

---

This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Agudetse Roures, Adriana; Hand, Felicity , dir. Fight Club : A Study on Teen Girl Angst, Female Friendship and Abuse of Power in Megan Abbott's Dare Me. Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2023. 22 pag. (1482 Grau en Estudis Anglesos)

---

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/273263>

under the terms of the  license



**DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA I DE GERMANÍSTICA**

**Fight Club: A Study on Teen Girl Angst, Female  
Friendship and Abuse of Power in Megan Abbott's**

*Dare Me*

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

Author: Adriana Agudetse Roures

Supervisor: Felicity Hand Cranhan

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

Grau d'Estudis Anglesos

January 2023

## **Statement of Intellectual Honesty**

**Your name:** Adriana Agudetse Roures

**Title of Assignment:**

I declare that this is a totally original piece of work; all secondary sources have been correctly cited. I also understand that plagiarism is an unacceptable practise which will lead to the automatic failing of this assignment.

Signature and date:



23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2023

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. Introduction.....	5
1. Theoretical framework.....	6
2. Analysis .....	12
2.1. Teen girl angst .....	12
2.2. Female friendship .....	14
2.3. Abuse of power .....	16
3. Conclusions .....	18
Bibliography .....	20

**ABSTRACT:** Megan Abbott's *Dare Me* (2012) follows the story of 16-year-old Addy Hanlon and how her relationship with her irreverent best friend, Beth, becomes sour when new cheerleading coach Colette French arrives at their high school. The coach manages to win over Addy and the rest of the cheerleaders with talks of empowerment and feminism, earning their admiration and respect while simultaneously isolating Beth. Though they have not necessarily been deemed as great issues in literature, I propose that teen girl angst and female friendship are essential factors when facing conversations about abuse of power.

In this dissertation, I aim to examine the angst that the young female characters face and its relation to societal pressures. In addition, I will be focusing on the impact of female friendship in the story, which is represented as an intense, intimate experience. Finally, I will be looking at how the Coach uses fake feminism in order to take advantage of impressionable teenage girls.

**Keywords:** *Dare Me*, Megan Abbott, female friendship, abuse of power, teenage girls, angst

## 0. Introduction

Throughout the last few decades, we have seen countless novels tell the story of under-aged girls who fall victims to adult men in positions of power. Though grooming is a topic that has recently began to be more spoken about and covered in popular media and literature, it is more uncommon for the adult exerting these manipulative tactics to be a woman. Moreover, when it comes to teenage girl representation, they can often be portrayed through negative stereotypes that try to diminish their struggles, taking away their voice. This is especially the case for girls like the protagonists of this novel, who find passion in a sport that has historically been ridiculed: cheerleading. According to many critics, Megan Abbott's best-selling novel *Dare Me* (2012) pioneers in breaking away from this tradition.

*Dare Me* has been described by its own publisher as “*Heathers* meets *Fight Club*”, references that make sense when we understand the themes that are covered in the novel. On the one hand, *Heathers* (1989) is a dark teen comedy film written by Daniel Waters and directed by Michael Lehmann. Similarly to the 1989 feature, in *Dare Me* we encounter presumably mean, popular high school girls who deep down are struggling with their self-image, an uncertain future, as well as trying to find meaning and acceptance. On the other hand, *Fight Club* (1999) by director David Fincher is a satirical film that follows a depressed man who is searching for a way to change his life. *Dare Me* takes the characters — and the reader — down a chilling path as we see the girls end up in situations that compromise their safety and integrity, all to find a sense of community and belonging. Consequently, we could say that for the cheerleaders in the novel, the cheerleading squad becomes a sort of Fight Club of their own once Coach French arrives, a place that serves them as therapy. That being said, as much as these references could be used to describe Megan Abbott's novel to someone who has never read it, *Dare Me* is

definitely a complex, multidimensional story with strong commentary on female mental health and how American society both awards and punishes teenage femininity.

“There is something dangerous about the boredom of teenage girls” (Abbott: 3). This quote pertains to the first chapter of the novel, and it describes the concerns presented in the story. The protagonist, Addy, introduces us to a setting of emotional instability and lack of purpose. Even though the main characters in the story show passion and pride towards cheerleading and the fact that they practice it, it is still implied that they are not sure how they ended up involved in the sport. All they know is that, if they did not cheer, they would have too much free time. This is something they actively avoid as they do not want to have enough time to stop and analyze how they feel about themselves and their surroundings.

