In *The Tie That Binds*, the author, Debra White Smith, provides some excellent advice, like respecting each partner’s unique gifts, and focusing on scripture rather than the gender stereotypes of our culture. But she also emphasizes that working for equality is a fallacy, stating instead that our goal should be to serve our spouses (and, of course, Christ).

While the goal of serving one’s spouse would undoubtedly work well for couples who are truly seeking God’s guidance with a servant’s heart, many marriages fall short of this ideal. For example, if one spouse dismisses equality for service while the other dismisses equality for domination, mutual service would be non-existent. With no one gauging the level of equality, the couple would have no way to break the cycle that would eventually make mutual satisfaction impossible. While I am certain this is not the author’s intent, it poses a risk that she fails to adequately address.

However, my major complaint with the book is the author’s use of pop psychology she has gleaned from writers who, I believe, do not have research support for their claims—claims that serve to foster damaging cultural stereotypes.

For instance, she reports Dr. Gary Smalley’s assertion that “most women are born with a relationship manual that supplies them with instinctive knowledge of how a great relationship should function.” No! Relationship knowledge is learned. It is not instinctive, regardless of gender.

In another example, Smith describes Bill and Pam Farrel’s idea of men as compartmentalists and women as multitaskers. Explaining the Farrels’ idea that men are like “waffles,” Smith says men become compartmentalists when the “male hormone hits the brain of a fetus… [it] severs some of the ties between the left and right brain…affecting the way men think” (p. 134). Women, however, as “spaghetti,” are more inclined toward multi-tasking being able to “be in one room of the house and hear a child fall out of a swing in the backyard and immediately know there’s a
problem.” (p. 134). Smith states that “most men are born with a natural ability to compartmentalize, and most women are born with the natural ability to multitask.” (p. 135)

To my knowledge, there is no research to support such a claim. I have not seen anything on an innate gender difference in thought processes. While there is support for women (more often than men) using both left and right hemispheres for specific tasks, it only accounts for 2% of the variability and therefore not likely to cause such major gender differences as reported by the Farrels.

Any difference in multitasking is more likely the result of the female role traditionally requiring that she keep up with each child while cleaning a house, preparing a meal, shopping, etc.

All of these criticisms notwithstanding, her chapters entitled “Ruling and Drooling” and “Leading and Following” are excellent in addressing gender prejudice and hierarchical marriage, respectively.

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