations in other cultures. For example, I would argue that what Marriott has identified is a particular cultural “representation” of the self rather than a characterization of the organization of the Indian psyche that is true in all contexts.⁵

In addition to confusing self-representations and a Kohutian model of the self as a center of initiative, these anthropological studies rest their arguments for the cultural construction of the self on a contrast between *the* Western concept of an autonomous, decontextualized self and *the* concept of self as it is to be found in the particular culture under scrutiny. With certain exceptions (e.g., Shweder and Bourne 1984), it is simply assumed that this essentially Kohutian concept of self accurately reflects Western self-experience.⁶ Despite their contentions that the notion of a bounded, autonomous self is not shared by other cultures, anthropologists investigating concepts of person and self retain the assumption that another culture produces a characteristic “self” in some form that can be described in terms of a few key concepts and symbols.

But a single model of self or person is not adequate for describing how selves are experienced or represented in any culture. If we were to construct a single model of the Pakistani self or person and apply it to Shamim, for instance, we could explain only certain aspects of Shamim’s utterances. A model based on codes for conduct and concepts of person derived from Islamic doctrine would be appropriate for elucidating Shamim’s concept of herself as a good daughter and future good wife and would also account for its antithesis, the concept of herself as “bad,” which was stimulated by memories of her father’s anger at her. This Islamic model, however, would say little about Shamim’s self-image as a “politician” and her view of the politics of everyday life, as I will demonstrate below.

This assumption of a single culturally constituted concept of self rests on a further assumption that, until very recently, has been the prevailing paradigm in cultural anthropology: that “cultures” themselves are coherent systems. Anthropologists have understood cultures to be organized sets of symbols, resting on distinctive underlying principles and constituting a global reality for those raised in a particular cultural tradition. From this perspective, culture itself is perceived as a timeless whole, which changes only if impinged
upon by external forces. A common procedure for anthropologists, exemplified in Geertz’s study of concepts of person in the diverse cultures of Morocco, Bali, and Java, has been to identify basic organizing cultural principles and then to explain how the culture’s concept of person also rests on these principles. Presumably, an individual’s experience of self was based on this cultural concept of person which Geertz had identified.

SHIFTING SELVES

I propose a model of the self that is in certain respects antithetical to Kohut’s notion of a “cohesive” self and avoids even the assumptions of symbolic anthropologists who have searched for a particular culture’s “concept of self.” I argue that the experience of personal continuity implied in Kohut’s model of a presymbolic, cohesive self that is a unitary center of experience is illusory. When we consider the temporal flow of experience, we can observe that individuals are continuously reconstituting themselves into new selves in response to internal and external stimuli. They construct these new selves from their available set of self-representations, which are based on cultural constructs. The particular developmental histories of these self-representations are shaped by the psychological processes of the individual. As a result of the process of self-reconstitution, an external observer may see shifts in self-presentation of which the participants in an interaction are unaware.

My dialogue with Shamim demonstrates just such shifts and negotiations between us, as well as within herself. These self-representations are accompanied by changes in other attitudes and in emotional state. For instance, Shamim’s utterance, “I am happy when I work,” was a reaction to a moment of self-reflection in the midst of an activity in which she and I had been intensely absorbed together. Evidence from her responses to my questions suggests that her state of contentment was accompanied by a self-image that she had partially “borrowed” from me (an orientation toward “progress” in one’s life, particularly progress toward a Ph.D., was at the time one of my major goals). In Freud’s terms, she had established a temporary identification with me. My subsequent questions disrupted this identification and created a new interactional context, which stimulated the emergence and negotiation of different self-representations.
What a close observer of another in a social interaction such as this actually sees is thus a sequence of shifting self-presentations (see Labov and Fanshel 1977; Ewing 1987). These selves are highly context-dependent and mutually inconsistent. There is no overarching, cohesive self that is identifiable to an outside observer (see Schafer 1976). This is true even for Americans who may think they have such a self.9

Some of the inconsistencies that are embedded in Pakistani culture and constitute the stuff of cultural argument are manifested in Shamim’s dialogue and in her rapidly shifting self-representations. Shamim displays a tension, for instance, between two self-images that are based on inconsistent premises. At some moments she presents an image of herself as a good, obedient daughter who will, hopefully, become a good wife. At other times her self-representation is that of a “politician” who can employ various strategies to meet her personal needs and wishes.

