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**İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI**

**CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY IN *PERFECT  
PEACE AND THEY TELL ME OF A HOME***

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### ÖZET

*Perfect Peace* ve *They Tell me of a Home* Daniel Black'in iki etkileyici romanıdır. Bu çalışmada, romanlardaki cinsiyet kimliği, cinsiyet kimliği rolleri ve aile ilişkileri temaları detaylıca analiz edilmiştir. Daniel Black, *Perfect Peace* adlı romanında, ana karakterin kadınlıktan erkeklığe inanılmaz dönüşümünü incelemiştir. Ana karakter, gerçekte bir erkek çocuğu olduğunu öğrendiğinde, cinsiyet kimliğini değiştirmek zorunda kalır ve yeni cinsiyetinin ve kimliğinin gerektirdiği gibi davranmayı öğrenir. Karakter, yeni cinsiyet kimliği rolünü edinirken; ailesi, toplumun yaratacağı muhtemel sıkıntılarla başa çıkarak onun rehberi olacaktır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmada, çağımızın süregelen meselelerinden biri olan cinsiyet kimliği rolleri, romanın başkarakteri aracılığı ile incelenmiştir.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğin, toplumsal şekillendirmeden çok doğuştan gelen bir özellik olduğu gerçeğinin altını çizmektir. Daniel Black, romanlarında iki tezat karakter ortaya koyarak çalışmanın bu amacını güçlendirmiştir. Black, Perfect isimli karakter aracılığı ile toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğin toplumsal bir şekilde oluştuğunu ileri sürer. Çünkü annesi, erkek kardeşleri ve toplumun tavırları Perfect'in toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğini oluşturmuştur. Diğer yandan; yazar, toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğin sadece toplumsal faktörlerden etkilenecek değil; asıl, kişinin ruhundan gelen bazı hisleriyle şekillendiğini kanıtlayan Mister adlı karakteri ortaya koymuştur. Perfect sekizinci doğum gününe kadar kız olarak yetiştirilmiştir. Kız kıyafetleri giyer, birlikte oynadığı kız arkadaşları vardır, ailesi ve kasaba halkı ona bir kız çocuğuymuş gibi davranırlar. Yaşadığı kimlik bunalımından sonra, bir erkek çocuğu olduğunu öğrenir ve yeni toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğine uyum sağlamaya çalışır. Ne kadar çaba sarf ederse etsin, iç dünyasında kendini bir kız gibi hisseder. Bunun aksine, Mister, Perfect' in abisi, doğumundan beri bir erkek çocuğu olarak yetiştirilir. Mister, birçok erkek role modeline sahip olarak, erkek çoğunluklu bir ailede büyümüştür, fakat buna rağmen farklıdır ve kızlardan hoşlanmak yerine, erkeklere ilgi duyar. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada, toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğin yapılanması sürecinde, bütün koşulların uygun olması ve toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğin cinsiyete uygun olması durumlarında dahi, kişi kendini cinsiyetinden farklı hissedebilir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma toplumsal sosyal cinsel kimliğin doğuştan gelen hislerle oluştuğunu göstermiştir.



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### SUMMARY

*Perfect Peace* and *They Tell me of a Home* are two impressive novels of Daniel Black. In this study, gender identity, gender roles and family relationships in the novels are analyzed in detail. Daniel Black portrays a character called Perfect who experiences an incredible change from femininity to masculinity in *Perfect Peace* (2010). As the character learns that she was actually a boy, the protagonist has to change his identity and learn how to behave as his new sex and identity require. Therefore, in this study, gender roles are analyzed through the protagonists of the novels which are hot-debated issues of our age.

The aim of the study is to underline the fact that gender is “an inborn quality” rather than a social construction. Daniel Black portrays two antithetic characters, which strengthen our argument. Black suggests by means of the character of Perfect that gender is socially constructed, as behaviors of Perfect’s mother, her brothers and the society build her gender identity. On the other hand, the author draws the character of Mister, as the antithetic one, who may prove gender is not achieved only by social influences, but by some feelings coming from one’s soul. Perfect is raised up as a girl until her eight birthday. He wears girl clothes, he has female friends, whom he plays with, his family and people in the village perceive him as a girl. After his identity crisis, he learns that he is a boy and he tries to adopt his new gender identity. No matter how hard he tries, he feels being a girl inside. On the contrary, Mister, his brother, grown up as a boy from birth and he lives in a man majority family, having plenty of masculine role models, but still he is different and has feelings for boys instead of girls. Therefore, it is suggested that; even if all the conditions are right for the gender construction and compatible with the sex, one can feel different from his/her sex. In conclusion, it is shown in this study that gender identity is constructed through one’s inner feelings rather than the social rules and norms.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Perfect Peace* (2010) and *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005) are two breathtaking novels of Daniel Black, who teaches black culture and gender at Clark Atlanta University. Daniel Black, a skillful author is knitting humor and agony together in his writings successfully, tells striking, but realistic rural stories. In these two novels, Black deals with gender identity and gender roles, which are everlasting concerns of the society. Gender identity, family relationships and love are the main issues of both novels. This study examines the construction of the gender identity of the characters in *Perfect Peace* (2010) and *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005) and in what ways, the factors such as social environment, upbringing style and family structure influence the gender construction.

Daniel Black scrutinizes the implausible change of the main character in *Perfect Peace* (2010) from femininity to masculinity. As the character learns that she was actually a boy, the protagonist has to change his identity and learn how to behave as his new sex and identity require. His family will be his guide to adopt the new gender role by helping him overcome probable issues caused by the society. Therefore, in this study, gender roles will be analyzed through the protagonist of the novel.

The talented author, in *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005), portrays a character, who tries to find himself and about his family. He faces with harsh reality about his own people, even his own brother and sister, which ruined him severely. He finds his beloved sister dead without a reason. The author makes his readers question about family institution and family relationships, which is also one of the main concerns of this study.

This study is divided into four chapters, the first chapter provides detailed information about the author. The biography of the author takes place providing some information to understand the success behind the novels. The first chapter of this part offers an indicative summary of *Perfect Peace* (2010). It gives stunning quotations, which support the idea of gender roles are shaped by the society. For example, when Authorly, his brother, teach Paul -Perfect's new name- how to behave as a boy, he warns Paul: "And stop screamin' like that! You ain't no girl no more!" (Black,2010: 150) As it is clear from Authorly's warning, people in the society, believe that girls can scream when they fear of something, not boys. It is also suggested that gender identity may be achieved by the individual with the inborn qualifications. For example; when Johnny Ray comes to talk to Mister about leaving the town together, Mister has to decline the offer which makes Johnny Ray disappointed. It is seen there is a special relationship between them. "They



embraced tightly and held on for several seconds. Locals would have frowned at the scene, two striking young men crying in the woods about a love they weren't supposed to have." (Black,2010:319) Although both striking men, Mister and Johnny Ray were born as a man and they look like a man, they have a deep love relationship which comes from their inborn qualifications.

In this chapter, a detailed summary of *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005) takes place as well. This part clarifies the family relationships in an Afro-American family, which lives in Arkansas, illustrating shocking issues between the characters. After giving the summary of each novel, the second chapter introduces the definitions of gender and sex, underlying the determiner effects of the society from a feminist point of view. Gender is shaped according to sex for centuries, thus exceptions are excluded by the society, which is an inapprehensible issue that this study questions. In this part, biological effects on gender identity are examined. The chapter puts forward two cases, which explores the biological effects over one's gender making comparison between two characters from the novel. Therefore, this part of the study offers a general idea of gender and sex, giving suggestions about the construction of gender identity.

Gender roles are taken as the main topic in the third chapter. Gender roles are analyzed with the help of observing family relationships in black society giving related passages from the novels. What kind of gender roles are imposed and "the impersonation abilities of the characters" are scrutinized in this part. Another issue dealt with in this part is an incestuous relationship between a brother and a sister in *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005).

The last chapter starts with the problems of the characters about their gender. Gender conflicts, which have real influence on characters' lives are discussed in this part drawing a picture of the consequences of these conflicts. Even, they do not choose or decide what happens, they have to endure all the unwanted and unpleasant consequences of their bad fate. For example, the main character, Perfect, in *Perfect Peace* (2010) has to overcome the reactions of the society and his own family members to his transformation from being a girl to a boy, whereas in *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005), main character Tommy Lee, who has feelings for boys tries to survive in the society which he lives in.

Finally, the paper will show the construction process of a gender identity. The parameters such as family structure, the way of upbringing and social atmosphere, which play an important role over the characters are put forth within the feminist framework.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DANIEL BLACK'S BIOGRAPHY AND SUMMARIES OF *PERFECT PEACE* & *THEY TELL ME OF A HOME*

In this chapter, the life of the writer is going to be given by introducing the extensive summaries of both novels. These summaries will help the readers understand the whole plot to correlate the main issues of the study such as gender identity, gender conflicts and gender roles.

Daniel Omotosho Black is an American author who was born in Kansas City spent his childhood years in Arkansas and now works at Clark Atlanta University as an Associate Professor of black culture. He is the author of *Perfect Peace* and *They Tell Me of a Home*. He has two other books called *Twelve Gates to The City* and *The Sacred Place*. As a native of Arkansas, he successfully portrays the characteristics of his own people in his novels that Greg Iles, a critic, praises him “Daniel Black understands the racial psychology and culture of the South so well that he can show, not tell, and his characters’ actions always ring true” (Macmillan, 2013).

*Perfect Peace* is Daniel Black's third novel, which takes place in the small Arkansas town of Swamp Creek. It tells the heartbreaking story of the Peaces. Gus, the father, never learns how to control his tears and has a habit of crying, such as when it rains in Spring near the Jordon River or when things go wrong. Actually, Black describes Gus's ritual with these lines; “he is *wailing away pain like a woman in labor*” when Spring comes with the rains (Black, 2010: 2). On the 16th August 1935, her wife is literally giving a labor. Although, he does not want any other mouth to feed, Emma Jean, his wife is pregnant again for her seventh child. This time, she is sure in a way that she will have a baby-girl, because she thinks that she has been an obedient daughter, even when her mother beats her, she feeds and dresses her children by doing her best, she is married to a husband, whom she is sure no one else has wanted. Emma Jean thinks she deserves to get a baby girl, all she wants is to comb a little girl's hair, binding it with ribbons and watching her to be admired by other people. However, Henrietta, the midwife, shows Emma Jean her seventh boy saying “*this one's kinda golden. Not as black as the others. Soft, curly hair. Yep! He's a beauty*” (Black, 2010: 13). Emma Jean starts to question God, she thinks that God is mocking with her. Henrietta wraps the baby in the pink towel, which Emma Jean prepares weeks ago and gives it to her. While Henrietta is about to tell the family about the boy, Emma Jean stops her and tells Henrietta that they have a baby sister. Henrietta gets shocked with her narrowed eyes, but Emma Jean wraps

the baby and underlines that she has a baby girl. Henrietta looks at her with her bulged eyes and says “*you is crazy! You must be done lost yo’ mind, Emma Jean. That baby ain’t no girl!*” Emma Jean answers; *I know what it is, but it’s gon’ be a girl. From now on*” (Black, 2010: 15). The author gives some details about Emma Jean’s sorrowful childhood days with her mother and her sisters such as how she suffers mentally and physically, which makes the reader understand why she is acting so odd. Such as, Mae Helen, Emma Jean’s mother, wants to be with Claude Lovejoy who is Emma Jean’s father, as he is yellower than Sammy, who is the father of two sisters of Emma Jean. However, Emma Jean emerges with Mae Helen’s ‘navy blue complexion’ which is a great disappointment for Mae Helen. Therefore, Mae Helen hates her daughter because of her skin colour. However, the other two girls from Sammy are more beautiful than Emma Jean so their mother always discriminate against Emma Jean. On her birthday, Emma Jean wants to have a birthday party from her mother but she scorns her and beats her. Emma Jean cries while her sister tries to sooth her: “*But I ain’t done nothin’ wrong! All I done was ask Momma for a birthday party and she hit me with the skillet*” (Black, 2010: 24). The skillet leaves a C-shaped mark on Emma Jean’s forehead which she says “*It’s my birthmark*” (Black,2010:24) when people ask for the origin of the scar.

