

## Driven to Survive: Four Filipino Women CEOs' Stories on Separation or Annulment

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**Abstract.** Discussions of the divorce issue in the Philippines have largely focused on women's concerns, given that marriage and relationships are gendered experiences shaped by traditional roles and expectations where women are seen at a disadvantage. Women's groups have emphasized the need for divorce for poor women who are victims of violence or whose sense of self is lost amidst domestic abuse.

This paper examines the stories of separation or annulment of four women CEOs who are highly educated and economically empowered, to explore how they handled domestic and marital challenges, and to create awareness on the issue of divorce that is truly inclusive for all women of whatever socio-economic class. Using a qualitative approach, purposive sampling is used and four women CEOs were interviewed in-depth to analyze factors beyond demographics, that included personal values and beliefs on religion, society, family, and gender roles.

The study yields that economically empowered Filipino women go through almost the same marital conflicts as women from other socio-economic classes and as such their views on or acceptance of divorce or annulment may take the same direction in claiming back a sense of self or protection from any form of violence. These are issues that might have been overlooked in the divorce discussion precisely because these women's education and social levels as well as their economic or financial independence are assumed to protect or shield them from possible abuse (physical, mental, emotional, and verbal) in the domestic domain.

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**Key Words:** Divorce in the Philippines, women, women's issues, gender

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### **Introduction**

The Philippines has always ranked high in the Global Gender Gap survey, placing in the top eight in a list of countries in 2012, where indicators of gender equality are measured in terms of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health in terms of life expectancy and mortality rates, and political empowerment or female representation in government. A 2012 Grant Thornton report also shows how the Philippines had the second most number of women leaders or managers in the corporate world, second only to Russia (Dumlao, 2012). In both studies, the indicators analyzed gender gaps and statistics, and the numbers certainly show that Filipinas are in a good, “gender-equal”, place when compared to men and other women from the rest of the world.

These indicators of empowerment or high status of Filipinas have been questioned (Castro, 2012; Solar & Garcia, 2012; Eviota, 1989) if indeed these numbers translated to true empowerment in the domestic sphere, suggesting that there should be other metrics that might be better measures of true empowerment, such as household work hours (still unequal despite marital

or employment status in Banzon-Bautista, 1989, p. 72) or even share in decision-making beyond household expenditures (Porio, Lynch & Hollnsteiner, 1978, p. 47). Gender roles remain heavily influenced by culture and the dictates of society, dominated by patriarchal laws, norms, and values. In certain homes, domestic abuse is either a secret or is accepted as part of the macho culture where the husband is allowed more leeway in terms of womanizing or anger management and where the wife is expected to be more patient and accepting, needing to, “give in”, to such indiscretion or even to violence and abuse (Medina, 1991, p. 18; Hollnsteiner, 1981, p. 251, 283).

It is important to be clear which lenses to use in this issue of domestic violence where abuse can take many forms – physical, emotional, sexual, mental, or verbal. The image of the abused woman (or girl) is one who is beaten up and left cowering in fear, unable to make decisions or to speak out, and incapable of self-support—images that propagate the idea that much of the violence happens only to women from poor socio-economic status or who are weak (physically, emotionally, mentally or financially). There seems to be a disconnect when we speak of violence among women who are more financially stable, are highly educated and more empowered – surely they must be more courageous to leave a dysfunctional relationship. But are they? Surely they must be more intelligent to speak out and to defend themselves when necessary. But do they? What is it like for these so-called empowered women to have marital conflicts and how do they deal with the problems?

Economically empowered Filipinas go through almost the same marital conflicts as Filipinas from other socio-economic classes and as such their views on or acceptance of divorce or annulment as options may take the same direction in claiming back a sense of self or protection from any form of violence. However, women of middle or especially the upper class may

have more reasons and options to maintain two personae and more resources to live those two lives: the strong and successful CEO in the corporate world and the quiet, submissive, if not simpering wife at home. These are issues that might have been overlooked in the divorce discussion precisely because these women's education and social levels as well as their economic or financial independence are assumed to protect or shield them from possible abuse (physical, mental, emotional, and verbal) in the domestic domain. It is important to explore here how these empowered women who have encountered marital conflicts chose to solve these issues and why they feel divorce or annulment may or may not be the best, most equitable or least painful solution.

The methodology used for this study is qualitative with purposive sampling. One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted for this exploratory and qualitative study that examined the lives of four women CEOs and how they handled marital conflicts that led to separation, annulment or divorce. Using purposive sampling of women members in an exclusive women's business association, their individual demographic backgrounds as well as their personal values and beliefs on religion, society, family, and gender roles were explored. These revealed some commonalities and patterns which were compared with some existing research and literature on the topic.

Discussed specifically is how Filipina CEOs think and feel about the issues of divorce, annulment or separation based on their marital journeys. Shared here are their stories on how their relationships started, when trouble began, why their marriages failed, what options they considered to resolve the issues, what led them to initiate annulment or separation proceedings and finally, how they survived in the aftermath. This will include their ideas on love and marriage, professional attainment and financial

independence, children, family, church, and society – and how all these influenced their decisions and actions.

