

**Asian American Reproductive Justice Oral History Project**

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College  
Northampton, MA

**SOPHYA CHUM**

Interviewed by

JUHEE KWON

July 12, 2013

Long Beach, California

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### Narrator

Sophya Chum (b. 1984) is a founder and current Community Organizer at Khmer Girls in Action (KGA) in Long Beach, California. The organization serves to empower and educate young Southeast Asian youth to become relevant social justice organizers. Back in 1998, Chum had been a participant in the Health, Opportunity, Problem Solving, Empowerment (HOPE) Project initiated by the Asian Pacific Islander Reproductive Health (APIRH). After APIRH discontinued the HOPE project in 2002, Chum and several other participants founded Khmer Girls in Action to continue serving the needs of their community.

Chum has been committed to KGA for over ten years – first serving as an intern then as a full-time staff member and community organizer. As a second-generation Khmer American and local community member of the Long Beach Khmer community, Chum strives to maintain a strong, direct connection to the community she serves.

### Interviewer

Juhee Kwon (b. 1991) is an undergraduate at Brown University, studying Biology and Ethnic Studies.

### Restrictions

Sophya Chum retains copyright to this interview during her lifetime.

### Format

Interview recorded in MP3 file format using Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-702PC. Two files: (a) 8 mins 21 sec, (b) 1 hr 19 mins 38 secs.

### Transcript

Transcribed and edited for clarity by Juhee Kwon. Reviewed and approved by Sophya Chum and Juhee Kwon.

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Transcript of interview conducted July 12, 2013, with:

SOPHYA CHUM  
Long Beach, California

by: JUHEE KWON

KWON: All right. So this is Juhee Kwon. Today is July 12, 2013, and I'm here at Khmer Girls in Action, and we are interviewing for the Asian American Reproductive Justice [Oral History] Project for the Sophia Smith Collection. Thank you so much for being here.

CHUM: Mhmm.

KWON: I just wanted to get started with your personal involvement with KGA [Khmer Girls in Action], and maybe you could tell us a little story about how you got involved.

CHUM: Yeah, sure. I was in high school in, I think, 1998. I started my freshman year [in] 1998. I know that KGA was formally known as APIRH [Asian Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health], and they started in '97. In high school, there were a couple of older girls who were already part of the program. They were juniors and seniors, and they were actually recruiting members to be a part of the HOPE project, which stood for . . . Helping, Opportunity, Problem Solving, Empowerment, I believe? [Health, Opportunity, Problem Solving, Empowerment] But anyways, we thought it was cool that some older girls came up to us and asked us to join, and that if we filled out the application, we got ice cream.

KWON: (laughs)

CHUM: So it was a good incentive during this hot weather in Cali. It was really easy to apply actually, because there were other students who asked us to join. They were very friendly. You know, as a freshman, you wanted to be part of this something bigger, a part of this organization and hang out with older girls, so that was how I started. We actually applied, they called us back. They actually offered to provide rides to pick us up and drop us off so that made it—

KWON: From school?

1:46

CHUM: From school. Yeah, from school and then to drop us off at home, which made it easier for us to be part of the program, and on top of that, my mom was definitely very supportive. I guess you could say in the beginning, she didn't know much about what we were doing, what the organization is about, but she grew to learn as she started coming to the events and supporting the work and the campaigns that I was a part of. So it was just a good way to just—how do you say it—have something to do during that time. It's like to keep you busy, and then you're learning something new and you get to be around other Khmer women. And also you get to be in a space where you express yourself and talk about issues that young Khmer women are facing. So that's what really kept me staying in KGA. And then also because my friends were still part of KGA, so it was more like, Your friends can join! And your friends are coming! It was really a good, fun, friendly space.

KWON: Is there a really big Khmer population in your area or your high school?

CHUM: Yeah, I actually attended the largest public school here in Long Beach—so there was a resettlement that happened in the early 1980s [and] throughout the late 1980s. There were waves of refugees who resettled here in Long Beach. What ended up happening was there's a large population of Southeast Asians, but particularly Khmer folks, living in Long Beach, and majority of the families—how do you say it—majority of the families, their children went to Poly High School. So the school I went to was Poly High School. It's in Central Long Beach, and it's in the heart of the Cambodian community. It's now called Cambodia Town.

KWON: I actually passed by it on the way here. Yeah, all the writings, I couldn't read, but the food places—

3:47

CHUM: Mhmm. So it's a lot of local businesses, a lot of homes, a lot of restaurants, and places like temples and—areas where a lot of the Cambodian community stay or they go to. That's pretty much where my school is located as well. It's the largest public school in Long Beach. You could say it's overcrowded, because when I was going to school, they had like four thousand students there, so.