Emma Jean wants to have a baby girl, because she wants to take care of a baby girl as her mother never did to her. Her mother, Mae Helen was bad to her due to her father, as she thought Emma Jean looks like her father and only reason of her ugliness is her father. Whatever Emma Jean does, her mother always finds something to get angry and finally she beats her. She has some kind of hatred in her, which Emma Jean never understands. She dreams that one day she will have a daughter and she will never act like her mother does. However her destiny does not let her to do. She has seven boys now, but she disobeys her fate and she changes her boy’s gender without thinking its consequences and effects. She is such an ignorant woman that she cannot imagine to what extent the psychology of her little boy will be affected.

The question of whether Emma Jean’s guilt about ruining her son’s life is understandable or not is left to the reader. How hard Henrietta tries her to dissuade Emma Jean from her crazy idea, she can not be successful. Emma Jeans is so decisive and blackmails the midwife, who takes her own sister’s child changing with her dead baby by telling everybody that her sister’s child is dead. Now, Henrietta is helpless and she has to obey her. Emma Jeans names her baby ‘Perfect’ thinking that she is a “perfect baby”.

The boys meet her on condition that they do not wrap her. Emma Jean always pays careful attention to her baby's needs and necessities. She says to her husband that *"a girl needs thangs boys ain't gotta have, you know," "Well, we got one now, and raisin' a girl is different from raisin' dem knucklehead boys. She gotta have pretty ribbons for her hair and dresses to match"* (Black, 2010: 43).

Moreover, she sternly warns the boys never to look at their naked sister. *"A girl gotta be tended to by her mother. Men ain't got no business doin' nothin' like that"* (Black, 2010: 78). Perfect has a room of herself, whereas the other boys have to share their room. Little Perfect also has been told not to leave her room until her mother comes. When she grows up, she is a pretty girl with slanted eyes and smooth golden complexion and Swamp Creek women call her *"pretty lil' thang"* (Black, 2010: 86). Perfect is always treated differently. For example, on Christmas 1944, Emma Jean writes each child's name on the presents. James Earl, Authorly, and Woody have new overalls. Bartimaeus, Sol, and Mister inherit their brothers' old ones, but they are happy to find new T-shirts beneath the wrappings. However, they wonder about their sister's present. They estimate that their parents will do something special for her, especially their mother will prepare special presents for her as usual.

This time, Perfect gets a baby doll and Emma Jeans adds that your father and I spend good money on it. When boys start to complain about their sister's present, which is a baby doll, whereas they get presents, which are clothes they need, Gus warns them to close their mouth. Mister wants a boy's toy like a train or a baseball glove, but he cannot express his feelings.

Time passes and Perfect wants to play with her brothers, but her mother says to her that she is a lady and teach her how to be lady-like ; *"Ladies ain't got no business rollin' ' round in de dirt wit' no boys. A lady is s'pose to stay clean and pretty"* (Black, 2010: 95).

Thus, Black starts to underline the gender differences about the training of children in a black family from rural areas of Arkansas. Bartimaeus is the only brother that she can play with as he was blind. That is the reason, why Emma Jean feels comfortable and she does not feel any disturbance about their synergy. When she is six years old, she needs a friend instead of her baby doll. Caroline and Eva Mae are her friends and they play house altogether. While playing, Caroline shares a secret with her friends and Perfect asks her mother, when she will start bleeding. Emma Jean tries to find a lie to pass over the matter, but she cannot hide her trembling hands. The question echoes

in her mind. She knows that she has to do something before anybody does. Emma Jean calls her and takes her to the forest. She tries to find ways not to hurt her while telling the truth. But there is no way to do it so she says “... *I wanted a girl so bad that...um....made you into one.* She holds Perfect’s hand and; *I know this don’t make no sense, baby, but you gotta know. Before somebody else tell you. That you ain’t no girl!*” (Black, 2010: 128) Poor Perfect does not understand what is going on and answers; “*What do you mean, Momma? Of course I’m a girl. I got long hair and everything*” (Black, 2010: 128). That is the very moment of crisis that poor little child is going to suffer all his life. He cries and still tries to figure out. Emma Jean tries to explain it and she lifts her dress and points her panties and says “*only boys have what you have*” (Black, 2010: 129) and she adds; “[*s ]o from now on, you gon’ be a boy. A handsome little black boy.It’ll be strange at first, but you’ll get used to it, and this’ll all be over afterwhile*” (Black, 2010: 129). Emma Jean changes her dress with the overalls in her bag and cuts her hair, while the paralyzed child is weeping. After going home, Emma Jean tells the truth to the whole family accompanied by Perfect’s weeping.

The author draws the picture so vividly that the readers feel they are watching the scene from the chairs in the kitchen. It is a very dramatic scene with all the movements and mimics that characters wear. All the family members especially Gus displays great perplexity and anger. Gus gathers his family and makes a speech that they are a family and they need to be strong against what people are going to say.

First change about Perfect is her name, now Gus makes it “Paul” and Paul is going to sleep with his brothers from now on. This is the first change after the transformation. Paul does not like his name. However, it is going to be a hard process for everyone. All the remaining things from Paul’s girlhood time are removed from the house. His brothers have a mission to teach him how to be a man. The author underlines the gender roles, imposed by the society by means of the characters in the novel. For example; Authorly warns him to sound like a boy, to talk deeper. Gus and the other boys work in the fields and look after the animals as usual, but this time Paul is also with them to pull the grass sprouts up and throw them away although he hates dirt and grime beneath his fingernails.

Without a doubt, the Church scene, which makes Paul encounter all the people of Swamp Creek for the first time as a boy, is a notable memory for him. In spite of the insistence of Emma Jean, Gus takes him to the Church thinking there is no need to hide, Perfect’s new gender identity is going to be revealed sooner or later. Undeniably, Paul will recall the day as the day of crying in the future. Paul’s situation is given in the

following sentences in *Perfect Peace* : “*Sandwiched between Emma Jean and Authorly, Paul slumped in shame. He heard every whisper, joke, and cackle as though people’s voices had been amplified. Didn’t they know their words hurt? Didn’t they care?*” (Black, 2010: 155) The author describes Paul’s feelings and disappointments coming with his transformation and the reactions of the people and his friends, whom he plays house with, in a way that the readers, totally feel it in their hearts with great grief. He uses such a moving language that you lose yourself in the story indeed. The author also projects the reactions, behaviors, humiliations or tolerance of the society to Perfect’s gender transformation. For instance; Daniel Black portrays the scene of Paul’s dreads from the insensitive eyes of his neighbors, scrutinizing him, whispering, and asking him things, he couldn’t possibly know. Especially the scene that when he sees the notes on his desk written – “PAUL PEACE IS A FAGGOT! AND A FREAK!” (Black, 2010: 193) with a small caricature that a long-haired girl with a dress and behind the frills, he shows the penis, which breaks his heart. By giving vivid examples, Black gives the chance to his readers to sympathize how it feels to be different from the others. He also shows the effects of the difference in Paul’s life. Paul misses the feelings that being beautiful, feeling special and compares to his new life being a man and feeling ugly and unimportant without any specialty, even the sameness with his brothers.

Although, Eva Mae is still his friend, he cannot imagine to marry her. Actually, he cannot get Johnny Ray out of his mind. He never thinks of any woman to get marry. However, around the age of eighteen, his physical transformation is almost complete. He does not miss the girlhood days anymore, all he wants to have is being treated in a normal way. He does not want to cook with Emma Jean and there is no feeling to wear girls’ dresses anymore. What he misses most about the days is that being confirmed by the others. He wants to hear how precious he is. That is the night, he goes to Jordan River and ask who he is. He hears somebody whispering “*fuckin’ freak*” (Black, 2010: 239). The crowd attacks him not letting him to see their face. Suddenly, Paul feels somebody turns on the button of his trousers. When they see that he is a boy, they start to beat him mercilessly. Then, one of the boys descends upon him from behind and attempts to enter into him. After the insertion, he feels himself dirty and nasty that never will be cleaned again. When he comes home, Gus asks him, who did this to him. He cannot find the energy to give an answer. He does not speak for days. He only eats. He only explains to Eva Mae that he is beaten. However, Eva Mae feels there is something that he hides and

she guesses that somebody touches him although Paul denies. He never shares the truth with anybody.

Such kind of hate crimes still occurs in Arkansas nowadays. For instance; two Arkansas men were sentenced to prison under a federal hate crimes law for attacking a group of Hispanic men and telling them to "go back to Mexico". Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division reports: "The facts of this case shock the conscience. Five men were almost killed for no reason other than the fact that they are Hispanic. The Shepard-Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act allowed us to bring these men to justice in a way that we could not have done just a few years ago" (Perez, 2014). From the sentences above, it is clear that people still have hatred against the ones who are not from themselves in Arkansas. Two men from Arkansas, insult Mexican men and try to kill them without any reason. Even though they do not know them, they threaten the victims just because they are Hispanic. Although this is a racial kind of discrimination, all kinds of discriminations should be punished, as it is in United States. As it is stated, poor Paul has experienced sex-discrimination as he has to change his gender and sex and moreover he is raped.

Time passes and there is one more thing that is going to shock Paul, Mister confesses that he has feelings for boys and he wonders if Paul feels the same way with him, however Paul lies to his brother, which makes him hate himself for lying. What is more, Mister has feelings for Johnny Ray, which causes great disappointment for Paul. Paul never tells anyone about his feelings for Johnny Ray and now he wonders that what Mister has and Paul lacks of it. He wants to learn the inadequacy in himself which leads Johnny Ray to Mister.

In the meantime, Paul needs a suit for his graduation party, and Emma Jean is enthusiastic about sewing a suit for her precious child, but she can not put the pieces the right way and can not put them together. Therefore, she needs Henrietta's help again. Henrietta quits midwifing after Emma Jean's giving birth and starts to sew and becomes a seamstress. Emma Jean knocks her door after years and wants her help. Now, it is time for Henrietta to blackmail. She accepts to fix the suit, if Emma Jean works for her. She wants to use her energy in return for the nights that she cannot sleep and the midwife career, which she quits.

Furthermore, she adds that she wants the life she has never had. That is the beginning of the process that causes Emma Jean question herself. Emma Jean is accustomed to live in a crowded environment, which gives no space for thinking about

herself. After working with Henrietta, Emma Jean realizes the silence, which she hates. The silence makes her think how she has given harm to her own child. She starts to hear a voice, which blames her for what she has done and tries to persuade her to admit her guilt. Emma Jean starts to talk with the voice, sometimes she fights with it. She begins to have psychological problems every passing day. The rest of the family begins to have concerns about her situation. On her birthday, she apologizes to Paul once again. She wants to take a walk around Jordon, but Gus does not want her to be alone and does not let her go out by herself. However, boys think it is her birthday and she can do whatever she wants, therefore she takes a walk. She leaves herself into the water, which gives her a relief. The author ends the story with a compensation. Emma Jean ruins her own child's life, but she cannot keep living with this great pain and kills herself. Thus, Daniel Black kills Emma Jean in return of Paul's life.