The purpose of this study is to examine how Filipina CEOs— all highly educated, respected in industry, and financially capable – view the concept of divorce or annulment based on their personal experiences in a gendered Filipino society. The findings can be used in future discussions of the Divorce Bill or HB1799 to provide another perspective on issues raised by Gabriela in this bill beyond matters of violence and inequality for marginalized women. These women CEOs must join the conversations bringing with them their stories and show that despite being empowered and educated enough to make decisions on their own, or having the ability to make use of more solutions available because of higher economic capacities, they still need to be heard and to have a law that provides them with safe haven or protection as other women in whatever socioeconomic class. This would help provide a clearer picture of women’s issues if Gabriela intends to make it one, or if other groups want to create a more comprehensive bill that covers all kinds of women and not just the poor and marginalized, so as not to discriminate. It may be pointed out that while the divorce issue could affect the middle to upper class more because of property issues, it must be acknowledged still that any woman remains vulnerable to violence or abuse as there are double standards in society and in the norms and laws that govern family and marriage.

A possible limitation to this study is the relationship between researcher and respondents. Since I am a friend/acquaintance of the respondents, some objectivity might have been lost. This kind of relationship, while enabling easy conversation and casual exchanges, may have also created limitations for me because out of respect, I had to wait for the interviewee to freely volunteer certain confidential and sensitive issues instead of conducting a

deeper probe. The fourth respondent was also in a hurry to go to another meeting so the interview was relatively shorter than the others. Aware that it takes two people to make or break a relationship, I only considered the stories of the women and no triangulation or validation was done with other friends, clinical psychiatrists or priest confessors. The discussion of the effect on children and other family members was minimal, if any, as this paper focused on the women themselves and their marital issues. As in any other qualitative study, the purposive sampling and the limited cases studied might only be helpful as reference for more in-depth studies in the future.

There are many existing literature on divorce locally and internationally. In the article titled, "The World's Last Divorce Debate: Does the Philippines need a divorce law?", Olivar (n.d., p. 18) notes that compared with the Reproductive Health Law, the issues of the divorce bill may not be as controversial, but still remains a concern that will clearly polarize Philippine society once again, with the Church and other opponents expected to make, "their final stand in Congress". Here, the author presents arguments from both sides and includes the anti's stand that divorce violates Philippine law and is not necessary given that legal separation and annulment are already allowed in the Family Code. Pro-divorce advocates, however, argue that these two options do not suffice as legal separation does not actually end the marriage while annulment only looks at issues before or at the time of marriage and not during the marriage itself.

Research by Mason and Smith (2003) on women empowerment and how it is measured or determined in South and Southeast Asia reveals three key points: 1) power within the household is strongly influenced by social context (national and community) as determined by social institutions rather than individual characteristics; 2) there are interrelations among different dimensions that depend on social context; and

3) some socioeconomic indicators may apply but only in certain contexts. In the third, education for women may actually do little to empower them in the short run though there might be other benefits in certain areas. In the same research, women empowerment at home is defined as, “freedom from control by other family members and ability to affect desired outcomes within the household”. The same paper explores aspects of domestic empowerment which includes decision-making power on economic issues, size of family, freedom of movement, as well as ability to disagree with the husband who might use force or intimidation.

Other indicators of women empowerment can be seen in the human development index (HDI), which was extended to include the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and the Gender Development Index (GDI), where countries are ranked and compared. Tapales (n.d.) listed how the United Nations defines these as follows: HDI measures the quality of life using four main categories: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment, and gross domestic product per capita. The GDI compares males and females in each country using these indicators while the GEM measures seats in parliament held by women, female legislators, senior officials, managers, female professional, and technical workers, as well as ratio of estimated female to male earned income. The same study by Tapales showed that the Philippines consistently ranked high in the GEM (35th) and GDI (63rd) though it has a lower ranking in HDI (77th).

Tapales (n.d.) further notes that the difference in human development rankings and gender rankings may actually reveal how the perception that women are actually empowered in the Philippines may not necessarily be translated into true gender equality as historical, cultural, and other barriers still prevent women from truly obtaining equal status with men.

This culture of context in defining gender equality was also explored by Solar and Garcia (2012, p. 80), citing that Philippine society is still male-dominated despite the Philippines' ranking 8th in the Global Gender Gap Report in 2011. Here, they suggested that the measures used to assess gender equality, "should be based on cultural contextual realities and not on quantity based gender participation", noting that, "cultural transition and changes in the structural context of the community reveal the authentic condition of gender equality in the Philippines". Future recommendations include the need to study male behavior in the context of women empowerment, taking into consideration that the diversity of abuse has actually been increasing and more laws on women's rights protection are being created despite consistent high rankings in gender equality reports. The study also states that proponents of women empowerment should advocate or include a program that will, "transform the socio-cultural attitude of men towards women", or even have a man to head the gender equality committee. It is interesting how Solar and Garcia suggested that even the word, "empowerment", should be changed as well because it connotes, "hunger for higher authority over a weaker entity, hence it contradicts the concept of equality" (p. 83).

Financial or economic capabilities play a role with regard to how women see marriage (or separation/annulment) and how the lack of such would affect their lives and their children's. Olivar (2011) quotes Dicen-Hunt and Sta. Ana-Gatbonton: "Filipino women accept that part of their role in marriage is to satisfy the sexual needs of their husband, whether they like it or not ... Abuse and violence is often accepted as part of married life. With financial support assured, more battered wives with no paid employment would likely seek divorce as a way out of abusive relationships". Olivar (2011) notes why women's rights proponents focus on spousal and child support, emphasizing that more battered women with no employment but who can



be assured of financial support will be more willing to leave an abusive relationship.

