



A Gender Performance or a Gender Performative: Masculine and Feminine Gender Performance in Don DeLillo's White Noise

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Abstract

Don DeLillo's White Noise has a direct discourse in dealing with various themes such as modernism, postmodernism, and Americanism. It also has an indirect discourse or a subtext in dealing with gender. This novel represents the performance of gender within the cultural context and its limits. It has a cultural scenario in a gender performance more than a gender performative and how the gender performance colonizes man's actions. This research exposes the differences between gender performance and gender performative in White Noise according to Judith Butler's perspectives on gender. Thus, this article disputes how the novel depicts gender roles as performance more than as performative actions. It further uncovers how DeLillo subjugates the gender performance of each sex to limited actions. For this reason, the male and female characters perform their regular gender practices within the domain of a patriarchal ideology. The gender theory of Butler's "Gender Performativity" will be adopted to support the main argument of this paper.

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جنس الأداء او أداء الجنس: الأداء الذكوري والأداء الانوثي في رواية دان ديليلو
"الديو الأبيض"
تاج الدين صلاح الدين نوري*

المستخلص :

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تتطرق رواية دان دليلو "الديو الأبيض" في خطابها المباشر الى مواضيع عديدة مثل الحداثة, وما بعد الحداثة , والامريكانزم ر كما تتطرق في خطابها غير المباشر الى الأداء الجنسي. فالرواية توضح بان هناك عوامل اجتماعية عديدة غير العوامل البيولوجية التي تحدد الأداء الجنسي في المجتمعات. ولهذا فان البحث يتناول الفرق بين الأداء الجنسي وجنس الأداء في رواية دليلو من وجهة نظر جوديث بتلر. فالبحث يبين بان دليلو قدم أدوار شخصياته بما يتفق ويتناسق مع الأيدولوجية البطريركية. كما أن البحث سيتبني في نظرية جوديث باتلر لدعم فكرته الرئيسية .
الكلمات المفتاحية: الجنس، اداء الجنس، الاداء الجنساني، الذكورة ، الانوثة ، جوديث بتلر

1.Introduction

This paper discusses the notion of gender and gender performance in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* according to Judith Butler's conception in "Gender Performativity." Butler gets dissatisfied with gender and the traditional classification of its performance into male and female performances. She refuses to give any priority to masculinity or patriarchy over femininity. Her theories are categorized with feminism and queer theories more than with other literary and cultural theories. She considers the traditional action or reaction of each gender as a "gender performance", and any action or reaction of any gender which attempts to go beyond that as a "gender performative." She explains the main differences between gender performance and gender performative stating that "when we say gender is performed we usually mean that we've taken on a role or we're acting in some way and that our acting or our role-playing is crucial to gender that we are the gender that we present to the world." (qtd. in Antony Bryant, 95). However, gender performative is different. Butler reports that "to say that gender is performative is a little different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman." (Ibid). Thus, a gender performance refers to the traditional performance of gender while the gender performative is a performance beyond that. Butler believes that the gender role is always distributed according to gender performance more than gender performative, especially in traditional patriarchal communities. She states that the focus should be on how to break this tradition rather than on how to maintain it. For this reason, she suggests gender performative, which is breaking of a gender traditional role, as an alternative to the gender performance. Significantly, Butler considers that a gender role is something created culturally and ideologically. Every society and culture puts a certain performance for every sex and his/her gender role. For Butler, what matters more is breaking the subscribed role or the performance of each gender and changing it to a performative one. She also argues that one gets more restrains in a traditional-gender performance than in a gender performative because a gender performance is policed but gender performative means breaking off all existing gender roles. Thus, Butler aims at breaking the domination of one gender role or keeping it as the dominant one. She always argues that the gender role is always changing or in a continuous process of changing and it is never something solid or fixed. She is against making gender and gender practices as a process of blind imitating certain practices. She believes the gender role of the people whether they are males or females can be switched or adjusted. According to Butler, it will be a

mistake to attach a particular performance or a series of performances to one particular sex. However, this article argues that DeLillo mostly enhances the traditional gender performances in *White Noise* and presents the gender role from the perspective of a male-dominated society .