In both of his novels Daniel Black tells stories from rural parts of Arkansas to his readers exploring what happens if there is a "misconception of gender" in the society and how they deal with the situation within the framework of their rural culture. In the latter novel of Daniel Black called *They Tell me of a Home*, he also draws the picture of country side, indigenous people, and their ignorance to significant events in one's life such as death.

At the beginning of the novel, the main character Tommy Lee Tyson returns to his childhood home in Swamp Creek, Arkansas, after running away ten years ago, when he was eighteen years old. He ran away from a mother, who hated him and a father who was austere and harsh and uncommunicative. Tommy used to love only his grandmother, who had died, and he felt great love and compassion for his little sister, as he called Sis.

After receiving his PhD in African American studies, Tommy returns home, longing for seeing his sister. Daniel Black draws a very vivid atmosphere, underlining the silence of the place, which also symbolizes the quietness of his childhood memories. While he is moving into the town, he begins to remember all his memories and he realizes that he has an immense feeling for coming back to home. He sees no difference in the town, but The Meetin'Tree seems broader, which the people of Swamp Creek gathers to socialize, share things and gossip about. Daniel Black describes the house and the ways using "personifications" such as; "*The Meeting Tree stood broader, like a great elder watching over a flock of children.*" (Black, 2005: 3) or "*Uncle James Earl's old abandoned house, on the south side of the highway, was more weathered than it once had*



*been. It leaned now like an old man without a walking cane*” (Black, 2005: 3). *“The house resembled a person in mourning over the loss of a child”* (Black, 2005: 3).

While remembering his childhood memories, he sees a child, who is full of hatred. He hates everything about Swamp Creek. He remembers how cruel his father is. His father works him to death and says *“Dat’s life round here, boy”* (Black, 2005: 6). That is why he has to leave Swamp Creek. The only enjoyable thing, he remembers is how people learn to sing their troubles away. However, he dreads to see his father. They have never had an intimate relationship. His father is cruel to him and his mother isn’t so fond of him either, she does not behave as a normal mother, who shows compassion, instead she is interested in what other people say about her children. Tommy Lee thinks that her mother behaves as though she is proud of him, as he has a great passion for reading. However, she never buys books for her son, which contradicts herself. Black sneaks into Tommy Lee’s mind with these lines: *“She wanted a smart child in order to elicit praise in the community. She really didn’t enjoy me intelligence, I presumed, for she reminded me constantly of my unwelcomed analysis. “You think you know so damn much,” she sneered any time I offered my opinion”* (Black, 2005: 8). Although Tommy Lee does not recognize the reason of his mother’s indifference to himself and becomes unhappy for not being able to make her mother satisfied, he is not discouraged thanks to his grandmother. It may be concluded that if Tommy Lee had the chance of bred up by his real mother with love and tenderness, Tommy Lee would have a different life.

His grandma is the one, who cares for him and treats with tenderness. She gives him a poetry book by Dunbar on his fourteenth birthday, which is the milestone in his life steering him to literature and cause him to be an academician. In fact, the grandma asks Miss Ruth, if she could lend her a book and Miss Ruth gives a book to the grandma. Although, he has to feed cows, he prefers to open the book and reads a poem, which he finds incredible and a guiding light for his future life. These are the moments for Tom to decide to become a writer, when he grows up. He expresses his feelings like; *“... The power of his words captured and healed my heart, and that’s what I wanted to do for others. To know that I could construct a poem in Arkansas and it soothe the soul of someone in California or Budapest was absolutely intriguing..”* (Black, 2005: 11).

In the second chapter, Tommy Lee expresses his feelings and excitement about seeing his sister. There was an intimate relationship between them, when one cries the other cries, too or they laugh at the same thing. They even sleep together in secret since their mother thinks it is not right for girls and boys to sleep together without giving any

reason. However, when they have company, the mother permits her sister to sleep with Willie James, their brother. Because only the mother knows Tommy Lee is not real brother of her little girl, it is the reason she never lets Tommy Lee and the sister sleep together.

While he is remembering all these memories, he hears a tractor engine coming down the road, although Tommy Lee is not sure what he is going to say, he says: “*Hey, boy*” but Willy James doesn’t respond. Tommy Lee addresses for the second time: “*Hey, kiddo*” and he answers: “*Where have you been all this time?*” (Black, 2005: 21) and adds “*you left here right after you finished high school. I didn’t know college took people ten years to finish*” (Black, 2005: 21). It is the first confrontation with a member of his family for Tommy Lee. Willy James wonders why Tommy Lee left his home years ago and Tommy Lee answers: “*Man, look. My sorrows were bigger than me. I was about to die. If I hadn’t left, I might have killed myself-or Daddy* ” (Black, 2005: 23). Then, he remembers the moment that he decides to leave Swamp Creek. It is the moment, when his daddy comes into room and noticing the picture, Tommy Lee gives to Willy James as a present, which Willy James likes so much, and says “*What’s dat bullshit?*” (Black, 2005: 24) Their father insults them and leaves the room. Thus, the decision to leave home is taken by Tommy Lee.

Tommy Lee sees the house from the outside; first, he notices the colour of white and then he remembers the old colour, dull blue, which he sees as the symbol of depression. And that was one of the reasons, why he hates the house. Seeing the external appearance of the house, he realizes there is not much fun to be remembered. He self-criticize that they are a family that despises their own blackness and being miserable complaining about not having average life quality which gives no space for fun. If the harsh life conditions during the slavery times are remembered, African Americans’ adaptation process to live their lives in normal standards would take time. In *the Slave Community*, John Blassingame describes the truculence they exposed to, and the terrible effects that such experiences had on their social lives. First was the psychological job that was done to impress upon Black minds that Whites were the superior race. Blassingame explains that deference was required at every turn and they were to bow upon meeting Whites and stand in their presence (256: 1979). Therefore, the underlying reason of their despisement can be understood. In the novel, while Ms. Swington is trying to convince Tommy Lee to stay in Swamp Creek as a teacher, she says “This is not about flattery or your ego. This is about the salvation of black children in Swamp Creek” (2010, 156). She

reminds him some books to teach the children the dangers of black people embracing European standards of beauty. She also reminds Tommy Lee that “the children think they are too black and too stupid to be of any value” (2010,156). From the lines, it is seen that black people in Swamp Creek still despise themselves about being black and as a teacher Mrs. Swington is aware of the responsibility to educate children first. She also realizes to teach them see their own beauty and wants Tommy Lee maintain the same stance as a teacher.

While he is thinking about his grandma and those times they spend together, he sees his mother. The author uses a visual language so that the readers may easily draw the picture of the scene of the encounter in their minds by giving details; “*She turned quickly and froze, statuesque. Her eyes narrowed intensely and she examined me from head to toe with an expression at once painful and refreshing. She knew it was me, for she kept staring and nodding her head, the long-established sign of her unexplainable irritation*” (Black, 2005: 29).

After having a little conversation with his mother in the kitchen, Tommy Lee asks the inevitable question to his mother, “*Where is that girl anyway?*” (Black, 2005: 31). She replies that his sister is out back and she has been waiting for him for a long time. When Tommy Lee goes to the back garden, he comes face to face with a tombstone. Tommy Lee feels as if he was losing his mind; he cannot believe that his sister is dead. While he is crying and screaming in agony, suddenly he yells that “*What happened, Momma?*” (Black, 2005: 32) that is also the inevitable question that steers the novel.

Black creates such an atmosphere with this dialogue in order to attract attention to the ignorance and nonresponsive behaviors of Arkansas people. There is a grave at the back side of house and her brother wants to learn what happens to her rightfully. Although a lot of water has flowed beneath the bridge, he, as her brother has a right to know the truth. However, the mother gives no response. The author asks this question in the third chapter and throughout the novel he gives us some clues. He succeeds in arousing the readers’ curiosity in each chapter gradually.

Tommy Lee cannot get the answer about the question of his sister’s death from his mother or father. He tries to learn the facts from Willy James, but he feels the same chagrin. He writes a letter to his best friend in New York, named George and shares his deep agony with him after his sister’s death. He writes his feelings and expresses how hopeless he is in the letter.

The fifth chapter starts with the scene of Tommy Lee and his father's meeting for the first time after ten years. Like all the other members of the family, his father also scorns him for leaving home unexpectedly. After talking for a while, his daddy reports that "*Ms. Swington is down low sick*" (Black, 2005: 61). That woman is the only teacher in Swamp Creek. Tommy Lee remembers Ms. Swington thinking about her and her aim in life, which is to help black children discover themselves to find their real identities. This is one of the striking similarities between him and Ms. Swington. They both help black children to learn and discover more about themselves.

The author describes the childhood days of Tommy Lee to give some detailed information about Ms. Swington and the relationship between her and Tommy Lee. One day, Ms. Swington asks him for staying after school. Tommy Lee thinks that he has done something wrong and he is in trouble. However, Ms. Swington assures him that he hasn't done anything wrong. Tommy Lee relieves. "*Ms. Swington pampered me kindly. I had never heard her take a motherly tone with any of us. I felt warm. "I asked you to stay because I have something for you"*" (Black, 2005: 64). Ms. Swington gives him a book as a birthday gift. From the language that Tommy Lee uses, it can be understood that he feels something special between Ms. Swington and him. Some intimate feelings and warmth, which are supposed to be in a relationship between a mother and a son. Black gives some clues about the relationship between them here. After the remembrance of past memories, Tommy Lee asks the question to his father and his answer really annoys him since he does not make any real explanation. Willy James is the one, who says something different from the other members of the family; he says that the sister wants to go to find Tommy Lee and before the day she is going to leave, she abruptly dies. While the two brothers are talking about their sister, their father hears them and in a way interrupts them to prevent them from talking about their sister's death.

The author turns back again to the past memories and gives no reply to the readers as well. This time, Tommy Lee compels Willy James to learn the truth and asks him in an indirect way. Willy James says that one day, he comes home and sees the fresh grave, he asks her mother about it and she says "*Yo' sista done gone and killed herself! We burried her right away. I didn't want you and yo' daddy to face no funeral. She would have wanted it that way*" (Black, 2005: 88).

Willy James also does not believe that her sister killed herself, but still he thinks that it is meaningless to try to learn the truth since his sister already passed away. Tommy Lee tries to find other ways to learn the truth. He goes to Ms. Polly, one of their neighbors.

Unexpectedly, he faces with a grim reality. He learns accidentally that his mother is someone else, not Marion. However, Ms. Polly does not tell him, who the birth mother is, she thinks his father is supposed to tell him. Now he is devastated twice. He starts to think how cruel was his mother to him and never shows the compassion that mothers are supposed to give. That was the time, after twenty-five years, for Tommy Lee to understand why his mother hated him. Black shakes his readers of both novels with the revelation of shocking truth. In *Perfect Peace*, the mother reveals the hidden sex of Perfect creating a great trauma on her, whereas in *They Tell me of a Home*, Tommy Lee learns his birth mother. By arousing the curiosity of readers and climbing the climax of the plots, Black reveals the truths. In both novels of Daniel Black, revelation of shocking truth changes the lives of characters. In *Perfect Peace*, there is a gender alternation whereas paternal change takes place in *They Tell me of a Home*. With the help of these striking changes, Black arouses curiosity of his readers. Then, the keywords of the characters' development which causes defects on their personality becomes discoverable.