In the international research scene, Olivar (2011) compared how the United States and some European countries fared with divorce statistics. In the US, it was found that an estimated two out of every five marriages end in divorce, and that the first marriage that ends in divorce lasts an average of eight years with the average time between divorce and remarriage estimated to be about three-and-a-half years. Factors that led to marital conflict and divorce included early marriage and lower level of education, premarital sex and cohabitation, psychological problems, and availability of alternative partners.

On the other hand, European countries with strong Catholic influences such as Ireland, Italy, and Spain have lower divorce rates than the US, with an average length of marriage before divorce considered to be at 15 years. Olivar cites the stricter conditions for divorce to be factors why divorce statistics in these countries are lower than in the US, specifically, the requirement for a continuous two to three years of separation and having no provision for no-fault divorce.

An interesting study by Bernardi and Martinez-Pastor (2011) explains some of Spain's higher divorce numbers as compared to Italy and Ireland. It appears that economic and education factors were on a reverse trend, where it is no longer just the highly educated (therefore, more economically stable) who are getting divorced. While it used to be true that higher levels of education enabled women to resist normative pressures of gender roles (thus they are less traditional and more open to consider or opt for divorce in an unhappy relationship), this changed when society no longer looked at divorce as uncommon. The researchers note that, "the social costs of divorce are higher in a society where divorce is a rare event... As divorce gradually becomes more common, it

is argued that the stigma associated with divorce declines and that the positive effect of education on divorce should therefore decrease” (p. 774). Bernardi and Martinez (2011) also notes the trend that showed premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy as determinants for divorce for the younger generation, whereas it used to be that the presence of children kept people from separating.

Divorce statistics in Nigeria also show how having fewer children makes divorce easier to consider as an option (Adegoke, 2010). Other socio-cultural factors that have been used to explain increasing divorce rates in Nigeria include higher family incomes, availability of free legal aid for the poor as well as greater opportunities for women that have made them less dependent, both financially and emotionally, on men. It was also found that education as a determinant for divorce lay on both ends of the spectrum, that is, either the least educated or the most highly educated stayed married. Education levels and economic capabilities for women of reproductive age, however, were more indicative of a predisposition toward divorce.

Adegoke (2010) also argues that it is possible that a, “greater social acceptance of divorce”, in Nigeria has actually led to increases in divorce rates, which actually include the, “relaxation of negative attitudes among religious” groups, which no longer treat the issue as a sin (p. 107). A research study by Stokes and Ellison (in Huges, 2010) that specifically focused on how religion shapes attitudes toward divorce show that church attendance was the strongest predictor of attitudes on divorce where those who are more religious or who regularly practice their faith prefer to have stricter laws about divorce. The same is true for those who profess some religious affiliation, like conservative Protestants who want divorce laws to be stricter.

In Zimbabwe and in many Southern African countries that are predominantly Christian, a failed marriage is considered,

“the ultimate sin”, and this was contrasted with how European countries that are also Christian have come to accept divorce as a solution where even divorced church leaders continue to lead Christian ministries (Nyoni, 2012).

In Asia, China and Vietnam are experiencing sharp increases or even doubling of divorce rates and this was found to be due to higher education and increased financial independence of women along with changes in traditional social values brought about by integration into the global economy, where it is anticipated that empowered and divorced women will drive the country forward. Vietnamese women are now filing for divorce citing economic pressures, lifestyle differences, adultery, and abuse (Bland, 2011).

### **Findings and Discussion**

Four women CEOs who are separated or whose marriages were annulled and who are members of a women’s business group were interviewed one-on-one to find out their personal backgrounds covering basic demographics as well as their personal stories of what their marriages were like from the beginning to the separation or annulment to discover reasons why their marriages failed, their efforts to resolve issues, and how they coped in the aftermath.

#### **Brief Marriage Histories**

**Amy** (age 48) had been a consistent student leader since high school. Always independent she worked in the US right after college and learned to fend for herself, saving enough money to come home and even build a house. She met her husband Tim in a charismatic community and at age 27, felt it was time to settle down like most of her peers. In less than six months they decided to get married and the only sign of things to come was an admission by Tim, two weeks before the wedding, that he had gotten someone pregnant years earlier and that the child was given up for adoption. She felt she could live with that and proceeded

with the wedding, only to discover other negative things about her husband – most especially his volatile temper that was triggered by the most mundane things, as well as some psychological issues possibly brought about by a dysfunctional family and childhood. Her husband would shout at the househelp and at the children, would call her names and would keep complaining about everything that at times, she felt she just wanted to laugh at him for his crazy ways. He would have nightmares and would not be able to sleep, eventually losing his job and needing to rely on Amy who by then just chose to go on with life by being active in industry associations and by traveling in and out of the country often for work. The children were then being taken cared of by the nannies and somehow, she overlooked the fact that the children were already being affected by her husband's ways as was seen in their grades. It was only when she found out that Tim was physically hurting their youngest son and her eldest son was already threatening to kill himself that she found the courage to separate and get an annulment, after 15 years of marriage. She paid for the civil annulment, which she feels was an expensive and traumatizing experience and has since remarried civilly.