In this dissertation, I will be tackling themes such as teen girl angst, female friendship and abuse of power and how these are portrayed in *Dare Me*, mainly focusing on the characters of Addy, Beth and Colette. Furthermore, I will be contextualizing these issues with information from different psychologists, sociologists and authors and contrasting their theories. Finally, I will explain why Megan Abbott succeeds at overcoming negative clichés on emotional instability, femininity and female relationships.

## **1. Theoretical framework**

The use of the word “angst” was first attributed to Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, who introduced this term in *The Concept of Anxiety*, back in 1844. In this philosophical work, he describes angst as “freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility” (Angst & Despair — Kierkegaard, 2020). This means, that there is a time when human beings become aware that we have complete freedom to choose. According to Kierkegaard, knowing that we can choose to do anything, including doing horrible things, leads to

feelings of dread and anxiety. Essentially, he suggests that “human beings enjoy a freedom of choice that we find appealing and terrifying” (Angst & Despair — Kierkegaard), so when we are presented with an infinite number of possibilities, we may become overwhelmed that we have to choose just one. His thoughts on anxiety are considered to be “one of the most profound pre-Freudian works of psychology” (Angst & Despair — Kierkegaard).

Dating back to the 1940s, existentialism was a philosophical movement that began in Europe, during the period between the two World Wars. Many renowned thinkers, such as Sartre and Nietzsche, were a part of this movement, which became popular because of the questions it formulated around emotions, human existence and the meaning of life. Though angst is often categorized as a synonym for fear or stress, existentialism offers a more exhaustive definition for this state of being, classifying it as “a state of anguish or despair in which a person recognizes the fundamental uncertainty of existence and understands the significance of conscious choice and personal responsibility” (APA, 2023). To this day, existentialism is known for its principle that everything is uncertain, thus it is up to each person themselves to find meaning and authenticity in a world that these thinkers view as purposeless. This perhaps bleak outlook on life would present as an anxiety-inducing situation for anybody. Nevertheless, for teenage girls who are still in their formative years, angst is a specifically heavy emotional burden to handle.

As far as dictionaries are concerned, we find that several varying definitions of angst are offered. For instance, while the Cambridge Dictionary defines angst as “strong worry and unhappiness, especially about personal problems” (2023), it is described by Oxford Languages as a “feeling of deep anxiety or dread, typically an unfocused one about the human condition or the state of the world in general” (2018). Merriam-Webster defines angst as a “strong feeling of apprehension or insecurity about one’s life or situation”

(2023). When it comes to this feeling contextualized in teenagers' lives, sociologists, psychologists and other specialists have shared many ideas on the topic. Indeed, "adolescent angst is an acute feeling of anxiety or apprehension that is often accompanied by depression; it is a frustrating, painful, and occasionally frightening problem for teens and parents alike" (Muscari, 2016: 1). Therefore, even though angst is a specific type of anxiety, they are not the same as the former is traditionally experienced when one is struggling to find meaning in the grand scheme of things.

A study carried out in the United Kingdom concluded that "girls are more anxious than boys about their appearance, careers and a celebrity culture that places a premium on good looks" (Boffey, 2011). According to this same study, the proportion of teenage girls who reported feeling worthless much more than usual was twice the number of teenage boys. Additionally, it explained that "almost a third of girls report feeling unhappy and depressed "rather more than usual" and "much more than usual", which was also twice as much as boys" (Boffey). Thus, even though it is common knowledge that angst is something that teenagers experience, it would make sense to separate it from the teenage angst experienced by girls, as being a girl comes with specific societal demands and expectations. Ultimately, teenage girls wish to be liked and accepted. We can relate this to the gender intensification hypothesis, proposed by Hill and Lynch in 1983. This hypothesis states that "beginning in adolescence, girls and boys face increased pressure to conform to culturally sanctioned gender roles" (Priess, Lindberg and Hyde, 2009). It explains that the aforementioned pressure can come from different external stimuli (parents, educators, friends, the media) which send certain messages about how boys and girls ought to behave according to their gender. In their studies conducted mainly in the United States, Hill and Lynch reported that "across adolescence and relative to boys, girls became more self-conscious, reported lower self-esteem, were more concerned with

