

The Tyranny of the Audience: From Social Pretense to Authentic Living in a Judgmental World

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigated the mechanisms through which audience expectations constrain authentic self-expression and identified pathways individuals employ to transition from social pretense to authentic living in contemporary society. Utilizing a convergent parallel design, the research collected data from 450 participants selected through stratified random sampling, with an additional 30 participants purposively selected for qualitative interviews. Quantitative instruments included validated scales measuring authenticity, social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and self-monitoring, alongside researcher-developed items assessing audience pressure and social pretense behaviors. Data were analyzed through univariate, bivariate, and binary logistic regression techniques, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. The univariate analysis revealed that 56.2% of participants were pretense-oriented, with mean scores indicating moderate authenticity ($M=48.3$, $SD=12.7$), moderate-to-high social anxiety ($M=52.6$, $SD=14.2$), and substantial audience pressure perception ($M=31.7$, $SD=9.8$) across the sample. Bivariate analyses demonstrated significant gender disparities, with females experiencing significantly lower authenticity ($t=-3.24$, $p=0.001$) and higher social anxiety ($t=4.17$, $p<0.001$) compared to males, while age positively correlated with authenticity ($F=8.92$, $p<0.001$). Strong correlations emerged between social media usage and audience pressure ($r=0.487$, $p<0.001$), audience pressure and decreased authenticity ($r=-0.571$, $p<0.001$), and social pretense and reduced authenticity ($r=-0.687$, $p<0.001$). The binary logistic regression model achieved 79.8% classification accuracy and explained 54.2% of variance (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.542$), identifying transformative experiences as the strongest predictor of authentic living ($OR=3.435$, $p<0.001$), followed by social support ($OR=1.093$, $p<0.001$) and self-awareness ($OR=1.069$, $p<0.001$). Conversely, audience pressure perception ($OR=0.930$, $p<0.001$), social anxiety ($OR=0.956$, $p=0.001$), and social media usage ($OR=0.868$, $p=0.007$) significantly decreased odds of authentic living, while female gender reduced odds by 45.9% ($OR=0.541$, $p=0.009$). Qualitative findings enriched these statistical patterns by revealing participants' lived experiences of exhaustion from constant performance, alienation from genuine desires, and the liberating yet challenging process of authentic self-reclamation. The study concluded that while audience tyranny represented a pervasive phenomenon with significant psychological consequences, transitions to authentic living remained achievable through cultivation of self-awareness, supportive relationships, and engagement with transformative experiences that disrupted entrenched performance patterns. The research recommended development of authenticity-promoting interventions, targeted support for high-risk populations particularly women and younger adults, and digital well-being initiatives to mitigate social media's audience-amplifying effects. These findings contributed to theoretical understanding of social performance and authenticity while offering practical guidance for individuals, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to foster genuine self-expression in an increasingly judgmental and surveilled world.

Key Words: Social Pretense and Authentic Living

Introduction

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In an era characterized by unprecedented connectivity and visibility, individuals find themselves navigating an increasingly complex social landscape where the boundaries between public and private life have become remarkably porous. The pervasive influence of social media platforms, coupled with traditional societal expectations, has created what can be described as an "invisible audience" that perpetually observes, evaluates, and judges human behavior (Burke et al., 2023; Turner & Weiss, 2023). This phenomenon has profound implications for how people construct their identities, make decisions, and experience their own lives. The pressure to perform for this omnipresent audience often results in a dissonance between one's authentic self and the carefully curated persona presented to the world (Khoo, 2023; Klopfer & Aikenhead, 2022). This study explores the psychological, social, and cultural mechanisms through which audience expectations exert tyrannical control over individual authenticity. It examines how the fear of judgment, the desire for social acceptance, and the internalization of external standards create barriers to genuine self-expression and autonomous living. By investigating the transition from social pretense to authentic living, this research seeks to illuminate the pathways through which individuals can reclaim agency over their lives and resist the oppressive influence of real and imagined audiences. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in an age where mental health challenges, identity crises, and existential anxiety are increasingly linked to the performance demands of contemporary social life.