Shamim’s image of a good wife is based on religious imagery that stresses obedience and submission. This image of being a good wife is consistent with her representation of herself as an obedient daughter and can be linked with an associated representation of her parents that she also elaborated: “God prefers the prayer of parents. They gave us birth, food, modern education.” These images are directly based on a Pakistani concept of person that is familiar to scholars of South Asia, highlighted in Dumont’s notion of homo hierarchicus, in which persons are regarded, not as individuals with personal needs, but rather as units of the social order (Dumont 1972). From this perspective, the primary basis for action should be the expectations arising from one’s position in the social order and the specific wishes of superordinates. In terms of this model, Shamim’s badness (which resulted from her failure to live up to the image of a good daughter) is caused by the nafs (the bodily soul) and its selfish appetites, which it is the duty of every good Muslim to control. A premise of this orientation is that external conformity to Islamic law and proper behavior will eventually shape inner habits and disposition, leading to a greater purification of the bodily soul. Shamim retained this stance as she alluded to a specific quarrel with her father, in which she implied that the traditional parent has the right to object to a love marriage, and the dutiful daughter strives to “sac-
sifice her feelings,” a culturally standard image that appears in countless films and novels.

Juxtaposed to this cultural model of the person is another concept, which derives from a culturally patterned mode of maneuvering and negotiation that Pakistanis call the “politics” of everyday life (often using the English word to describe this phenomenon). According to this model, each person operates to maximize his or her advantage (or that of his or her family) vis-à-vis others in order to realize personal or familial wishes and goals. This readily discernible, patterned mode of maneuvering and negotiation often involves influence based on hierarchical status relationships, bribery, and other such activities. It is an established part of life, even for people who see themselves as honorable and respectable. The man who extols the virtues of being a proper Muslim will attempt, in a different context, to rig exam results for a son. This “political” model is inconsistent with the Islamic idea that there is only one principle to guide behavior, namely obedience to God and His laws (and, by extension, to one’s parents). This inconsistency is a source of tension in everyday life, as Pakistanis blame pervasive social corruption on this tendency to maneuver and negotiate for one’s advantage at the expense of others.

The “political” mode of behavior is readily recognized in others and often criticized; conversely, it is rarely acknowledged in oneself as an ideology or principle of behavior. Yet this stance can be recognized implicitly in many utterances. Shamim manifested this approach to the problem of her marriage when she said, “I will try to convince them. . . .” Although she softened her statement by adding that she would try not to pressure her parents, we both knew that she was doing everything she could to maneuver them into accepting her wishes. At that moment, her position had thus shifted, though without obvious discontinuity, from the stance of dutiful daughter who will sacrifice her feelings to the stance of subtle politician who will do what she can to get her way.

Such maneuvering can be a source of guilt for Pakistanis. Shamim exhibited such guilt. Having asserted that she will try to influence her parents, Shamim assumed the position of disobedient child, as if she were speaking through the voice of her parents, seeing herself through their eyes. “Those who disobey their parents are not successful in life.” Interestingly, she then alluded to the illicit “politics”
that parents themselves engage in for their children: "They earn for us; they even deceive others for their children." Although she avoided drawing any explicit link between this and her own present activities, her "political" stance appeared to have aroused a specific string of memories about similar activities by her parents. But this allusion to their activities also served to highlight the honorable aspect of such "political" activity, particularly when it is done for the sake of others rather than for personal advantage. This shift of perspective on her parents illustrates how a particular self-representation is linked with a representation of others, which shifts when the self-representation shifts.

Dialogues often contain rapid, even unintentional shifts in definitions of the situation of the sort demonstrated by Shamim's conversation with me. Frequently the speaker juxtaposes contradictory positions without attempting to integrate them. In other cases the speaker has made some effort at synthesis or integration, whether in the past or in the current conversation. In the case of the two Pakistani models for behavior, "good Muslim" versus "clever politician," one model may be explained in terms of (or reduced to) the other during the course of argument. For instance, the good Muslim may explain manifestations of "political" action as the excessive indulgence of a person's nafs. Alternatively, from the political standpoint a person's actions, though proper behavior for a good Muslim, might be branded as "boorish" or stupid or, more benignly, labeled "simple" (see Kurin 1988 for an example of this type of inconsistency). A component of Shamim's intrapsychic conflict involved her inconsistent attitudes toward the "clever politician" that she knew herself to be: Was she merely indulging her nafs at the expense of her parents, or was she acting competently and wisely in a manner resembling her parents' own activities?