interpersonal relationships and with their physical appearance, and were more likely to be accommodating and compliant in their interactions with others” (Priess et al.). Heather Priess, Sara Lindberg and Janet Shibley Hyde wanted to contribute to the empirical research on this topic in order to test not only “the divergence of girls and boys in their gender-role identities across adolescence” but also “the ability of gender intensification to explain the emergence of the gender difference in depressive symptoms” (Priess et al.), which takes place during adolescence. It must be noted that the study did not find a correlation between femininity and depression. This means, that having qualities that have been deemed as feminine (i.e. being emotional or sensitive) is not linked to depressive symptoms and that femaleness is not psychopathological despite contrary, abiding assumptions. Instead, “the prevalent finding remains that by age fifteen, girls report more depressive symptoms than boys and are more likely to be diagnosed with depression” (Priess et al.). An interesting highlight of this study, which is relevant to the dissertation, is also that, “for some girls, closer friendships may offer social support that protects against depressive symptoms” (Priess, et al.).

In *The Adolescent Experience* (1966), Elizabeth Douvan and Joseph Adelson argue that friendships of the same sex are closer and more intense in early adolescence than they are during any other stage of life. Moreover, they propose that “friendships at these ages have a major influence on the development of personality, social skills, and social behavior” (Douvan and Adelson, 1966, cited in Berndt, 1982: 1447). Some theorists have suggested that children may form intimate bonds during the years prior to puberty as well, but other psychologists attribute the development of such intimate relationships to adolescence specifically. For instance, educational psychologist Robert L. Selman argues the following:

“Before (children) can share their thoughts and feelings with a friend and respond appropriately when the friend shares with them, children must be able to keep their own views and another person’s views in mind at the same time. According to Selman, this level of role taking normally is achieved during early adolescence” (Selman, 1981, cited in Berndt, 1982: 1448)

Relating to boys’ and girls’ friendships and the differences between them, Douvan and Adelson also state that “girls have more intimate friendships than boys during adolescence because, in the socialization of girls, great importance is attached to interpersonal relationships” (Douvan and Adelson, 1966, cited in Berndt: 1450). In line with this train of thought, they observe that “intimate conversations with friends may reduce adolescents’ fears and anxieties about the physical and emotional changes that occur during early adolescence” (Douvan and Adelson, cited in Berndt: 1450). In addition, studies have found that friendship between women is categorically of therapeutic value. For instance, Sherwin Davidson and Ted Packard carried out a study in the University of Utah which allowed them to uncover that “women (...) may have learned to minimize or devalue whatever positive experience they did have in their friendships with women” (Davidson and Packard, 1981: 501). Also, the results of this study showed that “while female friendship may be less visible than the overt camaraderie of men, it has highly valued therapeutic qualities”, and that the nature of female friendships “has a special quality which may appear vacuous but actually represents parallel emotional understanding” (Davidson and Packard: 509).

This dissertation also covers the theme of abuse of power, which is in some ways related to the problem of grooming. The term “grooming” actually originated in the 1980s, according to ex-FBI agent Ken Lanning, during a series of investigations regarding sex crimes against children in the United States (McManus, 2022). When it comes to this topic, not a lot of research has been carried on women grooming girls, nor do we find many headlines on the matter as it is typically considered a cross-sex issue. It is also true

that “the present literature that examines the sexual grooming of adolescents is focused on online grooming, and thus little is known about in-person sexual grooming as it pertains to adolescents” (Smith, 2021: 1). Still, author Acie Cargill published a book in 2020 called *Grooming: Sexual Abuse of Teenage Girls*, recounting a case in which a 21-year-old woman disguised herself as a 16-year-old boy online in order to have sexual relationships with over 50 teenage girls. Cargill defines child grooming as “befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, and sometimes the family, to lower the child's inhibitions with the objective of sexual abuse” (Cargill, 2020). Naturally, there is an inherent inequality in the relationship between the adult and the minor being abused, whether that is because they are in different stages of life, or even because the adult is hierarchically above them as they are in a position of power.