2. A Gender Performance or a Gender Performative: Masculine and Feminine Gender Performance in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Most texts and subtexts of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* are subjected to a masculine depiction of gender and its performance. The male characters in this novel are concerned with performing their masculinities and attempting to empower their gender performance according to pre-existed social or cultural constraints. They adopt violence and violent performances as inescapable practices of their gender. They associate themselves with Adolf Hitler and use shooting and other violent actions as a part of their gendered performance. Meanwhile, the women characters are presented through a masculine misogynist notion that define them as sexual objects and dutiful servants of men and children. They take care of their children and themselves to satisfy the sexual desires of the male characters or seduce them. In this sense, they are imprisoned with specific gender performance, which are common in the patriarchal society. Therefore, *White Noise* enhances the cultural performance of each gender according to the conception of masculinity .

White Noise repeats a masculine portrait of women and their gendered performance. The female characters conserve the male considerations of womanishness as a typical source of romance, gentleness, and beauty. They keep their traditional gender performance through the continuous inspection of their beauty and looks to satisfy men's desires more than to revolt against them. In "Amazons in the Underworld: Gender, the Body, and the Power in the Novels of Don DeLillo" Philip Nel mentions that women try to nourish their beauty by consuming the updated standards of beauty, especially through the media which "persuades them to strive for a too thin body" (2001, p. 423). In other words, the male-dominated media motivates women to maintain their beauty by having thin bodies to look attractive and thus, men fulfill their sexual desire. In "Homicidal Men and Full-Figured Women: Gender in *White Noise*", Nel also refers to a woman talking on the radio in *White Noise* that presents her as an embodiment of the cultural performance of women from patriarchal attitudes. The woman on the radio is dissatisfied with her face and feels frustrated with it (2006, p.181). She states:

I hate my face. This is an ongoing problem with me for many years. Of all faces you could have given me, looks wise, this one has got to be the worst. But how can I not look? Even if you took all mirrors away, I would still find a way to look. How can I not look on the one hand? But I hate it on the other. In other words, I still look. Because whose face is it obviously? What do I do, forget it's there, pretend it's there, pretend it's someone else? (Don DeLillo, 199, p.263)

The woman condemns her face and does not have any sense of attractiveness with it since it is one of her gender's distinctions. She feels more defeated and frustrated with her face as it will

disappoint a lot of men. Although the women's face is not seen, her speech reveals a typical relationship between her face and its role in her gendered performance. The woman on the radio has found other ways to see and consider her face beyond the mirror. That is evaluating the people's reactions after looking at her face and its attractiveness. Looking at her face and watching its beauty and attractiveness is a part of her gendered performance which she never gives up trying to improve .

The women compare the charm of their faces with each other, which is another gendered performance that revealed through this particular discourse. No one on the radio sees and condemns the woman's face except herself. She does not do that accidentally since she compares her face to other women's faces who are popular in a masculine community. She belittles her beauty and believes that it is unattractive or even ugly. She judges all of her performance according to the beauty of her face. She believes that her performance lacks the feminine imprints that men look for and her performance will be wild as long as she has this face. She considers the attractiveness of her face as a crucial part of her gender(ed) performance and helps her get more involved in society .

Despite hating her face, the woman is still watching it tenaciously. She struggles to maintain it. Instead of accepting the current looks on her face, the woman persists and tries to overcome it. Later, she discovers that her strategies of forgetting her face, belittling it, and pretending it will expose somebody else's will to contradict her personality and defeat the performance of her gender. She feels that the problem in her face puts the performance of her gender in crisis. Therefore, DeLillo supports the patriarchal ideology since it represents the woman as a weak and passive character. It indicates that a woman with a modest beauty will remain struggling to be adjusted to her society and all of the actions or gendered performance will be disempowered.

