



## Book Review

Kwame Appiah. *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2019. 272 pp. \$15.95 (ISBN: 9781631495977).

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*The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity*, a thought-provoking book by Kwame Anthony Appiah, challenges conventional notions of identity. It offers a fresh perspective on how to understand and navigate the complexities of identity in the contemporary world. With his insightful analysis and engaging writing style, Appiah delves into the intricacies of identity formation, exploring its social, cultural, and historical dimensions. Our sense of self is intricately tied to various factors such as gender, religion, race, nationality, class, and culture. These affiliations, Appiah famously argues, shape our perception of ourselves and contribute to the divisions in our world.

Throughout the book, Appiah challenges the notion of fixed, essential identities and argues that identities are not monolithic and static but rather fluid, constructed, and contextual. He invites readers to critically examine the narratives and categories that shape our understanding of who we are and how we relate to others. By weaving together personal anecdotes, historical examples, and philosophical insights, he encourages us to question the assumptions and stereotypes that often underlie our

understanding of identity. Appiah presents an intriguing perspective, encouraging readers to critically examine the ways in which identity is understood.

One of the strengths of the book is Appiah's ability to tackle complex concepts with clarity and accessibility. He explores the ways identities are constructed through language, culture, and social norms, highlighting the role of power dynamics in shaping these constructions. Appiah challenges us to move beyond simplistic categorizations and embrace the complexity and diversity of human identities. This deconstruction of identity challenges readers to reevaluate their assumptions and consider the complex interplay between various aspects of identity.

Moreover, Appiah engages with historical and contemporary examples to illustrate the complex nature of identity. He draws on cases from different parts of the world to highlight the fluidity of identities, the impact of historical events on identity formation, and the potential for identity-based conflicts. This approach adds depth and richness to the book, making it relevant and relatable across diverse cultural and social contexts. The author also addresses the implications of identity politics and the dangers of exclusionary thinking. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the multiplicity of our identities and the potential for overlapping and intersecting identities that can bridge divides and foster empathy and understanding. By questioning rigid identity boundaries, Appiah promotes a more inclusive and nuanced approach to social and political discourse.

The notion of Western culture can be seen as an illusory mirage. The author masterfully weaves together compelling arguments and captivating narratives to reveal the falsehoods embedded within our collective identities. He illustrates this through the stories of individuals like Anton Wilhelm Amo, an African child of the eighteenth century who astonishingly became a renowned philosopher in Europe before returning to Africa. Appiah also writes about Italo Svevo, a remarkable literary figure who changed his citizenship without leaving his home. Additionally, Appiah's own father, Joseph Appiah, a passionate anticolonial activist was willing to sacrifice his life for a nation that had yet to materialize and this discussion serves as another example to support the author's ideas. Through these narratives, Appiah questions the notion of a collective identity. His exploration exposes how these "mistaken identities" can contribute to some of humanity's horrendous atrocities, ranging from chattel slavery to genocide. Despite this, Appiah argues against the notion of completely discarding social identities as they have the potential to facilitate moral progress and provide

significance to our lives, by connecting our individual experiences to broader movements, causes, and concerns.

While *The Lies that Bind* offers a thought-provoking analysis, it is not without its limitations. One major criticism of the book is its limited engagement with certain aspects of identity. Appiah primarily focuses on social and cultural constructions of identity. Some readers may find that certain aspects of identity, such as the influence of biology, psychological factors, and individual experiences in shaping identities are not explored in as much depth as they would like. The book's focus on identity as a social construct may overlook the deeply personal and subjective dimensions of identity that individuals experience. Omitting these aspects limit the book's ability to capture the full spectrum of human identity. This narrow focus may leave some readers wanting a more comprehensive analysis that incorporates a wider range of perspectives.

Appiah's writing style is engaging and accessible, making the book approachable for a wide range of readers. He combines personal anecdotes, historical examples, and philosophical analysis to illustrate his arguments, providing a diverse set of perspectives that enriches the discussion. This multidisciplinary approach contributes to the book's overall appeal and relevance.

Summarily, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* is a captivating exploration of the complexities and nuances of identity. Presenting a bold and illuminating new theory of identity, the book is a resounding philosophical declaration for the troubled and conflicted twenty-first century. Appiah's nuanced analysis challenges us to move beyond simplistic understandings of identity, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic approach to our interactions and relationships; his work is valuable. However, despite the book's narrow focus and limited engagement with certain dimensions of identity, the work serves as a starting point for stimulating conversations and reflections on the intricate nature of identity in contemporary society. His work has the power to revolutionize our understanding of who we are and what defines us. This book is highly recommended for those interested in philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies, as well as anyone seeking a deeper understanding of how identities shape our lives and societies.