According to Michelle McManus, Head of Criminal Justice at Liverpool John Moores University, “early investigations uncovered patterns of behavior and specific techniques used by predators to gain access to and the compliance of victims” (McManus, 2022). That being the case, these conclusions present the concept of grooming as a non-violent technique which is used by sexual predators who are not necessarily strangers, but rather acquaintances of their victims (McManus). Thus, groomers place themselves in roles that allow them to have access to children. Although there are different forms of grooming, the common denominator is said to be that the perpetrator manipulates the victim by building trust and often also by becoming a role model they can look up to, which teenage girls, for example, do look for at such an impressionable age. Ultimately, in forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz’s words, “few discoveries could outweigh the importance of recognizing that a large proportion of offenses are committed by acquaintances of the child using techniques other than force or threat of force” (Dietz, 2018: 29).

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Teen girl angst

In *Dare Me*, angst is an emotion that the characters are familiar with to an uncomfortable extent. Though all the girls in the novel suffer from it at given points, it is especially visible for the main characters, Addy and Beth. It is constant in their case, too. From the very first chapter, we can see that 16-year-old Addy Hanlon is almost resigned to the alarming dread she feels towards life, human interaction and her future. She highlights this chronic discomfort as the main (and perhaps sole) reason her friends and herself got involved in the world of cheerleading. “At first, cheer was something to fill my days, all our days. Ages fourteen to eighteen, a girl needs something to kill all that time, that endless itchy waiting, every hour, every day for something—anything—to begin” (Abbott, 2021: 3). Addy recognizes that the sport serves as a form of escapism for her: “the more I did it, the more it owned me. It made things matter. It put a spine into my spineless life (...)” (Abbott: 4). She feels as though everything is meaningless and, like the rest of the girls in the squad, she found cheerleading when she needed a distraction from her thoughts and feelings, which otherwise led to anxiety, gloom and fear.

Teen angst has typically been portrayed as a joke in media and literature, especially when those experiencing it were teenage girls. Because a lot of the time, female characters are built on sexist stereotypes, their pain can come across as exaggerated, dramatic and even comical. In *Dare Me*, Abbott’s representation of teen girl angst is something rather serious. We find characters who feel deeply insecure, lost and do not know themselves. Though as readers we understand that the girls in the novel have been cheerleaders for a while, their relationship with the sport evolves when a new coach, Colette French, arrives

at their high school. For Addy and the rest of the squad, it might be the first time that they feel as though someone takes them seriously.

As they enter the world of competitive cheerleading, these girls attribute a lot of importance to their bodies and what they can do, whether or not they can achieve perfection. “The girls balance physical challenge for the sake of excellence with their own fears and insecurities” (Gaines, 2012). When asked about the physicality of *Dare Me*, the author replied:

“For teenage girls, the body can be such a prison – not thin enough, not perfect enough. Their bodies are, in many ways, spectacles and they feel the pressure of that gaze. (...) Cheerleaders are, for many, the teen girl ideal. (...) They are required to mold their bodies into these perfect machines.” (Abbott, 2012: 333)

Precisely, the characters in the novel face intense pressure to be perfect, not only because they encapsulate the traditional, All-American image of femininity but also because they want to be taken seriously as athletes and succeed at cheerleading. The possibility of being average is shameful and unthinkable, which is why the drive to be exceptional is a recurring topic in the story. This determination is what the characters use to try and combat their angst and uncertainty, as Addy explains in this excerpt:

“(...) most of all, we work hard because it raises a din, a rabid, high-pitched din that can nearly drown out the sound of the current and coming chaos. The sense that everything is changing in ways we can’t guess and that nothing can stop it.” (Abbott: 219)

Addy and the girls in the squad are aware that other people mock them, doubt them and believe that teenage girls have no depth. Nevertheless, as readers we have the knowledge that these characters, to different degrees, are all searching for the same things: attention, validation and purpose.

## 2.2. Female friendship

The dynamics between the girls in the squad do not go unnoticed, as friendship is probably one of the most poignant elements to the story. All these girls share something special, they understand one another in ways that other people in their lives do not. When speaking about the judgements of character that people make about them, claiming that they believe they are better than everyone else, Addy argues that “It is not aloofness, superiority. It’s a protection. Who in this ravaged battlefield doesn’t want to gather close her comrades?” (Abbott: 141). Their passion for cheerleading, though it might be the only thing they have in common, unites them and it makes them hold each other accountable. They push each other to be better and take the sport seriously, even if a lot of the time they do not do this in healthy ways. It must be noted that the bond between the girls in the squad is not always genuine, as there is a competitiveness to their actions and they often have ulterior motives. This is visible, for instance, in Addy’s character, who passively—then as the plot advances, aggressively—strives to be “top girl” (the girl at the top of the pyramid) instead of Beth. We also see it multiple times with Beth and how she ridicules Tacy Slaussen in cheer practice, mocking her lack of strength or charisma. That being said, the bond between the girls in the novel is probably not meant to be aspirational, nor is it supposed to be representative of sorority or feminism. Alternatively, their relationship illustrates how critical it can be for girls to be surrounded by other girls, especially those who understand their struggles and ambitions. It is clear that they are each other’s support, despite the fact that “their pain is never shared helpfully” (Graham, 2020).

