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## Intertextual Sexuality: Parodies of Class, Identity, and Desire in Liminal Delhi

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*This article examines articulations of class, identity, and desire as performed by a community of kotis in northern India, a transgender group that impersonates a second transgender group known as hijras in a staged event called "hijra-acting." Through a linguistic parody of lower-class hijras performing a birth celebration for their upper-class patrons, kotis critique the class-based animosity between hijra and gay sexualities in contemporary India, spoofing the sexual desires associated with both groups as inferior to their own. The analysis demonstrates that identity and desire are best understood as mutually constituted intertextual phenomena, with both importantly reliant on ideological linkages of language and socioeconomic class for their articulation. [parody, intertextuality, desire, hijras, kotis]*

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### Introduction

Residents of the Gujarat city of Surat recently witnessed a legal dispute between the eunuchs of the area, known in Hindi as *hijras*, and a group of impersonators who allegedly treaded on hijras' livelihood by masquerading as eunuchs. The impersonators, imitating hijras' traditional role as blessers of newborn children, had begun singing and dancing in an area of the city that was under the jurisdiction of one of Surat's older hijra communities. Suffering from ever-dwindling patron support, the hijra community filed a public appeal against their imposters—known locally as "fakes"—for encroaching on their professional territory and giving them a bad name. When the *Indian Express* reported on the incident (Sharon 2000), they depicted the conflict as a turf war between "the have-nots and the haves," implying that the dispute was as much about anatomy as it was about economics. This depiction is consistent with the way in which many hijras present themselves to outsiders. According to popular hijra rhetoric, members of the community have no genitals: Hijras claim that a divinely sanctioned birth defect has forced them into a third-sex existence that is neither male nor female.

Hijras in Surat used this rhetoric to their advantage, attributing a sexual licentiousness to their counterparts that they, as a third sex born without genitals, did not share. "We do not venture out of the house after 6 pm," explained the director of the hijras' legal council. "But these fake hijras hang around till early morning. People think we are the ones but it is not so." A second hijra quoted in the news article is similarly judgmental: "We will never accept them. Would you bring a prostitute home as a wife?" The implication of sexual licentiousness voiced in these two quotations also surfaced in the hijras' public appeal, which instructed city resi-

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dents on ways to recognize members of this supposedly non-genuine group: "Use of abusive language, obscene behavior, creating a ruckus at marriages and other functions, and forcibly demanding money, which ranges anywhere between 500 to 2000 [rupees]."

The appeal's claim that abusive language and sexual obscenity are indices of hijra fakeness would undoubtedly strike many an Indian reader as ironic, particularly since hijras are infamous throughout India, and sometimes despised, for these very behaviors. But even though hijras are everywhere known for their lewdness, they identify themselves in their rhetoric as ascetics who never engage in sex. This stance is made possible not only by a societal imagining of hijras as impotent (the term *hijrā* itself means 'impotent' in common usage) but also by hijras' self-produced "have-not" status. Much of India's population is unaware that many hijras undergo penile and testicle castration, attributing their conspicuous lack of male or female genitalia to a biological determination that disallows sexual pleasure as well as sexual potency. Indeed, popular texts in psychology and journalism theorize this very lack as motivating an excessive engagement with foul language, interpreting hijras' use of sexual obscenity as a vocal reflex of physical frustration provoked by impotence (see Hall 1997). When it comes to verbal aggression, then, fake hijras, as possessors of a penis, make better hijras than hijras, their use of sexualized insult reflecting not psychological compensation for anatomical lack, as is often popularly imagined to be the case with hijras, but "real" sexual desire.

That this desire is considered dangerous is reflected in the treatment of fake hijras by the Indian police, most notably in the ongoing harassment of "haves" for acting like "have-nots." The police often hold up family life as evidence for "have" status, since fake hijras in popular understanding, unlike their impotent counterparts, are seen as able to bear children. A news item from northern Bengal is a case in point (*Silliguri Barta* 2002). The Silliguri police, tipped off by real eunuchs in the area, discovered that a team of hijras dressed in bangles, lipstick, and colorful saris were actually men, daytime cross-dressers who put on hijra garb as a means of getting cash in exchange for pseudo-blessings. It was only when the police raided the house of a man named Ishua and discovered therein his wife and two sons that an arrest was deemed necessary, since "real" hijras are thought to be sexually impotent. When a medical investigation later confirmed that Ishua was indeed a man, not a hijra, he was arrested for impersonating a eunuch and held on charges of extortion. Tellingly, it was Ishua's involvement in heterosexual organizations of the family that betrayed him as a hijra pretender. Real hijras, according to dominant hijra ideology, sever family connections as part of a joint dissociation from the procreative world of men and women.

This article examines performances of sexual identity by self-identified *kotis*, a group of purported fake hijras in New Delhi who, like the hijras they imitate, claim a long-standing indigenous identity that dates back to the period of medieval Mughal rule. Although these *kotis* perceive their own identity as distinctive from that of the hijras, they imitate hijras as part and parcel of being *koti*, regularly engaging in a performance event they call *hijrā aiktīn karnā*, or "doing hijra-acting." In this staged activity, *kotis* do "hijra drag" by performing the role of hijras at birth celebrations, parodying the lower-class hijra community as well as their upper-class patrons. As with all parody, these performances bring the production of identity into sharp focus. Participants exaggerate and mock aspects of self that they perceive to be foreign to their own, positioning themselves as normative over and against the projected oddities of the other. As such, the "texts" that form the intertextual backbone of these parodic performances are as much texts of identity as they are dramatic texts of the hijra birth celebration.

Because *kotis* occupy an intermediate class position between hijras on the one side and gays and lesbians on the other, their linguistic parodies of the bawdy Hindi-speaking hijra and the prudish English-speaking patron serve as a commentary on the ever-growing tension between older and newer queer identities in urban India,

themselves divided along lines of class as well as language. The last two decades have given rise to a shift in the sexual layout of India, in part as a result of increasing globalization and the onset of HIV-AIDS activism. Most notably, an educated English-speaking gay identity has developed in Indian urban centers that rejects the transgendered stance associated with its hijra predecessors, perceiving their forays into femininity as a marker of lower-class sexuality. Hindi and English, as languages infused with class associations, have accordingly become symbolic of these identity distinctions, with the use of English indexing a cosmopolitan gay sexuality and the use of Hindi a more traditional transgender sexuality. But whereas gay men view the use of Hindi as sexually backward, kotis view the use of English as overly modest. They invoke this ideological conflict in their hijra-acting performances, projecting the tension between lower- and upper-class sexualities onto the linguistic personae of hijra and patron. The resulting polarization creates a space for the emergence of an alternative identity that is neither bawdy (like hijras) nor prudish (like gays and lesbians) but irrefutably koti.

This analysis demonstrates that sexual identity and sexual desire must be understood as mutually dependent intertextual productions. Recent scholarship in the field of language and sexuality has borrowed from psychoanalysis to suggest that researchers should shift their attention from identity to desire so as to bring the “sex” back into sexuality (Kulick 2000; Cameron and Kulick 2004). This is a valid suggestion, particularly since the existent literature does not fully address issues of sexual desire, focusing instead on the complex of indexical links between linguistic form and social identity. But desire-centered approaches to the study of language and sexuality often characterize the study of identity and the study of desire as contrary, if not polar, areas of intellectual concern, obscuring the fact that the expression of desire is ultimately social. I assert here that desire can never be analyzed independently of the ideologically rooted identity positions through which it is constituted (see Bucholtz and Hall 2004b). Indeed, analysts of language and sexuality would benefit from shifting more, not less, attention to issues of identity. Scholars have only barely begun to consider the many ways that sexuality is articulated through and against social hierarchy, with class constituting one of the most salient omissions in the literature. Although Foucault himself early on acknowledged the existence of “class sexualities” (1980:127)—and, accordingly, class-specific regimes of sexual desire—the variable of class continues to be neglected in the anthropological literature on language and sexuality. Kotis’ parodies of the sexualities associated with higher and lower positions on the class continuum offer a clear instance of the way in which class—or more specifically, the social characteristics that come to be ideologically associated with socioeconomic status—can constrain and structure the articulation of both sexual identity and sexual desire.