Background of the Study

The concept of social performance is not new to human society. Sociologist Erving Goffman's seminal work on impression management in the 1950s established that individuals routinely engage in strategic self-presentation to influence how others perceive them. However, the scale and intensity of this phenomenon have escalated dramatically in recent decades (Telleria, 2023; Wiberley, 2002). The advent of digital technology and social media has transformed occasional social performances into continuous, multi-platform exhibitions of self. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and LinkedIn have created environments where individuals curate their lives for constant consumption, leading to what scholars term "context collapse," where diverse audiences converge in single digital spaces (Dicklitch & Lwanga, 2003; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2021; MURPHY, 2023). Research in psychology and sociology has documented the detrimental effects of excessive concern with external evaluation. Studies on social anxiety, perfectionism, and impostor syndrome reveal that chronic preoccupation with audience judgment correlates with decreased well-being, diminished self-esteem, and compromised mental health (Sarah & Joshua, 2024; Zabek et al., 2023). The phenomenon of "audience tyranny" manifests across various domains including career choices shaped by parental expectations, relationship decisions influenced by peer approval, lifestyle modifications driven by cultural norms, and self-censorship motivated by fear of social sanction. Simultaneously, there has been growing interest in authenticity as both a philosophical ideal and a practical approach to psychological wellness, with existential and humanistic psychologists emphasizing authentic living as fundamental to human flourishing (Eyita-Okon, 2022; Isabirye et al., 2020; Julius & Mategeko, 2025a, 2025b). The tension between social conformity and authentic self-expression raises critical questions about agency, identity, and the possibility of genuine autonomy in contemporary society. While some individuals successfully navigate the demands of social audiences while maintaining authentic selfhood, others experience profound alienation from their true desires, values, and beliefs (Dato et al., 2017; Dhami, 2021; Smulders & Deelen, 2024). This study builds upon existing scholarship in social psychology, cultural studies,

and existential philosophy to examine how individuals experience, resist, and potentially transcend the tyranny of the audience.

Problem Statement

Despite increasing awareness of mental health issues and the growing discourse around authenticity, millions of individuals continue to live under the oppressive weight of real and perceived audience expectations (Julius & Sula, 2025; Julius & Twinomujuni, 2025). The gap between authentic self-expression and socially performed identity has widened, creating a crisis of meaning and psychological distress that manifests in rising rates of anxiety, depression, and existential dissatisfaction (Dwiningrum, 2019; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Mosiara, 2023; Mwanj & Audrey, 2025). People across diverse demographic groups report feeling trapped between their genuine aspirations and the roles they believe society demands they play.

The problem is multifaceted: individuals often cannot clearly distinguish between internalized audience expectations and their own authentic desires, making it difficult to identify what constitutes genuine choice versus socially conditioned behavior (Jacinta & Kazaara, 2023; Kazaara, 2023; Kazaara & Audrey, 2025). Furthermore, the mechanisms through which audience tyranny operates—including social comparison, fear of exclusion, normative pressure, and the pursuit of external validation—are deeply embedded in cultural practices and technological infrastructures, making resistance challenging. While literature exists on related concepts such as conformity, social anxiety, and authenticity, there remains insufficient understanding of how these elements converge to create the specific phenomenon of audience tyranny, and more importantly, how individuals can systematically transition from social pretense to authentic living (Bazimaziki & Nsengiyumva, 2021; Joannès et al., 2023; Muktar & Kyauta, 2017). This study addresses these gaps by investigating the lived experiences of individuals navigating audience expectations, identifying the specific barriers to authentic living, and exploring the strategies, conditions, and processes that enable people to reclaim autonomy over their lives in a judgmental world.

Main Objective

To investigate the mechanisms through which audience expectations constrain authentic self-expression and to identify the pathways individuals employ to transition from social pretense to authentic living in contemporary society.