If Amy's husband Tim was all noise with his screaming tantrums, *Therese's* husband Edwin was the opposite – being quiet and withdrawn, and seemingly emotionally detached or distant. He was often away for work and simply expected or wanted a wife who would be waiting for him the entire time. Therese (age 56) admitted to having her own emotional problems back then and needed more attention or affirmation than her husband was willing to give. When she was getting too depressed, she sought all sorts of counseling and help and attempted to bring Edwin along for some marriage counseling or therapy. Edwin refused as he felt that she was the one who had a problem and not him. It took 15 years before she found the courage to leave the marriage as all her advisers (even her priest confessor)

could see that she was becoming self-destructive. She admitted to already knowing there were some incompatibilities before they got married, but chose to ignore them at that time because she was in love when she got married at age 27, after being in an exclusive relationship with Edwin for two years. She also paid for her civil annulment and has since remarried.

Like Therese, **Hannah** (age 56) married at age 27 also because she was in love, having just finished a business master's degree where she met her husband Bob in the same graduate school. They were in a relationship for two years before settling down. She shared how the priest who was going to wed them and who knew the husband's family well, actually spoke and counseled her (and not her then fiancé) for an unusually long time, as if to make sure she knew what she was getting into. Having lost her father at an early age, she admitted to feeling handicapped in knowing about healthy cross-gender relationships as there were mostly women in her family and she never had a boyfriend before. She was unaware that it was not usual for couples not to have regular sexual intimacy, for example, as it seemed her husband only wanted contact when he knew she could conceive. Having married someone from a different culture, she did not realize until later that it was unusual for her to be seated at a separate table while her husband and daughter were seated with the family. She could not understand why her efforts to be more intimate with her husband did not work – until she found out that Bob has been having an affair with a married woman whom he was involved with even before they were married. When she realized he was just using her as a front (he would be sweet to her in front of other people), she separated from him after five years and needed to convince her mother to help her move on with her life as she had two young children then. It was only when she attempted to kill herself that her mother and her relatives realized how they all needed to rally around her and help her survive. She

also initiated and paid for both a church and civil annulment and has also remarried.

**Patti's** (age 62) case may seem different from the three other respondents, though her story may be typical of any teenager falling in love too soon and too seriously before their immature minds can fathom what they were getting into. Patti herself admits that falling recklessly in love at 18 years old, being together for less than six months and then eloping with a young scion of a wealthy family, was a recipe for disaster. Her husband Peter lived the life of a bachelor even when they were already married and had kids, coming home late each night and would be involved with other high-profile women at the same time. This made them fight all the time, separate for awhile then get back together, until after almost seven years, Patti's mother spoke with Peter's mother to decide that this should just stop as she saw how miserable Patti was. Unlike Hannah's difficulty to get her mother's support, Patti's mother willingly helped her raised her kids. Patti's and Peter's application for annulment was denied since at the point of marriage, there was nothing wrong with them psychologically as they were both young and admittedly in love. Patti pursued work and her academic studies including active involvement in the church. She is the only one among all four respondents not in favor of divorce as she feels it will lead to a fractured society of people no longer willing to still try to work things out. She has remained single despite being legally separated in the Philippines though her ex-husband had initiated divorce abroad so he could remarry.

### **Summary of Findings**

**Age, educational attainment and current marital status.** The ages of the four women are 48 (Amy), 56 (code name Therese), 56 (code name Hannah) and 62 (code name Patti) all with high educational attainments. Patti has three postgraduate degrees (MBA, MA and PhD), Hannah has an MBM from a premiere graduate institution, Amy has a certification for a higher level

business degree and Therese has attained some master's units. All were or still are CEOs of their respective companies (Patti has retired but is still active in advocacies). Patti is separated de facto (involving separation of properties) but her ex-husband divorced her without her knowledge and married another woman in the United States. They have two sons ages 43 and 40. Civilly annulled are Amy who has two sons ages 21 and 18, and Therese who has one daughter age 23 and one son age 19. Hannah's marriage is both civil and church annulled and she has two daughters, ages 26 and 23.

***Age at marriage, average number of years in a relationship before marriage, and reasons for getting married.*** Except for Patti who eloped and married at 18 as a form of rebellion from strict parents, all other respondents married at an average age of 27, considered above average during that time. Patti admitted that their young age (18) at the time of marriage was the reason behind their problems brought about by immaturity of being recklessly in love whereas Amy and Therese claimed that there was some pressure to get married due to age and other friends being already married or getting married. Both Patti and Amy had less than a year (four to six months) of being officially in a relationship as boyfriend-girlfriend while Therese and Hannah were in relationships with their ex-husbands for at least two years before getting married. When Amy, Therese, and Hannah were asked if they saw any signs of incompatibility or psychological incapacity before marriage, Amy shared how her then fiancé told her about some indiscretion (got somebody pregnant at 18, child given up for adoption) two weeks before marriage, Therese said she did see some signs but chose to ignore them out of being in love, while Hannah was unaware of how normal relationships should be given that she had no example to follow in her family as her father died when she was ten years old; she also married because she was in love.