In this article, I offer an overt example of the interdependency of these two aspects of self as a means of illustrating the importance of identity to the sociolinguistic analysis of desire. The first section of the article focuses on kotis’ understanding of self as expressed in interviews and everyday conversations, seeking to expose how kotis conceptualize the relationship between identity and desire in their everyday lives. Their self-positioning challenges the way in which their community has been represented, if discussed at all, in historical as well as popular texts. The second section turns to the materialization of koti identity within an extended hijra-acting performance, where kotis spoof their upper-class gay and lesbian audience through a parody of the hijra birth celebration. The performance reveals the specifics of the interplay between identity and desire, for kotis assert their own identity through parodic critique of the sexual desires associated with other class positions. In the third section, I examine the relationship between these koti performers and their audience in order to argue that desire is itself intertextual in nature, expressed through and against ideological “texts” of sexuality associated with particular gendered and classed positions.

### The Fourth Breed

Although current work on sexuality in South Asia has asserted that urban identities like *koti* developed only recently as a by-product of HIV-AIDS activism, the kotis I interviewed for this article dismiss this argument as simply one more instance of society's ignorance about their community. The rise of HIV-related activism in India has undoubtedly worked to solidify *koti* identity in urban centers like New Delhi, yet kotis themselves see this new solidarity as a logical progression for a community that has thrived on sex-work since the medieval Mughal period. Indeed, a careful examination of the historical literature reveals that kotis, or comparable instantiations of so-called fake hijras, have existed for at least as long as there has been scholarship on hijras. Although the term *koti* is largely absent in the historical record,<sup>1</sup> a significant number of colonialist texts mention groups that resemble today's kotis as a point of contrast when describing the supposedly "more authentic" hijra community. A tension between the real eunuch and its artificial shadow thus governs the colonialist record. Pairs of contrastive transgender identities appearing in late-19th- and early-20th-century literature include *kojahs* versus *higrahs* (Shortt 1873), *híjdás only in name* (Faridi 1899), *hijra* versus *zanána* (Ibbetson, MacLagan, and Rose 1911), *hijra* versus *khasua* (Russell et al. 1916), and even *those who shave* versus *those who do not need to shave* (Hirschfeld 1935). In such contrasts, one group—namely the group that is somehow seen to "choose" the lifestyle as opposed to being born into it—is usually represented as more vile, more immoral, more sexual, more obscene. This dichotomizing portrait of subaltern gender identities in traditional India, which continues in contemporary journalism, can be attributed to the fact that researchers from the colonialist period on have acquired their information on "competing" transgender groups from the hijras themselves. Kotis, if discussed at all, are thus portrayed reductively as "fake," "duplicate," or "bogus" hijras, as prostitutes and sodomites, as married men with children who selfishly imitate hijras for financial gain. Real hijras, in contrast, are discussed more favorably in the same texts as a "third sex" because of hijras' own self-identification as "neither man nor woman" (see Nanda 1990). This thirdness, furthered by popular understandings of the hijra as sexually impotent, ironically authorizes their societal role as givers of procreative blessings, particularly in the context of birth and wedding celebrations where their blessing is thought to secure a long lineage of sons for the recipient.

Contemporary researchers have likewise continued a bias against non-hijra forms of transgenderism in India, albeit for a rather different reason. The poststructuralist interest in third-gender categories has led scholars to focus on hijras to the exclusion of other less visible identities, thus continuing a one-track portrayal of India's gender alterity. Indeed, much of this research misreads the transgender identities of earlier literature as hijras, even when the term *hijra* is not used in reference to the communities under discussion. Hence, Niccolao Manucci's (1907) medieval court eunuch, Abbé Dubois's (1999 [1816]) effeminate urban prostitute, and Freeman's (1979) untouchable transvestite are conflated as *hijras* in scholarly reviews of the literature. The recent theoretical emphasis on the liberatory aspects of subversive gender performance, initiated by Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, has encouraged this conflation. In spite of Lawrence Cohen's (1995) carefully articulated concerns regarding the disembodied use of critical gender theory in the Indian context, this new line of inquiry continues to subsume India's impressive gender diversity under a theoretical concept of thirdness, banishing figures like kotis to the textual margins. Where, for example, do kotis fit into Sabina Sawhney's (1995:212) interpretation of hijras as a metaphoric concept that "demonstrates the speciousness of the notion of 'authentic genders'?" If kotis self-identify not as a third sex but as a "fourth breed," as in the conversations I recorded in Delhi, are they in turn merely demonstrating the speciousness of the notion of "authentic hijras"?

The concept of authenticity, while rarely investigated reflexively as a concern of sociocultural linguistics, continues to guide research assumptions regarding the collec-

tion and analysis of linguistic data. As Mary Bucholtz (2003:398) has argued, the research drive for *real language*—or rather, “language produced in authentic contexts by authentic speakers”—has historically produced essentialist, or at best unrepresentative, accounts of speech communities and the speakers and practices associated with them. In a series of articles on the place of identity in sociolinguistic research (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b, in press), we have jointly argued that authenticity would be better studied as an outcome of sociolinguistic practice, rather than as an orientation that somehow precedes and predicts the use of particular linguistic variables. We thus prefer the term *authentication* as an alternative, which highlights the fact that authenticity is not a given but a socially achieved act, produced in part through the appropriation of linguistic variables ideologically associated with particular identity positions. As such, authentication, along with its counterpart *denaturalization*, is one of several sets of relations—or *tactics of intersubjectivity*, as we call them—utilized by speakers to produce social identity. What will ultimately be of interest in this article, then, is the social interplay that governs the production of authenticity. When kotis denaturalize the alleged asexuality of hijra identity, for instance, they do so in order to establish the more “genuine” boundaries of their own identity.

The kotis I met in Delhi have a radically different understanding of their community than what is reflected in the work of previous researchers. For them, kotis are the original; hijras are the afterthought. Those who claim this richly diverse urban identity see themselves as direct descendants of the effeminate guards of the medieval Mughal zenanas, well-attested in the historical literature of the period, who were trusted to guard the women’s quarters because of their supposed lack of interest in women. According to Delhi kotis, a small group of these guards later decided to renounce their extended families, get castrated, and form the sect of eunuchs that only later came to be called hijras.

The koti understanding of their historical firstness makes good sense in the present, particularly since the koti community often harbors men who later transition to hijras. As a result of the constant back-and-forth movement between these two communities, kotis and hijras undeniably have much in common. Both groups conceptualize their male partners as *giriya*, a term they use for men who see themselves as heterosexual but take on the role of active partner in same-sex sexual relations. In addition, both groups make use of a secret lexical code they call *Farsi*, a name that recalls the dominant language of the medieval Mughal courts. Although the *Farsi* of kotis and hijras is unrelated to Persian *Farsi*, its speakers conceptualize it as such, employing it in the construction of a historically authentic sexual identity. In India’s shifting landscape of sexual identity, where newly emergent gay communities define themselves in part against the more long-standing transgender identities of the lower classes, both kotis and hijras employ *Farsi* as a tool for speaking back against the anti-Hindi sentiment embedded in the upper-class perception of English as sexually progressive. Yet in spite of frequent interchange between these two communities, kotis are keen to assert themselves as having an independent identity that predates that of hijras. This stance is encapsulated in their claim that the *Farsi* term *koti* precedes the Hindi term *hijra* in the historical record. As one self-identified koti explained to me: “The word *koti* has been used for a very long time, since before the time of hijras. Of all the words that hijras use for people like us, they’ve kept this one word *koti*.”