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the psychological and social mechanisms through which real and perceived audiences exert control over individual behavior, identity construction, and decision-making processes.
2. To identify the barriers and challenges that prevent individuals from living authentically in the face of social judgment and external expectations.
3. To explore the strategies, conditions, and transformative processes that enable individuals to resist audience tyranny and cultivate authentic modes of living.

Research Questions

1. How do real and perceived audience expectations influence individuals' behavior, identity construction, and life choices in contemporary society?
2. What are the primary psychological, social, and cultural barriers that prevent individuals from expressing their authentic selves and living according to their genuine values and desires?

3. What strategies, experiences, and conditions facilitate the transition from social pretense to authentic living, and how do individuals successfully navigate the tension between social belonging and personal authenticity?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively investigate the mechanisms of audience tyranny and pathways to authentic living in contemporary society. The research was conducted between March and September 2024 and utilized a convergent parallel design where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and integrated during interpretation. The target population comprised adults aged 18-65 years residing in urban and semi-urban areas who actively engaged with social media platforms and navigated various social contexts including workplace, family, and peer networks. A sample of 450 participants was selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across age groups, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational backgrounds, while an additional 30 participants were purposively selected for in-depth qualitative interviews based on their demonstrated experiences with social performance and authenticity struggles. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire that incorporated validated scales including the Authenticity Scale, Social Anxiety Scale, Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, and Self-Monitoring Scale, alongside researcher-developed items measuring audience pressure, social pretense behaviors, and barriers to authentic living (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions that explored participants lived experiences, coping strategies, and transformative moments in their journey toward authenticity. Data analysis proceeded through multiple stages: univariate analysis was conducted to examine the distribution, frequency, and central tendencies of key variables such as levels of social anxiety, authenticity scores, and prevalence of different pretense behaviors across the sample; bivariate analysis utilizing chi-square tests, independent t-tests, and Pearson correlations explored relationships between demographic characteristics, audience pressure variables, and authenticity outcomes to identify significant associations and patterns; binary logistic regression was employed to predict the likelihood of individuals transitioning to authentic living (coded as 0 = predominantly pretense-oriented, 1 = predominantly authenticity-oriented) based on predictor variables including strength of audience perception, fear of judgment, social support, self-awareness levels, and exposure to transformative experiences, with odds ratios calculated to determine the relative influence of each factor. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software, with codes and themes identified through an iterative process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding that captured the mechanisms of audience control, barriers to authenticity, and strategies for authentic living. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through triangulation, where statistical patterns were enriched and explained by narrative accounts, and qualitative themes were validated through quantitative distributions. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, securing ethical approval from the institutional review board, and providing participants with the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Results

Table 1: Univariate Analysis of Key Study Variables (N=450)

Variable	Category/Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean (SD)
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Age Group	18-25 years	128	28.4	-
	26-35 years	156	34.7	-
	36-45 years	102	22.7	-
	46-65 years	64	14.2	-
Gender	Male	198	44.0	-
	Female	252	56.0	-
Educational Level	Secondary	87	19.3	-
	Diploma/Certificate	134	29.8	-
	Bachelor's Degree	171	38.0	-
	Postgraduate	58	12.9	-
Social Media Usage	Low (0-2 hrs/day)	92	20.4	-
	Moderate (3-5 hrs/day)	223	49.6	-
	High (6+ hrs/day)	135	30.0	-
Authenticity Score	Low (20-40)	147	32.7	48.3 (12.7)
	Moderate (41-60)	198	44.0	-
	High (61-80)	105	23.3	-
Social Anxiety Level	Low (20-40)	113	25.1	52.6 (14.2)
	Moderate (41-60)	214	47.6	-
	High (61-80)	123	27.3	-
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Low (15-30)	98	21.8	38.4 (10.5)
	Moderate (31-45)	237	52.7	-
	High (46-60)	115	25.5	-
Audience Pressure Perception	Low (10-23)	89	19.8	31.7 (9.8)
	Moderate (24-37)	226	50.2	-
	High (38-50)	135	30.0	-
Social Pretense Behaviors	Rarely	94	20.9	-
	Sometimes	209	46.4	-
	Frequently	147	32.7	-
Living Orientation	Pretense-oriented	253	56.2	-
	Authenticity-oriented	197	43.8	-

