

AYA – Hilary Pennington

MOD Good morning. Thank you all for coming back to yet another wonderful second half to our program. I know, last night, I went home and my mind was numb after hearing from all the wonderful faculty and all the great conversations I had with many of you. Today, as you know, we're going to start out with some remarks from Hilary Pennington and then we are going to be moving to a lot of conversations with each other. So let me, please, introduce Hilary Pennington. She is the co-founder of Jobs for the Future. It is widely recognized as one of the leading research and policy development organizations in the country regarding issues of workforce development and future work requirements. Ms. Pennington graduated *summa cum laude* from Yale College in 1977 and also received her MBA from the Yale School of Management in 1983. She holds a graduate degree in Social Anthropology from Oxford University. At Jobs for the Future, Ms. Pennington has overseen an extensive research and policy agenda, as well as consulting with over 20 states and many communities on issues of economic change, youth transitions and workforce development.

Her organization's work has been nationally recognized and its designs for a comprehensive approach to workforce development have been implemented by seven governors. Ms. Pennington assisted in the crafting of a major piece of federal legislation—the School to Work Opportunities Act—which has provided over \$1 billion to help states and communities build better systems for supporting youth transitions from high school to post-secondary education and rewarding careers. Jobs for the Future is currently incubating a major new initiative for the Gates Foundation to create 150 new

schools across the country that blend high school and the first two years of college. It also provides technical assistance to communities engaged in welfare reform, school to career and community economic development.

Ms. Pennington was a member of Clinton’s Presidential Transition Team in 1992 and co-chaired the Presidential Advisory Committee on Expanding Training Opportunities. She has advised President Clinton and each of the Bush administrations on work force and education policies. In 1999, the National Academy for Human Resources selected Ms. Pennington for membership, recognizing her leadership in the field of human resources and workforce development. She has published in *The Harvard Business Review*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Boston Globe*, and she has appeared extensively on national and regional television and radio including the “Today Show” and NPR. Sought after as a public speaker—so we are very lucky to have her—she has addressed the annual meetings of many national education and business associations, both in the United States and abroad. Ms. Pennington serves on the boards of the Milton Hershey School and the Hershey Trust Company, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and the Independent Sector. Please join me in welcoming Hilary Pennington.

HP Thank you. It’s a pleasure to be here. I remember sitting in this room, often falling asleep, during Art History lectures as an undergraduate. I was sorry not to be here yesterday. It sounds as if you had an incredible day, and I hope my remarks will be a good starting point for the important conversations of this morning. I bring a broad perspective, since I was at Yale during two of the decades represented here—the ‘70s and

the '80s—both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student at the School of Organization and Management.

Having agreed to provide some reflections to get us started this morning, I have often wondered over the last several weeks what could have possessed me to agree to do this? Especially after reading the bios of the incredibly impressive group of women who are here, any one of whom could give this talk.

But I know what possessed me and that is that I found the topic, as Jeff framed it, intriguing—irresistible in a way. He gave me these questions: What does it mean to be a woman leader? How do we come into a sense of ourselves as leaders? What role or roles did Yale play? What are the positives and negatives of coming to a place of privilege like this one?

I have added a final set of questions because they are where the other questions lead me. And they are: As women leaders, are we making a difference? How far have we come? Where do we want to go? And how can we support each other in getting there? These are obviously big and challenging questions and, despite the fact that I make my living as an expert on the changing demands of our economy and our society, in thinking about what I wanted to say, I found that I didn't have technical or professional answers to them, that they required a kind of personal reflection which I look forward to continuing with you through the day. Reading the bios that you submitted, I sense that many of you are in a similar place to the one in which I find myself—at a point of transition or reflection, wanting to make sense of your career, your achievements and aspirations. Wanting, in a sense, to touch the person that you were at Yale—the experiences that helped form you, the dreams you had then— and to see how your current

reality measures up. Reading your bios, I was also struck by how rich are the dimensions of leadership represented in this room—women playing leadership roles in their work, in their families, in their communities, and in building a civil, democratic society. I was especially impressed by the overwhelming numbers of you who play significant volunteer leadership roles beyond everything else that you do in your lives.

So leadership, as embodied by the women here, is a rich, multidimensional way of engaging with life. It is much more than the ways in which our society commonly characterizes what it means to lead. And that is part of our opportunity and our challenge.