Tommy Lee is full of questions without answers and he tries to find them throughout the novel. While chatting with Willy James, he talks about life and being a writer, therefore he mentions that he comes Swamp Creek to understand his own individuality and discover the truths about himself. The author surprises the reader with an intimate letter from George, Tommy Lee's friend from New York. It can be suggested that Tommy Lee is sure that his parents never understand the romantic relationship between George and him. As George writes in his letter: "*I wish I could come check you out and meet the folks. They probably ain't ready for me though, huh?*" (Black, 2005: 131) When he thinks about George, Tommy Lee starts to remember the memories about Antony, one of his friends. The author expresses his ideas and thoughts about homosexuality with these memories with the help of the character of Tommy Lee. Tommy Lee thinks when he listens the story that Antony tells about kissing a man: "*People had taught me all my life that homosexuality was wrong, and although I didn't agree, I didn't want my homophobia to disturb my relationship with Antony. I didn't think he was gay, yet because he had kissed a boy I had no other category in which to place him*" (Black, 2005: 134). Tommy Lee does not have any conception about homosexuality at all in those times. He has some hearsay ideas that homosexuality is wrong from people in his life. As a matter of fact, the term means: "*Homosexuality is a sexual attraction to someone of the same anatomical sex; heterosexuality is a sexual attraction to someone of the opposite sex.*" (D'Augelli, Patterson, 2001: 27) Although, Tommy Lee does not know

exact definition of 'homosexuality', he tries to ignore his prejudice about being a gay and for fear that he disturbs his relationship with Antony, he controls his homophobia.<sup>1</sup>

Black gives a long conversation between Tommy Lee and his girlfriend Nzuri. After they sleep together, Nzuri tries to convince Tommy Lee that George loves him in a different way from a brotherly love. Nzuri blames Tommy Lee spending his most valued time with George, whom he loved most. Nzuri criticizes society that teach men to love what women can do instead of the women themselves. She claims that: "*Yet what most women don't know is that men are excited by the use of our biology, not the potential of our company. Like when a man needs an heir, he searches frantically for a woman to bear him a child. The fact that she can bear a child is what he loves most*" (Black, 2005: 136). Indeed, in the novel, Tommy Lee likes spending time with George rather than Nzuri.

While Tommy Lee is spending his time in Swamp Creek standing by with folded arms, wakes up at night and overhears her parents talking about himself. His mother says: "*How can we jes' keep walking' round like we don't know nothin'? TL ain't stupid.*" And his father threatens her mother to kill her, if she reveals true identity of Tommy Lee's mother. Mother continues: "*Fine, Cleatis, don't tell him. But at least tell de boy who his momma is. He got a right to know*" (Black, 2005: 175). Afterwards, he learns the truth and he is astonished at what he overhears, while his parents are talking. Now, he learns that his teacher, Ms. Swington, the source of inspiration for his life, is his real mother. Out of blue, all the pieces fell into place for Tommy Lee. He understands the source of the special intimacy between Ms. Swington and himself.

One day, he goes to field to help Willy James and they start a conversation about their sister. Willy James says that sister was pregnant with a baby-boy. Willy James begins to tell about the day his sister died. In point of fact, he does not say anything new. When he comes back from the field, he sees the fresh mound and asks his mother about it and she says your sister died today and we buried her today. What is different from the things Tommy Lee has already known is the revelation of the baby of his sister. Willy James tells about the little dead baby, he saw at the back fence. He adds that his mother must have had something to do with it. While he is talking, Tommy Lee is furious with Willy James that how can he remain silent and never asks about what is happening. However, Willy James wonders whether Tommy Lee will keep his secret or not. After a

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<sup>1</sup> Homophobia is an individual's irrational fear or hate of homosexual people.

couple of days, Willy James confesses the truth about the sister's death and he explains who "the father of the little baby". And this piece of information freezes Tommy Lee's blood. He learns that his brother Willy James is the father of the baby. Finally coming up with all the answers for his questions, and learning the incestuous relationship in their family he feels shocked and sorrow. "*I was in total shock. "Are you serious, man?" My fists balled in anger.*" (Black, 2005: 281) Tommy Lee asks the details about the death to Willy James such as; how did his sister die or where did they bury her and the baby. Tommy Lee's curiosity increases his rage and terror. And what is worse, their mother killed the sister. Tommy Lee is in a great trauma and cannot decide whether call the police or not. Willy James opens his heart bravely and makes a speech. He assumes that the sister came to his bed because she wants to create a life. Their sister loses her energy of life after Tommy Lee leaves Swamp Creek. According to Willy James, everybody has an aim to be remembered in the world. He thinks that people leaves something to the world in order to be remembered after they pass away. Some of them writes songs or books, others build buildings to name after them. He continues: "*But round here, what wuz Sister gon' do to make people remember hu'? The only thing she could think of was givin' life to somebody else. Then, someone would be grateful to hu' foreva. I guess dat's why I didn't stop hu', too. I didn't have nothin' to leave de world. Farmin' ain't nothin' dat nobody care 'bout and drivin' tractors ain't no special skill. I wanted to touch at least one person's life, T.L. Dat's what everybody want, I think.*" (Black, 2005: 291) After Willy James's tirade, Tommy Lee experiences a kind of enlightenment about his own people: "*I sighed deeply and fought to receive my brother's words amicably. In the midst of his insanity, I began to understand my family's dys-functional sensibility and why we were all determined, ultimately, to abandon our origin.*" (Black, 2005: 291) By means of Tommy Lee's enlightenment moments, Black makes it clear that why Tommy Lee decides to live Swamp Creek. He is back in order to understand his origin and his own people like his mother does. Finally, the novel ends satisfactorily giving answers to the questions and a sensible explanation for Tommy Lee's unexpected decision to stay in Swamp Creek.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY

The starting point of this chapter is gender and gender identity. Definitions of gender and sex are given by presenting the differences between these two terms. In addition to these, construction of gender identity takes place discussing the determiner elements which lie behind the construction itself.

Femininity and masculinity or one's gender identity refers to the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society. (Sets, Burke, *Feminity/Masculinity*:1) Contrary to this definition, the individuals cannot live as they feel, as they define their own identity. They need to shape it according to the demands of the society and want to be acknowledged by the society itself. As a following step, they want to gain a seat in it, too. Moreover, one's gender identity can be the same or different than their sex at birth. Generally, people build a gender identity, which matches their biological sex. However, some of them need to change their sex to match their gender identity which is constructed by social norms or determined by hormones.

Construction of gender identity will be discussed in this part. Furthermore, an answer, for the question of whether gender identity is determined socially or not, which is the inquiry of our study, will be given. Identifying the categories of gender will help to clarify the process of the construction. Gender may be divided into two categories; female and male. It is a kind of classification which is a determinant factor that decides our position in every part of our lives. It is generally defined as it is the social or cultural construction of sex. According to Butler, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. (1990: 10) Sex is seen as a biological, unaltered and unexceptionable feature, whereas gender is seen as changeable, a social role, in which one must behave appropriately according to social framework, that is to say, gender develops from sex. According to Butler, there is no distinction between genders. She argues that there is no precultural, prediscursive, politically neutral concept of a biological body. It is impossible to separate the cultural from the biological. In Butler's point of view, sex and gender do not exist purely, but are both performed constantly through everyday routines of the people. (1990: 1-7)

In Black's novel *Perfect Peace*, little Perfect learns harshly in her eighth birthday that actually she is a boy now. Her mother, Emma Jean says: "... *That you ain't no girl!*" Emma Jean tries to explain it and she lifts her dress and points her panties and says: "*only*



*boys have what you have. ... From now on, you gon' be a boy*" (Black, 2010: 129). It is seen that Emma Jean makes it clear by showing the genital organ. She tries to convince her by showing her genital organ. This is the clear-cut way of defining one's sex.

Now it is time to convince the other members of the family that she is a boy. They gather at home. Emma Jean utters the truth and orders Perfect to show that he is a boy. When he clutched his arms around his shoulders, all the family members agreed that he is a boy: *"They had stood and gazed, waiting to see if Paul had what other men have, and when they discovered he did, they immediately began constructing for him a new, masculine Self. It was as if the penis were the male identifier, the main thing, the only thing that made a boy a boy."* (Black, 2012: 144) As it is seen in the text, Black criticizes that a penis is a sign of being a man. After being convinced that he is a boy, now all the brothers have a mission to teach him how to be a man. Authorly warns him not to sound like a girl. He lowers his voice and says *"just talk deeper"* (Black, 2010: 147). Paul tries to imitate Authorly's baritone however, he reaches a weak soprano. Authorly is not happy with the sound Paul tries to make. Authorly gets angry and says to Woody, Sol and Mister, who are watching them, *"He is a boy now and he gotta sound like one. Right now. Today. What's gon' happen if other folks hear him and he sound like that?"* (Black, 2010: 147) Now we see that Authorly really cares about what other people will say, when they hear the feminine sound of Paul. It is an important detail that points out the social pressure over people, which shapes even how to sound in front of others. Next morning, Gus and brothers go to work. Gus directs all of them to pull the weeds from around the sprouts and take the cows some hay. Now Mister directs Paul: *"You take that row and I'll take this one. All you gotta do is pull these little grass sprouts up and throw'em away. Just don't pull up the plants. Daddy'll be madder'n a wet hen if you do"* (Black, 2012: 149). For Paul such directions are hard to apply as he hates dirt and grime beneath his fingernails. Mister tries to soothe him about Authorly. He explains that Authorly treats him harshly, but it is for his own good, otherwise people will laugh at him and call him a sissy. Paul wonders what that word means and the explanation is given by Mister: *"A boy who acts like a girl. People hate'em, especially other boys. They beat'em up sometimes."* (Black, 2010: 150)

In twentieth century, sexuality classified human beings as normal or abnormal, as members of the society. Since then sexuality has been placed in a critical point of contact between the genders and it is used to regulate them (Cranny-Francis et al, 2003: 17-18). The heterosexuality is constructed through the use of power ruling out homosexuality as

a possible option (Barry, 2002: 144). This power has been generally used by churches and medical institutions. Thus, homosexuality has been marked as a sin or illness. As Cranny-Francis et al suggest, heterosexuality is not a biological state or orientation, but socially and historically constructed category, which positions some people as good and others as bad (2003: 19). Mister's explanation for 'sissy' is a great example to point out that people hate homosexuals and they even beat them up without a reason. It is thought that they are bad, because they change their sex.

When Gus and the boys having their lunch, Paul suddenly screams, because he sees a snake, he jumps and begins to run. Authorly calls him back and demands him to stop screaming like a girl, whereas Mister grabs a hoe and chops the snake's head off. Authorly wants Paul to hold headless snake, which makes him freeze. Finally, he holds it, but Gus thinks he still does not seem like a boy. In the society, men have to be fearless, powerful and act like a hero. It is men's duty to be active and alert in any time. For that reason, Gus and the brothers try to impose the quality of being fearless on Paul. Boys are expected to be strong, outgoing and brave, whereas girls are to be naive, tidy, kind and obedient that establish the basics of our understanding of masculinity and femininity stereotypes. According to Abercrombie and Alan, these differences between the genders are carried from generation to generation by applying rewards and punishments for centuries. Such demeanors are obtained through the books of children, the toys they play with and the role models, they see on television programs. Although some parents do not compell the stereotyped toys according to their children's gender, girls are more likely to play with dolls, whereas boys are tend to play military-type games. As it is seen, people are socialized into the forms of behavior in accordance with their sex (Abercrombie, Warde, 1994: 227).