When it comes to Beth and Addy’s friendship, it is definitely the most stratified relationship in the novel. They have known each other for the longest amount of time as they are childhood friends. Addy once narrates: “It goes deep with Beth and me. Our

history is long and lashes us tight” (Abbott, 2012: 28). They have the closest relationship out of all the girls in the squad, which is signaled, for example, by the fact that their teammates refer to them as “captain and lieutenant” recurrently throughout the story. Nevertheless, their relationship becomes strained with Coach’s new presence, as Addy’s entire focus shifts from Beth to Colette. Beth longs for Addy’s love and attention in a similar way to how Addy craves affection and validation from Coach. She is possibly the first role model that the girls in the squad have had, but Addy is particularly infatuated with her and wants to spend as much time with her as possible, as she also develops romantic feelings. “And there’s really two of her: Coach, the leader Addy wants to imitate, and Colette, the softer woman Addy wants to be intimate with” (Graham, 2020). This way, what Beth feels for Addy is unrequited, just like what Addy feels for Colette.

There is a lot of subtext in *Dare Me* that hints to a relationship between Addy and Beth that was, at some point, more than platonic, even though this is definitely made more apparent in USA Network’s 2019 adaptation of the same name. Still, it is not revealed to us until chapter 32, the second to last chapter in the book, that Addy and Beth kissed about a year prior to the novel’s present, after Beth gave Addy the hamsa bracelet as a symbol of their friendship. Once Addy and Colette grow closer, the former gives the same bracelet to the latter, which makes Beth feel betrayed. At the end of the novel, Addy finally recalls that Beth told her to “wear it forever”, and she admits “which I think is the same thing I’d hoped for Coach” (Abbott: 321). Undoubtedly, the author “mines the homoeroticism of female bonds complicated by affection and loyalty” (Gaines, 2012).

The portrayal of female friendship in this novel has many layers; it is not necessarily meant to showcase healthy friendships but rather the intensity with which these relationships can be lived at this age, as well as how painful and isolating a betrayal can feel, whether or not this sense of betrayal is justified. Ultimately, Abbott’s illustration of

female friendship is intricate and nostalgic, emphasizing the impact of volatile friendships on emotionally unstable young women: “I hate how everything changes, always,” Beth once says to Addy, “But you don’t” (Abbott: 64).

### **2.3. Abuse of power**

There is a “stakes-raising quality” (Abbott: 334) to the story, which is why the author found the phrase “dare me” fitting for the title. Power or lack thereof is a predominant theme as wanting power is the motivation behind most of the characters. This way, it makes sense that *Dare Me* displays a relationship rooted in inequality, which is the relationship between Coach French and Addy Hanlon. At some points, the age gap between the cheerleaders and Coach can be forgotten, the former, so eager to grow up and act adult-like, and the latter’s hesitation to stick to the status-quo and accept her new life where she is a mother and a wife. It can feel like not that long has passed since Colette was the cheerleaders’ age, but it has been at least a decade.

Colette quickly becomes a role model for Addy and the girls because she embodies what they believe a strong woman to be. Moreover, the girls see themselves in Coach. We can observe this, for example, when Addy claims Coach is “So unconcerned with our nonsense. Bored with it. A boredom we know” (Abbott: 12). Appropriately, this boredom is mentioned again as something they experience themselves: “It’s something you feel constantly, the thing you fight off all the time. The knot of hot boredom lodged behind your eyes (...)” (Abbott: 79). Therefore, although she is an adult, they feel like she is an adult that they can trust and relate to. They look up to her and they attribute not only their physical progress to her, but their personal growth as well, as we can see in this key quote by RiRi: “To Coach, who’s made us women” (Abbott: 62). Coach treats cheer with a seriousness that the girls had been waiting for, as the sport is something that people

usually used as a reason to ridicule and judge them. She promotes ideas of feminism and female empowerment: “We are learning that our bodies are our own and they are the squad’s and that is all” (Abbott: 20). Similarly, she encourages feminine rage, assuring them that they are “not pretty, cute young things” but rather “the most vital part of one thing, the perfect thing” (Abbott: 21). However, her feminism feels inauthentic as many of her actions throughout the novel point to the fact that she does not care about uplifting the squad, and often neglects them. For instance, we see this once she begins to lose interest in the squad and stops showing up to cheer practice.