KWON: [Grades] 9-12?

CHUM: [Grades] 9-12.

KWON: Wow.

CHUM: I think four to five thousand, so—and it's not that big of a school. It's not that nice either. But that's where I got recruited into KGA. The location of



the organization at that time was really close by, so it was accessible for us.

KWON: Okay. Was KGA somewhere else before it was here [at 1355 Redondo Ave in Long Beach, California]?

CHUM: Yeah, it was. It was in multiple places. So we grew, we really grew. We were looking for places that were easy for the youth to go to and also in the heart of the Cambodian community—and also where rent is affordable (laughs). That was a big deal for us. So we actually used to be in the old UCC building, which is the United Cambodian Community building. It was made up of different service organizations, and we were like the only group during that time that was doing organizing work, so yeah.

KWON: Oh. So you started there, and then you—

5:23

CHUM: And then we ended up—

KWON: eventually moved over here?

CHUM: Yeah, we eventually ended up here.

KWON: Are there any other Khmer organizations that do women's work kind of like you do?

CHUM: In Long Beach?

KWON: Yeah.

CHUM: So not in terms of the kind of work that we do. It's just recently that we got the BHC, the Building Healthy Community, grant from—what is it—from the endowment center.

KWON: The California Endowment?

CHUM: Yeah, the California Endowment. They gave us money to really shape and change the way things look for us here through policy work. So a lot of different organizations have been involved. KGA is one of the leading organizations here involved.

In terms of other organizations that work specifically on RJ [Reproductive Justice] or with women in general, I don't think—I don't know of [any such organization] in Long Beach. I know there's other Khmer youth groups, who provide services and do leadership development for youth in general, like I think there's some Khmer youth [in their organizations]. UCC is one of them. UCC stands for United Cambodian Community, and they work with their youth, but I don't know exactly

what they do. They work with Khmer youth, and then there's EM3: Men with Meaningful Messages. They're part of St. Mary's Hospital, and they say they do leadership development, too. Their group is made up of mostly young Southeast Asian men, but I think it's a group that's made for young men in general or youth who are in high school. Yeah, multiracial youth in high school.

KWON: Uh-huh. I know you weren't here when APIRH first started the HOPE program, but do you know what the motivation was behind targeting Southeast Asian, and specifically Khmer, women?

7:10

CHUM: I knew that in the beginning, APIRH was formed because they wanted to work on reproductive health issues. So just taking on education and awareness, and being conscious of reproductive health, and how to get access to it, and things like that. I think it grew from there, where we realized that there were a lot more issues that were impacting young women. It wasn't just reproductive health, but also being able to connect reproductive health issues to immigrant and refugee rights. A lot of the [Khmer] community was facing deportation, too, during that time. So there was a lot of—there were multiple issues that were affecting young women, and we wanted to branch out. But I know in the beginning, we started off just focusing on reproductive health issues.

KWON: Could you talk a little bit more about the workshops or the program that you started with [in the HOPE project]? I know it was a while ago.

CHUM: Yeah. Can you put it on pause really quick? Let me see.

END OF FILE 1

## FILE 2

CHUM: So a lot of the trainings and the workshops that we were a part of when I was in high school—from what I remember—were being able to talk about our sexual orientation, our identity, who we are as young Khmer women. So being able to see what are the issues that young Khmer women are facing during that time, and also just being able to talk about gender roles and how that impacts our lives as Khmer women. Because we have this refugee status, but on top of that, our parents are first generation and we're second-generation youth, growing up in the U.S., you could say, and we identify as Cambodian American. There was a generation gap between our parents and then between us, and that was really hard for us to be able to have a relationship with them, and for both parents and for us to understand each other in terms of the issues, because it was very different, and we were raised very differently. So we were able to be in a space where we'd get to talk about that, and then look at how women in general, how Asian women, and specifically Khmer women, are portrayed in society, in the media, in our families, in our schools, in different places where we find ourselves. That was important to have that space to build our political consciousness and to think critically around how these things are impacting us and impacting our communities, and how we can find solutions and figure out what needs to change and how that can look like for us. So that was important in terms of how we started off, because we—it started off with really having that space to express ourselves and share who we are with each other, and then seeing that we can make that connection with each other. Like there's a connection between you and me. Our stories aren't very different; they're pretty similar, and being able to connect that to what our community was dealing with and seeing the bigger picture. And then from there, being able to figure out solutions and identifying root causes of those problems.