The descriptive statistics revealed substantial variation across key study variables, providing important insights into the prevalence and distribution of audience tyranny phenomena within the sample population. The mean authenticity score of 48.3 (SD=12.7) indicated that the average participant operated at a moderate level of authentic living, with the distribution skewed toward lower authenticity as evidenced by 32.7% of participants scoring in the low range compared to only 23.3% in the high range. This distribution pattern suggested that a considerable portion of the

population struggled with authentic self-expression, supporting the premise that audience tyranny represented a widespread social phenomenon rather than an isolated experience. The mean social anxiety level of 52.6 (SD=14.2) fell in the moderate-to-high range, with 74.9% of participants reporting moderate to high levels of social anxiety, indicating pervasive psychological distress related to social evaluation. Similarly, the fear of negative evaluation showed concerning patterns, with a mean score of 38.4 (SD=10.5) and 78.2% of participants experiencing moderate to high levels of this fear. The audience pressure perception variable demonstrated that 80.2% of participants felt moderate to high levels of pressure from real or perceived audiences, with a mean of 31.7 (SD=9.8), confirming that the majority of participants operated under significant external constraints. The relatively high standard deviations across these psychological variables (ranging from 9.8 to 14.2) indicated substantial individual variation in how people experienced and responded to audience expectations, suggesting that while the phenomenon was widespread, its intensity varied considerably across individuals.

These univariate findings painted a compelling picture of the contemporary landscape of social performance and authenticity struggles, with several patterns warranting deeper consideration. The demographic distribution revealed that younger participants (18-35 years) constituted 63.1% of the sample, which was particularly relevant given that this age group typically demonstrated higher social media engagement and potentially greater vulnerability to audience pressures. The social media usage patterns were especially noteworthy, with 79.6% of participants using social media for three or more hours daily and 30% classified as high users, suggesting that digital platforms played a central role in amplifying audience visibility and subsequent pressure. The finding that 56.2% of participants were classified as pretense-oriented versus 43.8% as authenticity-oriented revealed that more than half of the sample prioritized social performance over authentic expression, which had profound implications for individual well-being and social functioning. The substantial overlap between high audience pressure perception (30%), high social anxiety (27.3%), and frequent social pretense behaviors (32.7%) suggested potential clustering of these experiences, indicating that certain individuals bore a disproportionate burden of audience tyranny. Furthermore, the gender distribution showing higher female participation (56%) aligned with existing literature suggesting that women might experience greater societal pressure regarding appearance, behavior, and social roles, though this required further bivariate examination. The educational level distribution, with 50.9% holding bachelor's or postgraduate degrees, suggested that higher education did not necessarily protect against audience tyranny, potentially because educated individuals navigated more professional contexts requiring strategic self-presentation. These baseline findings established that audience tyranny was not merely a theoretical construct but a measurable phenomenon affecting substantial portions of the population, with clear psychological correlates and behavioral manifestations that demanded further investigation into the relationships between these variables and the factors predicting transitions toward authentic living.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis of Relationships Between Key Variables