Delhi kotis view the primary distinction between themselves and hijras as located within the realms of sexual expression and kinship, in keeping, oddly enough, with the negative journalistic accounts of “fakes” related at the outset of this article. Because kotis remain intimately involved in the family networks of procreation essential to Indian social organization—an involvement affirmed through their rejection of the hijra desire for castration—they lack the authenticity necessary for the giving of procreative blessings. Many kotis lead double lives, acting as husbands when at home with their wives and children and as hijras when on the street with friends. But their independence from the hijra community frees them from conforming to hijra rules

regarding public decency, which for many Delhi hijras means staying off the streets at night, conducting sexual activities in private instead of public domains, and carrying on a pretense of sexual asceticism with ignorant outsiders. There is no such pretense in koti interaction, as Example (1) illustrates. Kotis pride themselves on their ability to father children and participate in normative family structures. But they also proudly identify as passive recipients of sexual pleasure with other men, challenging the shame associated with passivity in normative understandings of male sexuality<sup>2</sup>:

(1) On the wrong side

Sarvesh:	maī to gharelū laṛkī bannā cāhtī hū.	S:	I want to become a domestic girl.
Ginni:	maī bhī gharelū laṛkī [(xxx)]	G:	Even I want to become a domestic girl (xxx)
Sylvie:	[(sādī karū)].	Sy:	(I'll get married).
Uday:	[(xxx)]	U:	[(xxx)]
Sanni:	[ <i>actually</i> maī- <i>actually</i> maī to nahī ban saktī na gharelū laṛkī kyōkī maī bāl vidhvā hū. ((laughs))	S:	[ <i>Actually</i> I- <i>Actually</i> I really can't become a domestic girl because I'm a child widow! ((laughs))
Shikha:	nahī aisā hai nā, bahut der kar dī (xxx)	Sh:	No it's not like that, it's too late (xxx)
Sanni:	nahī aisā hai maī, maī (ghar se gaī thī), <i>doctor</i> ne mujhse kahā thā, ki āpke, bacce dānī bhī hai <i>ultrasound</i> kiyā thā, to kah rahī bacce dānī sab kuch hai. par bhagvān ne tumhārā ched ultā de diyā (xxx) ((laughs))	S:	No, it's like this, I- I (had left home) the <i>doctor</i> told me that I had a uterus, she did an <i>ultrasound</i> and said that I had a uterus and everything, only God had put the hole on the wrong side! (xxx) ((laughs))

Many hijras, or at least those hijras conforming to dominant community ideals, would avoid discussing the specifics of their own sexuality so overtly in the company of outsiders. When Sarvesh and Ginni express their desire to marry and become housewives, Sanni jokingly boasts that marriage for her is impossible since she is already a child widow. “The doctor told me that I had a uterus,” Sanni interjects, gaining the upper hand on the feminized desires of her koti sisters with a claim of biological authenticity. “She did an ultrasound and said that I had a uterus and everything, only Bhagwan [God] had put the hole on the wrong side!” With this short punch line, Sanni manages to subvert a long history of hijra rhetoric that holds up hijra identity as a divinely determined state of existence. In contrast to kotis, hijras often produce refrains like “We are born this way” and “Bhagwan made us like this” when talking with outsiders, in part as a defensive measure in the face of ever-increasing threats to the community. In this excerpt, Sanni subverts these kinds of refrains by joking about, and ultimately sexualizing, her own divine origins. She thus manages to index hijra identity while simultaneously critiquing it. Most significantly, she transforms the hijras’ allegedly divinely sanctioned state—almost always discussed by hijras in their life stories as misery-producing—into something pleasurable. Yet by invoking the rhetoric of childbirth (e.g., *doctor*, *ultrasound*, uterus), she simultaneously reminds her listeners that she has the ability to procreate, even if her methods are a little unusual.

Kotis often present themselves as pleasure seekers over and against the prestigious asceticism granted to a supposedly asexual hijra authenticity. In Example (2), Mani, Uday, and Balli engage in a much-loved koti pastime, a verbal one-upsmanship in which participants attempt to top each other’s stories about times that they were mistaken for hijras. Mani offers two such instances in this passage, both occurring on the night she cross-dressed for a hijra party. She asserts her “success” in passing as a hijra by relating how outsiders treated her with respect, offering her the blessings and alms reserved for hijras in traditional India due to their perceived role as religious ascetics:

(2) Mistaken identity

1	Mani:	us din ham <i>party</i> pe jā rahe the na jab soniā	M:	On the day we were going to the <i>party</i> -
2		logō kī <i>party</i> - pichlī <i>party</i> jo thī.		when Sonya had her last <i>party</i> ,
3		is <i>party</i> se pahlī <i>party</i> .		the <i>party</i> before this <i>party</i> ,

4	to auto vālā jo thā na,	the one who was our cab driver
5	to usne, paise-	didn't take any money from us,
6	jitnī marzī duāē de do,	"Give us your blessings as you wish."
7	aur soniā ne (xxx)	And Sonya (xxx)
8	to soniā ko kahā tum sīdhī kharī raho,	So he said to Sonya, "Keep standing straight,"
9	to usne pair chue soniā ke.	and he touched Sonya's feet
10	aur kahtā hai mujhe bahut sārī duāē do.	and said, "Give me a lot of blessings."
11	aur paise nahī lie, usne kahā	And he didn't take any money, he said,
12	pacīs sāl se yah kām kar rahā hū,	"I've been working for the last 25 years,"
13	Uday: phir pair chue usne,	U: And then he touched our feet.
14	Mani: jab ham bhī hijrō kī party mē jā rahe thī, to	M: Then when I was going to the hijra party,
15	eh- pīche baiṭhī huī thī maī,	eh- when I was sitting at the back,
16	to mere ko paise de ke gae the vo.	someone gave me money also.
17	Balli: hā mujhe bhī de ke gayā thā.	B: Yeah, he gave me money too.
18	Mani: <loud, rapid> <tujhe <sup>int</sup> kyā patā.	M: <loud, rapid> <What do you <sup>int</sup> know?
19	((laughing)) tū <sup>int</sup> kaunsā gayā thā hijrō kī	((laughing)) When did you <sup>int</sup> ever go to the hijra
20	[party mē,>	party?>
21	Balli: [mujhe batāyā to thā.	B: I was told about it,
22	jahā barō mē rahā thā.	where I stayed with the elders.
23	hā rokar mē ikyāvan rupae.	Yeah, a solid 51 rupees cash.
24	aur tujhe <sup>int</sup> kotī kī tarah dikhā detā	And if I had exposed you <sup>int</sup> as a kotī,
25	vahā sarak letī,	you would have had to get out of there!
26	Mani: maī to cup-cāp milī aur cal dī,	M: I just met him quietly and walked away.
27	Uday: <u>kare kar</u> ↑jā	U: <u>Oh stop it!</u>

When Balli presents her own story as a challenge to Mani's hijra-acting success, relating how she herself was given 51 rupees on the very same night (lns. 17, 21–25), the exchange escalates into insult. Interrupting Balli with what is normatively perceived as "the hijra voice," Mani responds rudely with intimate *tū* forms of the second-person pronoun—forms normally used by a superior when addressing an inferior: *tujhe<sup>int</sup> kyā patā? tū<sup>int</sup> kaunsā gayā thā hijrō kī party mē?* (What do you<sup>int</sup> know? When did you<sup>int</sup> ever go to the hijra party?) (lns. 18–20). Indeed, the indiscriminate use of intimate (*int*) verbal and pronominal forms instead of the more respectful familiar (*fam*) or polite (*pol*) forms is ideologically associated with the hijra community more generally, as their renouncement of caste, class, and family is thought to produce asocial linguistic behavior. It is only when Balli returns the insult with an accusation of undesirability—suggesting that Mani would have had to flee had her patron only known that she was a kotī and not a real hijra (lns. 24–25)—that Mani comes back to her kotī senses. Her response, flirtatious and confrontational, succinctly rewrites the respectful exchange between hijra and taxi driver as an illicit one between prostitute and client. "I just met him quietly and walked away," Mani boasts coyly (ln. 26), reasserting herself as a sexually desirable kotī. The distinctive kotiness of this response is punctuated by Uday's use of the sassy Farsi expression *kare kar jā* (oh stop it!), an interjection that ends the game and declares Mani the winner.

This exchange points to an essential aspect of kotī identity as conceptualized by Delhi kotīs: the ability to imitate hijras. "If they say that they're kotīs," Balli explains in Example (3), "they act like hijras. In every word, in every gesture, in every style, their behavior is just like hijras." Indeed, Delhi kotīs even have a Farsi expression that they use explicitly for kotīs who fail to act like hijras: *kare tāl kī* (hard core). According to Balli, this phrase is used for effeminate men who refuse to express their femininity, or in her own words, those who "don't act as openly as we people do":

(3) They act like hijras

1	Balli: jo kotī khul ke ātī haī na,	B: Those who are kotī come out openly, right?
2	jo kahtī haī hā ham kotiyā haī.	the ones who say, "Yes, we are kotīs."
3	lekin jo <u>kare tāl kī</u> haī vo to kotī kahtī	But those who we call <u>kare tāl kī</u> don't call
4	nahī apne āp ko ki ham kotī haī.	themselves kotī, they don't say they're kotī.
5	Uday: lekin unke āp log to [kotī] kah rahe haī	U: But they themselves call themselves kotī,
6	na,	right?