In the church scene, Black underlines how important the reactions of the society are. All the family members care about what people would say, when they saw Paul. Although, Emma Jean thinks it is a bit early to take him to the church, Gus insists on going to church all together. Eva Mae, Paul's best friend, sees him first and wonders about Paul's boy clothes and his hair cut and she calls, "*Hey Perfect! What happened to your hair? And why you got on them boys' clothes?*" (Black, 2010: 155) Gus does not give Paul any chance to answer his best friend's question, instead he rebuffs the little girl. In a very short time, a crowd surrounds the Peace family, as if Paul were a celebrity or a freak. There are frowns and whispers and a volley of questions. Although Gus tries to keep his silence and leads his family into the church, the crowd blocks the way and

continues asking the questions like “*What happened to that girl?, Who did that to her?, What chu mean ‘he’s a boy now’?*” (Black, 2010: 155) The family pushes the crowd forward without giving any responses and goes into the church. Residents in Swamp Creek really get puzzled and stare at him annoyingly. Little Paul should be ready for every kind of humiliation and aggression. Although, he is totally innocent, he has to overcome the great trouble on his own. The trouble does not only result from the reactions of the society, but the trouble comes from his soul, as well. As a matter of fact, the trouble in himself is much more difficult to deal with. Little Paul cannot comprehend the whole process. When his best friend, Eva Mae asks him about his condition and the physical changes he went through, he cannot decide where he should begin to tell the story and he starts to talk about his hair “*Momma cut may hair off.*” (Black, 2010: 159) The expected question of ‘why’ is asked by Eva Mae, but Paul cannot answer and all he can do is shrugging desperately. Eva Mae expresses that “*Folks is sayin’ yu ain’t no girl no more.*” (Black, 2010: 159) Then, poor Paul begins to cry. He is desperate and unhappy about his gender. According to West and Zimmerman, “[a] person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others.” (1987: 141) As they state, Paul will construct his gender by interacting with his brothers and society, which will also create an identity crisis on himself for he has observed his mother as a role-model and all the family members behave him as a little, beautiful girl up to his eighth birthday. Now, he has an ultimate confusion about his gender identity. Furthermore, he has to learn how to be a boy as his new identity requires. His new role models become his brothers. Children start to learn things while they are imitating others. Paul starts to watch and imitate his brothers to behave as a man.

Eva Mae confirms that they are still friends, even though his name is changed, his hair is cut and he starts to wear overalls, which is for boys. Eva Mae adds that they can still play house with a slight difference; now Paul will be the husband. While they are playing house together, Eva Mae is the teacher for Paul to show how to behave as a husband. She says: “*The man ain’t s’pose to do nothin’ at home ‘cept enjoy his wife.*” (Black, 2010: 161) Eva Mae says that boys should take care of girls, which she learned from her mother. Paul answers her that men are supposed to work, which Authorly affirmed. Eva Mae agrees and explains the reason why men are supposed to work, adding that women marry men so that they can take care of the women and in return women are supposed to do what men order. As West and Zimmerman states “ [d]oing gender means

creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the “essentialness” of gender.” (1987: 137) It is clear that Eva Mae, as a little girl is taught what a man or a woman is supposed to do according to his or her gender roles require, by her mother and the society which she lives in. She draws a line and divides into two categories what men are to do and how women react to them as society orders.

In this part of the study, it is obviously seen that Paul’s gender identity is reshaped according to his new haircut, his overalls, which are signals for a male identity in the church by the people, the society. We can also observe that Gus, as a father, feels the responsibility for his son’s new gender identity. Although Emma Jean, as a protective mother, insists that it is early for Paul to be in the public eye, he wants to announce and be approved by the people.

The second issue in this chapter is “the effects of biological features over the construction of gender identity.” Sociologists of gender emphasize the social process rather than biological process that produce a person’s gender. However, gender construction starts with the decision taken by just looking at the genitalia at the birth. Moreover, thanks to the medical improvements, people are able to learn their child’s sex even in mother’s womb in the fourth month or maybe earlier. Therefore, according to the sex category, the room is painted pink or blue, clothes and toys are also chosen in regard to the sex of the baby. Obviously, the sex category becomes gender even at birth. Once the sex of the child is known, others begin to treat it regarding its being a boy or a girl. Thus, the baby learns and responds to these treatment as its gender requires him or her to do.

However, in *Perfect Peace* of Daniel Black, there are two cases which seems to underline the gender issue controversially. In the first case, we see the character of Perfect who is born as a boy, (biologically, she has a penis) but behaved as a girl by the society until she is eight years old. As readers, we see that she feels totally as a pretty girl, she lives as a girl, being treated as a girl. She is a girl without a shadow of doubt. After the gender identity crisis she goes through, she becomes a ‘he’. Although, she wants to stay as a girl, she has to become a boy. As a little kid, in order to satisfy the expectations of the society, for the sake of being accepted by them, she wants to act like a boy. Even more, she wants to have a penis like his brother Authorly has, “... *For years to come, he would wait his penis to evolve into what Authorlu had, but it never did. He wondered if*

*something might be wrong with his, if maybe its growth had been stunted during his girlhood days. Every day he looked to see if, finally, his penis size matched his brother's and every day he was disappointed that it didn't. Maybe if he could act more like a man it would grow, he thought. Yet after age sixteen, and very little success with masculinity, he stopped trying-although he never stopped hoping.*" (Black, 2010: 153) It can be concluded from the passage that, even if the sex is ignored even at the birth, the character feels the crumbs of being a boy somewhere deep in his soul. Although, he has been taught how to behave as a boy since his eighth birthday, and tries to adopt his new gender, Paul never becomes a real man.

On the other hand, Perfect's brother, Mister has feelings for boys, too. Although, he was born as a boy and being treated as a boy by the society, he feels differently, not like a boy. Mister is grown up in a very masculine family ruled by a tough father as a role model. Unlike Perfect, he starts to live his life as a boy from the birth and continues to live his life as a boy. Even more, when he is twenty-one, he has the most masculine physical appearance among the Peace boys, '*... His chiseled chest, arms, abs, and thighs caused Authorly to say, upon viewing Mister's naked torso, "Boy, you done got fine as hell!"*'" (Black, 2010: 278) It can be concluded from the sentences that there is nothing wrong with his body. Although, he seems like a normal man, he learns to ignore his feelings bursting into prominence. One day, he confesses his inner feelings to Paul, considering that only he can understand and maybe he has such kind of feelings as well. When Mister confesses his feelings for Johnny Ray, who is Paul's secret love from his girlhood days, Paul is surprised and disappointed. He starts to think about what Mister has and what he does not have.

Even if Mister is raised appropriately as in line with his sex and gender identity, he is a homosexual. Daniel Black reveals the homosexuality of the character in these following sentences: "*... In various sermons, Woody made the community's position on sexuality quite clear, calling same-sex attraction as a disease, an abomination, a reproach to humanity as the congregation shouted, "Amen!" The last thing that Mister wanted was to be the source of familial shame. He was certain Gus knew nothing of homosexuality – he knew about sissies, but that was different – and mentioning as much would surely have incited unbridled confusion in an already mentally fragile man.*" (Black, 2010: 279) Ruth Hubbard comments on the matter that Western people think that sexuality equals with sin as Christianity makes it very clear. In order to obey the Christianity discipline, sexuality must be intended for procreation. Therefore, all forms

of sexual expression and enjoyment other than heterosexuality are invalidated. (Hubbord, Ruth, 1990: 65) Thus, it is obvious that Mister has to hide his feelings not only for the social values but also to obey to the Christianity values.

Religion has incontestable effects on human beings for centuries, it still has. People try to put their lives in order to apply the doctrines of their religion. Although, there are many debates on whether the bible is against homosexuality or not, it may be suggested that in the churches homosexuality is explained as inappropriate and abomination. In his article, Greenspahn puts forward that homosexuality is invoked by conservatives and rejected by liberals. The Bible is understood by both sides as condemning homosexuality. He underlines that Bible's view is not clear about homosexuality by giving biblical stories which are widely understood as criticizing homosexual behavior. One of the stories, which he mentions takes place in the book of Judges. In the story, a resident of Gibeah who takes a traveling Levite, his servant, and his concubine into his home for the night. The inhabitants of the city call on him to send the Levite out "so that we might know him". In order to preclude their "doing such an evil", the man offers his own daughter and the concubine instead. However, the inhabitants are not satisfied, so he pushes the concubine outside, where she is raped and abused all night long. The next day he finds her dead. He suggests that neither story is concerned with the victims' gender so much as with how guests are treated. He also adds; the stories are about rape and humiliation, not homosexuality and the Bible never characterizes the problem in either case as homosexual lust. (Homosexuality and the Bible, 2002: 38-39) However, he gives place to the strongest evidence of biblical antipathy to homosexuality from the book of Leviticus. The book insists "Do not lie with a male as one does with a female, it is an abomination" and "if a man lies with a male as one does with a female, two of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death" (quoted: Greenspahn, 2002, 40). All in all, there are many contradictory statements about this issue. Therefore, it is quite understandable that Church reminds people that the Bible is against homosexuality and being a homosexual means committing an abomination in those years in Arkansas. Thus, Mister as a churchgoer, has to hide his feelings and his real gender identity as a homosexual person.

In conclusion, it is suggested that although genitalia, physical qualities, clothing, sexuality, social roles that society ascribed come together and produce gender identity, the contradictory situations can also occur. With the help of the character called Mister, it is seen that even if all the necessary conditions for an appropriate gender identity

construction is achieved, one can still feel different from what one's sex or gender is. Therefore, we are able to observe two situations; one of them is that, "biological features influence the construction of the gender identity in a negative way." For instance, Perfect has to be Paul and it causes him to go through a painful identity crisis and gender identity crisis at the same time that influence his whole life. Whereas, with the character of Mister, it is seen that biological features coming from birth do not influence one's gender identity at all. He borns as a male, lives as a male therefore, he should have had a male gender identity, however he has feelings for males even if he has to hide his real gender identity.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### GENDER ROLES IN BLACK SOCIETY

This part gives information about gender roles and family relationships in both novels of Daniel Black, which are settled in Arkansas, belonging to a black community. Gender is a product of material conditions but is also a sometimes habituated, sometimes reflexive practice in which people engage in relation with each other. (Holmes, 2007: 181) Therefore, it may be suggested that gender role is the set of roles, activities, expectations and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Giving some quotations from the novels, how the characters behave according to their gender roles and the practice of these roles are carried out in the family will be seen.

*Perfect Peace* is a stunning story, which tells about pathetic transformation of the novel's protagonist from femininity to masculinity, when the eight-year-old main character learns that actually she was born as a boy. Perfect -herself- is the one, who has to deal with the consequences of the harsh situation. While she is suffering from a severe trauma, the reactions of the family and the society over the unexpected alternation of the gender role of the main character will be observed.

Black, as he is one of the members of the African-American culture, verbalizes the black culture via the characters he creates. In order to understand the characters' behavior, the background of the black society should be taken into consideration, in the first step. It is known that African people suffered from slavery for a long time which lasted in the United States of America. The enslavement of African people was a compelling process which affected their whole lives including their relationships, marriages and family construction. According to Dixon, Africans were enslaved longer than they have been free. She adds that: "Some suggest that they still have not recovered from these horrendous experiences, while persistent racial discrimination continues to have negative effects on their relationships, marriages, and families" (Dixon,11,2007). After they were captured by western societies, they were exposed to walk hundreds of miles walk from the center of Africa to the coasts, they were kept in slave pens until they were sold. During the voyage to the overseas, many of them couldn't survive or committed suicide. Once they reached the United States they were usually sold and scattered on small plantations. They were used in field work and domestic work. Those who worked in the fields, or "field hands," worked long and grueling hours, from before sunrise until sometimes nine o'clock at night on both cotton and sugar plantations. They planted rice, sugar, tobacco, and cotton as well as harvested the crop. Other tasks



consisted of clearing forest land, building, construction, and maintenance and a multitude of tasks in the fields and around the plantations. Those who did domestic work, or “house servants,” did a multitude of tasks in and around the house including running errands, cooking and serving meals, milking cows and taking care of horses, sewing and spinning wool, churning milk, nursing and taking care of infants, dusting and sweeping the house and yard, and landscaping (Blassingame,251,1979). With the light of these lines, in both novels, it is seen that the works that African Americans do are still the same with an exception. Now, the male characters deal with field work and female characters are responsible for domestic work. It may be understood that the effects of their sorrowful past over their lives are seen even after slavery period. Even if they are not slaves anymore, they still do the works which they have done for years.