Similarly, the author reduces the emotions and reactions of Jack Gladney's wife, Babette, to a patriarchal community's needs and outlooks. She complains about her "bulky" body and feels that her body troubles the performance of her gender. She believes that her bulky body will not only keep her unhealthy but also an unattractive woman. Consequently, Babette hates her body and tries to decrease its bulkiness and increase its attractiveness. She exercises a lot and eats just yogurt and wheat (DeLillo, 1998, p.7). She thinks that her body reflects her gender and tries to keep it skinny. Therefore, having the right weight becomes her goal toward the cultural performance of her gender. For DeLillo, the women are culturally inclined to reflect their gender and feminine appearance since they are "so often the objects of attention, at so different levels. Whether they are in a streetcar, walking down a street or sitting in a restaurant" (qtd. in Nel "Homicidal Men", 2006, p. 181). Babette tries to be an attractive woman and displays her feminine looks everywhere which unconsciously supports the males' domination in her society .

Moreover, Babette imitates the traditional performance of her gender which is associated with typical motherhood and taking care of her family. Babette performs a conservative role with Jack Gladney, the narrator, and his children. Inside the house, she "gathers and tends the children" around herself, and outside the house, she "teaches a course in an adult education program, belongs to a group of volunteers who read to the blind" (DeLillo, 1998, p.5). Jack does not consider Babette as a wife, but as "some ex-wife and absentee mother" and even "ba-ba" (DeLillo, 1998, p 104). Jeanne Hamming sees Babette as a "place-holder" in which Jack "reconciles himself" or "material

and maternal figure, [and] a womb in which Jack seeks refuge as part of his infantilization” (2004, p. 174). Additionally, Jack likes to consider Babette sexually: “In bed we lay quietly, my head between her breasts... her body became the agency of my resolve, my silence.... Nightly I moved toward her breasts... I drew courage from her breasts, her warm mouth” (DeLillo, 1998, p 172). In this sense, DeLillo enhances the social practices of Babette within a traditional context .

DeLillo also introduces Babette as a woman characterized by guile or duplicity in her manners. Babette manipulates her gender and twins it eagerly with her guile. She has a sexual affair with her doctor, Willie Mink. She gives herself for Dylar, a vague drug, to forget the fear of death. The author represents Jack as a virtuous man who is stricken down by Babette’s sexual affair. He sadly states, “you walked barefoot on the fire- retardant carpet. Mr. Gray ...watched you undress. You lay on the bed, embracing. Then he entered you” (DeLillo, 1998, p.194). Thus, the novel displays Babette as a romantic partner and a source of nurturing .

Nevertheless, Jack knows that Babette’s exercises do not stem from her looking for gracefulness only but from trying to adjust her body to absorb Mink’s Dylar. She believes that drugs can further activate the performance of her gender. Having that done, Jack refutes his perspective on Babette as a “full-souled woman” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 5). He also realizes that there is no difference between Babette and his ex-wives because they were all ambiguous and secretive on the one hand and deny serious guiles on the other hand .

Therefore, *White Noise* reveals Babette’s guile and inclination to a sexual affair when she meets Murray Siskind in a supermarket. Murray is one of “The teaching staff [that] is composed almost solely of New York émigrés, smart, thuggish, movie-mad, trivia-crazed” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 9). Nel highlights how Babette yields herself to Murray instead of challenging him, particularly when he “clutches Babette by the left bicep and sidled around her, appearing to smell her hair” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 35). Simultaneously, when Murray stands directly behind Babette and tells her “a lovely dinner. I like to cook myself, which doubles my appreciation of someone who does it well.” Babette immediately agrees and accepts the invitation. She used to pay no attention to her surrounding as long as she is with Murray. Throughout such scenes, the novel represents Babette in ridiculous situations. It represents Babette as a discarded woman who feels more fancy and romantic engagement with Murray than with her husband. Babette’s romantic feelings toward Murray are suppressed since this practice contradicts the social principles which have been institutionalized in a male-dominated society.