***Number of years married before separation, who initiated and/or paid.*** Both Amy and Therese were married for fifteen years before deciding to separate and eventually get their annulments. Hannah and Patti were married for five years and less than seven years respectively before separation/annulment. Except for Patti, all three women initiated the annulment and paid for the process which ranged from P300,000 to P500,000.

***The marital conflict or tension.*** In the case of Patti, besides youth and immaturity of both parties, the ex-husband was a womanizer and had a series of high-profile girlfriends (models, actresses and beauty queens) during their marriage and separation. “Di pa nagsawa sa pagkabinata” (“He has not yet gotten tired of bachelorhood”), Patti shared. It did not help that the ex-husband’s family was very rich as this only made him more spoiled and irresponsible. Both families were unhappy with the situation though her mother-in-law once talked to her mother asking that the couple be given a chance to work things out by themselves but her mother refused since the fighting and separating then getting back together only to separate again was getting too frequent and irreconcilable, and her mother saw how miserable she already was.

For Amy, it was her ex-husband’s volatile emotions and temper and constant verbal onslaught toward everyone in the household that strained the relationship. In addition was the inability of the husband to be economically productive and find work for seven years and instead of being helpful at home and to the children, even proved to be burdensome. The verbal abuse toward her and the children affected her health. She lost 10 to 15 pounds and her children’s grades in school were at barely passing. Besides realizing that her eldest son was being traumatized by her ex’s temper and verbal outbursts, she also found out that he was hitting her younger son. And yet she remained to be a, “trophy wife”, who backed down at home and had a different



persona in front of others. She would bear the verbal assault from her husband as he would call her, “bitch”, or “shit”, when she comes home tired from work but needing to still tutor her sons for schoolwork.

Therese described her ex-husband as fearsome, emotionally distant, and uncaring. He was an engineer who was often away at work and expected to come home to a traditional home with an obedient and docile wife. While Therese admitted to also have some personal issues back then, such as her need to be constantly affirmed, their incompatibility was compounded by her ex-husband’s emotional distance. “My need for love was 105%; I married someone whose capacity to (show) love was 10%”. She felt that it was pointless to try to save the marriage with her ex-husband’s constant refusal to undergo counseling with her.

Hannah’s ex-husband had an ongoing affair with another married woman even before the start of their marriage, which explained his lack of attention or sexual attraction to Hannah. Part of the mental abuse was being told by her ex-husband that he didn’t find her attractive despite her efforts to buy sexy lingerie and look her best for him. “We only had sex when he knew I could conceive”, shared Hannah. She was clueless as to how marriages and sexual encounters should be since she lacked male role models in her life plus the fact that she never had a boyfriend before. It did not help as well that the husband’s family looked down on her as she was not deemed rich enough for their son. This was reflected on how she was treated during family reunions where she would not be seated with the family during mealtimes but her ex-husband and daughter would be at the table. She shared how she was like a front to a deception where her ex-husband would hold her hands and be sweet to her in front of other people but would totally ignore her when they were at home.

Already living apart for several years, Patti’s ex-husband orchestrated the divorce so he could remarry in the US. For

Amy, there was an incident of violence where the eldest son already threatened to kill the father after much verbal abuse, and threatened to kill himself or leave home if the father stayed. In the case of Therese, it was after a series of counseling that she realized her self-value (including affirmation from other men) was diminishing and her husband refusing to be part of the counseling for several years despite her efforts to work on their relationship. All of her, “marriage doctors” (psychologists, counselors, and even priest confessors), had advised her to leave home for the sake of her sanity and psychological healing, as she was already getting to be self-destructive. For Hannah, since there was nothing in the relationship to hold on to from the start, it was easier to let go once she found out about her husband’s affair with another woman and that she was just being used as a front.

***Family, Children, and Religion.*** After the separation and/or during the process of annulment, Patti and Hannah went back to live with their mothers especially since they had young children at the time. While Patti’s mother (and family) readily took her back, Hannah’s mother refused to take her in because the concept of separation was not acceptable to her family who were, “catolico cerrrado” (extremely conservative Catholics). It was only when she tried to take her life that her mother was shaken into realization that she really needed help, and therefore spoke to her other sisters and aunts to help her.

As for Amy and Therese, since the separation happened after 15 years of marriage, their children were already teenagers or at least tweens so it was manageable to just have the househelp assist them in managing the home and the children. They all continued to work as they needed to support themselves and their children. Only Patti had to go to court to demand financial support and was granted a cash component plus school and medical costs, a token amount that could not cover other expenses even at that

time, though her ex-husband sent their sons to study in the US from high school to college.

***Thoughts on divorce/annulment.*** Patti was the only one who is anti-divorce. She says, “I am anti-divorce precisely because of cases like mine, where marriage was entered into without considering the consequences. Divorce gives marriage lesser importance, while making reconciliation impossible. Studies have shown that divorce does not stabilize society; ... better for a law that strengthens support for the estranged couple, including financial support and counseling”. For Patti, divorce is a couple’s issue and among the rich, women are as gallivanting and prone to having affairs as men so they are not necessarily lacking in empowerment. “(The idea of) Divorce may be impossible before since older men in Congress have many wives but that could change with younger men and more women in government”.