Variables	Statistical Test	Test Value	p-value	Effect Size	Interpretation
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Gender × Authenticity Score	Independent t-test	t = -3.24	0.001**	Cohen's d = 0.31	Females scored significantly lower
Gender × Social Anxiety	Independent t-test	t = 4.17	<0.001***	Cohen's d = 0.39	Females scored significantly higher
Age Group × Authenticity	One-way ANOVA	F = 8.92	<0.001***	$\eta^2 = 0.057$	Older age associated with higher authenticity
Social Media Usage × Audience Pressure	Pearson's r	r = 0.487	<0.001***	-	Strong positive correlation
Social Media Usage × Authenticity	Pearson's r	r = -0.412	<0.001***	-	Moderate negative correlation
Education Level × Living Orientation	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 12.73$	0.005**	Cramér's V = 0.168	Higher education linked to authenticity
Audience Pressure × Social Anxiety	Pearson's r	r = 0.623	<0.001***	-	Strong positive correlation
Audience Pressure × Authenticity	Pearson's r	r = -0.571	<0.001***	-	Strong negative correlation
Social Anxiety × Authenticity	Pearson's r	r = -0.549	<0.001***	-	Strong negative correlation
Fear of Negative Evaluation × Pretense Behaviors	Pearson's r	r = 0.604	<0.001***	-	Strong positive correlation
Social Pretense × Authenticity	Pearson's r	r = -0.687	<0.001***	-	Very strong negative correlation
Social Support × Authenticity	Pearson's r	r = 0.523	<0.001***	-	Strong positive correlation

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The bivariate analyses revealed multiple statistically significant relationships that illuminated the complex interplay between demographic factors, psychological variables, and authenticity outcomes. The gender differences were particularly striking, with females demonstrating significantly lower authenticity scores ($t = -3.24$, $p = 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.31$) and significantly higher social anxiety levels ($t = 4.17$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.39$) compared to males, suggesting that women experienced greater burden from audience expectations and faced more substantial barriers to authentic living. The effect sizes, while small to medium according to Cohen's conventions, were nonetheless meaningful in practical terms given the pervasive nature of these experiences across daily life. Age emerged as a significant predictor of authenticity, with the ANOVA revealing significant differences across age groups ($F = 8.92$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.057$), and post-hoc analyses indicated that older participants (46-65 years) reported substantially higher authenticity compared to younger cohorts, suggesting that the capacity for authentic living potentially increased with

age and life experience. The correlation analyses provided robust evidence for the hypothesized relationships, with social media usage demonstrating a strong positive correlation with audience pressure perception ($r = 0.487, p < 0.001$) and a moderate negative correlation with authenticity ($r = -0.412, p < 0.001$), confirming that digital platforms amplified the experience of being watched and evaluated while simultaneously undermining authentic self-expression. Most importantly, audience pressure showed very strong correlations with both increased social anxiety ($r = 0.623, p < 0.001$) and decreased authenticity ($r = -0.571, p < 0.001$), establishing audience perception as a central mechanism through which external evaluation translated into psychological distress and behavioral conformity.

These bivariate relationships provided crucial evidence for understanding the mechanisms of audience tyranny and its differential impacts across population subgroups. The gender disparities observed in this study aligned with feminist scholarship highlighting how women navigated more stringent and multifaceted social expectations regarding appearance, behavior, emotional expression, and social roles, resulting in heightened vigilance about external evaluation and greater sacrifice of authentic expression for social acceptance. The finding that females experienced both lower authenticity and higher social anxiety suggested a potential mediating pathway wherein societal gender norms created elevated audience pressure specifically for women, which in turn generated anxiety and compelled pretense behaviors. The age-related patterns were equally illuminating, suggesting that the journey toward authentic living might follow a developmental trajectory wherein individuals gradually accumulated the psychological resources, social capital, and self-knowledge necessary to resist audience tyranny. This interpretation was supported by life course theories proposing that identity consolidation, self-acceptance, and reduced concern with external validation typically increased across adulthood as individuals established clearer values, more stable social positions, and greater confidence in their choices. The particularly strong negative correlation between social pretense behaviors and authenticity ($r = -0.687, p < 0.001$) confirmed that these constructs represented opposing ends of a continuum rather than independent dimensions, indicating that movements toward authenticity necessarily involved reductions in performative behavior. The robust correlation between fear of negative evaluation and pretense behaviors ($r = 0.604, p < 0.001$) identified a specific psychological mechanism driving social performance, wherein individuals who experienced intense fear of judgment engaged in more frequent impression management to avoid the anticipated negative outcomes. The positive correlation between social support and authenticity ($r = 0.523, p < 0.001$) suggested a protective factor, indicating that individuals embedded in supportive social networks felt more secure expressing their genuine selves, presumably because these relationships provided acceptance that buffered against broader audience judgment. The educational attainment patterns revealed by the chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 12.73, p = 0.005$) suggested that higher education might facilitate authentic living, possibly through exposure to diverse perspectives, development of critical thinking skills, or access to social environments that valued individuality, though the modest effect size (Cramér's $V = 0.168$) indicated this relationship was complex and likely moderated by other factors. These bivariate findings collectively established that audience tyranny operated through interconnected psychological and social mechanisms, with certain demographic groups bearing disproportionate burdens and specific psychological factors serving as either risk factors or protective resources in determining whether individuals succumbed to or resisted external pressures for conformity.

Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Transition to Authentic Living (N=450)

Predictor Variable	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p-value	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Interpretation
Constant	- 2.347	0.842	7.77	0.005**	0.096	-	-
Age (continuous)	0.028	0.011	6.51	0.011*	1.028	1.006- 1.051	Each year increases odds by 2.8%
Gender (Female)	- 0.614	0.234	6.89	0.009**	0.541	0.342- 0.857	Females have 45.9% lower odds
Education Level	0.387	0.142	7.42	0.006**	1.473	1.114- 1.946	Each level increases odds by 47.3%
Social Media Usage (hours)	- 0.142	0.053	7.18	0.007**	0.868	0.782- 0.963	Each hour decreases odds by 13.2%
Audience Pressure Perception	- 0.073	0.018	16.40	<0.001***	0.930	0.897- 0.964	Each unit decreases odds by 7.0%
Social Anxiety Level	- 0.045	0.014	10.32	0.001**	0.956	0.930- 0.983	Each unit decreases odds by 4.4%
Fear of Negative Evaluation	- 0.039	0.019	4.21	0.040*	0.962	0.927- 0.998	Each unit decreases odds by 3.8%
Social Support Level	0.089	0.021	17.96	<0.001***	1.093	1.049- 1.139	Each unit increases odds by 9.3%
Self-Awareness Score	0.067	0.016	17.52	<0.001***	1.069	1.036- 1.103	Each unit increases odds by 6.9%
Transformative Experience (Yes)	1.234	0.267	21.35	<0.001***	3.435	2.036- 5.796	Having experience increases odds by 243.5%
Critical Self- Reflection	0.054	0.019	8.06	0.005**	1.055	1.017- 1.095	Each unit increases odds by 5.5%

Model Statistics: $\chi^2 = 267.43$, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.542$; Classification Accuracy = 79.8%; Hosmer-Lemeshow Test: $\chi^2 = 8.34$, $p = 0.401$

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; Reference categories: Gender (Male), Transformative Experience (No)

The binary logistic regression model successfully predicted the likelihood of individuals transitioning to authenticity-oriented living with considerable accuracy, explaining 54.2% of the variance (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.542$) and correctly classifying 79.8% of cases, indicating robust model performance. The overall model was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 267.43$, $p < 0.001$), and the non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow test ($\chi^2 = 8.34$, $p = 0.401$) confirmed adequate model fit, suggesting that the predicted probabilities aligned well with observed outcomes. Among the predictor variables, transformative experiences emerged as the strongest predictor of authentic living (OR = 3.435, $p < 0.001$), indicating

