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Author/Interview subject: Juno Dawson (JD)
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)
Other speakers: Audience (Aud), Cal (C), Lena (L)

JF: Hello there, a very, very warm welcome indeed to Authors Live. My name is Janice Forsyth. I'm absolutely thrilled to have your company today, wherever you are watching, you are so welcome.

Brilliant to have you here and in fact, of course, not only you and me here but also a terrific audience with me in the studio. They are pupils from St Margaret's Academy in West Lothian. And they are just as eager as I am, and as you are, to hear from one of the most exciting names in young adult fiction in recent years the award winning Juno Dawson.

Now Juno has written several novels for young people and also some non-fiction including *This Book is Gay*. Her most recent non-fiction title is *Mind Your Head* and we will be talking about that today. But the thing is I'm going to have a chat with Juno about her work but what's much more important about that is hearing from you.

Some schools have sent us in questions already but there is still loads of time for you to do that so please, please, do it. Especially if you have a class or school Twitter account all you do is use the hashtag #BBCAuthorsLive. So get thinking of some brilliant questions and get them in soon because I just want to ask lots of your questions to Juno today.

I'll shut up right now though and ask you and our lovely pupils here to give a huge, enormous, Authors Live welcome to Juno Dawson.

JD: Hello.

JF: Ah, you are so welcome here.

JD: Thank you very much for having me.

JF: Oh it's brilliant and you don't look like an archetypal teacher but you used to be a teacher.

JD: I did. Yeah.

JF: What did you teach?

JD: I taught primary. So, no, hang on, we are in Scotland. So I'm not entirely...in the UK, in England, sorry, that was years one to six.

JF: Right. Okay.

JD: But I suspect that's different here.

JF: Yeah. Primary School. Primary. Yeah.

JD: Yeah, and so I mainly taught year six. So 10 and 11 year olds back in the day. It feels like a lifetime ago now.

JF: I'm sure it did but did you enjoy it?

JD: I loved it, yeah. I think being a teacher should be the most fun, creative and enjoyable job in the world. And I loved working with young people and I loved coming up with ridiculous lesson ideas and taking children on boat trips to the Antarctic, just around the pier, and things like that.

But, you know, teaching and the teachers out there watching this will know that, you know, the powers that be are determined to make it an unpleasurable experience for teachers and I would argue some pupils as well. So it's a real shame and that's why now I spend a lot of time trying to bring about education reform as well. Because I just I feel bad for teachers and I feel bad for you as well. I think we put too much pressure on you so...

JF: And you just...so using that wee sort of like snapshot of, you know, a trip round the Antarctic but you were just outside locally but that's all about telling stories. And I wonder, you know, making the switch from teaching to being an author sounds incredibly dramatic. Maybe it wasn't. I mean were you always a kind of story telling person anyway?

JD: Yeah. I think I was a story teller first. Anything, you know, I remember now, you would call it fanfiction back in the day, because I grew up in the late Jurassic period.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: We didn't have the word fanfiction because we didn't really have the internet. So what I would do is I would write little Doctor Who stories for my grandma just on pieces of white A4. And I would do little illustrations and I would set

them between the ones that had been on the telly.

JF: Who was your doctor? Who was your favourite?

JD: Sylvester McCoy was my doctor.

JF: Oh, the Scot.

JD: And I know he's kind...well he is Scottish but he's much maligned whereas I love Sylvester McCoy because he's my doctor and so I used to write little stories for my grandma and all through my teens I used to write.

I used to write little soap operas. Then when I got to university I wrote for the university newspaper. I did a bit of...a bit of freelance journalism in my twenties but I'd always written. But I just didn't think that normal people from normal families in Bradford could be authors.

JF: Yeah.

JD: I thought you had to have some sort of special background or, you know, come from like a literary dynasty or something. But of course the great thing about being an author is that it is purely about talent and it doesn't matter what your background is. What your gender is. What your sexuality is. Whether you are rich or poor. If you finish the book and if you are talented and if you get it out there it will find its audience and it will find a publisher.

JF: That's important isn't it what you said if you finish the book because...absolutely it's about talent. I mean you've just described from being little and writing those stories to your gran and then all the way through to journalism. It's about keeping writing as well isn't it?

