

Sarah Furlong, 35,  
pediatric nurse, one daughter.



Batia Zumwalt, 33,  
behavior therapist,  
pregnant, one daughter.

# Sex. Guilt. Work.

SELF brought together seven mothers, including moderator Jean Kunhardt of the Soho Parenting Center in New York City and psychiatrist Anna Fels. Here's what they said about the world's trickiest profession. BY JENNY ALLEN AND MARTHA FAY

## BABY LUST

**JEAN KUNHARDT:** So, why did each of you decide to have children?

**PAULA PREZIOSO:** I always wanted children—to mold, to give my insights to, to love. When I look at my children I see myself in them, and I see them as better than me because I see a strength there, a self-esteem, an energy, a joy that I didn't have when I was young.

**BATIA ZUMWALT:** I always wanted to deliver a child. I baby-sat until I was 25. I've learned as much about myself through raising my daughter in the past 21 months as I did from 10 to 15 years of working in an office.

**SUNI HARFORD:** The first diaper I changed was my daughter's. I never baby-sat. I had no interest whatsoever, but when I was 34, my husband said, "How about it?" So I crossed my fingers and hoped that in nine months I'd get used to the idea. I'm pleasantly surprised by how much I love it.

**ANN LUCE:** I waited a long time to have children. I had a great career, but I had a sense that there was one thing I hadn't yet done. My husband and I had reached a point where we wanted to make a family together. It is very intimate to have

children. You expose yourself in ways you never would have otherwise.

**SH:** Part of the reason we delayed having kids was because I knew I was going to work and I wasn't comfortable with the idea of the evil working mom: My kid's first day of school and I'm on a business trip. But you get as far as: Will you be enough of a mom so that they don't turn out to be Jeffrey Dahmer?

## THE NINETEENTH NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

**JK:** What surprised you most about becoming a mother?

**AL:** I never knew the depth of my emotions until I had children. I never knew I could be so happy, I never knew I could be so angry. You have an almost out-of-body experience. You hear yourself crying or screaming, and you think, "Who is that person?"

**SH:** The capacity I have for love really amazed me.

**ANNA FELS:** I wonder, in the myths that get passed down—such as that mothers are supposed to love their children unconditionally—where is the room for those really awful feelings that you can have about your kids

or the stages they go through?


**PP:** I used to be so mortified watching a mother yell at her child in a mall. Then my son threw a major temper tantrum in the middle of a supermarket. I didn't scream and yell and hit him because that's not who I am, but I felt I easily could have. You have this fantasy that you're going to be Donna Reed, but when you have all this anger inside you, it's very hard to be rational.

**SH:** When Devon was first born, my husband, Woody, was traveling and I went to live with my mom for a couple of weeks. I was so tired and miserable, and Devon wasn't sleeping. I had the breakdown I imagine every new mother has. I thought, "I'm going to throw you out the window if you don't shut up." When I woke up the next day, I was so upset that I had felt that. There is no way I ever would have done it, but all of a sudden I understood child abuse.

## SEX AND LOVE

**JK:** Bringing a baby into a family inevitably shakes things up, but it seems as if it is the women who adjust most easily. Maybe men just don't have as





Paula Prezioso, M.D., 37,  
pediatrician, two children.

our husbands were nursing and nuzzling, wouldn't we feel left out and want to claim him back? I try to get women to see that they're lucky if their husbands keep vying to pull them back into the world of adult relationships.

**PP:** I actually felt much more interested in sex after I had the baby. But my husband saw me differently, from when he watched our son being born to when he watched me breast-feeding. Now I was mother, and he had a hard time.

**JK:** I often say to a woman who's complaining about her husband's being skittish or worried about milk spurt-ing out when you're having sex, think about

how he experienced childbirth. You saw it from up here, he saw it from a much, much scarier vantage point.

#### THE TRADE-OFF

**JK:** What do you miss most about your life before you had children?

**SF:** Sleeping.

**SH:** Looking at my husband on a gorgeous Sunday and saying, "Let's grab a bottle of wine and go to the park."

**PP:** Time alone to be able to take a walk and think about things related to me.

**BZ:** I miss the physical freedom. I'm pregnant again, so I only had two and a half, three months between weaning and being pregnant. I want to write a book called "The Fourth Trimester."

#### GUILT

**JK:** Can we talk about the tension between work and mothering?

**AF:** Ours is a generation in the middle.

# Identity. Love.

much experience with change.

**SH:** The biggest surprise for me was the strain it put on my marriage. This has been the toughest year I could have dreamed of. Husband is now third on the list, after work and baby. And he doesn't like it very much.

**PP:** When I went back to work I thought I could be the perfect wife, the perfect pediatrician, come home and devote all my extra time to my children. The reason my marriage fell apart is because I didn't have enough energy for my husband. When I came home after work, I wanted to focus everything on my children. There wasn't enough left over.