Throughout the novel, norms of the gender roles are elaborated by Black meticulously. The author gives a start by mentioning Gus’s thoughts about building a house before proposing to Emma Jean. Gus thinks that “... *a man’s job was to provide a dwelling place for his wife; whether she liked it or not was her problem.*” (Black, 2010: 26) From this sentence, it is clear that a man’s job and a husband’s job is to build a house to set up a family. The mission of the building a house is ascribed to the husband by the society however, it is never asked the wife about her preferences on household things. Emma Jean liked the house, though. She imagines herself in the porch, which she likes most about the house. When she grabbed the gauge of the house she began to decorate it on her mind which is another mission ascribed to women. After Perfect Peace’s birth, Emma Jean and Gus teach their sons the differences between girls and boys. “*Li’l girls gotta be handled real gentle. You can’t be rough with’em like y’all is with one another*” (Black, 2010: 36). As it is seen here, little girls are raised with some codes which shape their behaviors. Perfect is taught to behave gently as she is a girl. Therefore, when she grows up she is always expected to be gentle and behave as a lady respected by the society. On the other hand, being gentle could make a girl vulnerable, thus girls may be in need of being protected by the boys in rough situations. Because boys are raised well-prepared for all kinds of conditions which make them have a multiple way of thinking ability, they are always ready for rough situations to keep girls safe or interfere with girls’ lives. Actually, being gentle is a quality which all the humanity should have regardless of being a boy or a girl.

As they have a little sister, the brothers are excited about playing with her. Sol, the brother, warns his brothers that girls do not like play rough. Woody adds that “*They*

*comb baby dolls' hair and play house and cookin' and stuff like that.*" (Black, 2010: 40) Daniel Black underlines the reason that lies under the fact that girls play with baby dolls, making Authorly speak; "... *they practisin' how to take care o' they own kids. That's de whole point o' givin' them dolls in the first place.*" (Black, 2010: 45) This is the orientation of girls for being mothers in the future. As a counter attack, Mister says "*But why don't boys play wit' baby dolls, too? Don't they need to learn how to be dadies?*" (Black, 2010: 45) Mister thinks differently from the other brothers, which is a foreshadowing signal for his hidden gender identity. Authorly answers his question: "*No, man! Bein' a daddy is easy. It don't take much. All you gotta do is work. That's why boys ain't got to practise. They jes' learn how to work, and when they get married and babies come, they jes' keep workin'. But a momma is whole different story. That's why girls gotta learn how to take care o' everybody – de husband and de kids – all at de same time.*" (Black, 2010: 46) The roles ascribed to a husband and a wife according to their genders in the family life are seen clearly. Black suggests once more that gender is socially constructed by the society members with a concrete base from bible in Afro- American culture. When Mister asks for the reason that why women have got to do everything about house and family, Authorly replies; "*Cause de Bible say so, stupid. Raisin' kids is a woman's job. Didn't you hear reverend Lindsey last Sunday? Dat's whay God make women carry de babies. De man is s'pose to work and de woman is s'pouse to raise the kids and take care o' de husband and de house.*" (Black, 2010: 46) Socially constructed roles are now justified by religion. According to Authorly, 'Being daddy is easy' whereas 'a momma is whole different story'. He learns from the society that a man does not need to learn how to be a father. Being a father does not take time, because the mother's task is to look after the house, the children and the husband. The division of labour seems acceptable for those times in Arkansas as the husband is responsible for working outside to bring home the bacon whereas the wife deals with all the household, taking care of children and the husband. The point is the relationship between the father and the children. For the fact that father has to earn money and work outside all day long, he does not have enough time to spend with the children. This situation creates a gap between the father and the children which is the unplanned result of the work share. By nature, men are not expected to show their feelings which is another code taught by the society. However, when a man becomes a father, he needs to show love, affection and interest to his children to build a healthy relationship which is necessary for the development of the children.

Emma Jean teaches her little daughter the feminine roles that a lady supposed to play. When Perfect wants to play with her brothers, Emma Jean opposes to her and says: “*Cause you a lady, and ladies ain’t got no business rollin’ ‘roun in de dirt wit’ no boys. A lady is s’pose to stay clean and pretty.*” “*But I don’t wanna be clean and pretty, Momma. I wanna play wit’ de boys!*” “*Well you ain’t! You’s a girl and gon’ act like one.*” (Black, 2010: 94) Emma Jean offers Perfect to play with Caroline and Eva Mae instead of playing with boys so they decide to play house altogether. Perfect wants to be a mother, Eva Mae becomes the father and Caroline, who is two years younger than them takes the role of daughter. Eva Mae thinks that she is the strongest among them, she should be the father and she gives her reasons for that saying: “*... since I can beat both o’ y’all up, I gotta be de daddy ‘cause daddies beat people. At least they gotta be able to. That’s what makes them daddies.*” (Black, 2010: 95) In early childhood, humans develop gendered personality structures and sexual orientations through their interactions with parents of the same and opposite gender. As adolescents, they conduct their sexual behavior according to gendered scripts. Schools, parents, peers, and the mass media guide young into gendered work and family roles. As adults, they take on a gendered social status in their society’s stratification system. Gender is thus both ascribed and achieved. (West, Zimmerman 1987: 147) As they stated, it might be suggested that Eva Mae imitates her father’s behaviors, while playing house which confirms that children form their gender identity interacting with their parents and imitating their roles in the family.

The children’s game has a lot of images in relation to the family life, husband and wife’s roles and the way gender roles are constructed during childhood. In the game, after pretending to eat their imaginary food, Perfect, as a mother and a wife, washes the dishes complaining that: “*Y’all don’t do nothin’ but dirty up a bunch o’ dishes that somebody else gotta wash. I tell ya, I’m sick o’ y’all.*” Eva Mae shouts as a father and a husband: “*Shut up, woman! Just do what you s’pose to do. Don’t nobody wanna hear yo’ mouth.*” Perfect returns: “*I speak when I want to, man, you don’t own me.*” (Black, 2010: 97) Eva Mae slaps her saying: “*Stay in yo’ place, woman!*” Perfect gets shocked and objects that it is not part of the game. Eva Mae defends herself by stating that it is the part of the game and adds that: “*I’m the daddy and the husband, remember? Don’t yo’ daddy slap yo’ momma when she get smart at the mouth?*” Perfect answers: “*No. At least I ain’t neva seen him do it.*” Eva Mae: “*Well, he is the man of the house, ain’t he? Then he can do whatever he want to. That’s what bein’ the man of the house means. And if anybody make him mad, he can hit’em.*” (Black, 2010: 97) The passage has many ‘key words’, which underlines

the male dominance behaviors of the society. For instances; Eva Mae reminds Perfect, who is the mother in the game, to keep quiet as she supposed to do and to stay in her place as a woman. Furthermore, Eva Mae, who plays the role of father, has the right of slapping his wife which is a sign of domestic violence at home. Those kinds of behaviors are so normal and widely accepted by the society that the children are inured the concept of 'being a man' and 'being a woman' and they practice their roles in their games. Over the past three decades, sociologists have demonstrated that men construct, enact, and negotiate a wide variety of masculinities shaped by both their social locations within interlocking systems of oppression, and local, regional, and global conceptions of what it means to be a man (Sage, 2012:26). Therefore, it might be suggested that the reflections of 'what it means to be a man' are seen clearly in the game. When Perfect resists doing what Eva Mae orders in the game, she insists: *"I'm de husband and you de wife, so you s'pose to do whatever I tell you! ... Dat's what de Bible say and dat's what Reverend Lindsey say, too. De man is s'pose to rule over de woman and she's s'pose to help him do whatever he dream of doin'. Don't yo' daddy work every day and yo' momma stay at home and cook and stuff?"* (Black, 2010: 99) The effects of male dominance and unfair hegemony of the man are engraved in little children's minds. Little girls learn how to obey to the authority and to accept the superiority of men by imitating their parents. The gendered practices of everyday life reproduce a society's view of how women and men should act. (See Bourdieu 1980: 1990) Gendered social arrangements are justified by religion and cultural productions and backed by law, but the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is that the process is made invisible; any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable (See Foucault 1972; Gramsci 1971) (quoted: Lorber, 2010: 58)

Emma Jean taught Perfect how to behave like a lady until her birthday. It is time for Perfect to change her gender role and start to behave according to her sex and become a boy. The importance of maintaining gender roles comes to the surface, when she is compelled to perform masculinity leaving aside femininity and lady-like behaviors. Emma Jean's duty as a teacher to instruct her how to behave as a lady comes to an end. Now it is her father and brothers' turn to teach her everything about masculinity. She is expected to behave as a boy. Gus makes a speech: *"Now, boy, you got a hard row to hoe, ... but whether you make it or not is up to you. We yo' family and we gon' help you, but we can't save you from other folks talkin'. You gon' have to be strong enough to take it and go 'head on 'bout yo' business. It's gon' be hard at first. Real hard. But you can do it. Ain't*

*that right, Authorly?*” (Black, 2010: 141) Gus warns him to be prepared for the consequences unless any failure happens and he is expected to be a boy immediately. First of all, they changed the name, Perfect becomes Paul from now on. Authorly is the one, who starts the process warning him to stop sounding like a girl and to use his voice like a boy. He commands him to talk deeper. Although Paul imitates him, he cannot be successful in sounding like a boy. From these examples, it can also be derived that Gus is a father, who protects his family and he tries to hold his family together at all costs. Being a family is really important for him even if such an unexpected issue comes out. Authorly demands Paul stop screaming, when he sees a snake, while he is sitting with Mister on the grass. Then, Mister grabs a hoe and chops the snake’s head off. Authorly commands Paul to hold the headless creature. Although Paul wants to obey, he feels the fear deep in his heart. Authorly slaps him harshly. Woody criticizes Authorly and reminds Gus that: *“But daddy, he’s only eight! Authorly ain’t gotta treat him like –*” Gus asks: *“You wunnit scared o’ no snake when you was eight, was you?”* Woody replies: *“No I wunnit, but I been a boy my whole life”* (Black, 2010: 151) Black underlines here that gender role is shaped by one’s own gender identity from birth. Thus, it takes time to adapt the new one. Even after Paul holds the snake, Gus still thinks that he does not seem like a boy. Therefore, it can be concluded that this transformation of gender is going to take time for both Paul and the society itself. Authorly follows Paul almost in each step. Paul moves away behind the barn. He unbuckles the straps of his overalls, lowers his underwear and squats. Authorly warns him: *“You don’t pee like that no more. ... A man pees standin’ up.”* (Black, 2010: 152) Every step of humanity is related to gender identity even when it comes to private personal needs. Gus starts to beat Paul, when he learns that Paul still plays with Eva Mae. He warns: *“You don’t play wit’ no girls, boy! Boy play wit’ boys!”* (Black, 2010: 174) As Maccoby states children choose same-sex playmates spontaneously in situations in which, they are not under pressure from adults to do so. (Maccoby, 2000: 325) Now, Paul has a real conflict, he still plays with his best-friend Eva Mae. However, it is seen that Gus compells Paul to play with a boy, instead of Eva Mae. While Gus is kicking him, he says: *“You gon’ be a boy! You gon’ be a boy! You gon’ be a boy!”* (Black, 2010: 175) Although he knows that Paul is the scapegoat, even if he has nothing to do with the situation, Gus vents his anger on him and beats him. Time passes and Paul tries to meet up with the expectations of his family and his neighborhood. He observes the men. At his brother’s wedding, he watches the men’s behaviors, while they are talking about women. He questions himself as he could be the kind of a man that

is expected from him to become. Every passing day, one of his brothers or Gus reminds him to unfold his arms or stop acting like a girl, which makes Paul anxious about the fact that there are a lot things on the way to alter. Paul has concerns if he could develop a masculine-self in the future or not.