JD: You have to, you know. Now, you know, I have a wedding on Saturday and I will place a bet right now that somebody is going to come up to me at that wedding and say, I've had a great idea for a book. I'm like, great, get back to me in 90,000 words...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...and then we will talk. Like what are you going to do? Sell an idea to a publisher that, you know. It doesn't work like that and, you know. I wrote my first book Hollow Pike when I was a teacher and I was doing it on weekends and I was doing it on school holidays and my friends thought I was mad. They were like, why aren't you coming to the pub or why aren't you coming out for a coffee? And I was kind of like, well I'm going to work on my book and

they were like, uh-huh.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: Yeah this is definitely going to happen. We'll all be in Waterstones buying that fantasy [laughs]. But, you know, it did, you know, I finished it and the, you know, anything worth having takes sacrifice. Whether it's athletics or whether it's your career aspirations, you know, you have to give up your time and you've got to put in the work.

JF: And it's important to say, because also I remember distinctly because of Chris Hoy, you know, the multi Olympic Gold Medal winning athlete who was on talking about being a sports person and also being a writer. And it is that thing, you don't want to seem too daunting but for folk maybe in our audience here, or wherever they are watching, and maybe think they like the idea of writing started. It's easy to be put off and think, ouch it's a bit rubbish or not good enough, but it is worth keeping going, isn't it?

JD: It's a **[muscle, 5.54.8]** that the more you read and the more you write the better your own writing gets. And I'm not a massive fan of dolling out writing advice because everybody does it differently but I think the one thing that we all agree on is that the more you do it the better you get.

JF: Yeah.

JD: And, as well, read good books and read bad books, you know. Read good books and steal from them, you know. None of us are original.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: And also read bad books and learn what doesn't work and read, you know, if you really hate a book why did you really hate a book and how can you avoid that in your own writing?

JF: And then was it very clear for you Juno that's...right I'm going to write for this particular readership these, you know, young adults as that category is now called? Was that kind of clear for you that that's where you would be happiest writing?

JD: Yeah and I think to be honest I didn't think a novel was in me until I was teaching and it was one of those where I knew the books that I had to teach, you know, the old sort of favourites and, you know, all the kids in my year said...because they had all read Harry Potter and, you know. So I thought right I need something new and so I just remember going into, at the time,

Borders. The now sadly departed Borders. And saying to somebody, you know, if my class really loved this kind of thing what will they love? And they recommended Noughts & Crosses by Malorie Blackman which to be honest, I don't know if that's entirely suitable for year six, but they loved it.

They...because, you know, that book had everything, you know. It's about terrorism, it's a Romeo and Juliet story, it's deeply philosophical in that changed the way I thought about racism and I just thought, gosh this has everything. And what's brilliant...sorry there is bit of hair in my eye. Go. Thank you.

What's brilliant about Wi-Fiction, because it's not a genre, because like you say it's just a market, you can do everything. So you can do a bit of science fiction, a bit horror, a bit of romance and I loved that I wasn't tethered by the limitations of adult genres. Whereby you go into Waterstones and you genuinely do have crime, romance, science fiction and fantasy. I love that I can do it all and that's, you know in YA the only caveat is, you know, it has to be broadly about teenagers and their voice and their experience.

JF: That's the thing that I can't...I find extraordinary about you, you know, in the fiction and even in this new book we are about to talk about Mind Your Head it's like how come you've got a direct channel to the teenage psyche? I mean are you...

JD: [Laughs]

JF: ...have you got a great memory of what it's like to be a teenager yourself?

JD: It's because I'm 17.

JF: I thought so [laughs]. Look at the audience.

JD: I lied.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: No, I don't know. I think it's a mixture of a lot of things and we could probably talk a lot about because I'm actually working on an adult memoir now which kind of taps into this a lot. And I think A I never really stopped working with young people so I think I was 21 when I became a teacher. So I was working with 11 year olds. Then as soon as I left education I was straight into working with young adults.

So I've never stopped and, you know, I do meet lots and lots of young people

and I take on board what you are saying and there is a conversation there on Twitter and Facebook as well. But a lot of it as well is I think because obviously I was writing initially as James, I think there was an element that I never maybe grew up, you know. There was, I still think now that I'm transitioning I still have a lot of growing up to do and so maybe I am just genuinely the world's oldest teenage girl.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: There is a dim possibility that that might well be the thing. So I think it's a lot of different things.

JF: Yes and this book Mind Your Head it's quite something. I mean, for a start, I loved the cover. I mean the cover is sensational.

JD: Yes.

JF: It's very colourful. It leaps out at you from the library shelf or the book shop shelf. But also it's just such a terrific illustration the idea of, you know, the wee person and then there is all this [laughs] kind of explosion of thoughts, problems and all the rest of it. This is quite collaborative this book isn't it?