To take the first of the questions that Jeff framed for me: how have we come into a sense of ourselves as leaders? I can share with you some aspects of my own journey and I look forward to hearing your experiences as we talk together over the course of this day. For each of us, of course, the impetus towards leadership starts with our own particular life experience. For me, the most important originating facts are these:

I was born in South Africa to a South African father and an American mother—a Smith graduate. My father died when I was three, leaving my mother with three children under the age of three to raise. My remarkable mother did just that and she worked all my life. Her job: developing one of the first continuing education programs for women in the 1960s at Washington University, for women who found their life circumstances in the '60s and '70s changing in ways that they had not anticipated. My sister, the youngest of us, was born with significant learning disabilities. My mother, in the days before the Individuals with Disabilities Act, had to work hard to find decent educational opportunities for her. There wasn't much available.

So, very early in my life, reinforced by regular visits back to South Africa, I had the experience of undeserved loss and undeserved privilege. And these experiences, plus being a smart girl from what was, in those days, a distinctly non-traditional family, led me to feel different, an outsider, and contributed in important ways to my impetus to lead, and certainly to the kinds of issues that I've chosen to focus on in my working life.

Coming to Yale, for me, was a transformative experience. I transferred here in 1975, my junior year, from Smith. I continued being a good student here, but had an absolutely undistinguished Yale career in every other dimension. Seriously—I did no music, I did no drama, I did no organized sports or extracurricular activities. I did not have the kind of incredible talents that you saw on display last night and yesterday. But, Yale, for me, was the opening of new worlds that I had neither imagined nor experienced. One of the most important things about the experience was, in fact, seeing leaders -- so many people being so good at such a wide range of endeavors—intellectual and other—from my fellow students and friends to the faculty to the incredible wealth of people who come to this institution to share their own experiences. It left me with a sense of the excitement of ideas, a sense of what it means to have potential and to recognize it in whatever sphere one chooses to apply one's self, and what it means to have the discipline and commitment to be really good at something.

In the years that I was a student here—both as an undergraduate in one of the early classes of women and as a student in the third class of the School of Management—I thought that the experience was only good. I had only good feelings about it. But in the years since, I realize that, in many ways, it was hard to be one of the early women at Yale. We didn't talk a lot about it then. I don't think we could afford to let ourselves

recognize how difficult, in how many ways, it was. It was hard to be in such a minority. It was worse to transfer. All the women students got an inordinate amount of attention from the Yale men and I can remember, literally, feeling like fresh meat as I walked through the dining hall in my first several weeks here. It was also challenging to learn to hold my own in the competitive, intellectual one-upmanship environment that characterized Yale in the years when I was here.

I graduated from Yale feeling that the world was my oyster. I could do whatever I wanted. I had unlimited options. I was conscious of wanting to achieve as I always had—but not of aspiring in any way to lead. I felt an enormous gratitude to the women who had blazed the trail before my generation, and eager to fill the promise. I never once considered not working. I assumed love, marriage, children would take care of themselves. I felt unease at the lives of the non-working women of my mother's generation and, worse, I felt scorn. I thought I could have it all and I had no idea how hard that would be.

Looking back now, 27 years later, I have become a leader in a very narrow sphere. I founded an organization around a cause for which I felt enormous passion and I've built it into a successful contributing leader in its field. I've had great accomplishments and probably like every one of us in this room, great struggles, too. Like many of us, there were times when my personal life paid a price, when it was much harder to get that piece of it right than the professional pieces of it. I married a college sweetheart, had a daughter, divorced, remarried happily and have had a second child—one mother, two children, three different last names in our family, which really does a number on people in our fairly traditional community outside of Boston.

So, for me, the sense of myself as a leader emerged very gradually. I did not see myself as a leader when I was young, nor did I consciously seek to be one. As my Yale friend Linda Mason said when we talked about her own perspective on these issues, I *emerged* as a leader. I find this interesting. In preparing to come here, I talked to a number of friends from my Yale days and, universally across us, being a leader was not something that we consciously sought to become. From the literature on women's development, this is actually a common experience. Carolyn Heilbrun wrote in her brilliant book, *Writing a Woman's Life*, about how common it is for women of achievement to attribute their success to luck, to forces outside themselves, not to their own effort and skill.

So, what is generalizable from my experience? Here are three themes that struck me from my experience and that of my friends who were here in the '70s and the '80 in coming into a sense of ourselves as leaders.

