

YA authors and mental health: Who's doing it right?

By Nicole Dalrymple

When trying to recommend a book that deals with mental health, it is important to understand the major players. Listed below are a select few authors that have made an impact in YA books and mental health, both recently and long term. It is important to remember that this list represents only a fraction of the authors writing about mental health for young adults out there today. We encourage you to continue finding your own favorites (we recommend Jennifer Niven, featured several other times in this issue, or Kathleen Glasgow of "Girl in Pieces"), and keep the conversation going!

The ones to watch out for

Juno Dawson (previously James)

Juno Dawson has written several young adult novels, mostly fiction. However, in less than six months over 2015 and early 2016, she did two very important things: she announced that she was transitioning into a woman, and she released a book called "Mind Your Head", meant for young adults struggling with mental health. Her non-fiction book is supplemented with additional information by clinical psychologist Doctor Olivia Hewitt, and covers a variety of important issues that young adults may have to deal with (including some more taboo subjects, like personality disorders or self-harm). Juno also wrote "This Book is Gay" (under James), which discusses being what it is like to be anybody, of any gender, or any sexuality, and includes writing from plenty of people under the spectrum. Dawson will be a force to watch out for in the future, and her current non-fiction selections are perfect for young adults looking to learn.

Karen Fortunati

Karen Fortunati's first book, "The Weight of Zero", deals with seventeen-year-old Cath's struggle with Zero - her overwhelming depression. As a teen with bipolar disease, Cath has already attempted suicide once, and her exploration of relationships and psychiatry detail her struggle to not try it again. "The Weight of Zero" was met with widespread applause - it has been named by the New York Public Library as one of the Best Teen Books of 2016, featured in Seventeen Magazine, named one of the 25 Best Books of October by Apple, a Barnes and Noble 2016 Most Anticipated Debut, and an Amazon Editors Favorite Young Adult Books for Fall 2016 (The International Bipolar Foundation, 2017). Fortunati's new book, coming in 2018, will explore mental health and the law. Keep an eye out for "The Arc of a Bullet"!

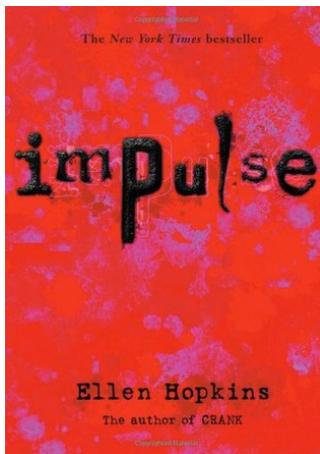
Louise Gornall

Louise Gornall's debut novel, "Under Rose-Tainted Skies", came out in North America in 2017 and has already had an impact on many youth who struggle with mental illness. The main character, Norah, deals with agoraphobia, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder - the

same things that Gornall herself struggles with. Her character is based off of herself, and she wrote the novel during a mental low. When she found the document later, she began to edit it - and history was born. Since then, Gornall has been active in the mental health community with teens, creating the #inshadowselfie encouraging people to post pictures of their shadows to raise awareness for mental health. She is currently studying for her Bachelor of Arts in English, and has found changes in her own mental health since her book was published - “I guess it comes back to that strength in community”, she’s said of the support received (Robbins, 2016).

The tried and true

Ellen Hopkins



It would be irresponsible to create a list of young adult authors that deal with mental health and not include bestselling veteran Ellen Hopkins. Her books address a vast range of mental health issues and consequences - and she holds nothing back. This is important to remember before recommending to younger readers (or anybody without providing adequate trigger warnings). Topics include depression, suicide, pressure from parents, drugs, abuse (both sexual and otherwise), and more. It is important to note that Hopkins has experience with plenty of these issues herself, and some of her books are based on the experiences of her family and her daughter (Hopkins, n.d.). Hopkins has also founded Ventana Sierra, a nonprofit organization that provides resources and housing for

disadvantaged youth interested in furthering their education.

Laurie Halse Anderson

Laurie Halse Anderson has released a number of highly accredited books for young adults, and similar to Hopkins, she has not shied away from difficult topics. Her first, “Speak”, dealt with a girl who stopped talking after being sexually assaulted. After that, she published books like “Catalyst”, which deals with a graduating girl under intense pressure, “Wintergirls”, which tells the story of anorexia, self-harm, and the consequences (including death), and most recently “The Impossible Knife of Memory”, which tackles PTSD. Her books have collected a wide range of awards, including the Margaret A. Edwards Award from the American Library Association for “significant and lasting achievement in young adult literature” (Anderson, n.d.).

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