Even when a person has made efforts to achieve integration, the result falls short of Kohut's cohesive self; the components maintain a semiautonomous existence, and new events can rupture previously established integrations (which in any case may not incorporate all of a person's self-representations). On the other hand, the level of integration will affect a person's experience of conflict and influence his or her strategies for dealing with inconsistency. I discuss this issue in more detail later in the paper.
Challenged by the criticism that static models have been unable to account for cultural change adequately, anthropologists have begun to focus on inconsistencies within cultures and to pay more attention to situational contexts in their analysis of symbols, ultimately developing models that highlight the ongoing activities of "experiencing actors." These models take inconsistency and the necessity for negotiation as an inevitable component of any cultural system and identify the resultant cultural processes emerging from negotiation as the proper object of anthropological study. Questioning Geertz's assumption of the consistency of Balinese culture, for instance, Boon (1986) argues that the multiple systems for assigning status and labels to people in Bali are inconsistent. These variable constructions, he argues, serve to satisfy different parties with different perspectives and are not reducible to a set of underlying, organizing principles or single set of symbols. He characterizes the experience of Balinese culture as one of "ongoing cultural argument" (1986:258). If we look closely at the process of what Boon calls cultural argument, it is evident that participants in argument do not necessarily take unitary, opposing but consistent stances vis-à-vis one another. On the contrary, humans are adept at using multiple rhetorical strategies, relying on ambiguity and tropes to establish a position (Burke 1969).

Among the positions that participants in dialogue strive to establish are self-representations that will be accepted by others. As Crapanzano has argued, the self (I would say "self-representations") and its relationship to the other are subject to constant negotiation during the course of interaction (1981a:140). Crapanzano has drawn on the philosophical tradition represented most notably by Hegel (1966), G. H. Mead (1962 [1934]), Sartre (1956), and Lacan (1977) in his argument that self constitution is actually a dialectical process in which individuals experience themselves from the standpoint of the other, so that self-experience is always changing. This model has served as an alternative to the model of an enduring, cohesive, unitary self, which is assumed in many cultural studies of concepts of self.

This model of a self constituted through dialogue is not by itself an adequate paradigm for the anthropological study of the self, however. In Schafer's work, for example, after "self" is stripped away what is left is merely the idea of a person as modes of action. Taken
to extremes, this theoretical stance has resulted in ethnographies in which the anthropologist strives to avoid depicting the "self" of the informant altogether. This effort reduces these studies to fragmentary, self-conscious recordings of the dialogue between informant and ethnographer, which leave it to the reader to make of these dialogues what he or she will (for examples, see Clifford and Marcus 1986). The most important problem with this dialogical paradigm is its inability to account for the experience of wholeness and continuity that is represented, I argue, not only in the Western concept of a cohesive self, but in the experience of self in other cultures as well.

Little progress has been made toward the development of a positive model of the experience of self that both takes into account this dialectical philosophical tradition and explains the illusion of wholeness. A critique of the Kohutian notion of a unitary, cohesive self that has continuity through time, together with a critique of the anthropological project of uncovering the underlying coherence of a culture, has suggested that we should turn to a model of "shifting selves" that are observable in dialogue. But if the notion of the unitary self is illusory, how can the experience of personal continuity, which informants claim, be explained? We need a model that accounts for the important phenomenon of the experience of wholeness and self-continuity without falling into the error of reifying a unitary self. How do people function in a semiotic environment that is characterized by inconsistency, contradiction, and constant change, in which their very "selves" are also inconsistent and shifting? Why are we not all psychotic?

THE EXPERIENCE OF WHOLENESS

The experience of a cohesive self must not simply be dismissed or ignored simply because it is illusory, as theorists such as Schafer, focusing on dialogue and flux, have argued. Rather, we must consider the semiotic process on which it is based, a process by which the flux of experience is reified and made the object of reflection. An experience of wholeness and coherence is encapsulated in a self-representation, in a semiotic process that highlights and organizes certain fragments of experiences. I argue that, although such wholes are actually fleeting, they are experienced as timeless.
In her conversations with me, Shamim repeatedly demonstrated this process of constructing a semiotic whole. With each utterance, she spoke as if the utterance and the self-representation it expressed or implied were her total experience of self. A particular self-representation, furthermore, coincided with representations of others that went together to constitute a symbolic whole. Her image of being a good, obedient daughter, for instance, was consistent with an image of her parents constructed in terms of a cultural ideal: they are parents who provide everything for their children and deserve perfect obedience. When her image of herself shifted, as when she saw herself as a politician, so did her image of her parents.

Though anthropologists have not recognized the importance of the illusion of wholeness for understanding the self, a few scholars have realized that people need to make sense out of inconsistency and have tried to show how they do this in other cultural domains. Revitalization and millenarian movements are a cultural phenomenon in which the management of inconsistencies is a central issue and the effort to construct coherent symbolic wholes is particularly evident (see Wallace 1956; Fernandez 1986). Even when confronting the juxtaposition of fundamentally different cultures, participants in revitalization movements are able to create and articulate new overarching, symbolically constituted wholes (Wallace 1956; Fernandez 1986). They create encompassing visions of the world in which the person (“self,” in my first sense of the organism and the total personality), however defined, is also coherently articulated. But these semiotic wholes are illusory.