7 Balli:	[thīk hai,	B:	Okay,
8	lekin ham <u>kotī- kare tāl kī kotī</u> unko	we are calling them <u>kotī-</u>	<u>kare tāl kī koti</u> ,
9	bol rahe haī.	But they aren't saying this about themselves,	that they're <u>kotis</u> .
10	lekin vo khud yah nahī kah rahī	Okay?	Because when they say that they're <u>koti</u> ,
11	ki ham <u>kotiya</u> haī,	they <u>act</u> like hijras. (xxx)	In every word, in every gesture, in every <i>style</i> ,
12	thīk hai na,	Their <i>behavior</i> is just like hijras.	Those are the ones who call themselves koti.
13	aur jab kahtī haī ki ham <u>kotī</u> haī.	Now those who are <u>kare tāl ke</u> [...]	they don't act as <i>openly</i>
14	to vo hījṛō <i>acting</i> kartī haī. (xxx)	as we people do.	
15	har bāt mē, har adā mē, har <i>style</i> mē,		
16	to nekā <i>behavior</i> hījṛō thīk rahtā hai.		
17	jo <u>kotī</u> apne āp ko kahte haī.		
18	ab jo <u>kare tāl ke</u> haī vo- [...]		
19	is tarah se vo ekdam <i>openly</i> nahī karte		
20	jis tarah se ham log karte haī.		

In koti discourse, the English term *openly* is used not for the public disclosure of same-sex desire, as it is in the urban English-speaking gay community, but for the donning of feminine clothes, makeup, and behavior in public—an activity more generally associated with hijras. This divergent use of the same term points to one of the important differences between koti and gay identity, as emphasized by the kotis and gay men I interviewed for this article. Whereas gay men view the kotis' focus on cross-dressing, together with their adamant preference for the passive role in the sexual act, as lower-class and culturally regressive, kotis criticize gay men for concealing their femininity in upper-class pretensions of same-sex desire.

Kotis see the ability to perform a hijra identity not only as instrumental to koti identity but also as prestigious within the Indian social hierarchy of gender. As Ginni proudly claims in Example (4), "A koti is a person who can take on any form. She could be a hijra, she could be a girl, she could be a man." The kotis' understanding of themselves as identity-shifters is necessitated by the many roles required of them in their everyday routines: When at home with their wife and children they play the role of a man, when on the streets with fellow kotis they play the role of a hijra, when cruising in a park with male clients they play the role of a girl. Indeed, role-playing is essential to the ways in which kotis recount their daily interactions. In Example (5), for instance, Balli appropriates a deep commanding male voice when relating how she demands dinner from her wife (addressed here as *mā* "mother"):

(4) The fourth breed (cauthī nasal)

Ginni:	<u>kotī</u> aisā hai, jo har rup le letī hai, hijre kā, ek larḳī kā aur ek ādmī kā. to usko cauthī nasal kahā jā saktā hai. thīk hai, bas yah <u>kotī world</u> hī aisā hai ki, <u>kotī</u> ko yah rup diyā gayā hai, cauthī nasal kah sakte haī māī phir yah kahūgā. [...] hijrā ban ke bhī rahā hū māī, aur larḳī bhī apne āpko mahsūs kartā hū kabhī-kabhī, jab <i>ladies</i> kapṛe pahantā hū, kabhī koī jab badatmīz hotā hai hijrā bhī ban jātā hū, <i>otherwise</i> māī <i>gents</i> bhī ban jātā hū.	G: A <u>kotī</u> is a person who can take on any form. She could be a hijra, she could be a girl, she could be a man. So in a way we can call her the fourth breed. Okay? Only this <u>kotī world</u> is like this, only the <u>kotī</u> has been given this form. So I would again say that they should be called the fourth breed. [...] I've lived the life of a hijra, and I also feel like a girl sometimes when I dress up in <i>ladies'</i> clothes. Whenever someone behaves badly toward me, I also become a hijra. <i>Otherwise</i> , I become a <i>man</i> .
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(5) Like men

Kira:	tum apne ghar mē kaise rahte ho	K: How are you when you're at home?
Balli:	ādmīyō kī tarah se, <deep, loud voice> <do ghaṇṭō mē khānā, abhī tak khānā garm nahī karā mā. > bahut badalnā partā hai ghar pe jā ke, kurtā pajāmā pahannā partā hai.	B: Like men- <deep, loud voice> <"It's been two hours! Mother, why haven't you warmed up my food yet?"> We have to change a lot when we go home. We have to wear kurta-pajamas.

As these examples suggest, kotis consider the ability to identity-shift to be the essence of koti identity. This kind of role-playing enables them to take advantage of what they perceive to be the major strengths of each identity they imitate, whether it be the sexuality of a girl, the street sense of a hijra, or the sexism of a man. That this



tripartite drag is instrumental to koti identity is reflected in the fact that many kotis understand themselves as *cauthī nasal*, or “fourth breed.” As Ginni expresses in Example (4), the three primary Indian sexes—man, woman, and hijra—are static identities, but the koti identity, by subsuming each of these primary identities as a part of itself, is necessarily fourth. Ginni’s choice of the term *breed* is telling, as it foregrounds a consideration of hybridity that is disallowed by more static designations like sex. Koti identity is not bound by the anatomical rules that control and distinguish first, second, and third sexes in India; rather, it is bound only by the unseen, by the invisible bloodlines, so to speak, that enable a koti to assume the identities of the three sexes that precede her in the Indian gender hierarchy.

### Hijra-Acting

In the remainder of this article, I analyze the ways in which this self-conceptualization materializes in a performance genre that kotis call *hijra-acting*. During 1999 and 2000, I watched and recorded approximately 20 hours of these performances at a non-governmental organization in New Delhi. The Center, which has as its mission the distribution of information about sexuality to the public, employs a number of people allied with alternative gender and sexual identities, including gay men, lesbians, and kotis. As such, it provides a unique field site for conducting research on sexual identity in northern India, harboring a diverse community in terms of class, identity, language use, and sexual practice. The hijra drag discussed in this section, for instance, which is performed by lower-middle-class kotis who are predominantly Hindi speakers, takes place before an audience of upper-middle-class gays and lesbians who are bilingual speakers of English and Hindi. It is important to note that in the context of the Center, which brings together older and newer sexual identities in an upper-class educational enterprise, it is kotis who are the “queer” ones. Their effeminate behavior and use of lively sexual punning strike many Center employees as at best oddly amusing, if not vulgar and lower-class. But because gays and lesbians constitute the bulk of the audience in these hijra-acting performances, kotis are met with a rare opportunity to counter this characterization. By reframing upper-class disapproval of their behavior as indicative of a prudish and uptight sexuality, koti performers manage to “queer” their onlookers and assert themselves as the normative ones.

When koti identity is forefronted publicly, as in these performances, the critical identity for kotis to master linguistically is undoubtedly the hijra. Indeed, Delhi kotis point to their expertise in imitating hijras as the main quality that distinguishes their community from other transgender groups who imitate only women. Kotis are usually unable to articulate the specific characteristics that constitute good hijra-acting, but as Balli told me one day at the Center, everyone knows it when they hear it. Hijraspeak, as imagined and produced by kotis in their performances, involves a number of phonetic features, including high pitch, nasalization, increased volume, and elongated vowels at the end of intonational units. But it also involves certain pragmatic features, in particular, the exclusive use of intimate second-person verbal and pronominal forms instead of the more socially acceptable familiar and polite forms. Both of these aspects of hijraspeak, along with the use of sexual crudity, loud claps, Koti-Farsi, and vocabulary associated with uneducated speakers of rural dialects, work to establish hijras as extremely lower-class, if not out-of-class altogether (a designation hijras would themselves prefer).

#### (6) *Features of hijraspeak, as imagined and produced by kotis*

- High pitch
- Increased volume
- Nasalization
- Elongated final vowels, often in final syllables of intonational units
- Raised pitch on final syllables of intonational units
- Use of intimate second-person verb forms and pronouns, for example, *tū<sup>int</sup>* (you) instead of *tūm<sup>fam</sup>* or *āp<sup>pol</sup>*

- Use of the intimate address term *beṭā* (boy) for men and women
- Flat-palmed claps
- Sexual insult and innuendo
- Koti-Farsi
- Exclamations associated primarily with hijras, such as *ae:: hae::*
- Vocabulary associated with “uneducated” speakers of rural dialects

In fact, the intonation pattern invoked by kotis reminds many onlookers of the artistic intonation used in urban or village folk dramas like *nautankī* and *sāṅg*, respectively, which are often performed by rural and lower-caste traveling groups. The use of antisocial linguistic forms and vocabulary speaks to the common perception that hijras, because their existence is tangential to the world of women and men, are a people without *śarm* (shame), freed from the constraints of decency that regulate the rest of society. Kotis, in contrast, as part of the world of women and men, lack the authenticity required for excelling at antisocial talk, and this is precisely what they exaggerate when doing hijra drag.