KWON: Yeah, so the latter portion of that—would you say that there was a leadership development and action-oriented portion to the program as well?

2:17

CHUM: Yeah, I think we only had one leadership program [in the HOPE project], and it really grew—the [current KGA] trainings actually came from our HOPE project. So in terms of how we see it now, we have a leadership pipeline that our members go through, and they get the skill set and the training and the political education they need in order for them to organize their community. But during that time when I first started, we were part of the HOPE project, and it was all together.

KWON: Oh, everything.

CHUM: It was just like, Come to this meeting. You represent the HOPE project, and you're getting skills and training to develop yourself as a leader based off of the issues that you're affected by and your experiences. So it's similar in that sense. I don't think in the beginning doing the campaign around the issues that we were focusing on was—I don't know how to say it—like I don't think it was intentional. It just grew out of the issues we talked about.

We're coming from a place where we started out in the trunk of our ED's [Executive Director's] car, and one of our program staff's car. And we're like, Oh, let's meet in the malls, and let's just meet and talk about all these issues, and then it really grew from there. Then being able to figure out the funding, and building the organization up, and having that project be built and these trainings that really lined up with what we thought made sense for the Khmer youth in Long Beach. So from there, it was how the campaigns grew, and we started organizing—I don't think it was intentional because we didn't have the capacity [or] the funding. And then at least for us as members, we originally thought we're just there to talk about our stories and hang out with each other. And it really grew because the problems and issues really got serious, and it was something that we felt strongly about, and it really connected with our reproductive rights.

KWON: Yeah. Do you remember the leaders that led the HOPE program when you were in it? Were they Cambodian women or were they APIRH women from—other Asian American women?

4:28

CHUM: They were definitely API women. I think it was good that we had a range of different API women who came to Long Beach and who supported the Khmer community. There was a lack of [Khmer] leadership during that time in the nineties because of the waves of refugees who just got here, and there wasn't like an identified organizer in Long Beach. There was no Cambodian organizer during that time. Organizing was taboo in our community, because of the genocide that had happened in Cambodia and how the Khmer Rouge actually wanted to shape and change the way things looked after the French left Cambodia; and it was during the time of the Vietnam War. So definitely being impacted by the Vietnam War and the U.S. involvement in Cambodia and the genocide happening, and how people in Cambodia try to organize and Khmer Rouge being one of them. It was very taboo in our community, even till now in some sense that people have fears, and they're afraid of what the outcomes will be. So I think during that time, we did have a strong solid group of staff, who were really powerful women, who were dedicated to moving the organization and to supporting and developing the young leaders.

I remember Riku Matsuda, who is Japanese American, who was our facilitator—our program staff who facilitated some of the trainings—who actually was able to provide us with a lot of our political education

during that time around gender, around LGBTQ issues. And it was a good experience getting to know him, because he identifies as LGBTQ, so being exposed to that through someone you know really closely and that you really love and care about was important.

And then there was Diep Tran, who's a Vietnamese American woman. She was our facilitator for our cultural historical arts program, which was also part of the HOPE project, but it was a side project—like a sub project, you could say—because we felt like all of these issues were coming up, but there was no way of thinking about, How do we heal from this? How do we use art and expression as a form of healing? So Diep Tran came in and helped us figure that out and gave us the tools and the training, and just all those different things that came into place, where we were able to express ourselves through poetry writing, through dancing, through skits, [through] acting and things like that—and art—you know, just being able to think about that. And those are fun ways that young people get—they're interested in and they get excited about, and they don't even know they're healing as they're doing this. So it was a really really good experience, and that's what really kept us coming back, too. It's being able to do all those multiple things. You get to be in trainings, you get to build your political consciousness around the issues that you're facing, you get to connect it with these other women that you're sitting right next to, and then you get to do all this fun art and healing at the same time.

6:46

And then there was Betty Hung, who was our ED at that time, I believe. She might've co-EDed with Que Dang, but they really helped move the organization [and] helped us to where we are now.

KWON: And was she ED prior to 2002, when it became Khmer Girls in Action?

8:33

CHUM: Yeah, she was. You have some inside scoop, huh? So and then—I don't know this for a fact, but I actually heard that during that time in '97, I believe, around that time, Cyndi Choi was in Berkeley, and she actually came up with that idea of doing something in the Cambodian community in Long Beach, because of the large population and because of the refugee status here. So she got together with some folks, and I think Que Dang and Diep and Betty Hung were the folks who got together, I'm sure, and then they decided to develop and build APIRH [in Southern California], and then the HOPE project grew out of that.