Lévi-Strauss, in his studies of totemism and primitive classification, labeled the tendency to strive toward coherent symbolic wholes as “bricolage” and identified it as a universal of human thought (Lévi-Strauss 1966). But, taking a cognitive approach to this issue, Lévi-Strauss argued that we do not succeed in overcoming fundamental inconsistencies and contradictions. Fernandez agrees with Lévi-Strauss that the search for a single set of principles underlying a culture is misguided. In Fernandez’s words, “the underlying unity found in religious culture cannot be expressed satisfactorily in any one metaphor” (1986:172). But Fernandez disagrees with Lévi-Strauss about the outcome of people’s efforts to strive toward coherent symbolic wholes. Though Fernandez does not address himself to issues of the self or individual experience, his argument about
the sources of the "conviction of wholeness" (1986:159) in religious experience can be used to lend support to the contention that the unity of being which we label the "self" is an illusion or reification, while at the same time suggesting the importance of such illusions for ongoing experience.

Focusing on how the coherence of myths and religions depends "more on a unity of feeling than logical rules" (1986:161), Fernandez examines the mechanisms that lead to a conviction of wholeness of world view in the face of inconsistencies and finds them in an "argument of images" that rests on semiotic processes such as metaphor and metonymy (1986:175–176). He argues that actors mix metaphors and that the enactment of a ritual "returns to the whole by means of the processes of iteration, by the discovery of replication, and by the creation of novel semantic categories of wide classification" (Fernandez 1986:175). The use of metaphors and analogy allows "the collapse of separation into relatedness" (Fernandez 1986:177). Fernandez further suggests that it is particularly in times of stress that we turn to figurative language and the argument of images to achieve a wider and more transcendent view of things.

Despite the different focus of Fernandez (who was considering religious culture, not the organization of the self), the semiotic devices he uncovers—including metaphor and metonymy—are actually similar to the processes people use to organize and interpret their sense of self. This similarity, I would argue, is to be expected, since people use the same semiotic processes to constitute experience in all situations. For this reason it is also unsurprising that many of the semiotic processes identified by Fernandez in the evolution of revitalization movements are related to phenomena observed by Freud (1965) in his studies of dreams and the organization of the psyche. These processes include what Freud identified as "condensation," "displacement," "transference," and "identification."

Condensation, identification, and transference all rely on what is essentially metaphor to organize experience. Condensation is a process of combining disparate thoughts into a single image, particularly evident when we dream. This process is parallel to what Fernandez describes as the identification of replication and the experience of similarity in a revitalization movement.15 Constructing a single image out of different experiences also occurs in the phenomenon of "transference," in which the image of one person is assimi-
lated to the image of another (see Freud 1965 [1900]:601n). More specifically, a person experiences toward someone in his or her current environment thoughts and feelings that originally applied to the object of an infantile attachment. "Identification" is a process in which the actor in some manner becomes like someone in the environment who is psychologically important to that person. With respect to the self, these experiences of similarity with another are self-referential and constitute the identity of the self while simultaneously ordering experience. Identifications are an important means by which the ego develops (Freud 1923) and may be understood as a primary source of self-representations. "Displacement," on the other hand, operates more like metonymy: the psyche evades the memory of a disturbing experience by focusing on a peripheral detail, which comes to represent the experience itself in a manner that is not affectively charged.

The concepts of condensation, displacement, transference, and identification are what would now be called semiotic processes, though Freud did not identify them as such. They specify how the psyche uses metaphor and metonymy to organize and internalize interpersonal experience. Consequently, I argue that these concepts developed by Freud may be used to resolve a problem that Freud himself did not recognize: how the individual constructs an illusory sense of wholeness and personal continuity out of what are actually inconsistent self-experiences.

Though it is difficult to demonstrate these semiotic processes conclusively with one brief snatch of dialogue without appearing to indulge in conjecture, I will risk an example that draws largely on my extensive experience with Shamim in other contexts. As I suggested above, Shamim's statement, "I am happy when I work. . . . Because I feel that I am making progress," was based in part on an identification with me and my goals. But her subsequent statements, "If I work, I will get money to help my parents. If I get a Ph.D., I will help my society," can also be traced to a long-standing self-representation involving the fantasy of being a son, which I had been able to discern more or less explicitly in other dialogues we had had. Working to support the parents is consistent with the traditional ideal for a son in a Pakistani family. Coming from a family that had suffered considerable hardship because the first several children had been daughters, she (and her sisters) showed several signs of such
fantasies. This fantasy was linked to a self-representation that shaped many of Shamim's actions and decisions. The fantasy seemed to emerge fleetingly here as a way of warding off the experience of conflict. Linking this fantasy with getting a Ph.D. represented an effort at compromise, a solution that I represented, since I was both a woman and a professional (and, as an American, free to choose a spouse without parental interference). Shamim had thus assimilated her long-standing, ego-dystonic self-representation of being a son with her image of me in a metaphorical act of identification, based on certain similarities between a Pakistani concept of a son and Shamim's ideas about my activities and goals.