Amy is pro-divorce as she wants a one-step procedure to freedom for women trapped financially and in emotional bondage with their husband. “Annulment is not easy to get both emotionally and financially: there is always the threat of losing the children or losing yourself. We need to strengthen laws on properties, paternal rights, and alimony”. For Amy, divorce is a woman’s issue more than it is a man’s and affects the middle and upper classes more. Annulment is not enough because it does not force the husband to provide financial support or alimony but she also believes divorce will not happen in her lifetime.

“YES!... in bold font, font size 24... buong (entire) slides”, says Therese emphatically when asked about divorce. She feels there is so much hypocrisy in society with many wives being unhappy. “If people were more honest, we’d have healthier relationships. If we were more compassionate and loving, we’d have a happier society”. Therese feels that divorce concerns both the wife and the husband and like Amy, is more a middle-upper class issue

because of properties. She adds that divorce is also a Catholic issue. “Annulment is like purgatory; it’s neither here nor there and it assumes something must be wrong from the beginning. Divorce means you married with the best intentions but somewhere along the way, you might have grown apart. How can you assume you’re the same person when you were 26 and then 46? There might be issues that were never addressed before”.

Hannah is also pro-divorce. “So it is more business-like. Annulment is too personal, destructive, painful”. Like the three other women, she also feels divorce will not happen in her lifetime but may happen in the next generation. Divorce for Hannah is an issue for both men and women.

***What influenced their attitudes toward marriage.*** Religion and family background were cited as the two largest influences on their attitudes toward marriage and divorce. All women are Catholic: Patti calls herself a, “renewed”, Catholic while Therese considers herself Catholic/Christian. Patti and Amy shared how their parents’ successful marriages or loving relationships were their ideals, especially since for Catholics, people are supposed to be married forever.

For Patti, marriage for her then and now is really togetherness and companionship, similar to how her mom and dad have a beautiful marriage of waking up together, eating together, etc. “People stayed married, that’s how it should be”.

For Amy, value for the sanctity of marriage is born out of her religious upbringing – marriage is a lifetime commitment. “It’s supposed to be two people in love, for better or for worse, ‘til death do us part”... She pointed out that love is always there until you lose respect. “When you lose respect, you lose love, too”.

Marriage for Therese is, “no longer white lace and promises, no longer the triple-decker icing cake or white wedding gown.

Marriage is something you need to work on and communication is important". Family, society, and religion all impacted on her attitude towards marriage and divorce, where her own family was against her separation, where society has, "allowed", men (in her life including brothers) to be insensitive and unsympathetic and where religion constantly made her feel guilty that she was the bad one.

Family is what shaped Hannah's attitude for marriage and divorce. "Marriage was a fairy tale – but it wasn't real", she says, again stressing how her lack of male role models as she was growing up made her incapable of seeing the truth or understanding how marriages should be.

***Ways to fix marital conflicts or other issues.*** For these four women, counseling both before and during marriage would be useful in preparing couples for the what-ifs or the unexpected. Amy even suggested the need for a blood test to determine genetic compatibility while Patti suggested some pre-nuptial arrangements while everything is okay and everyone is in love. Therese, however, noted that, "both parties must agree to come to the table", otherwise, counseling is useless. Hannah also agrees on the value of counseling as she says, "Get care when drowning".

This is consistent with Amato and Previti (2003, p. 603) who note that, "compared with men, women tend to monitor their relationships more closely, become aware of relationship problems sooner, and are more likely to initiate discussions of relationship problems with their partners. Men, in contrast, are more likely than women to withdraw from discussions of relationship problems".

***Women's ways of coping and empowerment.*** Patti yearned to work during the early years, feeling lonely waiting and waiting for a young husband to come home from his frequent nights out. She went back to school after marriage, and when they separated, she took her children to live with her parents in a compound

where the children grew up with other relatives. She took on jobs that required her to travel and leave the kids with her mom who helped her with her sons. “My separation only affected my work in the sense that I was so driven”. Her status of being separated never became an issue with the industry she was in or with her colleagues both at work and in industry associations, where she became president/CEO in several companies or organizations. Reflecting on this she noted, “... it (the separation) didn’t matter, because I was also in the company of empowered women, or in groups where the presence of a spouse did not matter; I felt society condoned this as an already accepted reality so I never felt any stigma”. The only time the issue of being separated became a problem was when she wanted her children to go to Southridge, which was strict on requiring both parents to be present in all activities.

Patti further shared, “For men, if *hiwalay*, *bahala ka sa buhay mo* (if separated, you’re left to your own devices) – they only ask for divorce/annulment if they want to remarry. For women (like me who was living with parents), it’s not only economic, it was more on – *napahiya ako*, *niloloko pala ako* (I was shamed and deceived), the last one to know. I started asking, “What’s wrong with me, why is that girl better? And seeing the other girl having the luxury I once had”. She felt that the loss of lifestyle and social standing were what hurt most. On hindsight, she feels that their relationship might have had a chance to succeed if they had left for the US forcing them to work things out by themselves and without their families interfering or providing too much comfort. Had they been counseled during the early stages of their marriage (to include pre-nuptial agreements to preempt what-ifs), Patti also feels their marriage might have had a chance.

Like Patti, Amy was driven to excel, to be, and do better. An active campus leader since high school and college, she worked

abroad for several years before coming back to the Philippines. She became president of her industry organization and achieved recognition in a global awards program. She was determined to be positive or pro-active so the children would be proud of her. "Work was my sanity", she says, "I buried myself in work, traveled every week even when I didn't need to". Her separated or annulled status also did not matter to her colleagues at work and in the industry. "I just dropped the last name". Things also got better for Amy as the children performed better in school after the separation.