What was your other question? What was the question before I—

KWON: I don't know (laughs).

CHUM: —you said something about—Oh, Que Dang. Yeah.

KWON: Yeah.

CHUM: So Que Dang had to take off to New York, and she pretty much quit when APIRH was—during the time that we were close to branching off. She went to New York to work for the Ford Foundation, and then when we actually branched off of APIRH, APIRH shut down, and we moved on, and we were like, We really—because a lot of the issues around why APIRH had to shut down was because I think they had another project in the Bay Area for another group of Southeast Asian young women, and I believe they wanted us to work on the same issues during that time, which was around teen pregnancy. And that wasn't a issue that the women and myself that were part of the group wanted to work on in Long Beach. We didn't feel like it made sense to work on teen pregnancy.

KWON: Was it not a relevant issue?

10:34

CHUM: It wasn't a relevant issue during that time, and we actually wanted to work on more immigrant refugee rights issues. So in that sense, we expressed that to some of the folks who were in [APIRH's] higher management, and I think there was some conflict or some disagreements between the Northern Cal and the Southern Cal [APIRH] groups. So we decided to branch off, and that's when Que heard about it, and Que was like, "I'm coming back!"

KWON: (laughs) And so she came back?

CHUM: Yeah, so she actually came back. It worked out really well. I don't know what was happening for her in New York, but she actually came back. We shut down for a little bit, and that's when we started meeting at the malls. We were meeting at Lakewood Mall. There's no Long Beach Mall, so we had to go to the nearest mall that was nearest one to the city. So we ended up at the malls; we were meeting at the food court. Cyndi Choi was actually the staff person who provided us [with] trainings, and during that time, she was giving us trainings on domestic violence, and looking at sexual harassment, and different trainings on reproductive rights and health, and how to really take care of yourself, and these issues that come up in our community. A lot of it was like sister hating, girl violence—relating to young people. So we were meeting in the malls and then we were meeting at our friend's house—like one of my best friends who was a part of the program, we were meeting at her house for awhile, and it was just like there wasn't any stability during that time. I know Cyndi Choi was working closely with Que and rebuilding our organization. Riku was part of that as well, and he actually helped us come up with our name: Khmer Girls in Action. Because the name grew from our group [of HOPE participants], who actually stayed, who really really wanted this, and who said they still want the organization to exist somehow.

KWON: How big was the group that stayed—that core group?

12:39

CHUM: It was probably a group of ten.

KWON: Oh, wow.

CHUM: It wasn't any more than ten of us. And we were meeting at the mall, and we were coming up with new names. It was during that time when we were like, Oh, look. There's you know—we're develop—we're rebuilding, so what name do we want? and things like that.

KWON: What were some of the candidates?

CHUM: I don't know. (laughs) I don't remember that far back, but I just remember Khmer Girls in Action was one of the names. And we really liked it because we felt like "Khmer" represents our identity and our community, and then the "Action" piece talks about how Khmer women are organizing. Riku helped us come up with that and made sure that we owned it and that the name came from us. So that was important for us, and till now, I really appreciate that. Because as a young person, you've just been thrown out the door—you've just been—they just kind of got rid of you, and then now to feel like there's folks out there who support you and have your back and really want to see you grow, really want to see your community thrive—and that's important for us, and that name really did it for us. It was being able to own that name and come up with that name [that] was really important for us, and we had people who made sure that we were the people who came up with that, and that was important.

KWON: Yeah. How old were you? You were basically a co-founder of KGA then.

CHUM: Mhmm. Yeah, I am.

KWON: How old were you?

CHUM: Let's see. In 2002, I was probably seventeen or eighteen. I was probably seventeen, I think, seventeen. Yeah, seventeen. I was still in high school. I remember that. Once that [branching off] happened, and we were able to rebuild and be in the community again, and we recruited and we got more members to join, I actually got an internship [at KGA] after I graduated. So I was helping with some of the program facilitation as well as bookkeeping. I was doing some tracking, some filing, some like admin work, too, on the side. But just being able to get that opportunity to still stay connected and to be part of the organization, knowing that it wasn't at a place where—it wasn't like "at that place" yet. We were still trying to figure things out, so—yeah, and then from there, once we got more funding, we were able to bring in more staff, and then I became—I came

on as a full-time staff, I think, in like 2005 or something. I don't remember. And then—yeah, so this is my tenth year as staff. This year.

KWON: Tenth year?!

CHUM: Yeah, September will be my tenth year as staff.