The processes of identification and transference (as well as condensation and displacement) contribute to the organization of memory. To use an image of G. H. Mead's, we "organize our memories upon the string of our self" (1962 [1934]:135). Conversely, it could be argued that we constitute the self as a string of memories. Advocates of the position that there is a single, cohesive self, which is continuous through time, argue from personal experience that they feel themselves continuous and can pull up memories to demonstrate their sense of a coherent, continuous personal history. Hal-lowell, considering this problem of the experience of self-continuity, also stressed the importance of memory: "Human beings maintain awareness of self-continuity and personal identity in time through the recall of past experiences that are identified with the self-image. If I cannot remember, or recall at will, experiences of an hour ago, or yesterday, or last year that I readily identify as my experiences, I cannot maintain an awareness of self-continuity in time" (Hallowell 1955:94). Clearly, memory is an important component of the experience of wholeness and continuity. But it is no proof of actual continuity. In order to establish a sense of continuity, we do not have to recall all of our experiences of an hour ago or a year ago; we need only command a few representative memories. I argue that these memories are analogous to a curriculum vitae for a particular self-representation, a highly selective personal history. This personal history is organized in terms of a coherent symbolic framework, which also encompasses specific images of others in relation to the self.

Since the memory on which the experience of self-continuity rests is highly selective, it is possible that, from the frame of reference of
an alternative self-representation, there would be a similar experience of self-continuity, but one that rested on an entirely different set of memories, perhaps organized in terms of quite a different cultural schema and images of others. To repeat G. H. Mead’s image of memories organized on the string of the self, there may be multiple “me’s” or selves on which to string memories. If each “self” emerges only in specific contexts, their coexistence will not be noticed, in a manner analogous to the existence of the phonetically diverse components of a phoneme.

In effect, actors often keep only one frame of reference in mind at any particular moment. Constantly responding to changing circumstances, the actor juxtaposes symbols from different domains and operates under inconsistent premises. Though in certain contexts individuals may identify themselves in terms of clearly defined, labeled categories (such as the santri and abangan categories of the Javanese [see Geertz 1960]), such categories may be relevant only in certain social situations or only for certain purposes. The same individual may shift frames of reference from one context to another, even from one moment to the next, and may tolerate considerable inconsistency in his or her own beliefs and opinions, often without realizing it, as Geertz himself has vividly demonstrated. From this perspective, it is tempting to add the notion of a “contextual unconscious” to Freud’s list of descriptive, dynamic, and systemic unconscious. Extrapolating from this perspective on memory, we may hypothesize that a person fails to notice inconsistency because, with the change in frame of reference, the environmental cues triggering memory also shift, leading to a “forgetting” of one’s previous point of view.

The phenomenon of shifting selves can be explained in essentially cognitive terms, in a manner reminiscent of G. H. Mead’s approach to the problem of the self (1962 [1934]). However, the experience of self-continuity and wholeness is also, or perhaps primarily, an affective state, and the “contextual unconscious” is reinforced by affect. As Fernandez (1986:161) pointed out in his discussion of religious imagery, coherence depends much more on a unity of feeling than on logical rules, even within the realm of phenomena such as a revitalization movement. It is a symbolic process resting on images that are not simply reducible to verbal articulations of experience.
The coexistence of alternative strings of memories and the affective coherence of a chain of memories associated with a specific self-representation is readily observable in a clinical setting, during the psychoanalytic process. Shamim’s memories, reported to me on different occasions, can also be useful to illustrate this point. I was amazed at the time at how different Shamim’s past sounded as she reported memories to me in different contexts, when different self-representations seemed to be foremost. Once, when she was presenting herself to me from the stance of dutiful daughter whose primary concern is the welfare of her family, I asked her to tell me about her past. This context stimulated in her a chain of memories that was quite different from her reported memories in conversations when she regarded herself differently. As a dutiful daughter, she remembered the time when her father was transferred to a job outside of the city, and she went to the shrine of Data Sahib to pray with her whole heart that he be transferred back. She remembered visiting her grandparents in their village and eating sugarcane with her cousins. She talked of how she, her mother, and sisters cook sweets at Eid and take them to neighbors. She remembered the house they had lived in when she was a child and nostalgically described how “simple” their life had been. Running through these and other memories was a common affective thread based on solidarity with her family, in which each family member fulfills his or her duties and supports the others with love.