Babette and Jack are going to have dinner at Murray’s house. It highlights Babette’s seductive guile and further fascination with Murray. She refuses to take any kid with them to Murray’s house. Elusively, she tries to change the invitation from dinner to a romantic date even though Jack is with her. She responds to Murray’s looking at her by the side of his eyes and over the coffee cups more romantically. She starts asking Murray a personal question saying “Have you ever been married?” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 51). The question is emanated from her guile and the nature of her gender which inspires her to know more about Murray. In return, Murray hints to Babette indirectly to wait for “a dramatic visit, between two and three in the morning” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 52). Babette’s reactions in different places and moments repeat the stereotypical performances of her gender. They depict

Babette and Jack's other wives as sources of cheating and seduction .

White Noise also presents a group of prostitutes and identifies them as "painted women" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 149). It shows them utilizing the nature of their gender and using it to break their conservative roles. They use any new or external powers besides their inherent ones to improve their roles. They adopt any kind of attractiveness from different places and media to strengthen the nature of their gender and get a masculine society in more troubles. They want to be like "the checkout women at the supermarket, blondish, double-chinned, and resigned" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 149). Nel refers to three prostitutes and their different ways of tempting Murray (2001: 188). The first one shows herself to Murray as "dressed in leopard loungewear under her coat" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 149). The second one says, "she has a snap-off crotch" (Ibid). Then, the last one decides to sell herself to Murray for "twenty-five dollars" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 152). Henceforth, whatever the intention of these women and their performance, DeLillo shows these women exploiting their gender to become a source of the plot. For this reason, the novelist disempowers these prostitutes and their performances as repugnant to a patriarchal society. Therefore, women's gender performance falls within gender performances more than gender performance. Thus, women's gender performance in White Noise normalize the gender roles and adopt the pre-existing practices and they fail to denormalize their gender roles. DeLillo maintains the gender performance of masculinity and confirms the ideological constraints of patriarchal traditions .

Masculinity and the performance of masculinity are equally important in White Noise. The male characters' performance does not surpass the expected practices of their gender. Jack performs his masculinity in numerous situations. Ruth Helyer argues that Jack performs his masculinity, principally with Babette, in various places such as "the supermarket queue, the kitchen, [and] the car" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 74). During shopping in a supermarket, Jack narrates "I rubbed against Babette in the checkout line. She backed into me and I reached round and put my hands on her breasts ... nuzzled her hair and murmured 'Dirty blonde'". Then, he puts "his hands into Babette's skirt, over her belly, as the slowly moving line edged toward the last purchase points" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 40). In this sense, DeLillo represents Jack's masculinity within a sexual context and denies Babette's actual emotions and reactions. Further, Jack performs masculinity on the steps of the stadium. He narrates, "I met her at the edge of the playing field and embraced her, putting my hands inside the sweatbands of her gray cotton pants a small plane appeared over the trees. Babette was moist and warm" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 14-15). Jack narrates that Babette tried to get something from the refrigerator, and he says "I grabbed her by the inside of the thigh as she passed the table. She squirmed deliciously" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 114). Clearly, Jack is addicted to erotic literature and likes to hear it read by Babette "I know you like me to read sexy stuff." (DeLillo, 1998, p. 28). Indeed, DeLillo highlights different situations of Jack's performing masculinity. He represents Babette as a sexual slave of Jack and by giving him absolute rights to fulfill his sexual desires with her whenever and wherever he desires anywhere and everywhere. DeLillo dissolves all hurdles in front of Jack's practices and shows that Babette should never reject Jack's desires.

After presenting Jack's sexual practices, DeLillo moves to bring out his intellectual practices and relates them to masculinity. He does not display Jack as an ordinary man. He presents him as a

“chairman of the department of Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill” and the one who “invented Hitler studies in North America in March of 1968” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 4). DeLillo also exposes detailed information about Jack’s race by describing him as “the heaviest white man” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 308). More importantly, DeLillo does not represent Jack as an average man. Yet, he is presented as a man with special intellect and profession. Jack states boastfully, “I’m not just a college professor. I’m the head of a department.” He is attached to intellectual and academic positions to Jack and makes these positions designed more specifically for men. Therefore, DeLillo reinforces the males’ academic and social positions in society and produces an intention toward keeping the women nurturing at home .