Without Addy and the girls even being aware of it, they alter their behavior to be in their Coach’s good graces. This is oftentimes at their own expense and even bad for their health, e.g. completely changing their diets and developing eating disorders so they can stay on the team. For Addy, her relationship with Coach affects several aspects of her life, as Coach begins to influence plenty of her decisions subliminally. Driven by her desire to have acceptance and approval from her, the changes she goes through range from what she eats to which boys she takes an interest in. On many occasions, Colette evidently surpasses the professional relationship she has with Addy. She is aware that Addy is infatuated with her and she often exploits this reality to her advantage even though she does not reciprocate Addy’s feelings. Though it should be mentioned that Coach and Addy are never intimate with one another, she does repeatedly put Addy in inappropriate, sexually charged situations. In one of these scenarios, Addy even states that “(...) it feels like I’m talking to a boy, a guy, an older one, or from another school” (Abbott: 35). Furthermore, Colette gradually influences Addy’s opinion of Beth, knowingly causing a strain in their friendship until she creates a noticeable divide between Beth and the rest of the girls in the squad. By distancing the two protagonists and polarizing them, it is easier for Coach to manipulate Addy and abuse her power.

This dynamic reaches its decisive point when Colette makes Addy pick her up from a crime scene, consequently involving her in Sarge Will's murder. She also lies to her about the nature of the situation, making her believe Will committed suicide. When Addy drops Coach off at her house, after having had to see Will's corpse, Coach simply tells her to "go home and pretend it never happened" (Abbott: 157). Afterwards, Addy asks her "Will the police call me?" (Abbott: 175), yet Coach does not address Addy's involvement as an accessory to murder. Instead, she focuses on her own safety and wellbeing. The protagonist narrates: "It's not until a long time later, standing at my school locker that I think, *But I was asking about me. Will the police call me? But, Coach, what about me?*" (Abbott: 175). Coach continues to discard her by keeping her in the dark about what she tells the police and making Addy her alibi.

For a good part of the novel, Addy fails to realize that Coach's intermittent acts of affection do not translate as genuine love and care. She struggles to accept the fact that Colette disregarded her and did not protect her, arguing: "(...) Coach would never let anything happen to me. *You can, she told us, fall eleven feet and still land safely on a spring floor* (Abbott: 216). Ironically, this quote symbolizes Coach's lack of engagement when it comes to the girls' welfare, specifically Addy's. There is some truth to her actions and she is a mentor to the girls in the squad, but it is always on her own terms. In other words, "(...) Coach allows close proximity but isn't achievable" (Graham, 2020).

### **3. Conclusions**

The aim of this dissertation has been to analyze how Megan Abbott's *Dare Me* navigates teen girl angst, female friendship and abuse of power. The novel treats teen girl angst and female friendship not only as themes that should not be trivialized, but also as pertinent when facing conversations about abuse of power. Ultimately, it shows that it is easier for

an adult in a position of power to abuse their power when the victim is someone who feels lost and unsure of themselves. Besides that, Coach separates Addy from the person she is closest to, Beth, because she exhibits ongoing distrust towards Coach. In doing so, Coach isolates Addy from the only person who contradicts her point of view on her. The girls undergo a sort of brainwashing while Colette is their leader that many critics, as well as the novel's publisher, find reminiscent of Fincher's *Fight Club*. In the world of the novel, however, this brainwashing is never questioned by anyone except for Beth, even though she does have ulterior motives. Virtually, the only reason Beth feels suspicious about Coach at first, is that she feels threatened by her and the possibility she might replace her role in Addy's life.