The performance analyzed here took place on a Tuesday night at the Center in early spring, shortly after the workday had ended. Props and costuming for the event were limited, partly because kotis employed at the Center are not allowed to cross-dress. Because the Center is situated in a well-to-do middle-class residential neighborhood, the director instituted this rule early on in order to stay neighbors’ curiosity about Center activities. It is a rule that has unfortunately kept hijras out of the workings of the Center, as most of them refuse to wear male attire in public. But on the night of this recording, Mani and her cohorts had managed to sneak on a hint of eyeshadow and lipstick in the back room before entering the main performance area.

They bustle in carrying a large and brilliantly red satin scarf, four times as long as it is wide, and proceed to wrap it around themselves seductively as both veil and pseudo-sari. The scarf is passed back and forth among the kotis for an hour or so, as they sport it in a variety of feminized poses, dropping it now and then to reveal an alluring shoulder or a fluttering eye. The best performers take it with them to center stage—here nothing more than a cold floor encircled by industrial-style desks and chairs—and incorporate it into a song-and-dance rendition of their favorite Bollywood temptress. Other employees at the Center, many of them gay and lesbian identified, take note of these dramatic displays while finishing up their work assignments, falling into the chairs in anticipation of good subversive fun.

When a respectable crowd has gathered, Mani, renowned in this small community for her hijra-acting prowess, grabs the scarf and wraps it brusquely around her hips. She walks to and fro among the kotis at a decisively rapid pace, all the while clapping her hands with palms flat and fingers wide. After she has gained the attention of most of them, she stops abruptly in the middle of the room, shouts out the Farsi expression *karē kar jā* (oh stop it!), and calls her hijra disciple, or “bride,” to her side. Her koti sisters, who immediately recognize this behavior as a break into hijra-acting, leap to assume kinship roles in Mani’s newly constituted family circle, shouting out the following series of high-pitched nasalized responses:

(7) Come my brand-new bride

*Kotis*     *Roles*  
 Mani:     Hijra guru  
 Sanni:     Great grandmother hijra of new bride  
 Balli:     New hijra bride/disciple

1	Mani:	cal merī naī navelī bahū,	M:	Come my brand-new bride,
2		yahā pe baiṭh beṭā,		sit here child.
3		rajdhānī mē āī hai.		You’ve come to the capitol.
4	Sanni:	^acchā celā kar use mere nām ↑pe:::^	S:	^Good, make her a disciple in my name!^
5	Mani:	^jī::yo::^	M:	^Live long!^
6	Sanni:	^surīle ke parpoṭī ce↑lā:::^	S:	^Great granddaughter disciple of the sweet-voiced one!^
7				

- 8 Mani: ^are khān\*dān ba ↑ṛa::^ M: ^Hey it's a big family!^  
 9 Sanni: ^are mere (gharō) kā celā::^ S: ^Hey disciple of my clan!^  
 10 Mani: ^are \*kis kā parpotī \*celā re be ↑ṛa::^ M: ^Hey whose granddaughter disciple are you, child?^  
 11 Sanni: ^\*merā aur \*kisī kā ((laughs))^ S: ^Mine, who else's?^ ((laughs))  
 12 Mani: ^\*are parpotī te ↑ṛa:::\* ^ M: ^Hey your great granddaughter!^  
 13 [^are \*khāndān barā pūrā::^ [^Hey the family is so big and full!^  
 14 Balli: [(xxx) B: [(xxx)  
 15 Sanni: acchā merī pācō (ālī) aur terī to S: Yeah, I got everything desired but you've been  
 16 kaccī kar dī ((laughs)) put to shame! ((laughs))  
 17 Mani: ^ae gul\*bār, gul\*bār, gul\*bār.^ M: Hey Flower, Flower, Flower!

Hijras are governed by an extensive alternative kinship system that assigns various feminine roles to members of the group, among them aunt, sister, grandmother, granddaughter, even great granddaughter. As the opening exchange in Example (7) suggests, this system is built around the designation of the hijra guru as mother-in-law and the new hijra disciple as bride. This conceptualization allows hijras to extend their families both horizontally and vertically, paralleling kinship relations in heterosexual society. It makes good sense that kotis would begin their hijra-acting performances in a parody of this system, since the most critical distinction between hijra and koti identity, in the opinion of both groups, is the hijras' rejection of the normative kinship structures that kotis continue to embrace. Here, as in all parody, the thing most exaggerated is the thing that most distinguishes the mocker from the mocked.

The red scarf takes on new life in the scene that follows, when Balli, assuming the role of an upper-middle-class mother, wraps it strategically around a pillow and cradles the newly formed bundle in her arms. A second prop surfaces that had heretofore remained hidden, a penis made of wood, seven or eight inches long. Balli grabs it with her free hand and stuffs it between scarf and pillow, transforming her bundle into a potent baby boy. The kotis then proceed to act out an exaggerated rendition of the hijra birth celebration, with Mani continuing her role as hijra guru and the other kotis taking up positions on either side of the hijra-patron divide. In the two hours of burlesque imitations of hijra and patron voices that follow, the kotis establish a fissure between lower-class and upper-class sexualities, thereby suggesting themselves as the desirable alternative to two extremes of undesirability. Because these performances are structured around the narrative of a hijra performer demanding more appropriate payment from a wealthy patron for her blessings, issues of socioeconomic class are embedded within each exchange.

The class differential becomes especially pronounced in the hijra's and patron's contrastive uses of language. While the hijra's use of obscenity and the patron's use of restraint are most obvious in this regard, the characters also differ in their dichotomous uses of impolite versus polite second-person reference as well as non-standard versus standard vocabulary. In a subsequent scene, reproduced as Example (8), the hijra, played by Mani, loudly demands an exorbitant gift (or *badhāī* in Hindi) of 5,001 rupees from the baby's mother in exchange for her blessings. Hijra and patron are then set up in opposition to each other with respect to linguistic politeness, with the hijra consistently using intimate (*int*) second-person verbal and pronominal forms in contrast to the mother's use of the comparatively more respectful familiar (*fam*) forms:

(8) 11,001 rupees

Kotis Roles

Mani: Hijra

Balli: Mother of newborn

Uday: Father of newborn, called Vikas

- 1 Hijra: āj hijrō vālī acting karēnge. H: Today we're gonna do hijra-acting.  
 2 Mother: us din kitnā first class acchā karā thā, M: The other day we did great first class (acting),  
 3 āj na- āj na bahut thakā huā hū. (...) but today- but today I'm really tired. (...)

4	Hijra:	^lā <sup>int</sup> bī::bī:: ^	H:	^Come <sup>int</sup> lady,^
5		pāc hazār ek di:yo: <sup>int</sup> .		give <sup>int</sup> me 5,001 rupees.
6		^acche mā::: ^		^Good mother!^
7		^ay na *badhāī ↑de <sup>int</sup> , ^		^Won't you give <sup>int</sup> us our badhāī?^
8		badhāī de <sup>int</sup> beṭ*ā.*		Give <sup>int</sup> us our badhāī, child!
9		^de <sup>int</sup> badhāī de be: ↑tā::: ^		Give <sup>int</sup> us our badhāī, child!^
10	Mother:	are baiṭh ke gāo <sup>fam</sup>	M:	Why don't you sit down and sing <sup>fam</sup> first,
11		to sahī badhāī dūgī tumhē <sup>fam</sup> ?		and then I'll give you <sup>fam</sup> badhāī.
12	Hijra:	are gaūgī pāc hazār ek lūgī	H:	Okay I'll sing, but I'll take 5,001,
13		usse kam nahī lūgī.		nothing less than that
14		bajā <sup>int</sup> be:tā:.		Play <sup>int</sup> , child!
15		harī lagā <sup>int</sup> ḍholak.		Hari, start <sup>int</sup> the drum.
16	Mother:	pāc hazār ek to maī nahī de saktī,	M:	I just can't give you 5,001.
17	Hijra:	kyō?	H:	Why?
18	Mother:	kyō kyā.	M:	Why what?
19	Hijra:	gap-gap karne mē	H:	When you were gulping (i.e. having sex)
20		*to baṛa ma*zā āyā hogā tere *ko <sup>int</sup> ,		you <sup>int</sup> must have had a really good time,
21		ab hijrō ko dene mē		but now when you're giving hijras money
22		mustī*bat ho rahī hai tere ko <sup>int</sup> .		you're <sup>int</sup> suddenly having a problem?
23	Mother:	[are suno vikās-	M:	[Hey listen Vikas-
24	Hijra:	[^(xxx) beṭā::: ek ka::m nahī lū*gī:: ^	H:	[^(xxx) child, I won't take a single rupee less!^
25	Mother:	vikās [isko so rupayā de do <sup>fam</sup> .	M:	Vikas, [give <sup>fam</sup> her a hundred rupees.
26	Hijra:	[mmm:::	H:	[mmm:::
27		are gyārah hazār ek lūgī be:↑tā,		Hey I'm gonna take 11,001!
28		ab to gyārah hazār ek lūgī.		Now I'm gonna take 11,001!

