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Queer Youth in the Province of the “Severely Normal.” By Gloria Filax. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006. xix + 180 pp. Images, notes, references, index. \$85.00 cloth, \$ 29.95 paper.

Gloria Filax poses an important question that has a specific context for the conservatism found in the Canadian prairies, yet is more generally applicable to modern western societies: Can queer youth, who struggle to define themselves as “normal,” negotiate a place of social belonging where heterosexual norms still dominate? She problematizes this question through a complicated mixture of ethnography, discourse analysis, history, and theory. *Queer Youth in the Province of the “Severely Normal”* tells a story about how queer youth in Alberta in the 1990s, unlike their heterosexual counterparts, have been actively excluded from social supports and public education that continue to be linked to Christian fundamentalist thinking that abhors the notion of sexual diversity.

The uniqueness of this story is that it draws from both sides. Filax offers a discourse analysis of a marginal weekly magazine, the *Alberta Report (AR)* that vilified homosexuals using headlines such as “Of Chemicals and Sex: Can Pollutants Cause Promiscuity and Homosexuality?” She also provides the words of queer youth who suffer the effects of this conservative stance. And she argues convincingly that a moral panic was generated by the extensive (and often free) distribution of *AR*, one that reached beyond Alberta’s borders. Excerpts from her interviews with queer youth (“If I touched the ball, they would back away and refuse to touch it after me. They said the ball was contaminated”) accentuate the effects of moral panic discourses produced by *AR*.

Drawing on anthropologist Margaret Mead and others, Filax begins by providing background on how the category “youth” is constructed in the social science literature. There are omissions in this section, which she acknowledges in her notes; nonetheless it would have been helpful

had she referenced some of this literature. One omission in particular is the work of Mary Louise Adams (*The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* [1997]), which examines the production of heterosexual “youth” post-WWII when conservative values in Canada were especially entrenched. Filax is ambitious as she ventures to tell this multilayered and complex story in 180 pages. Her ambition doubles when she attempts to do this, simultaneously, in a number of “voices.” While her efforts to defy a smooth reading of discordant identity formations are not always successful, her explanation in the introduction makes clear her intent. Indeed, both the introduction and her notes are crucial if the fullness of the book is to be appreciated.

Filax demonstrates her increasing reputation as a prominent scholar in her use of interdisciplinary methods and theories in order to disclose “subjugated knowledges” and offer a disquieting narrative without reducing it to “painful stories of subjection and pathos.” She optimizes the broader applicability of a local struggle by embedding it in the context of national legal battles for the acceptance and protection of same-sex relationships in Canada.

This book will prove to be one of the more important references for a variety of disciplines that address identity formations, including youth studies, queer studies, and critical sexualities studies (although it requires updating with the passage of Bill C-38, making same-sex marriage legal in all of Canada). It should make people think more broadly about how youth struggle to shape identities that reflect who they are—queer or not. **Doreen Fumia**, *Department of Sociology, Ryerson University*.