

From *Notebooks* to *Stars*: Representations of Lesbian and Gay Parents in YA fiction

Cultural products have a profound effect on hearts and minds, and young adult novels, in particular, can lead the newest generation toward empathy and respect for diversity. As increasing numbers of LGBTQ people marry and raise children, the need for novels in which these parents are represented in a positive light is growing. However, a number of works have already been exploring the joys and the trials of kids—gay, straight, queer—with non-heteronormative parents. In 1995, for example, Jacqueline Woodson explored the emotional and interpersonal struggles her young protagonist, Melanin Sun, experiences when his mother tells him that she is in love with a woman. In the intervening years, YA authors have treated LGBTQ families as problems, secrets, and, sometimes, havens of warmth and comfort. In each of these texts, however, the parents' sexuality is very much the "problem." By 2017, though, the landscape looks very different, as protagonist Lolly in *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* struggles with the loss of his beloved brother (and with building Lego towers) but isn't focused on his mother's long-term relationship with another woman. This suggests a new direction in YA novels featuring LGBTQ parents, one that sees parental relationships, in all their forms, as less of the problem and more of the background of the protagonists' lives. In order to show this changing dynamic, this essay will examine several YA novels from 1995-2017 and explore how representations of the lesbian and gay parents have developed over the years.