If Amy's ex-husband had a bombastic temper expressed through verbal assault, Therese's husband was the type to simply refuse to communicate and home was a place where things seemed to be just "simmering". "Work became a positive outlet for all the pain; it became a survival mechanism 'para hindi ako masiraan ng bait' (so I don't go mad). It was so easy to go crazy but I knew I couldn't afford to fail so my ex won't be able to say, 'See, what will you do without me'". While at home she felt like a, "simpering fool", who did not think too much of herself; at the office, she was confident and self-assured. She was aware of her own need to resolve her own issues so she sought counseling from several marriage doctors despite her ex-husband's constant refusal to be part of the counseling, with his claim that he did not have a problem and that the problem was with her. Like Patti and Amy, in work and industry, there was no judgment or stigma attached to being separated or annulled as her field in HR is considered a compassionate industry.

Like the others, Hannah wore two masks: the strong and successful CEO at work, and the quiet, tolerant wife who even gave all her salary to her husband to give him face. Like the other women in this study, work was an outlet and her being annulled or separated never mattered to anyone in the industry.

Within these women's stories, we find how women valued communication and their church. The issue of communication

is critical in all cases mentioned here though it is Therese who was very consistent in stressing this issue. She even noted how couples should also learn, “how to fight”, for it is better to have a discussion than merely sweeping things under the rug. She used the word, “simmering”, even when it came to how she thought her children were coping at home. “It was worse that there were no fights or arguments; they did not know what to do or what might trigger something”. In Hannah’s case, though it might have been doomed from the start, not understanding her ex-husband’s emotional and physical coldness should have been cause for alarm for a couple to discuss things more closely or at least seek help for her own understanding and healing. While Amy’s husband seemed like the opposite of Therese, the verbal assault is no less destructive as the emotional coldness.

In a study by Amato and Previti (2003), people from high economic status were most likely to complain about lack of communication, lack of love, spouse’s self-centeredness, and excessive demands as reasons for divorce among others, whereas those from lower socioeconomic classes would complain about physical abuse, gambling, drinking, lack of employment, and financial problems, etc. Amato and Previti (2003, p. 606) noted how, “as SES (socioeconomic status) increases, individuals are less likely to report instrumental reasons and more likely to report expressive and relationship-centered reasons”. In the case of Patti, it is not surprising to find research that supports the finding that individuals who marry at younger ages tend to have more marital problems and have greater chances of getting divorced due to, “psychological immaturity, unstable employment and a truncated spousal-search process” (Quah, 2003; Amato & Previti, 2003). These demographic variable findings are consistent elsewhere in the world.

Beyond demographics which are more indirect causes of divorce, it is important to note here a categorization of causes



of divorce as listed in a study titled, "Towards understanding the reasons for divorce", by Wolcott and Hughes (1999), which delved into affective issues, abusive behaviors, and external pressures. In this study, affective issues include communication problems, incompatibility/drifted apart, extramarital affairs while abusive issues include physical violence (spouse or children), verbal, and emotional abuse and alcohol/drug abuse. External pressures include financial problems, work/time, physical/emotional health issues and family interference and there are other causes that do not fall into one of the three categories like spouse's personality and problems with children, which are placed under the category, "Others". As mentioned above, we find much commonality in these categories in the local situations of troubled marriages.

In the world of empowered women, it seems that there is no stigma attached to the label, "separada", or "hiwalay" (separated). All the women did not feel any issue or problem at work or from the industry to which they belonged. It was Patti who said, "Society condoned, it was an accepted reality". While Patti acknowledged all these as part of changing times, she still believes that divorce should not be allowed on the grounds that divorce will devalue marriage, citing her own case as a young woman recklessly in love and rushing into marriage without thinking of the consequences. It is possible though that her status as a renewed Catholic has also influenced her mindset on how traditional ways of marriage (and natural methods of family planning as well) should still be the norm. On the other hand, it was only Hannah who felt the need to get a church annulment, "because it was important for me", she says, perhaps also because she is a volunteer lector in her parish even when she was separated. She has remarried in Catholic rites while Therese and Amy remarried civilly. Patti has remained single.

In the case of Therese, her sustained sense of guilt in the context of being brought up in a conservative Catholic family

bore heavily on her during the marital conflict as well as during the separation. She felt much blame and thought it was all her fault and needed a series of counseling both from psychologists/psychiatrists and from her priest confessor to be healed or released from the bondage of guilt. Perhaps this is why she prefers to identify herself as Catholic/Christian because she feels there are Christian groups who are more forgiving and more open. She said, "The Church needs to be less darn judgmental, to get real. There are so many unhappy women, unhappy marriages... so much hypocrisy in society". Both Amy and Hannah had to endure negative comments from their families during the initial separation, but these were settled over time.