KWON: But you're still in your twenties, right?

CHUM: I'm twenty-nine.

KWON: Yeah.

CHUM: So I started when I was like—I mean I'm barely. Barely in my twenties. But since then, I've been working here full time. I've been doing different things. I've moved from doing any of the admin or bookkeeping or finance support to more of the programmatic end, and being able to build and work on how we want our leadership program to look like. So that we can be a model for other organizations out there, too.

KWON: What kind of vision do you think that you've brought as like the program organizer? Do you have some vision that you wanted to bring to shape or change what the leadership program for Khmer women used to be?

CHUM: We want to make sure that we always have the cultural aspect of it, being able to talk about reproductive justice in the lens of Khmer women because—

KWON: Yeah, I actually wanted to talk to you a little bit more about that, because I don't know very much about Khmer history or anything like that. So can you speak a little to what you think are unique issues to Khmer community and the Khmer women? Because you were talking a little bit about teen pregnancy and how it wasn't really relevant to your community before, so what do you think *are* the relevant issues to your community?

16:13

CHUM: Now or then? Oh, like now?

KWON: Yeah, now. Or back then as well.

CHUM: Yeah, I think it's always been around getting comprehensive—what is it—sex ed [sexual education] for our youth. Because we've always done that. I know that from Day One since we started, we've always done sex ed, and that's not something that's given or talked about in our communities, in our families, or even in our schools. And just recently, the health classes have been cut on top of that, so our youth are really trying to fight for comprehensive health ed, and then thinking about how to take of their



bodies and having access to health care and services. And that's important for young people, because they don't have money or they don't have transportation or they don't know where to go, they don't know who to talk to.

A lot of our young people now face depression in the sense that they're responsible for a lot of things in their family, because they come from low-income families and their families don't have money, they don't have jobs, they don't have education, and they're still in that place of survival mode. The community's not in a place where they can really—how do you say it—they're not in a place where they're thriving, and they're really struggling a lot. And a lot of that struggle and those challenges that their families face actually take a toll on them, and it really impacts them, because they carry that with them and they feel responsible for having to change how their families are living. So I think that's important for them to have someone to talk to. So to think about how do we provide the right services for them physically, emotionally, and mentally. Because we know that their families have a lot of mental health issues too—post war, you know? And that's important for us to think about how all of that impacts a young person. What kind of support are they getting, what kind of support *aren't* they getting, actually, and what that does to them. And then in the long run, what that does to the second generation of youth who are trying to do more than what their parents can do for them or what their parents have done. So there's that, and then there's also—Oh, snap. I just lost my train of thought.

KWON: Let me just ask you a different question then.

19:00
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CHUM: Yeah.

KWON I'm actually a little bit familiar with PrYSM, which is the Providence Youth Student Movement. My friend works with them, and it's largely a Cambodian American community. They do a lot of youth organizing, too. Not specifically for women, but for Cambodian American youth. Their main campaigns have been around racial profiling but also addressing gang violence and things like that. Are those issues also relevant in your community here in Long Beach?

CHUM: Yeah. Yeah, they are. That's good that you brought up racial profiling, because we did a report called the Participatory Action Research report around the issues that young Khmer youth are facing living in Long Beach, and I can totally give you a copy of our executive summary. And then from there, a lot of the questions that we asked was around racial profiling, too, because we know that a lot of our young folks are being pushed into prisons and aren't being supported in that way. So if they're not being supported in schools or in their communities and through their families, they're being pushed into prisons. We see it as a problem in our

community, and we know that Long Beach has a lot—a majority of our funding or our budget go to policing.

KWON: What do you mean by policing?

CHUM: Policing is that they hired a lot of polices.

KWON: Oh. You mean the government funding goes to that.

CHUM: The city.

KWON: The city. Oh.

CHUM: The city's funding has gone to policing. So a lot of our money goes to hiring police officers. And what happens in our community when they're tons of police officers is that they're harassing our young people, and [the young people] are being racially profiled. They're being put on gang database, actually. We have a couple of our members in our program who are on gang file and didn't even know they were on gang file, and that's because the way that the gang file works right now, the process is [that] the police can put you on gang file without you knowing. They don't have to notify you, and they can just pull you over, ask you for your info, assume that you're in a gang, and just put you in gang file. And once you're in gang file, you're targeted in the community by police officers, and you're getting harassed constantly, and you're more likely to go to prison—to get locked up and end up in jail. And that's a big deal for us, because our young people are being targeted for that, and they don't know how to respond. In the sense that they know it's not fair and that they're being harassed. Most majority of them are our young men in the community.