Shamim, however, would present me with quite a different string of memories on other occasions. She once mentioned that she was feeling sad and restless as we sat in the courtyard of her family’s home late one winter afternoon, awaiting teatime. As in the conversation quoted above, we had been working, recording her observations about relatives and neighbors. But this time, she told me about a woman who was visiting next door, whose “nervous system had been broken for twenty years.” This led to a discussion about her own mother, who had had a similar problem when Shamim was a child. As in our previous conversation, she ultimately was led to reflect on herself and her feelings. She described how unhappy her own childhood had been: “we were very poor when I was a child. No sofa, no TV, just one bed. Because my father spent a lot of money on my mother.” She felt that her childhood had affected her personality:
I am sensitive, serious, always frustrated. I don’t know why I feel loneliness since I passed my B.A., especially in the winter season after three o’clock. I feel sadness if I am home. If I go for a walk, then I forget. Maybe some bad associations at home—I don’t know what. I think about why I feel this way, but I don’t know why.

Clearly, Shamim’s image of herself as sensitive, serious, and frustrated is linked to her childhood experiences with her mother. Such feelings lead her to seek escape from her family. In a similar mood, on another occasion, she described to me memories of walking down the road, thinking of ideas for short stories and dreaming of how they would be published in a magazine.

This example illustrates how a shift of mood and self-image can be so complete that the individual appears to be unaware of the change. Before Shamim mentioned the woman with the broken nervous system, her mood had been quite lively, with no hint of the sadness she reported after talking of her mother. Yet when she spoke of being sad and frustrated, she emphasized, not the shift from a previous mood, but the continuity with previous times when she had experienced herself in the same way.

THE DEFENSE OF WHOLENESS IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

Although many of our self-representations are formed in early childhood and remain with us throughout life, they may become more or less salient over time, and they may change. In times of personal stress or conflict, when “literal routines break down and we are constrained by false or moribund categories” (Fernandez 1986:178, discussing religious movements), our old self-representations may inadequately reflect our current experience. The experience of inconsistency confronts us with a challenge to our integrative capacities. In these circumstances, we may turn to symbolic, metaphorical processes to create more adequate representations of self and other. When an individual is faced with having to make a decision or take action that involves conflict, as was Shamim with respect to education and work, he or she strives to achieve a lost sense of wholeness while avoiding painful or threatening self-constitutions or representations. One strategy for restoring this lost sense of wholeness when faced with conflict is to create more adequate self-representations, a process that requires an effort of synthesis and
integration. Alternatively, most of us simply get by with unexamined inconsistency whenever possible.

Freud provided the first useful models for examining how individuals handle experiences that they find incompatible with their conscious experience of self. Freud recognized that much of our ongoing experience is shaped by unconscious processes. The process of repression is at work, unnoticed, even in "normal" people who presume themselves to be fully conscious and rationally in control. When we consider situations of conflict, the process of shifting selves can partially be explained in terms of Freud's model of the functioning of the ego, which struggles to control a diverse stream of inconsistent stimuli. Individuals evade inconsistencies and conflict by means of a variety of rhetorical devices, many of which Freud labeled "defense mechanisms." They may struggle to integrate their experiences when in the midst of conflict only when, because of the particular situation in which they find themselves, they cannot avoid the conscious juxtaposition of inconsistent, inadequate self-representations. We may say that a "contextual unconscious" is no longer adequate, because contexts have begun to overlap.

My dialogue with Shamim occurred when she was experiencing conflict but had not yet succeeded in integrating a series of inconsistent self-representations that she could not avoid juxtaposing because of her situation. In this situation of conflict, the shift from one self-representation to another did not prevent her from experiencing inconsistency.

My question to Shamim about her personal progress disrupted a self-representation based on a fantasy of being like me that was serving as an escape or defense from the conflict she faced. In response to my questions, Shamim reflected further on her immediate self-image and reexperienced the state of conflict that had dominated her recent experience. She expressed a series of inconsistent goals, each reflecting a rather different concept of self. She moved closer to the source of her conflict when she shifted to a fantasized image of herself as a good wife.

Through all of this, Shamim seemed to be striving to reconcile painfully inconsistent self-representations. We can see symbolic processes at work as she strove to resolve inconsistency. The self-representation as disobedient child being a painful one to maintain, Shamim rapidly defended herself against it first by tacitly associat-
ing her own maneuvering with analogous activities of her parents and then by focusing on her brother and his transgressions ("My brother is bad in this way."). The identification of her brother as the bad one served several functions in her communication. In addition to shifting the focus away from herself and onto her brother, it also reintroduced the theme that was implicit at the very beginning of the dialogue: that of being a son herself. When describing her brother’s transgression, she demonstrated both that she is like her brother (they are both disobedient) and affirmed that being a daughter instead of a son isn’t so bad after all.