The first is anger, anger translated into a desire to change things. For me, one of my work experiences in my twenties was being a Research Assistant for a big management strategy consulting firm in Boston called The Boston Consulting Group. I was young, I was idealistic and I was paid \$5.00 an hour with no benefits. Many of the consultants were, maybe, two years older than I was, differentiated only by the fact that they'd gone to Harvard Business School and were paid astronomical amounts of money. It was a period of time when BCG was making its reputation by helping companies decide to downsize and leave the communities in America where they were located. And I found myself getting so angry because I felt that you could look at the same analysis that we were producing and reach different conclusions about what the right solution for

those companies would be and, certainly, what the right decisions for those communities would be. So I decided that I needed to learn the languages of power and money and that's what precipitated me to come back to the School of Management.

I also had the experience of having good ideas and having my ideas be overlooked. My friends had similar experiences, too. Linda Mason's experience in relief organizations and management consulting made her furious at how men put women down. She decided that she wanted to become a different kind of leader, a different kind of manager and went on to found Bright Horizons, consistently ranked as one of the best companies to work for in America. Another friend, Marilyn Paul, now a leading author and organizational change consultant, talked about how her own personal make-up and experiences growing up led her actually to want to fight leaders rather than to want to be one.

At first, the idea that anger should lead us to an aspiration to lead seemed kind of surprising to me, and maybe counterintuitive. But maybe not. The legendary community organizer, Saul Olinsky, who founded the Industrial Areas Foundation, trained organizers to look for people in communities who have the capacity, as IAF puts it, to make their private anger public. That's who they want to have leading organizing efforts. In many ways, anger is a theme which I imagine runs common for many of us. It's an important factor for women coming into a sense of themselves as leaders. I wonder if it is as much so for men.

The second theme was recognizing our competence—learning that we were good at making something happen, figuring out what we were good at, and learning to build on those strengths. For me, it was founding an organization and figuring out how to grow it

without the benefits of an Old Boy Network— figuring out, in fact, how to get the Old Boys to support what I was trying to do. And a huge part of coming into a sense of my own competence was having a mentor—a man, Arthur White, who gave me the chance to do what I thought I had the ability to do, and supported me in stretching beyond my natural comfort zone.

The third theme from across my conversations and reflections had to do with getting in touch with our own voices, gaining the confidence and the skill to assume we would be listened to, and learning how to use our voices publicly. In my early years—and perhaps this is the down side of being a “good Yale student,” I was very adept at figuring out what the establishment wanted to hear from me in order to be able to succeed by its ground rules. I didn’t take a lot of risks to deviate or to talk about the world as I saw it in a different kind of a way. By virtue of running a non-profit organization, which are not particularly well respected in our society, I never really had the experience—and I think this is true for many women—of having positional power, power that was associated with me because of the position that I held.

An early experience that really brought home just how silly and irrelevant, in many ways, our society’s infatuation with position is was my experience on the Clinton transition team. I was the only woman on my little subset of the transition team. The rest were men who had been in the Carter administration. And they were on memory lane. They wanted to talk about what they had known about youth development and youth transitions and what they had done, and I was out there doing it. I was in the field, I was in the work, and it was very, very hard to get a voice with them. And then something

happened. I got a call to come make a speech at Clinton's Economic Summit, the one that he held in Little Rock.

I flew down and spoke there and Clinton introduced me and talked about all of the great things that we had done for him when he was Governor of Arkansas. Then I flew back to the same transition team I had left 24 hours before. And you would have thought I was God. Seriously. Same person as I had been two days before, same ideas, same experiences. But everybody thought I was going to become something. Maybe I was going to go into the administration. Maybe I was more important than they had thought I was. That was gratifying on one level, but humbling on another because I knew that nothing was different about me. It reinforced for me that what matters is what is in you. It's not about what's in the external world.

Let me turn now to this other set of questions, which it sounds as if you have been talking a lot about over the last day: as women leaders, where are we now? Are we making a difference? How far have we really come? Where do we want to go? I personally find this a very complicated picture, one where I feel I don't, at least, have answers.

A pessimist would say that we have not come as far as we wanted. For those of us here who were here in the '70s, we thought, for sure, women by now would be leading half of the companies in this country, holding half of the elected offices, that we'd have a woman President, we'd have parity in wages and parity in representation on corporate and other boards.

I don't know how many of you read an article that was in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* last October by a woman named Lisa Belkin. How many of you saw

that article? She pointed out an additional phenomenon, which is the numbers of well educated women who are leaving the workforce. And she called it “The Opt Out Revolution.” Here are some of the facts that she presents: 50% of the Yale Class of 2003 were women, 60% of the graduating class at Berkeley Law School in 2003, 46% of the class of Harvard Law School, 51% of the class of Columbia’s Law School, 47% of medical students nationwide in 2003, 50% of undergraduate Business majors—women. And then she says, “Suddenly, they stopped.”

