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The Dasein of Gen Z: In Search of Authenticity of Being

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Abstract:
The struggle for survival in modern society is a real one. The reality of economic, political, and social uncertainties, coupled with lethal diseases and a degrading environment, had made living a nightmare. The characteristic attitude of Gen Z, as doubtful as it may appear, projects an authentic attitude of intentionality. And aggressively calls for a social, political, and even religious rethink of the present pretentious attitude of being in the world. The Genzein mode of being is one that sprouts from the ontological attitude of being as exposed by Heidegger, and presents a better mode of being that is critical, authentic, and progressive (CAP). It hopes for a happier and healthier life for both humans and their environment.

Keywords: Dasein, Gen Z, Authenticity of Being, Genzein.

Introduction and Background

Questions, problems, and anxiety have always been built around the "Gen Z". And so, one may ask: who are the "Gen Z"? What do they want in life? These are individuals born between 1996 and 2012. The Gen Z are also known as the "Digital Natives". Gen Z has sometimes been described as unpredictable and unemployable. They are the lazy generation who cannot make any meaningful commitments in life and do not enjoy working. This paper seeks to draw attention to what seems a rash and harsh nomenclature and diagnosis of the Gen Z by the very society that gave birth to them, or more accurately, "the very society that manufactured them". It is interesting to note that the first generation of individuals to be assigned an alphabet letter is the individuals born between 1965 and 1980, known as Generation X. The first generation to be assigned a Greek letter is individuals born after 2000, known as Generation Alpha. The question may be asked: Who names the generations, and for what specific purpose? Whatever is said of and about Gen Z, then, Gen Alpha is an updated version. Nevertheless, this paper explores a suggestive line of thought that seeks to sieve out a more objective "identity of being" of Gen Z. Is it not possible that Gen Z, like the Dasein of Martin Heidegger (1885-1976), is seeking the meaning of their being?

The Analysis of Dasein

The choice of Dasein as the methodological discuss for this paper is attributed to the Being of Dasein as "Being-in-time"– it expresses the totality of the human lived experience. The concept of Being-in-time does not only allude to the existential reality of the Dasein, but also to the transcendental reality. As such, the analysis of Dasein enables one to embrace and discuss the totality of any reality under study. Indeed, realities or beings can only be understood, not in their partialities, but in their totality, enabling one to

understand the being at rest (in-itself) and the being in relation (with-other/engaged). From Heidegger, we learnt that the existential situation of Dasein is that of a Being that puts its being in question: a Being in perpetual search for the meaning of its own being. Heidegger presents Dasein in such a way that it enables for phenomenological understanding of human existence as one full of possibilities and at the same time, limitedness. It provides the stage for a "wholeness" engagement with the totality of the human reality. This includes the facticity (thrownness) of being, and fallness (limitation) (Heidegger, 1962). According to Heidegger, facticity expresses the existential reality of being as thrown into the world with other beings that they had not chosen. The fallness of being captures the living experience of individuals as living in the bondage of expectations imposed on them by others and living towards their own death (being-towards-death). Whereas the thrownness points towards the past of being, Fallness points towards the present and future of being. The totality of the reality of being, as living towards its death, awakens the individual to the search for the meaning of life and meaning in life. This is a search for and towards authenticity, such that the possibility of the death of Dasein throws open the possibility of its authenticity. The phenomenological reality of being thrown into the world, and experiencing its limitations as living towards death, arouses the anxiety or malaise of the being. This feeling of anxiety is an ontological reality of being, and in response to this anxiety, "Dasein's being reveals itself as care." This is to say that "care" is also an ontological reality of being.

It is important to recall here that Dasein is "Being-there" or "Being-in-time". The concept of being and time *(Sein und Zeit)* expresses both the finality of being and its transcendence. Every disclosure of the being is a transcendental experience, such that the totality of the phenomenological manifestation of being is a transcendental manifestation. This understanding of Being as a transcendental, alludes to the unceasing behavior of being towards authenticity, in search of truth and meaning through care or empathy (being-with-others).

The Gen Z

This generation represents individuals born between 1996 and 2012. They come after the Millennials (1981 – 1996) and follow the Alpha (2012 – 2024). The letter "Z" represents the German word "Zeitgeist"; Zeit for time, and Geist for spirit. So that Zeitgeist(Z) means the "spirit of the time". This alludes to the prominent behavioral characteristics of individuals so tagged Gen Z. According to Suzy Welch, the Gen Z are unemployable. She further explained that the major values expected by hiring managers – previous achievements, learning, and a strong desire for work- are completely lacking in about 80% of the Gen Z surveyed. She added that indeed, most of the Gen Z place greater emphasis on "self-care, authenticity, and helping others."