Because Shamim was in a state of active conflict, she could not avoid juxtaposing inconsistent definitions of the situation. Yet, despite these juxtapositions, Shamim did not appear to suffer from any experience of "fragmentation," any breakdown in her experience of wholeness. She was successfully able to shift from an experience of self that was linked to her fantasy of being a son and was partially merged with her experience of me as a "worker," to an experience of self as an obedient daughter and a good wife, and finally to an experience of self as a disobedient child, which created considerable distress and pushed her into a series of defensive maneuvers. These shifts and maneuvers drew on culturally shaped concepts of self that Shamim experienced and contextualized in distinctive, idiosyncratic ways.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

Individual development, including the formation of self-representations, occurs in a matrix of culturally shaped situations in which mutually inconsistent symbols and organizing principles are continually being juxtaposed in various ways. The developing child, whether seen as internalizing the images that the Other has of him or her (Mead 1962 [1934]), identifying with his or her images of others experienced as significant lost objects (Freud 1923), or experiencing others as self-objects to be incorporated through transmuting internalizations (Kohut 1977), can be said to be internalizing images that are embedded in inconsistent, often incompatible symbolic systems. But these symbolic systems, and associated self-images, are always experienced in particular behavioral and relational contexts, and the child learns not only a set of symbolic systems and self-images, but also how to make the shifts from one to another,
when to juxtapose them, and when to keep them perceptually distinct. In situations of conflict, this “contextual unconscious” is reinforced by defensive processes, resulting in what Freud called dynamically unconscious processes.

It is possible to consider Kohut’s developmental account of the emergence of a cohesive self and the experience of a “fragmenting self” from this perspective of shifting definitions of a situation. During the experience of fragmentation, the individual experiences a “deep loss of the sense of the continuity of his self in time and of its cohesiveness in space—a psychic condition that produces profound anxiety” (Kohut and Wolf 1978:419). But judging from Kohut’s descriptions, the essence of the “cohesive self” is flexibility. It is as if during the course of development, the adequate parent responds to the child as something different from one minute to the next, sensitive to shifts in the child’s self-representations. Calling this capacity for flexibility a “cohesive self” is, in my opinion, a misleading image for the psychological and symbolic processes involved. One can see where the image comes from experientially (and Kohut maintained that his model was an “experience-near” one): when individuals are successful at making these rapid, contextually appropriate shifts in orientation, they experience a feeling of wholeness and continuity, because they are able to maintain an orientation that is coherent at any particular moment and involves a complex integration of many components (which may include representations of space, time, etc., as well as representations of others that correspond with one’s self-representation at the moment). I would thus argue that, as long as an individual is able to maintain contextually appropriate self-representations in interaction with others, he or she may experience a sense of continuity despite the existence of multiple, unintegrated or partially integrated self-representations.

CONCLUSION

Self-representations are embedded in a particular frame of reference, are culturally shaped, and are highly contextual. Contexts themselves rapidly shift, as actors negotiate status and seek to achieve specific goals, implicitly redefining themselves and each other during the course of the interaction. They assimilate ongoing experience to established representations of self and other, by a process related to the psychoanalytic phenomenon of transference.
When existing self-representations are rendered inadequate by explicit conflict that requires resolution, the individual may draw on a range of rhetorical strategies, either regressive and defensive, or integrating and creative, in an effort to adapt to the new situation. But even in the absence of cultural solutions to these conflicts, individuals have a remarkable capacity to maintain an experience of wholeness in the face of radical contradictions, by keeping only one frame of reference in mind at any particular moment.

Kohut’s concept of a “cohesive self” may point to the experience of wholeness that a healthy, flexible person is able to maintain in the face of these rapid shifts in self-experience and social context. By creating this term, however, Kohut has reified an active process, draping it with attributes such as boundedness and autonomy that make it seem analogous to such entities as the Indian concept of self as “dividual” particles of various types of flowing substance-code (Marriott 1976a). Kohutian psychoanalysts have argued that healthy Indians have “cohesive selves,” despite their unusual ideas about the constitution of the person, and anthropologists have dismissed the psychoanalysts’ views as ethnocentric. I argue that the phenomenon to which the psychoanalysts are alluding when they speak of a cohesive self—that is, the experience of wholeness that derives from a symbolic constitution of the self and the phenomenon of rapid shifts in the content of that experience—may be universal. The object of anthropological studies, namely cultural concepts of self, is a component of the content of that experience of wholeness. But rather than simply looking at this or that cultural concept of self or person, it would be more interesting to focus cross-cultural research on how multiple self-representations are organized, contextualized, and negotiated in dialogue.