**SARAH FURLONG:** I got divorced about a year and a half ago. I had been taking care of my daughter, Alley, trying to work and trying to take care of my husband. I remember saying, there is no way I can do this for the next however many years. I don't blame it on having

my daughter, but the strain of having her and being pulled in yet another huge direction was the last straw.

**SH:** I feel that I give an awful lot, so that sex has become a demand from him on me. We had a very difficult first year until we worked this out. I started recognizing that he wasn't coming after me to take something away from me. Sex was something I could still enjoy.

**JK:** You can go off on those two separate paths of somebody demanding and somebody retreating, and it's very hard to get back in sync. You need to see it as something that you both used to like to do together. Also, a lot of women describe their early relationship with their babies as being as close to sensual or sexual as you can get. Men are not typically having that kind of relationship.

**SH:** I think sex is the guy's way of claiming you back as his alone.

**JK:** If we were in that situation, where



Jean Kunhardt, 45,  
psychologist,  
two daughters.

Anna Fels, M.D., 49,  
psychiatrist.

Suni Harford, 37,  
investment banker,  
one daughter.



My son will have grown up in a family where the mom works and the dad works. For our transitional generation, it's very stressful and complicated.

**BZ:** My mom always worked when I was a child. When I had Ruby I thought that I would work more. I was about to start a full-time job, but I called the woman I was supposed to work for and said, "You know what? There is no way I can do it." I ended up working part-time. I loved working but I love this, too.

**PP:** I went back to work after two months with my son, and after one month with my daughter. I had to. My husband was a student at the time. But as soon as I walked in the door, I would try to cook homemade chicken soup, bake brownies, do his laundry and iron his shirts and be just like my mother, who was always at home.

**AL:** Even when you stay home, it's stressful to try to be the perfect mom.

**PP:** My mother always said, "I wished I had gone on and done what you did." She had a master's degree in education. She retired from teaching the day I was born and never went back again. She was very unfulfilled and said so. She never made me feel guilty about going to work. I felt guilty on my own.

**JK:** Guilt seems to be a pervasive reaction to motherhood.

**SH:** Probably six out of eight senior women in my department have had children in the past 18 months. I've noticed that two of the women have husbands who work on Wall Street. They don't need to work, and the guilt they feel is unbelievable. Tears in the morning. Maybe I am kidding myself, but I've taught myself to believe that I need to work financially. My husband doesn't have a job on Wall Street. When I say good-bye to Devon, it's, "This is the way it is, Dev. See ya. Got to go to work."

When I said to my old boss, "In order to live our lifestyle, I really have to have this job," he said, "You could switch jobs." And I said, "I don't want to do that." It's easier for me to justify the fact that I spend only two hours a day with my daughter because I need to work.

**AL:** I had this fantastic job at a museum before I had children. I would go to dinner parties and people would say, "What do you do?" I'd tell them, and they'd say, "That's so interesting!" They would talk to me the whole night. After I had Jake, I

would say, "I stay at home with my newborn." They'd turn around and face the other direction.

**PP:** I think what we're all finding is that it's okay to have an identity of your own outside of being a mother. When I got divorced, I had family members and friends say to me, "Great, what you should do now is focus just on your children and on your job." And I thought, Gee, this is nice. All my feelings that I'm not doing enough for my children are now being reinforced by these caring people who are going to say don't think about yourself at all.

### NOT-SO-SUPERMOM

**AF:** So far, there's not been a single mention of, "I leave the kids with my brother, my sister, their grandma." Ours is one of the only societies where mothering is done exclusively within the nuclear family, and it's brutal.

**JK:** It's almost a cultural expectation that we all do this in isolation, that it's our responsibility alone.

**PP:** That's the superwoman problem. I feel I can't ask anybody for help because I should be able to do it all by myself.

**AL:** I grew up in the era when we thought we could do it all. Now I know I can't. Having children humbled me.

**JK:** A lot of women say they learned to appreciate their own mothers' lives only after they became parents themselves.

**SH:** I can't conceive of what my mother sacrificed for us. She used to have a job. She had a master's degree in pharmacology and she gave that up for us. It never occurred to me to even think 'thank you,' let alone say it.

**PP:** My mother is very supportive about how I'm raising my kids, but my father says things like, "Well, we never did that with you guys and you grew up just fine." In my mind I say, Yeah, we grew up just fine, but I would like to do it differently. Not better, but differently.

**JK:** The problem is, you do mean better.

**PP:** A little bit better. Absolutely.

**AF:** Considering the number of child-rearing books on the shelves, I'm always stunned to realize there's very little known about what helps and what hurts kids. We tend to be cowed by all these specialists, but I'm not sure we're so much smarter than our parents.