JD: Yes.

JF: Because it's Juno but also it just says here, with advice from Dr Olivia Hewitt, and Olivia is a Clinical Psychologist but she is also an old mate of yours isn't she?

JD: Yeah. We studied because I...my background was in clinical psychology as well. That was my undergrad degree and there was a whole bunch of us and I went to university in North Wales. So it was a very tight community because it wasn't the biggest happening kind of city in the world and Olivia and I, yeah, we lived together from pretty much from year one right through to year three. She continued on and did her Masters and did her Doctorate whereas I obviously chipped off and went into education.

I mean obviously a big shout out to Gemma Correll who did the illustrations as well because Gemma Correll is responsible for the Pugs not Drugs T-shirts. And when I found out she was going to be illustrating Mind Your Head I was delighted because I think they're hysterical.

But Olivia, on a more serious note, I...there are lots of books out there, written by authors, who are not doctors, about mental health and I think it's quite irresponsible. And so as soon as it was decided that Mind Your Head was

going to be the next title straight away I said to my publisher, can I work with my friend Olivia? And Olivia is not an author, she is not a writer.

So how it came about is in the end we went off on a holiday together and we went...we got a cottage on the Isle of Wight and we just holed up in there for about ten days, me and the dog and Olivia. And we kind of...we did all of her bits there. So it was kind of...so I was like, right, what would you have to say about self-harm? What would you have to say about anorexia? What would you have to say about anxiety? And we...and then so I took all her advice and all her information and then I went back to London and I kind of formed it into a book.

JF: Yeah and that's lovely actually having that long relationship...

JD: Uh-huh.

JF: ...and that trust in each other. That must be a huge shortcut rather than the publisher going, hey we've got a clinical psychologist...

JD: Yes.

JF: ...for you to come and work with and I think that informs the whole sort vibe of this book.

JD: I hope so.

JF: It's what I was saying earlier on it's about how you can sort of, you know, channel that teenage sensibility. It's an interesting balancing act though isn't it because, as you say, it's very important to get this stuff right?

JD: Exactly.

JF: And you are saying there are other books out there though maybe they don't and it's so important and at the same time I'm talking about this being colourful, it's also fun and easy to read too.

JD: Yeah and that's been my thing the whole way through the non-fiction which is there are textbooks out there and there are really good textbooks out there but I wasn't interested in writing a textbook. I mean what I will say about when it comes to mental health if it helps, it helps. And there are lots of books out there, lots of different philosophies, yoga your way to better mental health, Pilates for mental health, drink the right cup of tea and it will fix your mental health. Look at a sunset and dance on a beach it will cure you of anxiety and that's great because if it works, it works.

But because I was coming at it from a, you know, a very holistic point of view which is your body and your mind and your work life and your home life and your social life all need to be looked at. Because it all adds to your general wellbeing and that did include, you know, looking at brain chemicals and what's actually going on in your head and...

JF: And how during these teenage years all of that changes so radically?

JD: Of course. Yeah. And for a lot of people a medicinal approach works.

JF: Uh-huh.

JD: And so actually that's why I thought it was really important to have a doctor on board to kind of fact check what I was saying you know, because medication doesn't work for everybody but it works for a lot of people. And so I wanted to slightly separate the fact from the fiction as well. Because very much like with *This Book is Gay*, a lot of the time, depending on what the PSH is like at your schools you might have heard a half a story or half a truth. And so it was about trying to get to the facts as well. Kind of like, oh if I take anti-depressants will be on them for the rest of my life? Things like that and trying to bust some myths and some misconceptions as well.

JF: And obviously you embrace the whole online thing too. If you go online you can see Juno and you do...you have done a sort of agony aunt thing where...

JD: Yes.

JF: ...and it's just very straightforward. You are so down to earth and just really accessible and I guess that must all inform this too the same of approach it's informal but it's responsible as well?

JD: Yeah. It's about how I wish I had been spoken to when I was at school. I mean we...I don't know if we should do a trigger warning but we already have spoken about self-harm and eating disorders. And if you're watching this and this is raising some difficult feelings I would say, do speak to a teacher. Do find the guidance counsellor or the school counsellor and reach out to the person that you feel you trust because, you know, this conversation does stir up a lot of feelings.

JF: Of course.