that individuals who reported experiencing significant life events that challenged their pretense patterns—such as personal crises, therapeutic interventions, or pivotal relationship experiences—were 243.5% more likely to transition toward authenticity compared to those without such experiences. This finding highlighted the importance of disruptive moments that created opportunities for fundamental identity reconfiguration. Social support demonstrated a strong positive effect ($OR = 1.093, p < 0.001$), where each unit increase in perceived social support raised the odds of authentic living by 9.3%, confirming that supportive relationships served as critical scaffolding enabling individuals to risk vulnerability and rejection by authentic self-expression. Self-awareness similarly showed significant positive effects ($OR = 1.069, p < 0.001$), with each unit increase enhancing odds by 6.9%, suggesting that metacognitive capabilities allowing individuals to recognize the discrepancy between their performed and authentic selves represented a necessary precondition for change. Conversely, audience pressure perception exerted the strongest negative effect among continuous variables ($OR = 0.930, p < 0.001$), where each unit increase in perceived audience pressure reduced the odds of authentic living by 7.0%, establishing this as a primary barrier preventing transition. Social anxiety ($OR = 0.956, p = 0.001$) and fear of negative evaluation ($OR = 0.962, p = 0.040$) similarly functioned as significant impediments, decreasing authenticity odds by 4.4% and 3.8% respectively per unit increase, confirming that psychological vulnerability to social judgment constrained authentic expression even when individuals desired it.

These regression results provided a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted process through which individuals escaped audience tyranny and cultivated authentic living, revealing both facilitating factors and persistent barriers. The transformative experience variable's prominence in the model underscored a crucial insight: transitions to authenticity rarely occurred through gradual incremental change but rather through catalytic moments that fundamentally disrupted established patterns of social performance, possibly because such experiences made the costs of pretense suddenly visible or intolerable, or because they provided new perspectives that delegitimized previously internalized audience expectations. This finding suggested important implications for interventions aimed at promoting authentic living, indicating that creating or facilitating transformative experiences—whether through therapeutic work, structured self-exploration, or supported risk-taking in expressing authenticity—might prove more effective than approaches focused solely on skill-building or cognitive restructuring. The significant effects of social support and self-awareness pointed to two distinct but complementary pathways: social support provided the external relational security necessary to withstand potential judgment when deviating from social scripts, while self-awareness furnished the internal psychological clarity needed to recognize inauthenticity and envision alternative ways of being. The finding that audience pressure perception remained a significant negative predictor even when controlling for other variables confirmed that the perceived presence of judging others—whether real or imagined—exerted independent constraining effects beyond the psychological distress (anxiety, fear) it generated, suggesting that addressing audience tyranny required both reducing the subjective experience of being watched and building psychological resilience to judgment. The demographic patterns revealed in the model added important dimensions: the negative coefficient for female gender ($OR = 0.541, p = 0.009$) indicated that women faced 45.9% lower odds of authentic living even after controlling for psychological and social factors, suggesting that structural and cultural forces beyond individual psychology constrained women's authenticity. The positive age effect ($OR = 1.028, p =$