NOTES

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“Boundedness” in this sense means a clear distinction between that which is psychologically felt to be inside the person and that which is outside. It is closely associated with the idea of autonomous functioning.
This distinction, which Kohut eliminated, has been central to thinkers of diverse backgrounds, including G. H. Mead (1962 [1934]), in his efforts to articulate the relationship between the "I" and the "me," and Sartre (1956) in his discussion of "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself."

The epistemological status of the idea of self is analogous to Freud's metapsychological propositions, such as the tripartite model of the mind. As Gedo and Goldberg pointed out, the crucial scientific test of metapsychology is that of usefulness and internal consistency, rather than truth or validity (1973:169). The idea of a "self" is not an empirically verifiable entity and arguments for the existence of some sort of self must, therefore, rest on a logical and philosophical basis.

This is not a coincidence: Geertz had been inspired by Kohut's work when he wrote that description, as his reference to Kohut indicates (see Geertz 1984:124).

McHugh has recently challenged Marriott's and Dumont's positions in their most extreme form, namely that the concept of the individual does not exist in South Asia and that persons are perceived only in terms of relatedness, by looking at data that appear in contexts different from those studied by Dumont and Marriott (1989:76-77).

Shweder and Bourne, like other anthropologists, contrast a single Western concept of self with a "contextualized self" that is found in many non-Western cultures, but they are focusing exclusively on cognition and thus do not presume to be assessing intrapsychic experience of self. Furthermore, they acknowledge that this Western concept of self does not necessarily accurately reflect Western self-experience (1984:192).

We can see that, for Geertz, there is a coherence to, say, Balinese culture that is mirrored in his depiction of the Balinese self: "what is philosophy in Java is theater in Bali" (Geertz 1984:128). Though Geertz identified "at least a half-dozen major sorts of labels, ascriptive, fixed, and absolute, which one person can apply to another (or, of course, to himself)," he argued that all of these systems serve to mute individual characteristics in order to make life "an enactment of hierarchy, a theater of status" (1984:129) in which time and the individual are obliterated.

This connection between a cohesive cultural and social order and a unitary self-experience was suggested by G. H. Mead: "The unity and structure of the complete self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole" (1962 [1934]:144).

As McHugh (1989) has pointed out, observers of the American psyche such as Gilligan (1982) have observed self concepts that are very different from the concept of an autonomous, bounded self.

For an example in an American psychotherapeutic setting, see Labov and Fanshel (1977).

Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (1986) have labeled their efforts in this direction "the anthropology of experience."

Crapanzano has been in the forefront of anthropologists attempting to make his colleagues aware of the relevance of this tradition to their own endeavors (see Crapanzano 1981a:140).

According to Tyler (1986), for instance, "A post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect" (p. 125).

Crapanzano, following in this tradition, has attempted to show how our notions of language, text, and biography have limited the further development of this philosophical paradigm and its application to social science (Crapanzano 1981b). Schafer, working within the tradition of American psychoanalysis, had made a similar point (Schafer 1976).
Freud specifies several ways in which condensation may occur. In a collective image, for instance, the features of one person are combined with those of another. A composite image encompasses several thoughts possessing contradictory characteristics by highlighting only features that the thoughts share, while allowing contradictory features to become indistinct, unnoticeable (1965 [1900]:328).

Graduate students to whom I presented the argument that we do not experience a single continuous self clearly demonstrated this point in their reactions.

Geertz describes the case of a member of an anti-Muslim cult who was confronted with a disruption of the funeral of his son because the Muslim religious official refused to carry out the Muslim rite: "It had evidently never occurred to him [the father] that the anti-Muslim funeral agitation of the party would ever appear as a concrete problem" (Geertz 1973:155).

Current theories of memory that attribute recall to the presence of appropriate environmental cues are consistent with this approach. The work of experimental psychologists such as Tulving (1974) is particularly relevant.

See Ewing (1987) for evidence of this phenomenon in both clinical and fieldwork settings.

Repression maintains what Freud called the "dynamic unconscious," a process by which affectively charged material is kept from consciousness.

The technique of free association introduced by Freud demonstrates the affective continuity of chains of memories.

Mead recognized the possibility of multiple, mutually incompatible selves arising out of an inconsistent social order, since in his theory the self is based on the images that others project in social interaction. Mead suggests that the existence of multiple "me's" or selves is a pathological state, evident in the clinical phenomenon of multiple personalities, which arises with the breakdown of a cohesive social order and the "generalized other." In his theory, the development of a "core self" is dependent on the existence of a consistent social order. But if we throw into question the existence of cohesive social order and the idea of "culture" as a coherent, symbolically organized whole, and suggest that all social orders are based on inconsistent cultural principles, the existence of a "generalized other" on which a core self is based is also thrown into question.

Kohut uses "fragmentation" to describe the painful psychological state that results when the cohesiveness of the self is threatened (1977).

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