Part of what she writes about is what we call “The Glass Ceiling.” Only 16% of partners in law firms today are women, 16% of corporate officers, 8 of the Fortune 500 CEOs, 62 of the 435 Representatives in Congress, 14 of our Senators. We still earn around 80 cents on the dollar for comparable jobs. As for the elite professional women who interest Belkin, she looked at the Harvard Business School classes of ’81, ’85 and ’91 and found that only 38% of women were working fulltime. As I look at the class notes of my class at SOM, I would say that the statistics look quite similar. Belkin writes that between a quarter and a third of professional women are out of the work force, and of the two-thirds who are working, only 5% work 50 hours or more a week.

Now, I have to add an important sidebar here, to say that the Belkin article is about extraordinarily privileged women who have a lot of choices and opportunities. She does not write about the majority of women who work, many of them single mothers who have no choice but to work out of economic necessity. For many women, it is not about careers. It’s about putting food on the table for their families. Belkin doesn’t write about all the reasons that women heads of households are more likely than men to be poor and, if they are in low wage jobs, to stay trapped in them. For men, statistically, low-wage

work tends to be a transitional experience. They're in for a period of time and then they move out of it.

But it was an overwhelming picture—reading that article. As my 16-year old daughter would say, “What’s up?”

Belkin acknowledges that this “opt out” phenomenon is, partly, the Glass Ceiling, but she claims it is also about the difficulty that we are all finding of combining work and life, whether or not we're parents. She argues that it is partly because women are finding they are no long willing to “work so hard for a prize they're learning they may not want.” There's a lot in that. I also think it's more complicated. As we go into the small group sessions today, I hope we have a chance to talk about these issues because I think that, while women are making choices—and many of us here are fortunate enough to have choices to make—it is still true that the structures of work have not changed and that the enormous numbers of us who have good educations and have moved into leadership positions in the workplace have not succeeded in really building supportive structures for women, for families, men included, support for children.

For many of us, we are quietly, individually exhausted. We are exhausted by the burden of carrying the dissonance of these forced separations between work and life. We are exhausted by how people judge women who work and women who stay home. We are exhausted by the double message that we really can be anything, should be anything, but society makes it so hard. One of the questions we have to ask ourselves is: Why has that personal struggle stayed so private—unlike the “Women’s Movement” and “Feminism” in the ‘70s, which was a much more public and much better organized movement. So that’s what I think the pessimist would say about where we are right now.

The optimist would say that women have a lot of choices, a lot more choices than earlier generations of women have had, and we have made enormous progress, even though we have a long way still to go. Many people, and certainly my work confirms this, would say that the nature of the economy and of what work requires today gives advantages to women in many ways. The leadership style in the knowledge economy and in networked, knowledge-oriented, team-oriented companies plays to a lot of the natural strengths women have as leaders. Certainly, if you think about the literature on servant leadership, many women have experience in that through their roles as family members, as parents. What Peter Senge in *The Learning Organization* and others write about are many attributes that women bring to work and to leadership.

Also, in a very significant trend, women are starting most of the small businesses in this country. One of the ways in which they are “opting out” is actually to opt in to creating their own workplaces, workplaces that work better for them and for their lives. Women create business enterprises at a rate two times more than that of men and that this is growing dramatically. If you look at the research, it finds that women entrepreneurs who are starting their own organizations tend to be more comfortable with the balance between work and life in their lives.

Taken together, all this highlights what a confusing and chaotic time we are living in. Are we going forward? Are we going backward? By what standard?

“By what standard” is, in many ways, the most important question. And it’s a question we have to define for ourselves and for our daughters, our sons, for the broader society. It would be enormously damaging if we decide that the Opt Out Revolution is where women have got to in this society.

As we think about these questions, it's important to remember the breadth of leadership roles represented by the people here at this conference—leadership in work, in families, in communities where, historically, society always has needed the “red tent” and relationships that women provide, and leadership in the civic sphere. Maybe, we are at a time when a new paradigm is emerging. Maybe looking back 10 or 15 years from now, we will see that we changed the terms in ways that allow the dimensions of work and family and community to be less in conflict. That the choices that we're making now, the ways that we're trying to balance or integrate our lives better, can be about changing the terms—for men, as well as for women, and certainly for our children. Maybe the challenge for us is not to figure out how to infiltrate the still predominantly male structures, but to redefine them.