Interestingly enough, DeLillo also focuses on toughness and violence which are other performances of masculinity. For Ruth Helyer, masculinity “requires that a man must put himself at a stake, take risks with his physical being if he is to obtain satisfaction, fulfillment, even knowledge” (2001, 76). Indeed, Jack did these requirements. After discovering the secret love between Mink and his wife, he decides to take revenge and adopts violent masculinity. He is suddenly transformed from a university professor to a killer. In “Amazons in the Underworld: Gender, the Body, and the Power in the Novels,” Nel asserts that Jack feels the masculine role of his gender is threatened (2001, 425). Jack’s murdering intentions are also arisen by Murray and Babette. Murray encourages Jack to kill Mink and tells Jack “to kill him [Mink] is to gain life-credit. The more people you kill, the more credits you store up” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 290). Likewise, Babette reminds Jack of being a man and considers killing as “something men are good at. Insane and violent jealousy. ... If I were good at it, I would do it.” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 225). In the end, Jack killed Mink. He reports that “I fired the gun... I watched the blood... squirt from the victim’s midsection.... Mink’s pain was beautiful, intense I fired a second shot... the bullet struck him inside the right hipbone ...Mink’s eyes dropped out of his skull” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 312-13). Instantaneously, Mink shoots Jack in return. Thus, through Jack’s action and Mink’s reaction, DeLillo enhances the violence of masculinity and romanticizes its toughness. He also draws a negative and unlawful portrait of women. He shows them motivating the males toward more violence and more crimes .

On campus, Jack adopts Hitler to empower the nature of his masculinity. He believes that becoming “more ugly” will be an incisive way to perform his masculinity (DeLillo, 1998, p. 17). For this reason, Nel believes that Jack prefers to cut his name J. A. K., and he always wears his “academic gown and dark glasses day and night whenever ...[he] was on campus ... carried two hundred and thirty pounds on a six-foot three-inch frame and had big hands and feet” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 32). He also imitates Hitler because he believes that “Hitler is larger than death.” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 287) Murray believes that Jack imitates Hitler because he desires to have enough “significance and strength” (Ibid). Consequently, DeLillo represents Hitler as a symbol of tough masculinity that every male should adopt without any hesitation .

At a repressed level, DeLillo reveals the weakest aspects of Jack’s masculinity. Jack has been living obsessed with the fear of death without doing any notable action to end his fear. His masculinity is thoroughly disempowered when he goes to a clinic to have a medical test. In “Exposing Men; Medical Imagining and the Paradox of Invisible in White Noise and ‘My

Mammogram”, Angela Laflen describes Jack as a “bad patient” (2010, 375). The pillars of Jack’s masculinity such as cutting his name to J. A. K, the continuous wearing of dark glasses with the gown, and learning German to compete with his colleagues, are completely faded away. As soon as Jack is naked for his body tests and treated as a patient, he is changed from an ugly and strange man into a naked and visible one. The doctors start utilizing his body as a visible subject they use him to have further knowledge on Nyodene D. As a result, Jack feels more dehumanized and emasculated (375-79). Indeed, Jack is perceived not only as a male patient but also as a weak individual. He states

.Dr. Chakravarty wants to talk to me but I am making it a point to stay away
.He is eager to see how my death is progressing. An interesting case perhaps
He wants to insert me once more in the imaging block, where charged particles
collide, high winds blow. But I am afraid of the imaging block. Afraid of its
magnetic fields, its computerized nuclear pulse. Afraid of what it knows about
me. (DeLillo, 1998, p. 325)

Jack’s external body, which is the core of Jack’s masculinity is completely ignored and accused of being untrue since it tries to impress the medical tests. He finds himself out of the management of his body and does not know even the result of his test (Laflen, 2010, pp. 379-83). Through this scene, DeLillo unconsciously emasculates Jack’s masculinity .