Figure 1

Generation Years

Note: Created by LoveToKnow – Images from via Getty Images.

Many individuals had supported this negative remark and description of Gen Z as unemployable. They argued that many Gen Z are ill-prepared or unwilling to adapt to what is known as "conventional professional expectations. This argument had been backed up by Business Leaders surveyed in 2024: one in six had expressed reluctance to hire recent graduates, and three-quarters had labelled their hires as unsatisfactory (Lichtenberg 2025 & Welch 2025).

It is at this point that this paper would like to take a focused and realistic opinion on the Generation Zeitgeist (aka Gen Z). Indeed, they reflect more than any generation the spirit of their time! In other words, they are true (honest) to the totality of what they should be as products of many previous generations. And Suzy Welch was right on all spotlights: the Gen Z are unemployable. However, they are authentic and empathic.

The making of the Gen Z

Every human generation has a preceding generation. So, every generation is a product of the preceding generation. No preceding generation has any moral or legal ground to antagonise the present generation Z, because the characteristics or dominant behavior of the present generation are a given from the preceding generations. This is true of Gen Z. The blame game being played by previous generations is a total dishonesty to oneself and others. The historical experience of Gen Z has nothing significant to be appreciative of, as they grew up experiencing and enduring failing Government institutions and policies, where prestige, human life, and values are given lesser priorities. Diplomatic manipulations and exploitation have become the new legal laws. These are at the expense of human health, life, and the environment, which have become collateral damage. Under the pretence of diplomatic immunity, governments, institutions, groups, and individuals get away with fraudulent and life-destructive investments and agenda. These life experiences had naturally pushed the Gen Z, more than any other generation, into the mode of the Dasein, and they are questioning, not only the meaning of their lives, but also the meaning of life itself.

The Dasein of the Gen Z: the "Genzein" mode.

The seemingly lazy attitude of Gen Z towards work must not be interpreted through a simple linear equation, but rather strategically examined for its psychological meaning and sociological implications: it is a total rejection of the working experiences of their parents or significant adults in their lives. These adults work from day to night, and yet cannot afford any decent lifestyle, neither for themselves nor for their family members. Why shouldn't work come with dignity? Why shouldn't work be valuable? Why do prices increase rapidly? Why are travel visas needed to move around the world? Why do nations go to war? Why does one produce mass-destructive weapons? Why can't people live in peace and health?

"My mortgage has increased multiple times this year, and groceries are becoming extremely expensive. Without having received a pay rise, I've had to use most of my fortnightly pay for bills and groceries, and could not save as much as I need to" (Gen Z, Female – Deloitte Global, 2025, p.31)

According to Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966), the characteristics of Dasein are evident in its continuous search for existential meaning, that is, in the pursuit of possibilities of being: human freedom, responsibilities, and the authenticity of life. Summarily, these characteristics are grouped into three analytical behaviors:

1. The Umwelt- being in the physical world(with-things)
2. The Mitwelt- being in the social world (with-others)

3. The Eigenwelt- being in the self (with-self)

This further explains the reality of the individual as "being-there", and thrown into intentionality, temporality, spatiality, and rationality. So that the individual is ever conscious of their being, including its changing, relational, creative, and temporal characteristics. However, the meaning of being cannot fully be understood in totality from only the existential aspect of being as enumerated above. Emmy van Deurzen (1951-) has proposed the transcendent or spiritual dimension of being in what is known as *Uberwelt* (Martensen 2021). This further illustrates the possibility of beings connecting to the nonphysical world – transcendental. In her existential therapeutic exposé and the construction of Emotional Compass, she maintained that individuals find meaning only when they have accessed the totality of their emotions and give these emotions positive appraisal, rather than naming some emotions as positive and others negative. The totality of an individual's emotions is significantly the connecting vibe between the individual and their surrounding environment, both physical and transcendental environments.

Figure 2
Existential Dimensions

Note: Existential Dimensions (after Hanaway, the Existential Leader, 2019)

As mentioned above, the transcendental experience is an authentic experiencing; it is the path of *Being* in a continuous search for meaning and actualizing. It is the path of honesty, trust in self, others, and the environment, through asking the real questions, and not for any blame-game play. Individual's emotions are not classified into "good or bad", but every emotion provides a platform for a transcendental reflection and growth.