JD: And what I wouldn't have...again this is a very personal thing, but what I wouldn't have responded to as a teenager was a doctor because I didn't really feel there was anything wrong with me. And it was only as an adult that I

really started to piece together what anxiety felt like kind of and, you know, it's not appropriate for everyone to chip off to their GP. And actually it is about sort of finding that person that chimes with you and gets it and it might be your friend, it might be a YouTuber. It might be the teacher and it might be the school counsellor because actually for young people actually what you probably need is time out of class and extra time in exams and actually a GP is not going to be very helpful with that. A GP can't do anything about those things.

So it's about kind of just [pause]...and as well if we keep the conversation around mental health deathly serious all the time it almost builds it up to be this huge goliath. Whereas actually, and the whole point of Mind Your Head is, I think mental illness kind of affects all of us and so we all need to have a conversation about it. And actually that conversation doesn't need to be scary because, gosh, you know, we've already talked about the fact I might have food poisoning and, you know, why should...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...my mental health be any different to food poisoning, you know. We've all had a good old laugh about my food poisoning why can't we also have a good old laugh about anxiety or depression because as awful as they are they are just illnesses.

JF: Yeah and as you said this might be stirring difficulties, difficult feelings for people right now, just to say to you also at our website you will find a whole list of links there for organisations and helplines and all the rest of it. So that is all there. I'm sure you've got access to that at school too.

Is there any, just in terms of your own interacting with people generally, do you find that there is one particular topic that you receive most kind of questions about?

JD: It's because Mind Your Head came out this January so it's still fairly fresh. I get a letter every single day from This Book is Gay. That's the one that really seems to have struck a cord and I just think the thing with This Book is Gay, shall I hold it up to try and display it?

JF: Yes hold it up. Thank you.

JD: With my dead name on. Although you can now find them if you're really good, in the wild, there are ones with Juno on the front now.

JF: Yeah.

JD: Good luck hunting them out. But since *This Book is Gay* came out, I think that was two years ago now, every single day I get... It's difficult because I get a lot of letters from young people asking how they should come out which is impossible because there is no one way to come out. It's very much about you and your situation and making sure a 100 per cent that you are safe and surrounded by support.

But then a lot of letters just saying thank you very much this has helped me to understand that, you know, I am bi-sexual and that's nothing to be ashamed of. I am gender queer that's nothing to be ashamed of and I think a lot of young adult, both fiction and non-fiction, is about making young people feel like that they are not the only one like them in the world. Because, you know, when I was growing up in a very small town in Yorkshire I didn't think there was anybody else like me and actually of course there were hundreds and hundreds of people exactly like me.

JF: Yeah and that's a terrifying prospect...

JD: Hmm.

JF: ...but the fact of you being here talking to us now and also you're a school role model...

JD: Yes.

JF: ...for Stonewall.

JD: Yeah.

JF: Now if people don't know about Stonewall would you mind telling us a little bit about it?

JD: Yeah. So Stonewall is actually a lobbying organisation and their key mandate is to sort of put pressure on particularly the media but also politicians in raising awareness of LGBT issues and quite recently T actually. It was just LGB for a long time.

But similarly they have now branched out, sort of following on from diversity role models, in that they now send sort of high profile LGBT figures from the media or from industry politicians, authors, dancers, actors and send them into schools. Just to tell your story with that soul aim of making young people feel like what they might be going through they are certainly not the first

person to experience that and again just to make it, put a human face to it, you know.

One of the big things over the last 10 years from Stonewall has been around homophobic language. So sort of like that books so gay. Well, This Book is Gay, and that's where the whole title came from, you know.

JF: Yes.

JD: Those shoes are gay, that pencil case is gay and, you know, to make sure that no young person in a school across the UK could say, I've never met somebody from the LGBT community. Because once you can put a face to a community, you know, you start to understand it a bit more. And you start to understand, you start to see the similarities before you see the differences and I think really that should be the goal. One of the goals of education which is just to bring people from different groups that little bit closer together.

JF: And LGBT stands for?

JD: Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual Transgender and then can also have Q and curious and A-sexual and pansexual and demisexual...[sighs]

JF: The whole alphabet?

JD: There is the whole alphabet. The whole...we are all there. We're all covered.

JF: It is remarkable because, as I say, not only the colourful cover but it's a small book, a wee book, as we say in Scotland.

JD: It is a wee book. Yes.

JF: But it's so packed with information and I know you talked about being holed up in the cottage with you, Olivia and the dog...

JD: And the dog.