And then there's also the issue of deportation as well, because on top of our community having refugee status, the U.S. signed the Repatriation Agreement with Cambodia in 2002, and that was—that's retroactive as well, and it impacts our community extremely, because of the folks—the 1.5 generation who came here when they were five years old or four years old or three, or even a little bit older, who don't have citizenship. It's double punishment, we feel like, because these people have already served their time, and then they're being put on this list, and they're deportable. And that's hard for them because families here are trying to survive, and it's not their fault that they end up in prisons or they end up doing time or they end up—how do you say it—being criminalized. So pretty much our community's being criminalized in different ways, and it's not really helping our community. They're barriers that we have to get rid of and organize on.

So the issues of deportation, the issue of policing, and even gangs in our community, and healthcare. And healthcare services for young

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people is really important. It's just when we—the way we talk about it is like the holistic development of a young person and their well-being and their wellness. It's like we have to really touch on all of those issues, because [the young people are] affected by those issues and that holds them back thousands of steps.

So those are some of the issues that I recall, and working with our members, that's what they talk about a lot. It's like they have families, they have friends who are being detained or who have been deported, who are facing deportation, people who are being criminalized or being put in prisons right after they graduate high school because they don't have jobs, they can't get jobs, or they can't go to school, and things like that. And then we have members who are affected by pregnancy, and even thinking about how to take care of yourself as a young mother. So just being able to provide for your family at any age.

KWON: What kind of issues have you—or what kind of organizing have you done around deportation? Because that's a really really large issue for a local organization to tackle. Have you done policy work or like—

24:13

CHUM: We've been involved in like different coalitions to help shape different platforms on how we talk about deportation and how we talk about immigrant/refugee rights, actually. And let's see, in ninet—no, sorry—in 2002, after the repatriation agreement passed, organizationally, we decided to take [the issue of deportation] on because a lot of folks were going to be impacted by this. It was like a mad rush during that time where like ten or more people were getting deported every month from our community, so we were losing people, and majority of these people were main income earners. So it was seeing our community break up and breaking up families. And what happens to those people who get deported, but also what happens to those people who get left behind? How are they supposed to survive without this main income earner in their life? And what does that do to our community emotionally as well?

So I remember during that time it was chaotic, and we decided to do two things. One, we did an anti-deportation protest at the ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] center in LA. So we did that, and we had a candle light vigil for folks who got deported. They wouldn't let us in the building anyways, but I think it was a good way for us to raise awareness and to say that our communities are resisting, and we're fighting back. And to let them know what they're doing is wrong and it's double punishment—[it] is a way for us to really express ourselves and share why we believe it's wrong. So we had an anti-deportation, stop deportation protest in LA, where we transported and we mobilized a lot of Cambodian folks to go out there and protest and march, and we had a rally. And then we also—from there, for a couple years, we did community education on the issues of deportation, because we knew that a

lot of people in the community didn't know about this happening and that—

KWON: Oh, really?

CHUM: Yeah, and that it wasn't talked about. It was a secret agreement that was signed, so it wasn't aired on the news or anything like that. People weren't talking about it. So we're like, Let's raise awareness. Let's talk about this issue and get people to really organize in our community. So we were able to do that and do presentations in schools, in different organizations, in other people's trainings and spaces. And then we also did some type of legal service support, where we referred people who were affected by deportation to—I think it was the Asian Pacific Legal Center during that time. And we took in intake forms, we interviewed people or talked to people over the phone and got more information, so that we can pass it on and give them some type of service, refer them to some type of service that they can get.

26:34

So that was within our capacity to do then, and then from there, our two key issues we're working on [are] reproductive justice and immigrant/refugee rights. And they go hand in hand, because we felt like the members in our community, or the women that we work with, were affected by both. In that sense, that we had to take on those two issues. And from there, we actually grew. Now we actually work on racial, gender, and eq—sorry, we work on race, gender, and class issues now. So those three issues are important for us, and it ranges. It's more broad, so we're able to take on issues in those three areas: race, class, and gender. And we talk about issues through those lens with our members, too, so that they can understand how racism looks like, how classism looks like, and how sexism looks like in our community, and being able to connect that all three of those things to their health, and—yeah.

KWON: Yeah. Is deportation for the Cambodian community still a huge issue?

