

# Issue of sexism in lullabies for little criminals by heather o'neill

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



I was excited to continue reading the novel *Lullabies for Little Criminals* and I was looking forward to accompanying Baby on her quest of self-discovery and happiness. However, as I continued the novel, I was heartbroken to see Baby's life crumble around her as she faces the consequences of sexualization. When I examined *Lullabies for Little Criminals* from a feminist perspective, I found that women are unjustly sexualized by society and blamed for their sexualization.

Although I noticed many subtle traces of sexism throughout the novel, I was exposed to increasingly concerning statements and opinions in the second third of this novel. Something that stood out to me was how Jules sexualizes his own daughter, Baby, who was just twelve years old. He wouldn't let her braid her hair, wear bobby pins or do anything to enhance her appearance, saying " elastic bands with big plastic balls on them were for prostitutes" and that if Baby wore nice clothes, she was " trying to be a whore". However, when men like Alphonse dress nicely, they are perceived as looking " spectacular". This contrasting view is a testament to the unjust sexualization of women and the undeniable double standard that exists within Baby's society. To men like Jules, when a woman puts effort into her appearance, it was perceived as something done for the sole purpose of sexually attracting men. This viewpoint shows that the men in this novel regard women as sexual objects that exist for their pleasure and that their self-expression is in some way influenced by them. However, when men dress nicely, it is never perceived as sexual, or a shameful attempt to seduce women. I wish I could protect Baby her from her unjust, sexist society where girls like her are slut-

shamed for their self-expression and men are praised for the exact same thing.

Soon after I was introduced to this vivid double standard and sexualization of women, I was appalled to be confronted with another misogynistic male perspective that blames women for their sexualization by the hands of men. This point of view was revealed when Jules tells Baby that if a girl stays out after nine, it meant that she wanted to have sex with anyone that passed by. He even tells his daughter that if she got raped after dark, the courts would probably say she deserved it. These statements confirm the prominence of rape culture within Baby's society. This culture validates gender norms that consider men as sexual pursuers and women as sexual objects that are responsible for the urges and actions of men. Baby is taught that women who do certain things automatically want to have sex with any man and that it's her responsibility not to get raped. This sends the message that women are dehumanized objects with the purpose of satisfying men and their sexual urges. While women are criticized and humiliated for being sexualized, the men that sexualize them are praised and rape is justified as the uncontrollable urges of a man. I pray that Baby is never unjustly judged, shamed or blamed for the mistakes of misogynistic men in her life

After finishing two-thirds of this novel, the excitement I once felt about reading this book has now turned into foreboding, concern and fear for Baby's wellbeing. Considering Baby is a vulnerable young girl living within a male-dominated society that both sexualizes women and blames them for it, I have a bad feeling that she will eventually fall victim to these sexist

attitudes that shape her community. My only hope is that she is strong enough to persevere, just as she persevered for the first twelve years of her life.