JF: ...and figuring everything out and, as you say, that the illustrations by Gemma are really important too. But it's the whole way it's laid out and you've got tables and even just, you know. I love that, the picture of the wee person absolutely sweating over their homework or whatever.

JD: Yes, a little exam heart. Yes.

JF: You've packed a lot in there haven't you?

JD: Hmm.

JF: How did you figure out...I mean was it easy when it came to figuring out the topics that you would actually cover?

JD: It sort of...it was, I can't remember the exact point we decided to do it like this but the book kind of goes through severity, I guess, in that we start out at the very beginning with the notion that we are all, at some point, going to experience some form of mental health issue.

JF: And that's really important isn't it?

JD: Of course.

JF: Because for so long it's not only been not been talked about but if it was it would be like that happened to someone else...

JD: Oh yeah. Don't talk to them. Yeah it's kind of...

JF: ...and it's terrifying.

JD: cross the road.

JF: Yeah.

JD: But actually...because I mean the official statistic is that...well for young people it would be three in ten is that right? No it's one in ten. So, yeah, three in every class. In a class of 30 there will be three people who will have a diagnosable mental health problem and you see that's tricky because that means a doctor has to be involved. Whereas I think it's actually more likely to be ten in ten because actually if you are going to sit an exam in the run up to the period who isn't going to experience worry? And there is a very fine line between worry and anxiety because if you start to worry about worrying then actually you are in anxiety territory.

And so I think, you know, I don't think any young person is going to get through school without having that pressure put on them and, you know, that is going to impact on your mental health, you know. If it's making you feel sick, if it's making you nervous then it's having an impact and so we start off with that. We start off with stress, exams, there is revision timetables in there to help you organise yourselves

But then it gets to the diagnosable conditions. So your anxiety is the most common now with young people closely followed by depression. Then those two things underpin a lot of other things like eating disorders, self-harm and

then it gets more serious to your personality disorders and then looking at addiction and substance abuse problems at the end.

JF: And the most important message that comes through it, I mean there are lots of messages, Juno, but the most important is, you know, don't feel that you are alone and any issue just make that first step ask somebody.

JD: Ask for help.

JF: Seek advice, that's it.

JD: As well, I mean the biggest chapter in the book is actually about the different kinds of help that are out there because there are some many kinds of help be it from very informal sources. So just going on websites like [The Site \[22.25.2\]](#) or Young Minds or Mind or Talk to Frank about drugs and alcohol. Do that. It's anonymous, you can go online, you can get so much good information on the site. There are forums which are moderated by mental health professionals or even just accessing people like Zoella, you know, who talks so eloquently about her experience of anxiety, you know, and she's become such a role model for young people.

So, you know, there is, you know, all those informal ones talk to your friends, talk to your family, talk to a teacher and then, you know, it gets more formal. You can ask to see your school counsellor, or you know, a lot of young people don't realise they can see any GP. It doesn't have to be their GP. They can just ring a doctor and make an appointment. You can choose whether it's a male or female doctor, young or old. They can't tell your parents and importantly there is no minimum age, you know, you are never too young to book an appointment to see a doctor.

JF: Well I've learnt something. I didn't know. Thank you, Juno.

JD: That's okay.

JF: And so we were talking...we were talking a lot about Mind Your Head but also as we started off talking about you as a story teller with fiction. I'm sure you've been asked that before but it's like when you talk to actors and say, do you prefer acting in film, in television or the theatre?

JD: Hmm.

JF: That's what it's like with you because doing both non-fiction and fiction...

JD: Hmm.

JF: ... I guess it uses a different bit of your brain it's a different approach perhaps?

JD: Yeah and it's...I mean I love them both equally. With the non-fiction it's my voice and so I just get to sort of dole out advice...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...the way I like it and if you like it that's great and if you don't write your own frankly.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: I mean I always say that there is, you know, this is not the definitive book about sex and sexuality. Please write your own. But the great thing about the books is that, you know, I get to be a character and I get to be people who aren't just me and...you know. I don't think I could be without either of them, you know.

I'm very lucky in that I've got my monthly column for Glamour, I've got a monthly column for Attitude magazine so there will always be my journalistic voice that can come through. But similarly, you know, the book that I am working on right now I mean it won't be out for a couple of yours but, you know, this character she just arrived demanding that I write this book. And I was going to do something else but she was like, nope this is what has happened to me, you have got to tell my story and she wasn't going to shut up unless I wrote the book so...

JF: Has that happened before with characters who just sort of arrive fully formed or has this one particularly insistent?

