

# Pay Up

## Discussion Guide

### INTRODUCTION

- In the prologue, Saujani describes following the “right track” to achieve her dream of a big career and rich family life. Was there a “right track” prescribed for you, either by your family, or that you internalized along the way? What did it look like?
- In your early career, what were the messages you received from role models and managers about workplace success? How did family fit in (or not) with climbing the career ladder?
- What do you think about the idea of the “Big Lie”? Or in other words, the idea that “having it all” is just a myth – a euphemism for *doing* it all. Do you agree? Was there a particular moment when you realized you were living your own “Big Lie”?
- Saujani talks about what she calls “The Gospel of Professional Ambition” – the promise that women can succeed if they just lean in hard enough, raise their hands, and take more leadership courses. Have you encountered this kind of messaging in your career? How has it impacted you?
- If you have children, have you experienced pressure to “hide your motherhood” at work for fear of being taken less seriously? What are some times you have felt this tension?
- The author considers COVID-19 a breaking point: when the delicate balancing act for women and work finally became untenable. How did the pandemic change your experience? Did it surprise you to read about surging burnout rates and increased alcohol consumption among women?

- We are in a moment when women are quitting their jobs and leaving the labor force in large numbers. How do you think companies, and our broader society, change if fewer women are able to work? What is the impact on corporate performance, diversity of thought, and women's progress overall?
- Do you believe that workplaces can and should do more to support women? How did reading this book change your thinking?

## PART ONE: THE OPEN SECRET OF WOMEN AND WORK

- Saujani points out that two thirds of American women regularly work more than a 40 hour week. What do you think is the optimal amount of time to spend working? When you work more than that, how does it affect you?
- The author describes what she calls her “meltdown moment” – when she had reached an emotional and physical breaking point from the stresses of home and work life in the midst of the pandemic. Can you relate to this experience?
- If you have children, do you feel like becoming a parent has impacted your career, your relationship, or your mental health in ways you weren't prepared for? What surprised you most?
- Do you agree with the authors view that feminism has put too much emphasis on shattering glass ceilings in male dominated workplaces, and not enough on making it possible for women to thrive as their whole selves?

- The author talks about her experience turning her meltdown moment into activism, by creating the Marshall Plan for Moms. What should the government's role be in supporting women right now? What do you think women need most to recover?

## PART TWO: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

- Were you aware of the history of women's workforce participation in America? Did anything surprise you about the trajectory the author traces?
- How has pop culture played a role in shaping your idea of the ideal professional woman? What were some of the pop culture role models of professional women you grew up with? Who did you find aspirational and what do you think of those aspirations now?
- Saujani argues that media representations of working motherhood present a distorted view. If you have children, did you have unrealistic expectations coming into motherhood?
- Do you think it's true that until there is an equal division of labor in households - women will be unable to achieve equality at work?
- Saujani talks about how the trend towards "intensive parenting" has emerged in our society, which puts an even bigger burden on women, and adds more physical and emotional labor outside of their jobs. How have you experienced or observed parenting become a "competitive sport?"
- Our view of the "ideal mother" – the classic 1950s housewife image, that celebrates women for being totally dedicated to her kids – clashes with our view of the "ideal worker" – always on, always available. Is this a tension you experience? How does it impact you?

## PART THREE: PAID IN FULL: HOW WE GET THERE

### EMPOWER: Changing our Reality from Within

- The author suggests some tactics to help shore up our well being given the high rates of burnout, including prioritizing sleep, health and taking some space from our roles in our work and home lives to just be ourselves. What other strategies help you manage burnout?
- Do you agree that setting boundaries at home can prepare you to be more assertive about your needs in other areas of your life, including the workplace? What boundaries have you drawn and what did you learn?
- It's been shown that social media has a negative effect on teen girls' mental health. Do you think the pressure to be a perfect mom as represented on social media is also impacting moms mental health?

### EDUCATE: Reimagining the Workplace

- Saujani lays out 9 key things workplaces can do to support women, including: giving women control over our schedules, supporting with childcare, providing paid leave, incentivizing paternity leave, offering reentry support and onramps back into work, eliminating the motherhood penalty, prioritizing our mental health and more. Which of these do you think would make the biggest difference?
- Why don't employers offer these supports already? ? Is it about educating them about what women need, or that women aren't a priority? How do you think that is changing as the labor shortage continues?

- How can offering flexibility and remote work have the potential to disadvantage women? What are some ways the author suggests to mitigate that unintended consequence? Does your workplace use any of those strategies?
- How would it impact your life if your employer supported you with your childcare needs? Do you think they ever would? How?
- The author asserts that by companies not just offering, but actually incentivizing or even mandating, men to take parental leave, they'll actually help women out too by setting a more equitable division of labor at home. Do you think paid parental leave should be equally available to men and women?
- Research shows that a small percentage of men who are offered paid leave actually take it. Why do you think that is and what would encourage more men to take it?
- Saujani notes several forms of bias that work against women in their careers after they have kids, leading to them to be "mommy-tracked" and hitting a so-called "maternal wall" in their careers. All this leads to a wage gap known as the "motherhood penalty." Have you or moms you know been affected by this kind of bias?
- What do you think are some of the biggest obstacles women face when they seek to come back to work? What kind of re-entry supports like returnships, coaching or other resources do you think would be helpful?
- Do you feel like your employer prioritizes your mental health and overall wellness? What type of support would you benefit from when you are feeling burned out?

## REVISE: Shifting the Narrative in Our Culture

- What are the assumptions and cultural stereotypes about motherhood that may be standing in our way from policies like government subsidies for childcare and a national paid leave program?
- Have you encountered anyone in your life who has suggested that a woman's role is to be at home with children? Do you think this view is still secretly more pervasive than we even know?
- One of the things the author talks about is how even women have internalized a bias against moms, which can fuel the false divide between working moms and stay at home moms. Do you ever catch yourself looking down on the work of mothering?

## ADVOCATE: From Rage to Power

- Saujani lays out three critical public policies that could be game changing for women – and that are long overdue: affordable childcare, guaranteed paid leave, and cash payments to parents (like the Child Tax Credit). Why do you think these are so controversial in Washington?
- In countries like Norway or Denmark, the government contributes close to \$30,000 per year towards care for toddlers. In the U.S., that number is just \$500. What does this tell us about America's value system versus those of other countries?
- Saujani talks about one of the more controversial ideas she raised in her original Marshall Plan for Moms proposal – a cash payment to moms for their unseen, unpaid

labor. What do you think about the idea of putting a price tag on the work that happens in the home?

## AFTERWORD:

- After reading this book, are you more or less optimistic about creating a future of work that works for women? What type of advocacy do you think it will take to create the sweeping changes Saujani is calling for? What role do you want to play?