As we go forward, we have to know from how hard and how painful it is to be women who have it all and are trying to balance it all, that this is going to be enormously difficult work. We have to bring to it our anger and our competence and our voices. We have to care for, not punish, ourselves. We have to care for each other, for the different choices we make—do we work, do we work full-time, do we have a career, do we stay home to take care of children? There is no one right way. And we have to shore up confidence in our ways of knowing as we make a path forward that makes sense.

As we do this, it is really important to shift the struggle from one that we experience individually or in small groups of like-minded, like-situated friends to a struggle in which we figure out, in some way, how to *organize*, how to reclaim some aspects of what the Women's Movement of the '60s and the '70s had. This is one of the great dangers of privilege. It is one of the dangers of coming to a place like Yale. The

early feminist movement thought about women and their needs as a class, women as a group in which low-income women, women who were poor, women who were wealthy, had common needs and, therefore, common changes that they needed the society to make. It's very easy for women of privilege now to focus on their individual struggles and to dissociate themselves from the struggles of all women. Yet, as another recent magazine article warns, one of the ways we've been able to solve the workforce problem is through the influx of immigrant low income women who serve our families and our needs, and without whom we would not be able to do what we do. So, we have to make space for a new kind of common cause that sees the challenges and the struggles and the opportunities that we have as ones that are about women as a class, and ones that are going to require changes in the society, and not just in our individual lives.

There's a woman at Harvard named Theda Skocpol who writes about democracy and civic action. She writes about the debate between whether you're better off with universal solutions that benefit everybody or with policies that segregate the poor and deal with their needs separately through targeted programs. The danger of that route is that it's always easier to shrink the pie because there's no broad-based political support for people who are poor. She writes about how three of the great social achievements in the 20th century on which America prides itself—I'm going to get this wrong—I wasn't able to look for it before coming down here—I think they were Aid to Families With Dependent Children, Social Security and Medicare—grew out of women's organizations at the turn of the century that were trying to figure out how to make things better for women and for families.

We forget things like that. We forget what it's possible to do as an organized group of people. If you look at the widening income gaps in this country, if you look at the increasing political polarization of people whose minds are fixed, we have a lot of work to do—a lot of work to do.

As the daughter of one-time English teachers, I want to close with two poems. The first speaks to some of the individual challenges that I've been talking about. It's by Rainer Maria Rilke and it's a poem called "I Believe in All That Has Never Yet Been Spoken."

I believe in all that has never yet been spoken.

I want to free what waits within me

So that what no one has dared to wish for may, for once

Spring clear without my contriving.

If this is arrogant, God forgive me.

But this is what I need to say:

May what I do flow from me like a river,

No forcing and no holding back, the way it is with children.

Then, in these swelling and ebbing currents,

These deepening tides moving out, returning,

I will sing you, as no one ever has,

Streaming through widening channels

Into the open sea.

This is part of where we're struggling to get—out of the exhaustion of living the lives that we lead, out of the confusion of trying to figure out whether it's great to be a woman leader in these times, or really hard and maybe not all that it's cracked up to be.

The last thought that I want to leave with you is a poem by a woman, Marge Piercy, that is about organizing. It's called "The Low Road:"

What can they do to you?
Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can bust you,
They can break your fingers, they can burn your brain with electricity,
Blur you with drugs 'til you can't walk, can't remember.
They can take your child, wall up your lover.
They can do anything.
You can't stop them from doing.
How can you stop them?
Alone, you can fight, you can refuse.
You can take what revenge you can.
But they roll over you.

But two people fighting, back to back,
Can cut through a mob.

A snake dancing file can break a cordon.

An army can meet an army.

Two people can help each other,

Can keep each other sane.

Can give support, conviction, love, massage, hope, sex.

Three people are a delegation, a committee, a wedge.

With four, you can play bridge and start an organization.

With six, you can rent a whole house,

Eat pie for dinner with no seconds,

And hold a fundraising party.

A dozen, make a demonstration.

A hundred, fill a hall.

A thousand, have solidarity and your own newsletter.

Ten thousand, power and your own paper.

A hundred thousand, your own media.

Ten million, your own country.

It goes on, one at a time.

It starts when you care to act.

It starts when you do it again after they said no.

It starts when you say, "we," and know who you mean.

And each day, you mean one more.

Thank you.