Moreover, *Dare Me* encapsulates the ephemerality of female friendship while also highlighting how significant loyalty and validation can be in formative years. Essentially, the novel successfully deals with the topics covered in this dissertation because the author treats issues that affect young women with seriousness and depth. In doing so, Abbott breaks away from harmful stereotypes and prejudice towards emotionally unstable teenage girls. Embracing feminine rage, the story "exposes the physical and psychological extremes that some young women are willing to endure in order to get ahead" (Flook, 2019). The characters illustrate the struggle some American girls face in their coming of age, all while being aware they are often seen as bodies rather than people, "(...) the façade of beauty and war paint insubstantial when integrity and a true sense of self are at stake" (Gaines, 2012). Because of these reasons, *Dare Me* is a departure from the way that teenage female characters have traditionally been represented in literature and media.

## Bibliography

### Primary source

Abbott, Megan. *Dare Me*, 2012. Reagan Arthur Books, United States.

### Secondary Sources

*American Psychological Association*, <https://dictionary.apa.org/existentialism> (Accessed 17 January 2023)

“Angst and Despair” – Kierkegaard”. *Eternalized*, <https://eternalisedofficial.com/2020/10/02/angst/>, 2020 (Accessed 12 December 2022)

Atkinson, Nathalie. “*Dare Me* Creator Megan Abbott on the Dramatic World of Competitive Cheerleading”. *The Globe and Mail*, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/television/article-dare-me-creator-megan-abbott-on-the-dramatic-world-of-competitive/>, 2020 (Accessed 17 January 2023)

Berndt, Thomas J. “The Features and Effects of Friendship in Early Adolescence”. *Child Development*, Vol. 53 (6), 1982: 1447-1460.

Boffey, Daniel. “Growing Up Gets Tougher for Girls as 'Teen Angst' Levels Rise”. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/apr/17/teenage-girls-angst-depression-demos>, 2011 (Accessed 22 December 2022)

Cain, Chelsea. “Bring It On”. *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/books/review/dare-me-by-megan-abbott.html>, 2012 (Accessed 24 December 2022)

Cargill, Acie. *Grooming: Sexual Abuse of Teenage Girls*. Independently published, 2020.

Davidson, Sherwin & Packard, Ted. “The Therapeutic Value of Friendship Between

- Women". *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 1981: 495–510.
- Dietz, Park. "Grooming and Seduction". *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 33 (1), 2018: 28-36.
- Douvan, Elizabeth & Adelson, Joseph. *The Adolescent Experience*. New York: Wiley, 1966.
- Flook, Ray. "'Dare Me': USA Network's Megan Abbott Adapt Combines Teen Angst, Cheerleading & Murder". Bleeding Cool, <https://bleedingcool.com/tv/dare-me-usa-networks-megan-abbott-adapt-combines-teen-angst-cheerleading-murder-trailer/> , 2019 (Accessed 4 January 2023)
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Problem of Anxiety*. Connecticut: Martino Fine Books, 2013.
- Gaines, Luan. "Book Review: Megan Abbot's *Dare Me*". *Curled Up with a Good Book*, [https://www.curledup.com/dare\\_me.htm](https://www.curledup.com/dare_me.htm) , 2012 (Accessed 4 January 2023)
- Graham, Trudie. "Love and Repression in *Dare Me*". *Film Daze*, <https://filmdaze.net/love-and-repression-in-dare-me/>, 2020 (Accessed 24 December 2022)
- Kahn, Jeffrey P. *Angst: Origins of Anxiety and Depression*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Concept of Anxiety*. Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *The Gendered Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- McManus, Michelle. "Grooming: An Expert Explains What it is and How to Identify it". *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/grooming-an-expert-explains-what-it-is-and-how-to-identify-it-181573>, 2022 (Accessed 12 December 2022)
- Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/angst> (Accessed 17 January 2023)
- Muscari, Mary E. *Child Behavioral and Parenting Challenges for Advanced Practice*

*Nurses: A Reference for Frontline Health Care Providers*. New York: Springer Publishing, 2016.

Priess, Heather A., Lindberg, Sara M., & Hyde, Janet S. “Adolescent Gender-Role Identity and Mental Health: Gender Intensification Revisited”, 2009. *Child Development*, Vol. 80 (5), 1531–1544.

Smith, Taylor C. “They Should Know Better: Recognizing Sexual Grooming and Culpability Placement in Adolescents versus Children”. John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2021.

### **Filmography**

David Fincher. 1999. *Fight Club*. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.

Megan Abbott. 2019. *Dare Me*. USA Network & Netflix.

Michael Lehmann. 1988. *Heathers*. New World Pictures.