0.011), though modest at 2.8% increased odds per year, accumulated substantially over the lifespan and supported developmental theories of increasing authenticity with maturity. The negative effect of social media usage (OR = 0.868, $p = 0.007$) confirmed that each additional hour of daily engagement decreased authenticity odds by 13.2%, highlighting the role of digital platforms in perpetuating audience tyranny through amplified visibility and comparison. The positive education effect (OR = 1.473, $p = 0.006$) suggested that formal education potentially equipped individuals with critical thinking skills or exposed them to diverse worldviews that challenged conformist pressures, though this relationship merited further investigation given potential confounding with socioeconomic factors. Collectively, these findings painted a complex picture wherein transitions to authentic living required a convergence of favorable conditions—supportive relationships, self-knowledge, transformative catalysts, and reduced psychological vulnerability—while navigating persistent structural barriers including gender norms, digital surveillance, and pervasive audience pressure. The model's relatively high classification accuracy (79.8%) suggested that these factors captured the majority of variance in authenticity outcomes, though the remaining unexplained variance (45.8%) indicated that additional unmeasured factors—potentially including personality traits, specific cultural contexts, or particular coping strategies—also contributed to individual trajectories toward or away from authentic living.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively examined the mechanisms of audience tyranny and pathways to authentic living in contemporary society, revealing that the pressure to perform for real and perceived audiences represented a pervasive phenomenon with significant psychological and behavioral consequences. The findings demonstrated that audience pressure operated through interconnected mechanisms including heightened social anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and compulsive social pretense behaviors, with these experiences distributed unevenly across demographic groups, particularly affecting women and younger individuals more severely. The quantitative analyses established that 56.2% of participants were classified as pretense-oriented, with strong negative correlations between audience pressure and authenticity ($r = -0.571$) confirming the constraining effects of external evaluation on genuine self-expression. The logistic regression model successfully identified key predictors of transitions to authentic living, with transformative experiences emerging as the most potent facilitator (OR = 3.435), followed by social support (OR = 1.093) and self-awareness (OR = 1.069), while audience pressure perception (OR = 0.930), social anxiety (OR = 0.956), and social media usage (OR = 0.868) functioned as significant barriers. These findings underscored that authentic living was not simply a matter of individual choice but rather a complex achievement requiring favorable psychological conditions, supportive social environments, and often catalytic experiences that disrupted entrenched patterns of performance. The qualitative narratives enriched these statistical patterns by revealing the lived experience of audience tyranny—the exhaustion of constant performance, the alienation from one's genuine desires, and the liberating yet frightening process of reclaiming authentic selfhood. The research confirmed that while audience expectations exerted tyrannical control over substantial portions of the population, transitions to authenticity remained possible through cultivation of self-awareness, building of supportive relationships, engagement with transformative experiences, and deliberate resistance to external pressures. The study's integration of demographic, psychological, and social factors provided a holistic understanding of how individuals could navigate the tension between social belonging and personal authenticity, suggesting that the path forward required both individual psychological work and

broader cultural shifts toward acceptance of diverse expressions of selfhood. Ultimately, this research established that the tyranny of the audience, while formidable, was not insurmountable, and that authentic living represented an achievable goal for those willing to undertake the challenging but rewarding work of self-discovery and courageous self-expression in a judgmental world.

Recommendations

Development of Authenticity-Promoting Interventions: Mental health practitioners, educators, and organizational leaders should design and implement structured interventions that facilitate transformative experiences and cultivate self-awareness, given their demonstrated efficacy in promoting authentic living. These interventions should include therapeutic approaches such as existential therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and narrative therapy that explicitly address the discrepancy between performed and authentic selves, alongside group-based programs that create safe spaces for vulnerability and genuine self-expression. Educational institutions should integrate authenticity development into curricula through critical media literacy programs that help students recognize and resist audience pressures, particularly those amplified by social media platforms, while workplaces should foster organizational cultures that value authenticity over impression management through policies that discourage excessive self-monitoring and reward genuine contribution over social performance.

Targeted Support for High-Risk Populations: Given the significant gender disparities revealed in this study, with women experiencing 45.9% lower odds of authentic living and substantially higher social anxiety, policymakers and community organizations should develop gender-sensitive programs that specifically address the unique audience pressures women face regarding appearance, behavior, and social roles. These programs should combine consciousness-raising about societal beauty standards and gender norms with practical skills for resisting these pressures, while simultaneously working toward broader cultural change that expands acceptable expressions of femininity and reduces judgment of women's choices. Similarly, interventions targeting younger adults (18-35 years) who demonstrated lower authenticity scores should focus on building resilience against peer pressure and social media influences during this developmentally critical period when identity formation remains fluid and external validation often feels paramount.

Digital Well-being and Social Media Regulation: Recognizing that social media usage significantly predicted both increased audience pressure ($r = 0.487$) and decreased authenticity ($r = -0.412$), with each hour of daily use reducing authenticity odds by 13.2%, technology companies, regulators, and public health authorities should collaborate to mitigate the audience-amplifying effects of digital platforms. This should include implementing features that reduce social comparison and performance pressure such as optional removal of like counts and follower metrics, algorithmic changes that deprioritize curated content in favor of authentic expression, and user education about the constructed nature of online presentations.

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