Moreover, the hijra's pronominal choices are often nonstandard, as with her use of the Panjabi-ized *tere*ko<sup>int</sup> (to you) (lns. 20, 22). Although a form like this would not necessarily be noteworthy on its own, for much of Delhi uses nonstandard pronominal forms, it works to index a class differential when juxtaposed with the mother's repeated use of the very standard *tumhē*<sup>fam</sup> (to you) (ln. 11). The class contrast between hijra and patron is further intensified by the hijra's use of sexual innuendo, as when she accuses the mother of failing to express proper financial gratitude for the child's conception (lns. 19–22): "When you were gulping you must have had a really good time, but now when you're giving hijras money you're suddenly having a problem?"

As the drama progresses, so too does the class differential, with the mother's speech becoming increasingly polite and the hijra's increasingly vulgar. This intensification is achieved linguistically not only through the mother's use of polite (*pol*) imperative forms such as *bāt kījīe* (please speak) (ln. 44), *kījīe* (please do) (ln. 58), and *ā jāie* (please come) (ln. 61) but also through the punctuated employment of English as opposed to Hindi vocabulary:

(9) Hijras are the most vulgar of all

*Kotis*      *Roles*

Mani:      Hijra

Balli:      Mother of newborn

Uday:      Father of newborn

29	Mother:	so rupae de do <sup>fam</sup> isko,	M:	Oh just give <sup>fam</sup> her a hundred rupees.
30		dekho <sup>fam</sup> suno <sup>fam</sup> ,		See, <sup>fam</sup> listen, <sup>fam</sup>
31		abhī mere baṛe <i>operation</i> se baccā huā		I just had my child with a major <i>operation</i> .
32		hai.		
33	Hijra:	mmm:::	H:	mmm:::
34	Mother:	ṭhīk hai.	M:	Okay?
35		itnā vahā pe kharc huā thā,		It cost so much
36		to maī itnā nahī de saktī na <i>please</i> ,=		that I can't give that much, <i>please</i> . =
37	Hijra:	=kyō nahī,	H:	=Why not?
38		are kyō nahī de saktī.		Hey why can't you give it to me?
39		ādmī ko to kahtī hogī "ā:↑jā::: <sup>int</sup>		You must be telling your man, "Come <sup>int</sup> !"

40	bajāegā: bā:↑jā:::int''	Come <sup>int</sup> play my instrument!"
41	heh?	Yeah?
42	aur ab tere ko <sup>int</sup> musibat ā gaī be:↑tā?	And now you're <sup>int</sup> having a problem, child?
43	ab gāḍ phat rahī haī te↑rī <sup>int</sup> ?	Now your <sup>int</sup> asshole is splitting?
44	Mother: to dhang se bāt kījīe <sup>Pol</sup> ,	M: Please speak <sup>Pol</sup> properly!
45	badatmīzī mat karo <sup>fam</sup> .	Don't <sup>fam</sup> be vulgar-
46	kis[ne-	[Who-
47	Hijra: [na ae:: hae::	H: [No? ae:: hae::!
48	*hijre badatmīzī nahī ka*rēngī	If hijras don't act vulgar
49	to hijre kaun kahegā unko.	then who will call them hijras?
50	[phir to lōḍiyā nahī ho jāēgī.	[Then won't we become girls?
51	Father: [hijre to badatmīzī karte haī.	F: [But hijras do act vulgar.
52	Hijra: heh?	H: Heh?
53	Father: hijre to badatmīzī [karte haī.	F: Hijras are definitely vulgar.
54	Hijra: [māf karnā,	H: Excuse me,
55	hijre sabse zyādā badatmīz hote haī.	but hijras are the most vulgar of all!
56	hā bībī batā de <sup>int</sup>	Yes lady, say <sup>int</sup> so,
57	nahī to naṅgī hū yahī pe.	otherwise I'll strip naked right here
58	Mother: acchā ek kām [kījīe, <sup>Pol</sup>	M: Okay, let's please [do <sup>Pol</sup> one thing
59	Hijra: [a:::h	H: [a:::h
60	Mother: suno <sup>fam</sup> , suno <sup>fam</sup> bahanjī,	M: Listen <sup>fam</sup> , listen <sup>fam</sup> , sister,
61	āp agle mahīne ā jāīe <sup>Pol</sup> phir inkī salary	please come <sup>Pol</sup> back next month, then he'll
62	mil jāēgī [to māī de dūgī.	get his salary [and I'll give it to you.
63	Hijra: [are- are-	H: [Hey, hey-
64	agle mahīne kyā kah rahe ho	What are you talking about "next month"?
65	ek sāl tak to tū <sup>int</sup> ne bitā diyā,	You've <sup>int</sup> spent a whole year now
66	ab lōḍe kā janmadīn bhī tū <sup>int</sup> ne kar	You've <sup>int</sup> already celebrated your boy's
67	liyā abhī kah rahī hai	birthday and you're still saying
68	agle mahīne ānā.	"come next month"?

The mother's use of the English words *operation*, *please*, and *salary* contrasts sharply with the hijra's use of nonstandard Hindi vocabulary such as *lōḍā* (boy) (ln. 66) and *lōḍiyā* (girls) (ln. 50), terms that much of affluent Delhi associates with rural and uneducated Hindi speakers. Indeed, the incorporation of English is particularly marked given that most kotis, including Balli the performer, know very little English and produce it only awkwardly. What results is a staged production of classic Batesonian schismogenesis (Bateson 1936), with the divergent speaking styles of hijra and patron intensifying into conversational breakdown. Unable to handle the hijra's increasing sexual crudeness, the mother exasperatedly calls for its end: "Please speak properly! Don't be vulgar!" (lns. 44–45). Her cry is met with a moment of linguistic reflexivity on the part of the hijra, who counters by arguing that vulgarity is precisely what makes a hijra a hijra: "If hijras don't act vulgar then who will call them hijras? Then won't we become girls?" (lns. 48–50). She then threatens to expose herself, an activity associated with hijra identity since at least the early 1900s when British colonialists first catalogued the behavior for the *Bombay Gazetteer*: "Excuse me, but hijras are the most vulgar of all! Yes, lady, say so, otherwise I'll strip naked right here!"

It is at this point in the drama, when hijra authenticity is brought into sharp focus, that the exchange between hijra and patron begins to take a distinctively kotiesque turn. What had originated as a financial quarrel between patron and hijra suddenly gets sexualized, as the mother begins to plead with the hijra to dance for her. Here, as in the "mistaken identity" example discussed earlier (Ex. 2), the respectful exchange between hijra and patron is resignified as an illicit one between koti and client, with the mother now offering payment for sexual services, not blessings. The implication behind this resignification is clear: The mother, trapped in the restrictive mores of a globalized middle-class sexuality, appears so desperate that her only chance to experience sexual desire is through the vulgarity of a Hindi-speaking hijra. This time the mother is not affected by the hijra's mockery of upper-class prudishness, here

expressed as insults to her daughter for “behaving all properly” (ln. 103) and “feeling shy” (ln. 109). Instead, the mother reverses the interactive dynamic once and for all by positioning the hijra as a dancing prostitute and herself as the desiring client: *e nāc<sup>int</sup> to sahī, manī, nāc<sup>int</sup> na raṇḍī* (Hey just dance<sup>int</sup>! Mani? Why don’t you dance<sup>int</sup>, prostitute!) (lns. 111–113).