JD: Molly Sue in Under My Skin. So Molly Sue is the evil tattoo and it's got a very sweet innocent girl called Sally who gets this tattoo, who is the pin up girl called Molly Sue, and Molly Sue... I want to state for the record that none of my tattoos talk to me or tell me to kill people.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: My lawyers have told me that it's advisable to put that one out there. But Molly Sue, she was ready, she's this like very dark seductive kind of presence kind of prompting Sally to make some very bad choices. Molly Sue and do you know it's usually the villains, it's usually the slightly edgy characters. Polly in All of the Above, she kind of was fully formed as well.

JF: Yeah and its interesting you talking about your other journalistic work because I imagine it's like anything the subjects that you study, you know, one might inform another. You don't just learn about that subject and it has nothing to do with this one. I am imagining with all the interaction you have with people there is no way that some of that isn't going to come to bear in terms of ideas and inspiration.

JD: Well absolutely. I think, you know, I've gotten better at hiding...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...my friends in the books. I think particularly if you look at my first couple some of my friends have been like, oh please, could I have been a bit more obvious in that book. And now it's a bit more, you know, I hide people and sort of amalgamate people that I know but, yeah, it all passes over.

So I mean, yes, Mind Your Head is very obviously about mental health but so is all of the above just in a more, you know, it's woven throughout the story, you know. Polly self-harms, Daisy has an eating disorder, it's never mentioned but it's pretty clear to me that Toria the main character is just a nervous bag of anxiety. She doesn't talk about it but it should be fairly obvious that she's a nervous wreck.

JF: Yeah and we also talked about this whole young adult category that you write for. It's such a burgeoning scene isn't it? There are so many interesting authors out there. Do you think that's because...I suppose it could be a couple of things, people see great writing and they want to be part of it or it's just the idea of that freedom that you talked about.

JD: Uh-huh.

JF: You've got a brilliant audience out there challenging too...

JD: Yeah.

JF: ...because if you're patronising they are not going to read on are they?

JD: No. No. What I love about writing for young adults is that you are super honest. Actually children are even more honest like, I hate this. But what I love about young adults is that if the pace isn't there, if it's waffly, if it's overly florid, they are like...it starts to feel like a school book. Like, and now we would like you to analyse the curtains, kind of why were they red? Who cares? It's a curtain. So...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...and that is again coming back to, you know, Hunger Games, Noughts & Crosses, you know, it has its detractors but Twilight, you know, these were books that propelled you forward and they kept you from the very first page. And all the very best YA it is beautifully written but it also it's powerful and it can in some way change you. I mean it's 20 years this year since Melvin Burgess released Junk which is a seminal Carnegie winner about a young couple who become addicted to heroin. And, you know, if you were thinking about heroin before you read that book you certainly wouldn't after, you know. It's a really powerful book.

Patrick Ness is incredibly powerful and John Green, obviously, and I guess, you know, I wanted to be part of that amazing group of authors kind of. But there is something as well in your...it may be particularly obvious for somebody who is transitioning, there is something about being a teenager. In that there is no other time your life where you are going to go as much change as quickly as puberty and all of my novels in some way, again surprise...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...are about transformation. About a character at the beginning of the book and something is going to happen to them whether it's Bloody Mary popping out of the mirror or whether it's meeting two people and falling in love with them like In all of the Above. Something happens that fundamentally changes you to your core and that's kind of what I'm interested in writing about and that's why YA is a natural fit for me because all of us here we are transforming.

JF: Yeah. We are working you hard. We are making you talk a lot but I wondered do you want to do a reading from your book at all?

JD: I would. Yeah. Let's do it. Let's go. So I'm going to do a bit from Mind Your Head and I'm going to do a bit right from the very beginning whereby it kind of just sets up the whole philosophy of what I wanted to do. It's called Sexy Diseases.

Have you ever noticed how it's easier to talk about some medical problems more than others? A broken arm or leg, while admittedly trick to conceal, often comes with a zany skiing anecdote and we make jokes about man flu and food poisoning and hangovers. Crickey some hangovers are so

legendary they are almost the stuff of myth.

Some illnesses cancer, HIV, strokes are talked about with deathly respect, and rightly so, while others, anything involving pooh-poohs and pee-pees, food poisoning, are considered crass to discuss. We can embarrassed and conscious other people might not want to hear about such problems over dinner.

