

## Opting In: Having a Child without Losing Yourself

Amy Richards.

New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008.

### Reviewed by M. Louise Ripley

Amy Richards has written the ideal book for any woman contemplating having children. An underlying theme of *Opting In* is the long-debated question of whether women can work outside the home and successfully raise their children. Richards considers whether feminism can help support a mother's decision to work outside the home and offers an historical review of her subject. In the end, she contends that women should work—for the sake of themselves, their children, and their relationships—but she advocates a new approach to the notion of work.

At the heart of feminism, Richards argues, is a willingness to consider choices, to push for change before others recognize that change is needed. Informing her analysis is the systemic problem of sexism and how it affects women's decisions regarding children. Richards emphasizes, for example, that women with money and social status must fight to improve things for all women.

Richard's extensive chapter on who does how much work in the home while caring for children emphasizes the importance of choice for individual women. She stresses that women must give men a chance to learn the parenting skills that, too often, they believe men do not possess. To illustrate her argument, she delves into her own childhood experiences and those of well-known feminists such as Gloria Steinem. Richards affirms the individual personhood of each child and recognizes that no single method of childrearing can guarantee a "perfect" child.

A sad chapter deals with how easy it is to lose friends when one becomes a mother, or when two friends, both mothers, disagree on parenting issues. Another chapter deals with a woman's relationship with her own mother and shows that our individual experience of being mothered influences how we mother our children.

Richards concludes on a hopeful note, citing examples of women who have been open about their own experiences, have made difficult, life-altering choices, and have worked to improve societal views of women, mothers, and children.