(10) Proper behavior

Kotis	Roles	
Mani:	Hijra	
Balli:	Mother of newborn	
Uday:	Father of newborn, called Vikas	
Rahim:	Daughter (i.e., sister of newborn, called Sakima)	
90 Hijra:	((to Vikas)) are *kyā- are kyā hījī*ō kā	H: ((to Vikas)) Hey *what- so, you would like to
91	janma de*khegā bābū,	see the life of hijr*as, sir?
92	kyā hījīrō kā janma dekhegā.	What will you know about the life of hijras?
93	mālik *na kare tū <sup>int</sup> hījīrō kā janma dekh	May god *never show you <sup>int</sup> a hijra’s life,
94	beṭā,	child!
95 Mother:	cal <sup>int</sup> cal <sup>int</sup> nāc <sup>int</sup> to sahī,	M: Come <sup>int</sup> come <sup>int</sup> , at least dance <sup>int</sup> first,
96	ham dēge tumhē <sup>fam</sup> ,	then we’ll give it to you <sup>fam</sup> .
97 Hijra:	ā <sup>int</sup> sakīmā baiṭ <sup>int</sup> .	H: Come <sup>int</sup> , Sakima, sit <sup>int</sup> .
98	beṭā, yah kah rahī hai	Child, this woman is saying
99	pāc hazār ek de dūgī.	that she’s gonna give us 5,001.
100 Mother:	to nāco <sup>fam</sup> to sahī dūgī,	M: Then at least dance <sup>fam</sup> ,
101	jītnā mere pe hogā, nāco <sup>fam</sup> to sahī=	I’ll give you whatever I have, but first dance <sup>fam</sup> .
102 Hijra:	=(gesturing to Rahim)) are vo	H: ((gesturing to Rahim)) Oh, now she’s
103	bhalā:-bhalā: sī cal rahī hai,	behaving all properly.
104 All:	((laughter))	A: ((laughs))
105 Daughter:	<softly> <yār tū <sup>int</sup> hījīrā hai.>	D: <softly> <Friend, you <sup>int</sup> are a hijra.>
106	maī to apne āp ko laṛkī samajhtī hū.	But I think of myself as a girl.
107 All:	((laughs))	A: ((laughs))
108 Hijra:	hay laṛkī:::	H: Hey girl,
109	are [sārm-varm lagī (xxx)	hey, are you feeling shy?
110 Mother:	[cal <sup>int</sup> nāc <sup>int</sup> dikhāiye <sup>pol</sup> ,	M: Come <sup>int</sup> , please show (your) dance <sup>pol</sup> .
111	e nāc <sup>int</sup> to sahī,	Hey just dance <sup>int</sup> !
112	manī,	Mani?
113	nāc <sup>int</sup> na raṇḍī.	Why don’t you dance <sup>int</sup> , prostitute!

A primary kotiness leaks through the text here, betrayed by the mother’s use of Mani’s real name in the final two lines. Her subsequent use of the word *raṇḍī* (prostitute) affirms this leakage, for this is an affectionate term of address used among kotis in everyday interaction. Both of these shifts are instantiated grammatically by the mother’s use of intimate forms of the second-person pronoun for the first time (lns. 111–113), instead of her usual familiar and polite forms. Her sudden engagement with impolite forms of speech, highly out of character for her in this drama, signals her conversion to a kind of sexual desire at odds with the “niceties” of her class position.<sup>3</sup>

The scene that follows can be described as nothing short of chaotic. The authority of the text, the mystique of the hijra birth celebration, is irrevocably undermined by Balli’s reversal of the expected coordinates of sexual desire. What results is a “maximizing” of the intertextual gap between the generic model and its re-creation (Briggs and Bauman 1995), when participating performers, together with the crowd viewing the performance, begin to challenge hijra authenticity in carnivalesque abandon. Balli removes the wooden penis from beneath her bundle and holds it out in front of Mani, exposing her as a “have” rather than a “have-not,” a pseudo-hijra, a fake. The other kotis take the fun a step further, grabbing the penis and fondling it, posing with it in suggestive positions. The anatomical and ascetic dimensions of hijra identity are at once denaturalized and illegitimated, exposed as ideological constructs that hide the true nature of hijra desire. The tables of authenticity are thus turned, with hijras

revealed as little more than fake kotis: in short, all talk no action. When the women at the Center themselves join in and plead with Mani to strip, as Gita, Nilam, and Bina do in the following excerpt, they find their hijra prostitute unable to follow through on her earlier threat. Koti identity, avowedly promiscuous and anti-ascetic, thus asserts itself as a more modern, if not realistic, expression of sexual desire:

## (11) Strip naked!

<i>Kotis/Onlookers</i>	<i>Roles</i>		
Mani:	Hijra		
Balli:	Mother of newborn		
Uday:	Father of newborn, called Vikas		
Nilam, Gita, Bina	Women in the crowd		
256 Hijra:	nahī. nahī.	H:	No, no,
257	mīyā, māī phir nañgī-sañgī hoñgī,		Sir, then I'm gonna strip naked
258	yahā pe hā:::		right here, okay?
259	jaldī se de varnā kamā [hī paṛegā.		Give it to me fast, or I'll have to do it.
260 Father:	[a:::	F:	Ah!
261 Mother:	are bahanjī yah kyā [kar rahe ho <sup>fam</sup> .	M:	Hey sister, what is this that you are <sup>fam</sup> doing?
262 Nilam:	[(xxx)	N:	(xxx)
263	cal <sup>int</sup> ho jā <sup>int</sup> nañgī,		C'mon <sup>int</sup> just goint ahead and strip already!
264 All:	((laughter))	A:	((laughter))
265 Hijra:	hay- hay tū <sup>int</sup> cup rah <sup>int</sup> gurū,	H:	Hey- hey guru, you <sup>int</sup> shut up <sup>int</sup> , guru!
266	tū <sup>int</sup> cup rah <sup>int</sup> gurū,		you <sup>int</sup> shut up <sup>int</sup> , guru!
267 All:	((laughter))	A:	((laughter))
268 Mother:	cal <sup>int</sup> thīk hai. nāco <sup>fam</sup> to sahī.	M:	C'mon <sup>int</sup> , okay, but at least dance <sup>fam</sup> .
269 Bina:	hā nāc to dikhāo <sup>fam</sup> , phir dekhēge.	B:	Yeah, show <sup>fam</sup> the dance, then we'll see!
270 Father:	are nāc do <sup>fam</sup> pahle phir [dekhēge.	F:	Hey dance <sup>fam</sup> first, then we'll see!
271 Gita:	[nahī, pahale	G:	No, first
272	nañgā hone do <sup>fam</sup> isko calo <sup>fam</sup>		let <sup>fam</sup> her strip naked, c'mon <sup>int</sup>
273	nañgī ho.		get naked!

Nilam's request for a strip show (ln. 263), articulated with the intimate second-person forms of a "cruder" sexuality, is particularly effective, bringing forth uproarious laughter from participating kotis (and a series of "shut-ups" from Mani, who sees that Nilam has stolen the show). The few gay-identified men remaining in the room stand uncomfortably on the sidelines, amused but comparatively nonplussed, a stance the kotis later pointed to as yet another example of class-specific restraint regarding sexual expression. But this lack of involvement goes unnoticed at the moment, while the kotis revel in their success at having convinced their female colleagues to abandon their upper-class sensibilities. Raw unadulterated desire is the stuff of kotis, not of gay men who talk above it, not of hijras who talk below it. By parodying both sides of the traditional hijra-patron exchange, kotis manage to distinguish their own sexuality, and by implication their class position, as being not too crude, not too uptight, but just right.

### Intertextual Conclusions

Although parody carries the potential to expose the constructed nature of the identity it mocks (and hence denaturalize it, as poststructural theorists such as Judith Butler emphasize with respect to drag performance), it also importantly works to construct an identity for the performer. This is by no means a new idea in linguistic anthropology, for a number of articles published in the last decade—inspired variously by Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) notion of heteroglossia, Voloshinov's (1973) understanding of voice, and Goffman's (1974) idea of the dramaturgical self—have sought to explicate double-voiced phenomena such as parody in terms of what it means for the performer. But the anthropological interest in speaker agency is contrary to the spirit of most poststructuralist accounts of parody. This is particularly true within queer theory, where parody continues to be discussed primarily in

terms of its potential to subvert dominant discourses of sex and gender. Hijras have become particularly vulnerable to this kind of theorizing, as scholars from varied poststructuralist traditions have focused on the disruptive nature of hijra identity. Vinay Lal, for instance, claims that the hijra offers the modern nation-state an “emancipatory politics of knowledge” (1999:119), arguing that hijra identity defies the paradigms of classification and enumeration that now characterize middle-class globalization. Sabina Sawhney discusses the hijra as a trope that, by resisting categorization, “insistently call[s] into question the parameters that delimit feminism and its scope” (1995:208). Geeta Patel is interested in the effects of hijras on women in the upper-middle-class home, seeing the hijra as potentially hybridizing “the seamless uniformity of heterosexuality” (1997:134). I find all of these discussions intellectually compelling, but I am concerned by the way in which such texts interpellate hijra identity itself as a kind of parody—one that mocks the two-sided face of its discursive predecessor, teasing it, exposing its imperfections. Although all of these authors acknowledge hijra diversity by engaging with the ethnographic findings of social scientists, their representation of hijra identity is ultimately singular, reduced to its potential for subversion. It is this very singularity that continues to contribute to the scholarly invisibility of other transgender identities such as kotis, who do not so easily fit into the third-gender tropes of post-structural academia.