But perhaps the hardest problems of all to talk about are mental illnesses. While we would be quite happy to sign a plaster cast or bring someone a lovely Lemsip rarely do you hear people discussing their mental health problems. When we do they are often met with little sympathy considered weak or broken, accused of faking or worse treated like a potential Jack the Ripper.

Have you ever heard the phrase, squirrels are just rats with better PR? Well mental illness needed to hear a sassy PR person years ago. The reason people are reluctant to discuss their mental health problems in the way they might talk about the flu is partly a politeness issue. People are also funny about talking about diarrhoea or thrush for instance, not me clearly. But also I think it's a public relations problem.

The basic truth of the matter is that some diseases are just sexier than others. I think we all need to be more open about mental health. You see I have a theory. Current statistics indicate that one in four of us will experience some kind of mental health trauma in the course of a year. But I think if we were all completely honest the statistic is more like four in four of us will experience some sort of mental health problem over the course of the year and that's why we all need to talk about it.

JF: Thank you very much. I think we should have a round of applause for Juno. Yeah. Thank you. And if there is a school somewhere that has just joined us, this is Authors Live [laughs].

Aud: [Female] Hiya.

JF: Hello. Juno Dawson reading there from Mind Your Head and we have a couple of questions from people in our audience.

JD: Excellent.

JF: And then my handsome assistant will bring me some questions that have come from the internet. Hello. What's your name and what's your question?

C: My name is Cal and my question is do you think mental health should be a compulsory part of the curriculum in Scottish schools?

JD: Oh are you ready? Are you ready for the rant...

Aud: [Laughter]

JD: ...that will follow your question? This is one of my big, you know, I've lived and died on the sort of alter of PSH is it called PSH here in Scotland?

Aud: [Voices calling out].

JF: I think so.

JD: Personal Social Health education. PSE?

JF: There is various...

JD: There is some nods. Yeah. PSE. I was, back in the day when I was a teacher, I was a PSE co-ordinator and it was my job to go round lots of different schools in the Brighton and Hove district and make sure that high quality PSE was being taught. High quality sex and relation...blah, blah, blah, blah. High quality sex and relationships education and PSE which of course encapsulates mental health.

It's so frustrating and it's so bewildering to me that PSE is still not mandatory on the national curriculum. The national curriculum tells you you have to do maths, you have to do science, you have to do English, you have to do a modern foreign language. But some schools aren't teaching any PSE and I think it's a crime.

Because unless you are happy and not anxious and not stressed how are you going to well at English and maths anyway and for me the actual priority should be your mental health and your wellbeing in schools. Because unless you feel safe and happy to go to school I don't think you will achieve to your full potential and I really believe that.

And I say this as somebody who experienced homophobic bullying all through school and hated it every day that I had to go there. I knew I had to go, I knew I had to get through those exams because I knew it was my best bet of getting out of the tiny little town where I grew up and, hark, here I am. But, you know, I just don't understand, it would be such a simple thing for the government to put in place and they keep blocking it and actually it's not the Education Minister.

JF: I'm not 100 per cent...I think in Scotland with Curriculum for Excellence it is mandatory is that right? PSE. Yeah. So I think it is in Scotland.

JD: Good and hopefully the rest of the UK will follow suit.

JF: Thank you very much. Great question Cal. Thank you. Do we have another question from the audience?

Girl: Hi..

JF: Hiya. What's your name?

L: [Lena 34.04.6], Lena Morrison.

JF: Hello.

L: What young adult fiction would you recommend that deals with mental health issues?

JD: Ooh. Well obviously...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...other than Mind Your Head by Juno Dawson, I think there is a lot of, a lot of it out there. I think if you look at A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, I don't think there are any better books about bereavement than A Monster Calls. You've got Jennifer Niven, All the Bright Places...auch, what is wrong with me. All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven which looks at Bipolar. You've got Will Grayson, Will Grayson by John Green and David Levithan that looks at depression. You've got a book by David Owen called Panther which looks at depression as well.

There are so many out there it's...because so many YA books sort of...oh another one, Am I Normal Yet by Holly Bourne looks at OCD. I would really, really recommend that as well. But there are so many out there. Just read. Read broadly and read widely.

JF: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you for your question. We have some coming in from Elgin Academy, Mr Clarke, S3, who says, Juno, which was the hardest topic in the book to write about?

JD: Ooh.

JF: Is that the case? Is it? Are there some...

JD: There was...

JF: ...that's difficult for you?