Moving on to Black's other novel *They Tell Me Of A Home*, the incestuous relationship between the characters is analyzed. The protagonist of the novel goes to study for his PhD education. After ten years, he comes to his hometown to find out that his beloved sister has died. While he is trying to learn the cause of his sister's death, he faces with an outrageous reality. He harshly learns that his brother and sister have a baby. What is more cruel is that his mother kills her sister and her infant by beating. Tommy Lee is in a great shock and anger. In his both novels, Daniel Black handles the topics about his own people and criticizes them severely. By means of the characters, the author tries to make the readers sympathize with them by penetrating into characters' inner worlds. Before he leaves Swamp Creek, Tommy Lee and his sister have a special and intimate relationship. They both laugh at same things as they find them funny. They both like running in the woods behind their house and mock old Reverend Samuels's woops, who is the preacher man in Swamp Creek. Tommy Lee remembers one of their memories that he imitates the old preacher: "*I would jump up on a log, creating a raised pulpit structure, and say, " Good moanin', bruthas and sistas! We'se gathered here dis chere beautiful day to heayh a wurd from de Good Lawd. He's done brought us from a mighty long way."*" "*Amen, amen,*" Sister would say, *craking up with laughter*" (Black, 2005: 19). They used to sleep together, although their parents would get really mad at them. They like spending time together. He comes and finds that her sister is dead. He tries to understand what has happened, but nobody says anything. However insistently he asks, and he never gets the answer until his brother Willy James pour out his heart. Willy James confesses that he is the father of the sister's baby. Tommy Lee screams: "*What?*" (Black, 2005: 281) Willy James continues: "*Don't act so surprised. When you left here, she didn't have nobody, and I neva did; that's why we went to each other. We didn't mean to have sex, though. She jes' came to sleep in my bed one night 'cause she was missin' you, she said, and she asked me to hold her like you used to do. I didn't know how to do dat, so she showed me. It felt good to have somebody dat close to me. I pulled her closer and she didn't stop me. She was cryin' and I was cryin', too. But it felt ... right. I ain't neva knowed what love feel like, but I felt love right then. I asked her is she wanted me stop and she squeezed me harder.*" (Black, 2005: 281) Tommy Lee is overwhelmed by what he hears from his

brother. He is in great rage that his fists balls in anger and tries to understand. Willy James continues to clean his closet: *“We wunnit thinkin’ of babies condoms or nothin’ like dat. We wuz jes’ free to love one another. When I released, I knew we had created life. I felt it. I shook all over and started mumblin’, ‘No, oh no,’ but Sister smiled and rubbed my head as she kept on holdin’ me.”* (Black, 2005: 281) It is obvious in these passages that Black wants his readers to read between the lines and make them see the real causes of the unwanted situation. Willy James tries to explain that it has happened because of lovelessness. They – Willy James and The sister- need to be loved by each other. Although nothing explains this situation morally or legally, Black tries to sympathize with his own people through the character of Willy James and his sister. However, with the help of Tommy Lee, Black takes stock of his own family and own people from an objective point of view. After Willy James reveals all the truths about the situation, he rescues from the secrets that he has to keep for himself and gets a great relief. They cry together. Tommy Lee tries to soothe his brother. Willy James looks different to Tommy Lee in the moonlight and he sees a kind of innocence on his brother’s face. He thinks that: *“For the first time in my life, I saw the core of Willy James’s heart. It was caring, sensitive, and compassionate. I supposed I hadn’t seen it before because those kinds of hearts in a southern black man either get destroyed or are masked throughly. The darkness of the night, ironically, assisted in his heart’s exposure and allowed him express its contents unashamed.”* (Black, 2005: 293) Black uses sentimental adjectives such as ‘sensitive’, ‘caring’ and ‘compassionate’ to portray Willy James’s personality in order to make the reader sympathize with his situation. As a matter of fact, he refers to ‘southern black man’ through the character of Willy James. Black underlines his ideas in Tommy Lee’s sentences: *“I was still livid about him and Sister, but for some reason, my anger abated. Maybe I felt sorry for Willy James and what he never had. Such neglect didn’t justify what had happened, but it did explain it.”* (Black, 2005: 293) Black chooses the adjective of ‘livid’ to describe his strong anger about his brother and sister. He uses this adjective on purpose to distract readers’ attention that he realizes that the situation is an inexcusable one. However, Black thinks that it is understandable. If the effects of past memories over African Americans are taken into consideration, it may justified Black’s thoughts. As Blassingame suggests that “the family, while it had had no legal existence in slavery, was in actuality one of the most important survival mechanisms for enslaved African Americans. In the family they found companionship, love, sexual gratification, sympathetic understanding of their sufferings, how to avoid punishment, and how to

maintain self-esteem (1979,151). Therefore, with the light of these lines, the brother and the sister feel safe under the shelter of the family and share their love, companionship and at the same time the sufferings they have. It may be concluded that they do not have any self-esteem to love somebody else, instead they love each other in their comfort zone without taking risks such as not be loved or humiliated. Although it is not acceptable or understandable under any conditions, African American people have different history which effect their way of life, psychological mood, their family life and their understanding of morality. This unacceptable situation may be evaluated from this perspective.

As a conclusion for this chapter, it may be suggested that Daniel Black writes his novels to touch sore spots in his own society. He takes issues, which are not even mentioned and neglected as the main topics in his novels. He wants to face the realities of his society such as incestuous relationships, ignorance of people, domestic violence and men priority over women in order to fix the things that go wrong in the society.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### GENDER CONFLICTS

In this chapter, gender conflicts which the characters are going through will be analyzed and the influence of these conflicts over the lives of them will be presented. Beside gender conflicts, the antagonist in *Perfect Peace*, suffers from identity crisis, too. According to psychologist Erik Erikson, who coined the term, ‘an identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself’ (1970: 51). In *Perfect Peace* (2010), the main character has to face himself, when he learns about his real biological sex. He tries to understand, who he really is and he has to look at himself from the male point of view, at the moment, when the truth is revealed to him. As Erikson states above, now he explores of a different way of looking at himself. The process of this identity crisis is presented in this chapter with examples from the novel.

It may be suggested that gender identity crisis happens, when people experience conflicts with the sex, they have from the birth and the gender roles associated with the sex, too. In *Perfect Peace* (2010), the issue is a bit different from this definition, but still there is a gender conflict; the main character has experienced a conflict with his sex, however he does not know what his real sex is, he grows up as a girl, as his mother wants him to do so. The main conflict starts, when he learns the truth that biologically he is a boy. The process of denying his real sex and gender identity and then his efforts to adopt to his new identity will be scrutinized in this chapter.

In both novels of the author, it is observed that the characters suffer from some severe gender problems, which influence their whole life and at the same time their immediate families as well as people around them. Since a society consists of people, each individual influences the society and its future.

In *Perfect Peace*, the protagonist is grown up as a girl until she gets eight years old. On her birthday, she faces the grim reality. That may be called the black day since she has to deal with the identity and gender crisis at the same time. Until that day, she lives her life as a girl since her birth; she has ribbons on her hair matched with her dresses, although her brothers do not have even shoes to keep their feet covered in winters. She is treated specially, just because she is a girl after the six boys in the family. Even though, her brothers are playing with each others’ toys, she has her baby-doll, she has her own room, because only her mother knows her real sex and she has to keep that as a secret. She enjoys being a girl until that moment, which ruins her life totally.

Holmes, sociologist, comments that the story of gender acquisition perhaps relies too heavily on the influence of parents in early childhood. Also, although this idea indicates that children learn about gender partly by comparing their parents to others, a lot of emphasis is put on the parents' role in transmitting gender to their offspring (2007, 44). Under the light of this comment, it may be stated that Perfect acquires her gender identity in a totally wrong way, via her mother. Emma Jean, her mother, teaches her the way of holding a baby, with her baby-doll or warns her not to play with boys, instead of encouraging him to be strong or playing with cars or boy games in accordance with the gender patterns that society confirms. Perfect asks her mother: *"How come I cain't play with Mister and the other boys?"* Emma Jean replies: *"Cause you are a lady". "A lady is s'pose to stay clean and pretty"* (Black, 2010: 94). The assumption is that mothers are responsible for teaching their children social expectations about gendered behavior, which children supposedly "passively internalize". (Holmes, 2007: 44) Perfect, as an innocent child, internalizes himself as a girl with her mother's efforts. Emma Jean, for the sake of her own immense desire to have a baby girl, she ruins her son's life leaving incurable sores on her psychological state. Emma Jean thinks that she deserves a baby girl, for the fact that she is an obedient daughter, even when her mother beats her, she does her best to feed and get dress her children and she is married and respected by a husband, whom even nobody else wants to get married with. Thus, she is disappointed to have another son. Black reflects Emma Jean's inner thoughts: *"All she could think about was the promise she had made as a child to love and pamper a daughter the way someone should've loved her. She'd dreamed of stroking a little girl's hair and binding it with golden ribbons, then sending her off to be admired by the world. But that couldn't happen now. How would she ever spite her mother without a daughter of her own?"* (2010: 13) It is clear in these sentences that Emma Jean has a great hatred for her mother and wants to take a revenge by raising a lovely daughter. She hates her mother because she has never felt being loved. Whereas, her mother, Mae Helen hates her daughter because Emma Jean has Mae Helen's navy blue complexion instead of her father's golden skin. It may be suggested that the reason, why Mae Helen hates her daughter is ridiculous. In fact, Mae Helen hates her own skin color. She sleeps with men who has golden complexion to have babies with golden skin. Although Emma Jean's father has golden skin, she resembles her mother. Mae Helen dismisses Emma Jean's father from the house. One day, Emma Jean asks her mother for a little birthday party. Mae helen glances up: *"A party? Shiiiiit! Ain't nobody wastin' no time on no goddamn party. We got work to do 'round here, girl.*

*I mean, who you think you is for real? You ain't nobody special. That's what I shoulda named you- Nobody.*" (Black, 2010: 20) All Emma Jean wants to feel being special, however her mother hits her with the skillet, which leaves a c-shaped mark on her forehead. Therefore, it can be understood from the sentences that why Emma Jean has a craving desire to have a daughter. She wants to love her daughter as she has never loved and named her 'Perfect', out of spite her mother who wishes to name her 'Nobody'.

Black tries to make his readers understand the background of the characters especially the ones who do wrong in both novels. In *Perfect Peace*, Emma Jean ruins her own son's life for the sake of her own desire to have a baby girl without thinking its consequences. And, in *They Tell me of a Home*, Willy James has an incestuous relationship and has a baby from his own sister. It may be suggested that Blake underlines that both characters do such kind of evil things in order to be loved. Furthermore, he might put forward that feeling unimportant and not be loved causes dramatic events, of which consequences are harsh and irrecoverable.