28:33

CHUM: It is. I think it's still a huge issue. From there on, once people understood that it was happening and that they saw that it was happening, people were applying for citizenship, and there was a group of—there were different organizations that provided that service. And then on top of that, we still refer people in case they contact us still about that issue. But it's not as—how do you say it—we're not in that mix as much as we were before. But we are working with other API groups who are in LA, who work on deportation, and then there's also the One Love movement in Philly, who works on deportation, and they have different branches now. They have one in San Diego, and I think they have one in the Bay Area. So they're still working specifically just on that issue, and that's their key issue. And because KGA has grown so much, and we were really able to connect all these different issues, we want to make sure that we're able to do all of

them. So deportation is still an issue in our community. I think it will always be an issue in our community, because it really holds our community back. Our members are still affected by deportation, but as they—what I'm noticing, too, as they're getting older—when we first started in '97, a lot of the young women who were part of the program also had refugee status because they were the 1.5 generation. And then the second generation were the folks who were born here, so deportation affects them and their families and their older brothers and sisters and cousins and relatives, but not necessarily *them* in general, because they were born here. But we talk about it—we talk about deportation in our curriculum now, in the way where we talk about what are the issues our community are facing and how deportation affects them, even though it doesn't directly affect them, just [like] how language access affects them and also their parents and their families, so.

KWON: Yeah. I know this is a little creepy, but I actually read an article about you speaking on immigrant rights and reproductive justice—I forget what the article was, but it was online—and I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about—I know it's not your current campaign, but before—how immigrant rights and reproductive justice intersects.

30:39

CHUM: Okay. I thought you were going to ask me about my sister.

KWON: No, no.

CHUM: Definitely, let's see. As we're talking about—Okay, so there are issues around deportation. I think one thing that gets left out in some sense is that a lot of women are being deported, and my sister is one of those women who's affected by deportation. And that's a big deal, because a lot of the women in our lives are the ones who take care of the children, and put food on the table, and do a lot of the house chores, and that comes with a lot of the gender roles and expectations. But when women are also being deported, that affects us in our lives and the women in our lives, and that's important for us to think about, too. And when we talk about reproductive health and—when we talk about reproductive rights, it's like, What happens to these women who get deported, as well as what happens to their children who need a mother figure or who needs a sister figure or a cousin figure or something like that in their lives? And what happens to those role models when they're not there in that place? So I think that's how I'm able to connect reproductive justice to deportation. And then also thinking about those women who get deported, What happens to them when they get deported? What are the issues they're facing? Because when the men and the women both get deported, it's very different for [the women], and it's also different for the families here. So thinking about that, and I think it's important that we talk about women who are being

deported, because they really hold down—umm, they really hold it down (laughs).

KWON: Yeah.

CHUM: And they actually pass on the cultural practices and the food and the reading and the writing and the language to the next generation. We talk about that in our research report, too, because our members talk about how they don't know how to read and write, and a lot of them don't have relationships with a lot of women in their family—a lot of their communication that they have with parents are mostly with their moms. So that gets lost somehow. But that's something that they actually want to be able to do is read, write, and speak Khmer fluently, too, so—

KWON: What happen to the men and women that get deported back to Cambodia? I know there's some services that were starting up around it. I watched a documentary about it, but I wasn't really sure.

33:31

CHUM: I think—well, I know that they first—when they get deported, if it's not voluntarily, they would get put into a center, like an ICE center, and then they would either get picked up or they get released in a couple days. It really depends. You really don't know, and there's no way for us to communicate to those who got deported, and the folks who got deported, they can't communicate to their families because they're really going there with nothing, and they have to start all over. But I know one of the things they try to do is look for family that are in Cambodia already, because a lot of us do have families still, who didn't get to come to the U.S. or who didn't get to come to like France, or Australia, or any of those other places.

So they end up there, and for example, I have a story of my partner's cousin who got deported, and when he was released, he actually found his family in Battambang, which is the countryside of Cambodia. It's not in the city, and it's north—a little bit north of Cambodia, and he actually found family there, but they're really poor. So they still—you know, their houses are still made out of wood, and they still shower from the river and things like that. And he has to adapt to that kind of lifestyle and learn how to pick up the language all over again. So in a sense, it's kind of like when folks came to the U.S. for the first time, they had a really difficult time, and there were definitely a lot of challenges with the language, with food, with the way they have to look, act, and feel. And I think that applies for people who get deported as well. And then on top of that, people in Cambodia also—there's this thing around labeling you as someone who really messed up, because you had the opportunity to come to the U.S., and then you messed up, and you got sent back. And that's really not true, because they don't know about the problems that exist here. But there's that type of thing that [the deportees] have to carry with

them, too, being deported. So there's the shame that people are giving them, you could say. Yeah.

