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AP English Language

5 September 2022

Social Media Use

Social media. Everyone knows it, and most everyone has it. Through it you are able to see what your friends are doing in real time, communicate with them more easily, and have access to the entire world at your fingertips. Sounds astounding right? Think again. In her commencement address to graduates of Northeastern University, Tara Westover explains her story of how someone can become trapped within a false identity in which they are not able to be their true self. By connecting with the audience through pathos, the use of long flowing sentences, and a call to action to evaluate oneself, she is able to resonate with the audience on the dangers social media can bring about and how it is important for one to realize what makes them special.

Tara Westover is one of many in the world who has fallen victim in allowing social media to give herself a fake identity, a “third self.” Allowing herself to deny her own unique qualities. To spread her message of this danger, she uses this as her basis in her commencement speech to the graduates of Northeastern University. From the start she explains her background, such as how she grew up, to form a connection with the audience. This allows them to perceive who she is, and to acknowledge her basis. Subsequently, she goes on to elaborate on her own college graduation day. She mentions, *“I remember that back then I was an avid Facebook user, and that like everyone, when the ceremony ended, I uploaded photos to my page. Specifically, I*

uploaded three photos. One of me, standing alone, in my cap and gown. Another of me with my mother, and a third of me with both my mother and father,” (Westover). Just like everyone else when they have a special occasion, they share it online to the rest of the world. This allows her to connect with the audience, such that she is just like them. However, she further remarks on how she has had an inadequate relationship with her parents throughout her life; they were even late for the ceremony. *“In them we were smiling, or near enough to it. In them I was just another happy graduate full of promise, embracing my happy parents. But this was a fiction, and I knew it,”* (Westover), she goes on to say, demonstrating how social media was creating this false identity of herself for other to see. Through her own personal experience, she is able to connect with the audience on a personal level, using pathos, for them to see and feel first-hand what she went through, which assists in building her credibility as well. Furthermore, throughout the speech, long flowing sentences are put in place in order to create a sense of thoughtfulness and interest in what is being said. Thereby, those listening are able to focus on her central idea, and nothing else. As she concludes her speech, to leave the audience with something to think about, she implements an appeal to the graduates; *“So. Class of 2019. March up here, and claim your degree, and give the camera your best smile. But tonight, as you upload that photograph, take a moment to check in with your un-instagramable self—and thank them for getting you this far, and for taking you the rest of the way,”* (Westover), she says. Her intent through this call to action is for the audience to walk away empowered to not let social media define who they are, but yet instead let their true self shine, because in reality that is what makes everyone unique. Everyone in the world is special in their own way, and yet despite the fact that social media can make oneself feel they are not good enough, it is important for everyone to remember what makes them themselves. That is what truly matters.

Works Cited

Westover, Tara. "Commencement Address." *Tara Westover*, tarawestover.com/commencement.

Accessed 5 Sept. 2022.