Additionally, DeLillo strengthens the masculine practices of Vernon Dicky, Jack’s father-in-law. Despite his old age, Dicky still has a sort of Michael Kimmel’s “Four Traditional Rules of American Manhood.” Kimmel believes that “in crisis men do not reveal their feelings.” (qtd. in Nel, “Homicidal Men,” 2006, pp.183-4) Dickey asks Jack and Babette never to worry about his cough. He believes that “the little limp means nothing. People may age limp, a limp is a natural thing at a certain age.” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 255). Moreover, there is another role of Kimmel’s principles of manhood in Dickey’s performance, which is to “give them [men] Hell: Exude an aura of manly daring and aggression ...” (qtd. in Nel “Homicidal Men,” 2006, 184). In this sense, DeLillo represents the gender practices of masculinity as beyond getting aged and defeated .

For Nel, Dickey’s masculinity is “an elaborate performance” of his gender and its cultural role (184). DeLillo’s intentions to masculinize Dickey’s performance are strikingly expressed in Dicky’s farewell speech “Don’t worry” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 185). He informs his daughter and her husband “Don’t worry about me.... So you do not have to worry about that [stocks and bonds] ... Don’t worry about the shakes... Don’t worry about the eyes.... So don’t worry about the mind” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 255-56). Indeed, through Dickey’s performance, DeLillo asserts that restricting the performance of gender to a certain age is an outdated tradition .

In DeLillo and Masculinity, Helyer considers manual skills as a part of the gendered practices of masculinity. He believes that manual skills symbolize ideal masculinity. Regardless of the fact that Jack’s father- in- law is an aged man, he gives Jack sufficient awareness of his gender and its performance. He motivates Jack’s performance of masculinity from fixing a faucet to shooting (DeLillo, 1998, p. 125). It is Dicky who gives Jack a German-made gun to shoot Mink. Jack narrates the importance of that gun. He says, “the gun created a second reality for me to inhabit”

(DeLillo, 1998, p. 279). Thus, Jack's performance of masculinity is enhanced by Dickey and the gender practices of both characters could complete each other. In this sense, DeLillo builds a patriarchal community in which the male characters support each other and attempt to stay tough as long as they live .

Alongside what was mentioned about Dickey, the nineteen-year-old and the senior at the high school, Orest Mercator, tries undeniably to display a more challenging way in performing masculinity. He performs his masculinity by sitting in a "cage full of deadly snakes" to "break the record" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 207). He measures masculinity according to one's abilities in doing the best to belittle the fear of death. It is worth noting that his name is not an accident. Richard Potter believes that Orest's name is based on "Orestes Complex - a psychoanalytical phrase denoting an unconscious desire of the son to kill his mother." (2003, 49) Unlike Jack who desires to live and fears death, Orest much desires to die to break the international record. His masculinity does not yield to any dangerous situation. He emphasizes confronting them aggressively. He has a different performance of masculinity. For him, masculinity means sleeping while standing, sleeping with poisonous snakes, waking up without moving suddenly, and staying with a "mamba" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 182) as much as he can. Thus, Orest introduces other cultural performances of masculinity which are challenging and complicated .