"I don't want to pigeonhole myself within the first few years, no matter if it's a very good company or a very good salary. If I'm going to be pursuing my career and there are no programs in place internally to help employees grow, then it's not worth it to me. No matter the company name."

(Gen Z Male – Deloitte Global, 2025, p. 11).

Yet, many CEOs around the globe still maintain that "clocking in at 9 am and throwing in the towel by 5 pm would not get one to the top (Burleigh 2025). Like the Dasein of Heidegger, the reality of uncertainty in the present society has created a corresponding anxiety or mode of being for Gen Z. The feeling of anxiety has exposed the ontological characteristic of every individual as care: self-care and other-care. Any critic of Gen Z that overlooks the ontological behavior of care, as a search for authenticity, has overlooked the most significant aspect of being human.

The Gen Z are slow to engage in any workforce that is not genuinely productive. They do not wish to work under the sun, and one unscrupulous individual, in the comfort of their mansion, reaps the dividend and the glory. How come that significant adults instigate and begin a war, and only the young people go to fight the war, and sometimes, they never come back alive? And when they do come back alive, they are mentally and physically destroyed? This phenomenological attitude of the Gen Z expresses the transcendental character *(Uberwelt)* of Dasein; it is a form of stepping over, or surpassing, or exceeding, or climbing over. It is the Uberwelt experience. Gen Z does not just want to exist; they want to participate in their existence and take control of it - Genzein.

Existential Implication of Genzein

It could be said with assurance that the ontological mode of Being is "care". It is the path that leads to the transcendental experience of every being, namely, the motivation to self-actualize. In this paper, we have exposed the need to embrace the Being of beings in all its totality: internally, existentially, and transcendentally. The one is not complete without the other. The meaning and sense of the one is dependent on the other. It is another way of saying that all phenomenological dispositions are not meaningful without the comprehension of their ontological and transcendental engaging. What one means by "Genzein" is the appreciation of a being that is connected to its history, present, and exploring the future. Such being is in total comprehension of its historical evidence, and is motivated to exceed it, in the way of transcending it (Uberwelt). It is a new mode of being, or a generational mode of being that consistently and intentionally questions its historical experiences and explores or searches for a more authentic version of being.

The implication of this is that from birth, individuals are already beings living towards death, that is, already questioning the meaning of being, and seeking transcendence. It is to say that, from birth, individuals are already characterized by "care" and are aware of other beings and reach out to them. So that individuals are products (composite) of physical and transcendental connectedness and must never pretend to be "being-alone", or self-made, or self-sufficient. Notwithstanding that Erik Erikson (1902-19994) had identified the virtue of "care" only at a later stage in human life, the most dominant DNA of being is "care" (McLeod, 2025). It cannot be denied that the virtue of care is an ontological aspect of being.

The Genzein is a critic of the historical culture of human societies, where hierarchical systems have established pathways for human exploitation and devaluation by fellow humans. The realities of wars, the struggles for sustainable human development, the struggles for financial freedom, economic, social, and religious freedom, the struggle for basic life needs and environmental safety, are evidence that human societies are lacking in the virtue of care. The Genzein culture not only criticizes these fetal financial, economic, and political behaviors, but also protests actively to denounce them. According to the Global Peace Index 2025, in the past years, 74 countries recorded an improvement in peacefulness, while 87 countries recorded a deterioration. There are now 97 countries in the world that are less peaceful than they were at the inception of the index in 2008 (p.6). Truly, are Gen Z lazy, or are they asking the "real questions?" The attitude of Genzein seeks to lead a life closer to reality, and not a make-shift or fake one that does not create an enabling or striving environment.

"Our teachers didn't teach us that bills are living things – they grow as we grow. They were busy teaching us to find X that has nothing to do with our future." *Melvina Shamba Facebook*

Conclusion

In recent times, Scott Sutfin-Glowski withdrew from Microsoft, an action characteristic of Genzein, and expressed the determination of the young generation to awaken to a form of lifestyle that respects and upholds human life and dignity. Human life and dignity cannot be weighed in the balance for sale and profit. As such, the laziness to work of the Gen Z, as exposed by most contemporary critics, should be understood as a strong protest against any form of abuse of the human person and the environment. It seems the conventional professional expectation is exploitative, and according to Cuban, wealth is not the problem; it is how companies use it (Coacci 2025). Genzeins do not just want to be "Rich Boss", but want to pursue the highest form of wealth, namely: health. HEALTH FOR EVERYONE.

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