This theoretical emphasis is not so much a shortcoming as it is an outcome of disciplinary differences regarding the analysis of performance, with ethnographers of communication, in contrast to their Derridean-inspired counterparts, seeking early on to describe the specific cultural contexts that make certain speech acts, and the performances that host them, felicitous (see Hall 2000). Unsatisfied with the study of ritual as mere reiteration, scholars such as Dell Hymes (1975:71) called for contextualized discussions of “structure as sometimes emergent in action.” When Goffman (1974, 1981) began to discuss the self as also emergent in action, viewing even the everyday speaker as a performer of sorts, the situated analysis of identity became a stronghold of linguistic anthropology. Parody, as inherently intertextual and multiply reflexive, is an especially important site in this regard (see Bauman 2000; Haney 2000; Jaffe 2000). Indeed, the analysis of parody as a site for identity contestation and negotiation has been formative to the field of *queer linguistics* (e.g., Livia and Hall 1997; Barrett 1997, 1999; Bucholtz and Hall 2004b), which, unlike higher branches of queer theory, seeks to ground the study of sexuality within localized communities of practice. Such studies have examined how sexual identity, far from being essentialized or static, emerges through and against a competing array of ideological discourses on sexuality, themselves indexed by particularized ways of speaking. But sexual desire, formulated through these same ideological discourses, is similarly intertextual, bound to the speaker’s own situatedness within the sexual regimes that constitute her. We see this in the kotis’ burlesque performances of the hijra birth celebration, where desire is expressed through a mockery of the prudishness and rudeness associated with gay and hijra class positions, respectively. An analysis in which identity is subordinated to issues of psychoanalytically conceived desire, as proposed in recent critiques of research on language and sexual identity, would be unable to acknowledge the complex of class-specific sexualities through which koti desire is constituted.

The audience’s entry into the performance in the final scene suggests that the ideological linkages of language, class, and desire enacted in hijra-acting are recognized by the larger Hindi-speaking community in New Delhi. Indeed, it is the sharing of ideological assumptions about the linguistic instantiation of class-specific desires that makes these performances work, enabling a common ground of interpretation that cuts across the divergent class identities of performers and audience members. When the women at the Center insert themselves into the text in Example (10), an intertextual relationship is established between the narrative plot and the frame of the



performance. That is, the women's transformation from distanced spectators to engaged, even rowdy, participants parallels the changing role of the upper-middle-class mother in the improvisational script, who moves from a position of class distance and defensiveness to a position of sexual abandon. The mother's transformation, as outlined in Examples (8) through (10), is indexed in part by her shifting uses of second-person pronominal reference. Her use of the informal *tum* in Example (8), while more polite than the hijra's use of the intimate *tū*, works to establish her hijra interlocutor as lower-class and hence highlights the class distance between speaker and addressee. Her use of the formal *āp* in Example (9), performed as a defensive measure in reaction to the hijra's increasing lewdness, furthers this distancing through a kind of hyperpoliteness or hyperformality. Finally, her use of the intimate *tū* in Example (10) moves the plot in the opposite direction entirely, yielding a highly foregrounded display of intimacy and sexual desire. The progression from social distance to sexual desire is consistent with the actions of the women at the Center, also of a higher class than their koti performers, who ultimately lose all pretense of class aloofness when they beg Mani to strip using intimate *tū* forms of the imperative. In short, the performance-audience frame comes to mirror the transformation of hijra-mother relations represented in the story line. Through this kind of entailed or multilayered intertextuality, the performance frame is brought into partial alignment with the narrative plot, resulting in a collaboratively produced, pan-class satire of the class-embedded nature of sexual desire.<sup>4</sup>

The success of the performance is facilitated by the kotis' day-to-day forays into identity-shifting, a way of life necessitated by their decision to remain in their extended family structures. Indeed, kotis are committed by group ideology to the performance of different gender identities, which is in part accomplished through the appropriation of gender-indexing "voices." Even the conversational data reviewed at the outset of this article show kotis variously performing male voices (Ex. 5), female voices (Ex. 1; Ex. 2, ln. 26), and hijra voices (Ex. 2, lns. 18–20). The mastery of voicing phenomena is not only expected within the community; it is critical to the way kotis function in society—as husband, girlfriend, and hijra, alternatively. As such, kotis are themselves intertextual impresarios<sup>5</sup> of a sort, strategically building their own identities through the adoption of linguistic traits ideologically associated with first, second, and third genders. But whereas the colonial record and its journalistic lineage have dismissed groups like kotis as hijra mimics, we find in the intertextual slippage between the traditional hijra birth celebration and the kotis' parody of it much more than mere imitation. Although kotis, with their penises and families, lack the authority to issue blessings to newborns, their involvement with the procreative heterosexual world, together with their public embrace of a male-focused sexual desire, enables a recontextualization of the birth celebration that places koti desire at the center of the performance.

But this centering, and the slippage it entails, is dependent on a discursive background of sexual identity politics in New Delhi. English and Hindi, for instance, have come to be ideologized in radically different ways by the Hindi-speaking lower-middle class and the bilingual upper-middle class, with the latter disparaging Hindi as a language that carries traditional and oppressive notions of gender and sexuality. But whereas English is viewed by members of this class as sexually progressive and is therefore used to index a "modern" sexual politics, monolingual Hindi speakers see the upper-class refusal to talk about sex in Hindi as indicative of sexual prudery. Kotis strategically incorporate this conflict into the characters of hijra and patron, an incorporation that becomes particularly meaningful in front of an audience constituted primarily of upper-middle-class gays and lesbians. It is through the intertextual parody of all that is not-koti that kotis are able to assert a distinctive sexuality for themselves. This research thus highlights the fact that desire, like identity, is itself an intertextual undertaking, the authentic speaker and its inauthentic nemesis always lurking behind its very constitution.

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### Notes

1. One of the earliest uses of the term *koti* I have found in the anthropological literature surfaces in Sinha's (1967) article on eunuchs in Lucknow. Sinha contrasts kotis with both *hijras* and *jankhas*, defining them as "sex-perverted" boys who are understood by others as "prospective" hijras (Sinha 1967:172). It is most assuredly the case that even if the term *koti* is as widely used in India as Delhi kotis claim it to be, its reflexes will vary significantly from community to community. As such, I do not wish to make any generalizable claims about koti identity in India. Rather, my findings should be read as specific to this particular group of kotis in New Delhi, whose claims to identity are undoubtedly produced through localized understandings of class, sexuality, and gender. For a very different ethnographic account of koti identity, see, for example, Reddy's (forthcoming) discussion of hijras in Hyderabad.

2. Transcription conventions are as follows: Standard font indicates Hindi; *italics* indicate English or English borrowings; underline indicates Farsi; a colon (:) indicates lengthening; an equals sign (=) indicates latching (no gap between utterances); a bracket ([]) indicates overlapping speech; an arrow (↑) indicates pitch accent in the syllable that follows; an asterisk (\*) indicates a flat-palmed clap simultaneous with the syllable that follows; a pair of carets (^ ^) enclose sustained high pitch; a period indicates a falling contour; a comma indicates a rising contour; single parentheses enclose unintelligible or estimated speech; double parentheses enclose transcriber's commentary on the interaction; grammatical abbreviations include pol = polite, fam = familiar, int = intimate. I have used pseudonyms for all of the kotis and women appearing in this article, as well as for the Center in which these performances took place.

3. There is much more that could be said about this example, of course, particularly with respect to gender expectations, but my main concern here is with the subversion of upper-class sexual rigidity.

4. I am grateful to Asif Agha for helping me better formulate the parallels between the narrative plot and the performer-audience frame. Many of the ideas expressed in this paragraph are his.

5. Many thanks to Asif Agha for providing me with this very fitting term.

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