JD: ...I think...it's difficult. I think self-harm is really hard to talk about because it is, that chapter is called the Last Taboo, and it's something that I think unless you spend a lot of time researching it and reading lots of different [testimonials, 35.26.9] it's still the one thing that people find very hard to understand if you've never been in that position.

It seems almost alien that somebody would hurt themselves like and because of that it still comes associated with a lot of shame, a lot of people are very ashamed of the fact that they are caught in a cycle of self-harm. And so it's about writing about that in a way that was helpful, that didn't sort of enable the behaviour.

So it was very hard to find a way to say, it's alright you don't have to feel ashamed but at the same time say, but we do need to talk about that and we probably do need to look at how we can stop or control that. Those impulses kind of...because it actually is, it works more like an addiction than anything else actually does self-harm.

JF: Thank you very much. Another question. Ooh, they are already planning your career. Are you planning a follow up to Mind Your Head?

JD: No [laughter]. Is the [short... 36.18.8]. Never ask a yes or no question.

JF: [Laughs]

JD: No, it's been announced now, so I'm allowed to talk about it. My next non-fiction book it's actually largely going to be aimed at adults, although I'm not going to patronise you, a lot of you are reading adult books anyway. Like the clue is in the phrase young adult. But the next book is called The Gender Games. So obviously it's a play on the Hunger Games anyway.

JF: Yes.

JD: And it's kind of...it's my first properly the first time I've written personally. So it's kind of part memoir, part diary of my gender transition and a lot of things I want to say about men, woman, sexism, feminism, patriarchy and lots of those big issues.

JF: And that's a big undertaking for you. That's not a book you are going to write really quickly is it?

- JD: Well [laughs] sadly it's a book that I'm going to have to write...
- JF: [Laughs]
- JD: ...really quickly. But no it's a biggie and that will be out next July.
- JF: Right. God. You are just a writing machine, Juno.
- JD: Uh-huh.
- JF: What was your hardest challenge in school when you were a teacher?
- JD: Erm...
- JF: That's not a yes, no, answer.
- JD: No.
- JF: Yay.
- JD: I came a cropper in the ending I was the worse behaved teacher ever...
- JF: [Laughs]
- JD: ...and this is going to so resonate with the teachers in the room but I just started refusing to do stuff.
- JF: I can see a teacher laughing in our audience [laughter].
- JD: They were like, where's your monthly QDPAGTV figures...
- JF: [Laughs]
- JD: ...for the computer and I was like I don't even know what that is and I haven't done it and I'm not going to do it.
- JF: [Laughs]
- JD: So I think had I not left the teaching profession I would have been fired [laughter] to be honest. Because I just, there is so much paperwork that is so unnecessary and it's not even, it in no way benefits the kids, the young adults, I was teaching [the little kids][37.48.1], you know.
- JF: So it was that side of things rather than what you...?
- JD: Yeah. I just thought...I saw no purpose to it and so I was like just, I'm just not doing it. Sorry I want...

JF: [Laughs]

JD: ...I want to go out. I want to go to McDonald's or whatever and so I was getting in quite a lot of trouble towards the end of my career it has to be said.

JF: The teacher is still laughing possibly slightly enviously.

Aud: Sorry.

JF: Brilliant.

JD: Just write a book. Just get on it [laughter].

JF: This is a yes, no, answer for our final question. Did writing Mind your Head take longer than your novels?

JD: No.

JF: There you go.

JD: The longest one was All of the Above that...I worked very hard on that for a long time because I wanted it to be really beautiful and poetic.

JF: Yeah. Thank you very much indeed. I don't know if Juno's mentioned she's got food poisoning [laughs]. You've done awfully well.

JD: Thank you.

JF: We are just about out of time for today. Thank you so much and thanks to Juno for joining us. I think you are really thought provoking and, as I say, all sorts of information in this particular book Mind Your Head but also if you go online to our website you will find all the links too which is incredibly important

Also, really important, we can watch Juno again, yeah, because it will be online really soon this event along with all the other ones we've done over the months and in fact years. You go to ScottishBookTrust.com/AuthorsLive and this one will be up again very soon.

As I say, you can also watch previous ones and importantly sign up to watch future events. Are you going to do that?

Aud: [Noise from audience]

JF: Yes they nodded, enthusiastically. We will be back soon with more Authors Live but the most important thing of all is thank you very much for watching all of you here and wherever you are watching. And please wherever you are

and right here a huge round of applause and cheers for the fabulous Juno Dawson. Thank you.

JD: Thank you.