Heinrich, Jack's fourteen-year-old son, also enhances the performances of masculinity differently. He attempts to combine the regular and irregular performance of masculinity. For Jack, Heinrich is a German name and has sufficient masculinity like Hitler. Heinrich's name reminds Jack of his masculine achievement because he was born when Jack founded Hitler studies and explains the reasons for calling Heinrich with this name. He says, "I thought it had an authority that might cling to him. I thought it was forceful and impressive and I still do. I wanted to shield him, make him unafraid" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 63). DeLillo connects masculinity with technology and shows males' characters, like Heinrich, having enough knowledge in technology. Heinrich wants to replace the physical and traditional performance of masculinity with the mental performances of masculinity. Unlike Jack's masculinity which is based on violence and holding guns on heads or Orest's sleeping with snakes, Heinrich's performance is based on mental exercises such as watching actions from an "attic window" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 110) and playing chess via the mail with a killer in the jail. Furthermore, Heinrich's masculinity has a "fast glance" (DeLillo, 1998, p. 115) and usually sends a "certain practiced accusation" (DeLillo, 1998, p.115). Jack views Heinrich's masculinity in traditional ways. He tells Babette that Heinrich "will end up in a barricaded room, spraying hundreds of rounds of automatic fire across an empty mall before the SWAT teams come for him with their heavy- barreled weapons, their bullhorns and body armor." (DeLillo, 1998, p.22) In this way, Jack thinks of Heinrich's masculinity in a primitive way. Thus, DeLillo represents Heinrich as a symbol of a hypermasculinity .

However, Heinrich's masculinity goes beyond Jack and his traditional perspectives. Heinrich considers masculinity a mental practice rather than a sexual or violent practice. Instead of focusing on violence, he focuses on understanding, learning, and acquiring knowledge. He does not drive his masculinity from history or abstract knowledge but from

technology and its applications. For him, masculinity is not only “knowing what you know about the progress of medicine and diseases” but also comprehending “how to apply it in one little crucial thing that might save a million and a half lives” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 148). Significantly, he considers knowledge as a dynamic base of masculinity and technology as an art of masculinity. He believes that every man has a certain sort of masculinity, and if that masculinity lacks knowledge, the male will neither know it nor be able to manage it. Thus, Heinrich’s masculinity is not based on performing or showing violence, as Jack wants. Instead, Heinrich’s masculinity is based on having more knowledge and repressing all violent actions of masculinity .

Further, Heinrich’s cultural performance of masculinity is not free from a physical performance of masculinity. He practices certain exercises, especially chinning up to stop the falling of his hair and improve his masculinity. When Jack asks him, “Why do you want to chin? What does chinning accomplish?” He answers, “I just want to build my body to compensate for other things” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 181). Thus, Heinrich starts gradually to exercise and does not want to have a weak body because that will passively influence the nature of his performance. Indeed, he represents a complex performance of masculinity. He combines the physical and mental performance of his gender together .

It is important mentioning that Heinrich is similar to Jack in certain situations. Jack states, “Heinrich wore his camouflage Jacket and cap, an outfit with complex meaning for him, at fourteen, [and he is seen] struggling to grow and to escape notice simultaneously” (DeLillo, 1998, p. 109). Instead of presenting typical masculinity, Heinrich presents a different one. His masculinity seems to trace the same trajectory as Jack’s masculinity in certain situations. He masks his body with a vague jacket and tries to resist the falling of his hair by wearing a cap. These practices are accompanied by “inadequacy, violence, and vandalism”. Hayler considers this performance as an act of counter-masculinity (2001, 133). They build a world of masculinity and become its victims rather than its heroes .

3. Conclusion

This article sums up that *White Noise* is involved in a gender discourse and its performance. DeLillo enhances the expected performance of the characters and their reactions according to the existing nature of every gender and its performance. He highlights the gendered performance of each sex in various situations within the limits of a patriarchal ideology. In other words, he reinforces the ideological constraints of each gender’s performance and uncovers the traditional motivations of each gender in different ages and situations. For this reason, the male and female characters in *White Noise* offer expected gender performance more than unexpected one or gender performance more than gender performative. The characters of both sexes, particularly the female characters, could easily yield to the social constraints of a patriarchal community and never attempt to challenge them. The female characters are represented through the perspectives of a male-dominated society. They are represented as a source of corruption and sexism. They could do nothing to defeat the male or overturn women’s traditional depiction in a male-dominated society. The male characters, however, are presented as symbols of power, knowledge, and science. They have more power and intellect than the female characters. The novel displays that the males can be

sick or get old or have a little weakness here and there but they will never get defeated. After all, DeLillo enhances gender performance more than gender performative in *White Noise* as he assigned each gender to its traditional and cultural role.

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