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The members of Generation X – those born between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s – have the potential to offer a unique perspective on academia. Gen Xers (as they are known) have experienced all the elements of the changing academy of the ‘80s, ‘90s, and the new millennium, ranging from ever-increasing diversity (especially in the number of women entering academia) to the many alterations in the classroom, some brought about by technology, others by economic pressures, recessions, and the growth of the adjunct track as a reality for many new professors. While this book touches on a handful of these issues, however, it is not intended to explore them in depth; it is far more about Gen Xers who happen to be professors then it is about Generation X and academia. Editor Elwood Watson's interest is in the psychology of (and stereotypes associated with) this generation; his introduction includes a bullet-point list of what he sees as the most common characteristics assigned to Gen X – “independent,” “ready for adventure” (xii) – along with such sweeping generalizations as "we are a magnetic generation" (xviii).

That psychological focus also provides the context for the contributors. Author Carrie Jo Coaplen notes that the editor requested that each essayist "emphasize how [he or] she either does or does not represent Generation X" (4). How interesting the reader will find eleven individual answers to that question is probably a good determinant of how worthwhile any given reader will find this book.

The editor is to be commended for including contributors with a variety of class backgrounds and racial identities, but, oddly, he has included very few women – only three of the 11 contributors. It is also worth noting that, aside from three history professors, all of the contributors work in English, composition or rhetoric. As a result, there are no voices from the sciences and very few from the social sciences, which helps to explain a certain redundancy of experience in many of the essays, even as it raises questions about the volume’s relevance for many academic readers.

Unsurprisingly, due to the editor’s focus, most of the essays lean heavily toward the autobiographical. At best, this results in some lively and well-written personal stories, some of which engage with issues confronted by many academics. For example, Emily Hinnov’s article (“Bertha Is My Doppelgänger; or, My So-Called Academic Life”) on struggling with the gap between the R1 job she dreamed of and the realities of teaching at a small Midwestern college is likely to strike a note with many readers from this generation, although it is overshadowed by her creation of a literary alter-ego modeled after the mad wife in Jane Eyre. Unfortunately, the majority of the essays offer less inspiring birth-to-current-day autobiography. Typical of these is the author who writes “The next three years passed without any earth-shattering development, as I… enjoyed the early grades in elementary school” (96). The Gen X element is often relegated to a few paragraphs and, unfortunately, several essayists also touch on academia only in passing or not at all.

Two notable exceptions are the contributions by Marc DiPaolo (“From Die-Hard Conservative to Liberal Humanist: Education and the “Corruption” of Students”) and Johnson Cheu (“Threat”). DiPaolo writes about his own experiences as a deeply conservative student coming to college suspicious of liberal professors, how and why his perspective changed, and how it now complicates his experiences as a classroom teacher. DiPaolo’s candor about his own struggles with how (and whether) to reveal his politics to his students will resonate with many teachers. Cheu is equally candid about his experiences as a disabled man working in academia, detailing the discrimination and ignorance he faces on the part of colleagues and job committees as well as from students; it is a courageously honest essay.

With the exception of these two essays, however, this anthology is hampered by the uneven quality of the contributions, by their often tenuous relationship both to academia and to the subject of Generation X, and by the decision to draw almost exclusively on contributors from the humanities. This combination of factors makes the book a questionable investment for both readers and libraries, especially considering its prohibitive cost.