Here we see the dynamics of church and society at play – where we have a society that has accepted the situation and presence of more separated women and a church that does not seem to see what has been changing in society. While it might be true in Africa where greater social acceptance of divorce has led to increases in divorce rates as there is a, "relaxation of negative attitudes among religious groups", that no longer treat the issue as a sin (Adegoke, 2010), the Church in the Philippines still wields some influence as shown in some indicators of strong religious influences with regard to divorce. For example, it was shown that those who attended church and practiced their religion more regularly, wanted stricter laws governing divorce. It should therefore, make sense for the church to treat their flock in a more compassionate way so as to encourage them to participate in mass and other religious practices regularly where they can discuss values and the importance of commitment, instead of driving them away by judging those who disagree and using the mass homily to be vindictive. Bishop Modesto Villasanta of the United Church of Christ Philippines (UCCP) noted that UCCP is open to the issue of divorce. "It's up to the Church on how they will teach their people the importance of marriage and not on barring its (Divorce bill's) approval" (Paloma, 2011).

## Conclusion

In these stories of four women CEOs who underwent separation or annulment, we find how marital conflicts encountered at their level of empowerment (with higher education and from a higher socioeconomic class), are the same issues that other women are experiencing at whatever level. These include the usual reasons we hear or read about, specifically infidelity or womanizing and verbal or emotional abuse, where we sometimes find cases of the latter so intense that the violence may leave more lasting, “scars”, than a physical assault. These are women who can afford to seek counseling either to heal their personal wounds or their broken relationship, but they might also have been in a state of denial or unawareness given that their work (and travel) allowed them to recover (however briefly) from the emotional battery at home, maybe due to naiveté from lack of a model of an ideal marriage or for having a family to run back home to when things do not work out. This ambivalent situation is something any intelligent woman can justify in her own head – women are supposed to be more understanding and patient as society expects, women are supposed to stick it out, “for better or for worse, until death do us part”, as the church expects, women are supposed to give it all and nothing less as their husbands expect... And yes, for the longest time and even until present, many women are still bound by these expectations that making things work in a marriage or relationship, is a woman’s responsibility.

In the four stories, work was clearly an empowered woman’s way of coping. It was in work that they found their affirmation, independence, and self worth, something that their troubled marriages could not or did not provide. Therese said she really worked hard, “para hindi ako masiraan ng bait” (so I would not lose my sanity or my sense of self). Amy also described it the same way, “Work was my sanity”. Both Patti and Hannah said they became more driven at work, and were

grateful their mothers helped raise their children so they could work even harder.

As we hear the voices of these empowered women and learn about their true stories, we find that just as it is difficult to maintain a face of normalcy, it is as courageous of them to balance two different personae: the strong, empowered woman at work and the quiet, simpering, and suffering wife at home. While not necessarily deliberate, maybe more out of denial or even guilt, an empowered woman's way of coping is expressed through her work that gives her power while maintaining sanity. She needs to put on a mask for the different roles she has to play, not necessarily to hide the truth but more to manage her double life to keep the peace and status quo. In the four stories, the problem was truly a relationship issue between man and woman that needed to be resolved at their level and not so much for the sake of the children. These are women who knew that they could raise their children, either on their own or with their parents, and separation or annulment was a better course of action for them, instead of staying in a broken relationship for the sake of the children.

Gigy and Kelly (as cited in Wolcott and Hughes 1999) note: "Whereas before, divorce was a solution more often limited to such stark and specific circumstances as desertion or chronic alcoholism, in the mid 80s, divorce appears to be mostly commonly sought because of a more general dissatisfaction with the emotional and affective deficiencies and tenor of the marital relationship" (p. 12). Clearly, with the changing times, more women have higher expectations for self-fulfillment in marriages and lower tolerance for unsatisfying relationships, perhaps influenced by greater social and personal freedom (Wolcott & Hughes, 1999).

As this initial research is exploratory, future studies could examine other emerging insights from other Filipina CEOs and their views of marriage, roles in society and empowerment,

as well as the impact of the church's stand on their lives, in shaping their views on the divorce bill. It would be interesting to find out how their opinions and decisions will be formed depending on the Church's stance on this matter or if these women will find other forms of rationalization in making their own informed choice.

According to Mangahas (2012), surveys by the Social Weather Station consistently show a rise in the numbers of Filipinos in favor of divorce, from being mostly neutral in 2005, to 50% in 2011. Notable in this survey is the opinion of the majority of the youth who are pro divorce and this will therefore increase the proportion in favor of legalization in a few years' time. Women are likewise getting more educated and gainfully employed, further changing the profile of Filipinas who are getting married or who will be getting married and in the same light, getting separated or annulled as well. Will this continuing trend finally turn the tide toward true women empowerment at home and not just at work? Will society not just remain open to these changes but actually initiate the change that will reduce expectations and equalize (if not eliminate) gender roles? Will both Filipino men and women choose more wisely now that roles, attitudes, behaviors and expectations in relationships are evolving such that maintenance of relationships is no longer just a woman's responsibility? And will the Church, as Pope Francis is now advocating, be more compassionate and be more charitable to everyone, providing care and support for members of her wounded flock, and not drive them away by focusing on guilt and sin? Is divorce the answer to these questions or must these questions be answered first before divorce can happen?

Marriage is a gendered experience and for the four women in this study, their empowerment was at work, outside the home – for the home remains enclosed in tradition, set by structures,

with society-defined roles for men and women, ingrained into the psyche and personae by family and church. True empowerment may seem elusive for now but this will change too, and when that happens, one wonders whether divorce will matter at all, for these women driven to survive.

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