One of the dramatic scenes of *Perfect Peace* is that Emma Jean reveals her secret to Perfect. After the day of her birthday, Emma Jean calls her daughter and they walk away till they are both vanished leaving the house behind. When they reach the forest, Emma Jean broaches the subject calculating that how she can express the whole thing without hurting her, which is impossible in any way. Emma Jean knows in her deep soul that she just ruined her beloved child for the sake of her desire for having a daughter. Emma Jean kneels and says: "*Years ago, I did.. um..something I shouldn't have done.*" Perfect frowns: "*What?*" She continues: "*And I need to fix it now. So no one hurts you in the future... See, honey... um... when you was born I wanted a little girl so bad I woulda done anything to get one.*" Perfect says: "*Then you got one!*" Emma Jean continues: "*Um... yes... well... sorta.*" "*I mean that... um... I wanted a girl so bad that I... um...made you into one.*" Emma Jean glances into Perfect's eyes and she sees complete confusion. She holds her hands and says: "*I know this don't make no sense, baby, but you gotta know. Before somebody else tell you.*" "*That you ain't no girl!*" Perfect: "*What do you mean, Momma? Of course I'm a girl. I got long hair and everything.*" From the answer Perfect -as a little girl- gives, having long hair is a sign for being a girl which is also de facto accepted by the society. Emma Jean stands: "*Listen, Perfect. You been thinkin' you a girl yo' whole life. I understand that, because that's how I raised you, but you wunnit born that way.*" Perfect begins to tear up. "*I ain't no girl?*" (Black, 2010: 127,128) This is the catastrophic question of his life, which turns his entire life into hell. According to

West and Zimmerman, the received doctrine of gender socialization theories conveyed the strong message that while gender may be “achieved” by about age five it was certainly fixed, unvarying and static-much like sex. (1987: 126) In the light of these explanations and taking the age of Perfect into account, it can be assumed that she will have real difficulty in her life as she suffers from a gender crisis which brings an identity crises all together. At the time, Perfect is questioning her mother about her identity by asking her: “*Then what I am?*” Emma Jean says: “*You’re a boy. That’s what you are.*” (Black, 2010: 128) Now ‘she’ becomes ‘he’. Perfect is labelled as a boy. It can be suggested that as readers, we witness the effects of the devastating moment on Perfect’s life as he is struggling intrepidly to adapt his new identity and he tries hard to adjust to the norms of ‘being a man’.

The other character, who has a conflict about his sex is Perfect’s brother called Mister, since he has feelings for boys. Homosexuality is a sexual attraction to someone of the same anatomical sex (D’aguelli, Paterson, 2001: 27). However, Hooker’s studies demonstrated that homosexuality was not a mental illness and, in and of itself, posed no barrier to the ability of an individual to be a productive and healthy member of society (Hooker, 1957: 18,31). Thus, it is not an illness or disease, but a situation that some people face with. Two approaches are most often taken to the biological causes of same-sex sexual orientation: neurohormonal and genetic. The neurohormonal approach is based upon the hypothesis that sexual orientation depends on the early sexual differentiation of hypothalamic brain structures (Ellis, Ames, 1987: 235). According to this view, the differentiation of these structures depends on “prenatal androgen action”. It also suggests that the absence of sufficient levels of androgen causes the feminization of the brain structures. As the second, several studies indicate a correlation between an individual’s genotype and his or her sexual orientation. In one, a sample of 115 gay men, who had male twins, 52% of identical twin brothers were also gay compared with only 22% of fraternal twin brothers and 11% of adopted brothers (Bailey, Pillard, 1991: 1090). Beside psychological and social effects, genetic and neurohormonal effects are also worth studying.

In this chapter, how the gender identity influence the whole life of the protagonist in *Perfect Peace* will be analyzed. Perfect Peace is the main character of the novel, struggles during his whole life to become a man with the help of his brothers and father. Sometimes he feels inefficient and wondering if his “*miniature penis*” (Black, 2010: 152) would be like the penis Authorly had. He waited for his penis to evolve, but it never

happens. By the time, he reaches age sixteen, he gives up trying to be a man, however he never gives up hoping to be one. He intensely misses his girlhood days. He feels that people hate him, although nobody says anything explicitly. He feels lonely. He thinks that his family should have supported and been with him, when others scowled at him. Poor Perfect waits for his family to say that he is still the joy of his family and he is still as precious as he was before. Only Emma Jean, his mother says: *“You still my baby. Don’t chu never forget that. I don’t care what you do or what happens to you, you gon’ always be my baby. I wouldn’t take nothin’ for you. Nothin’. And you still perfect”* (Black, 2010: 168). Although his mother is the only one to blame for his trauma, Paul does not call his mother to account for or blame her in the novel. Even more, although Emma Jean confesses: *“I shouldn’ta done what I done though. I messed up yo’ mind”* Paul replies: *“You didn’t mess up my mind, Momma. I had fun back then. I don’t neva talk about it no more,.”* (Black, 2010: 323).

He also suffers from discrimination at school. He finds a note on his desk written *“Paul Peace is a faggot! And a freak!”* (Black, 2010: 193) He faces the harsh and merciless side of the people and he tries to learn how to ignore them. Smith argues that there is an increase in gender policing in children as young as nine or ten years old in USA nowadays. Many bullying behaviors are acts of gender policing and much of the aggression that occurs within student social culture can be connected to gender norms. Any child who does not live up to idealized gender identities is subject to this kind of harassment like Perfect. Smith also argues that homophobic bullying is significantly rooted in gender policing. Many young boys have been labelled “fag” for a love of purple sneakers. (Smith, 2012: Addressing Gender-Based Bullying in Elementary School) Perfect is subjected to same harassment at school as she has to change her gender identity and become a boy. Therefore, although time passes, the same kind of harassment occurs at schools against children, who do not behave in accordance with the expectations of the society.

To cut a long story short, Perfect longs for being the center of attention, now he feels ugly and unimportant. He questions that whether it is possible that he could be a boy and beautiful at the same time. In addition to these, he cannot stand thinking of Johnny Ray. He does not like girls as romantic lovers, instead, he likes boys. As his mother drums marriage and intimacy with men into his head, he has never thought of marrying a woman. He misses the days, when he was precious so much that one day he wears one of summer dresses of Emma Jean and a dusty pair of black heels. He is precious for the time being

again and he is Perfect Peace for that moment until the barn door is opened. And Gus entered into the barn. While he is trying to explain that it was only a joke Gus slapped. He promised not to do it again to his father even if he couldn't figure out why his father beat him. As he grows up his body has developed, however inside of his body he still has feelings for boys not for girls till at the end of his life. Homosexuality is defined as a sexual attraction to someone of the same anatomical sex; heterosexuality is a sexual attraction to someone of the opposite sex. Whereas, a person's sexual attractions and fantasies are primarily homosexual, then that person may be labelled "lesbian" or "gay". (Hershberger, *Biological Factors in the Development of Sexual Orientation* : 27) As it is seen, there is not a clear difference between the terms of "homosexual" and "gay". Therefore, as Perfect has feelings for boys for his entire life, he could be labelled as a homosexual person. However, if his girlhood days from his childhood is taken into consideration, he misses being a girl. He has feelings for boys, when he is a child because he thinks that he is a girl. Moreover, his mother, being in the first place and the society, in which he lives also support his gender identity, being a girl in those times. That is to say, Perfect's tendency toward being a girl is not unfounded. Although he learns the truth about his real gender identity, he cannot suppress the feelings coming from his girlhood days such as having feelings for boys or having a desire to wear dresses.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, Daniel Black's two breathtaking novels namely *Perfect Peace* (2010) and *They Tell Me Of A Home* (2005) have been analyzed with regard to gender identity and gender roles, which are constructed by the society. Through an in-depth analysis, it may be derived that gender is "an inborn quality" rather than a social construction. Daniel Black portrays two antithetic characters, which give weight to our argument. Black suggests by means of the character of Perfect that gender is socially shaped, as Perfect's mother, her brothers and the society behaviors build her gender identity. On the other hand, the author draws the character of Mister, who proves gender is not achieved only by social influences, but some feelings coming from one's soul. Perfect is raised up as a girl until her eight birthday. He wears girl clothes, he has female friends, whom he plays with, his family and people in the village treat him as a girl. After learning his real biological sex, he has an identity crisis and he tries to adopt his new gender identity. He tries hard indeed to take over his new identity as a boy, unfortunately he feels being a girl inside. On the contrary, Mister, his brother, grown up as a boy from birth and he lives in a man majority family, having plenty of masculine role models, but still he is different and has feelings for boys instead of girls. Unlike Perfect, Mister does not need to change his identity. Luckily, his mother Emma Jean accepts Mister as a boy and does not want to change his sex and/or gender when he is born. Therefore, Daniel Black underlines the point that even if all the conditions are right for the gender construction and compatible with the sex, one can feel different from his/her sex. Thus, it is shown in this study that gender identity is constructed through one's inner feelings, as an inborn quality.

In the "Introduction" part, the life of the author and the summaries of the novels are given. These summaries provide a closer view of the characters, which are analyzed in the stories. With the help of detailed summaries; family life and the relationship between the members of the family are shown. It is underlined that family and society have a great importance in establishing a gender identity.

In the second chapter of the study, detailed definitions of 'sex' and 'gender' are presented. In the study, whether gender is a social construct or it is an inborn quality has been discussed under the light of Butler's ideas. Construction of gender identity is depicted observing every detail in the development of the characters in their daily life. In order to support our argument, we make use of the fiction of Black, who creates two

different cases to elaborate the levels of the gender construction, considering the reactions of the society, in which characters live.

Chapter three starts with the definition of gender role and some information about the effects of the society in determining the frame of the gender roles has been given. We underline that the roles ascribed to a man and a woman by the society compel individuals obey the limits of society expectations with the support of religion. As an answer to Mister's question of why women have got to do everything about house and family, Authorly reminds him the churchman's words that "... *Dat's whay God make women carry de babies. De man is s'pose to work and de woman is s'pouse to raise the kids and take care o' de husband and de house.*" (Black, 2010: 46) Relying on religious sources, people cannot behave according to their own desire or feelings, but they behave according to the society which they are a part of it.

The last chapter deals with the gender conflicts of the characters in novels, namely *Perfect Peace* and *They Tell me of a Home*. The moments of gender identity crisis, the characters go through are identified and examined. The post-crisis period is also analyzed. It is observed that the characters have gone through really harsh times. Perfect, who has a new identity and a new name, which is Paul has a great challenge to orient himself to his new self. On the one hand, he is trying to cope with the troubles he faces, on the other hand he tries to satisfy the expectations of his own family and his own people in the neighborhood. Society and people put obstacles and limits for individuals to realize themselves. As people, we have insuperable prejudices about how to live a life and how to behave according to certain norms, established within centuries. Moreover, it may be suggested that we never try to understand people and their backgrounds or stories. It is easy for us to blame or discriminate them just because they are not one of us or they want to live as the way they like. We should learn how to respect others and give them right to live their life as a part of the society.

As a conclusion, this study argues that gender is "an inborn quality". Although Perfect's family, especially his brothers and the society in which they live, impose him the norms of being a man, he still has some feelings for males. Perfect never loses his inner feelings about males. On the other hand, Mister is raised up as a boy without any intervention which Perfect is exposed to and he lives his life according to the feelings which comes from his soul and has a love affair with a man which is wrong in the society. Despite the fact that we cannot ignore the effects of the society in the construction of



gender identity, we can suggest that someone's inner feelings are more important than the social construction to establish one's gender identity.

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