KWON: Have you also been following the recent immigration reform act?

35:56

CHUM: (shakes head)

KWON: No? Okay.

CHUM: Not really. I'm so swamped at KGA with all this stuff. But I think we try to stay connected actually through our coalition, so I know that the immigration reform is actually not good, and it's not helping anybody who's undocumented right now. So they're not counting undocumented folks, and that really impacts our community. I know we have some summer—the interns that I introduced you to, they're working on surveying undocumented folks so that they can still get health care. So that's important for us to do, but I know that we're still—as immigrant reform is moving along, we're continuing to fight back and our communities are continuing to voice our issues because it gets lost, especially in our [Asian American] community, because we're like the model minority. But on top of that, it's also thinking about groups that are marginalized, and Southeast Asian groups that aren't being talked about or aren't able to share their stories. Because I think that's really crucial in policy change work, too, in thinking about, Who are the folks who are being left behind? Who are the half-empty glass of folks? And hearing their stories and listening to them talk about their experiences, and being able to use that as a way to shape and change policy. So our community's still fighting back, and in our coalition work, we always offer to share our stories, for our members to share their stories, to talk about their experience, because that's not often validated or even talked about. Or it gets misunderstood, or you could say it gets categorized, and it's different, where you don't really—it's not really your story. It's not really—yeah, so.

KWON: Yeah, I think that happens even within the API community, when—I mean, API community itself is already silenced and marginalized, but how do you situate the Southeast Asian women within that API category? Do you feel like the API issues are your community's local issues or do you think they're relevant?

37:56

CHUM: I think they're relevant. I think with the model minority myth, I think that impacts all API groups. I think it looks really bad for us—we don't get the resources and the support that we need for all of our communities, because (sarcastic) “we're all doing so well.” So it's just a matter of being able to connect with other API groups and their stories, and standing strong as a group of folks who are impacted by immigration and—yeah, standing by

folks who are undocumented, folks who are being deported, folks who are affected by all those issues as well, too. Because it doesn't just affect them, but everybody else who is in their lives. So definitely. Being able to work with other API groups is a big deal for us, and we're doing as much as we can, in working with API groups in LA and then in Long Beach to address those issues or talk about those issues and think strategically around how do we work together and how are we able to tell our stories, spread the word, and do all of that.

KWON: Yeah. What kind of organizations are you working with?

39:31

CHUM: I can tell you later.

KWON: There's so many? (laughs)

CHUM: Our board—Shiu-Ming [Cheer], she's on our board, and she's a lawyer; she's an immigration lawyer. She's part of multiple coalitions, and that's how we really get involved [with] the different coalitions. And I think there was just a new coalition that was built through the immigration reform act.

KWON: Oh, are you talking about We Belong Together for women?

CHUM: Mmm.

KWON: No? It's a different one?

CHUM: I think it's like Unite One or something like that. I have to get—I don't want to give you wrong info. So this is like follow up for me that I can do.

KWON: Okay, okay. All right.

CHUM: I can tell you what coalitions KGA is a part of and how we're talking about immigration and putting our communities out there. But definitely deportation is one of them, because right now it's like—even with our members, they talk about immigration issues impacting Latinos mostly, the illegal Latino community, but also for them to see how that impacts the API community, specifically the Khmer community. And then just being able to connect with all those folks, all those communities, and really come together and talk about this issue. Because I think it's more powerful when we're able to say, This is an issue the Khmer community's facing, and these are *our* issues. And they're pretty similar [to issues of other communities]; they're really relevant, and the stories are really similar, so it's thinking about what policy needs to be in place for all of our communities, so that we're not fighting with each other and we're benefiting as a whole.



41:13

KWON: I definitely heard that. I actually didn't even know immigration was an issue that a lot of Asian American organizations organized around until I went to Asian American Justice Center. My Cambodian friends from Providence went with us down to D.C., and we did like a campaign there. They were talking about how a lot of their families—yeah, they come over as refugees, but they sponsor other families via family reunification visas, and I mean, this immigration reform bill is cutting off siblings and adult children [visas]. It's going to completely change the demographics of Asian American communities, so—yeah, it's not good stuff.

All right. Let's see what else I have.

CHUM: (laughs)

KWON: I actually had wanted to talk a little bit more about the tensions and the growth of the organization. So you talked a little bit about the branching off. Was that 2002? 2003?

CHUM: I'm not sure exactly, but I believe it was in 2002. My senior year. Because I remember working at KGA in 2003. I got the internship in 2003, so I believe in 2002 was when it all happened—probably early 2002—and then we rebuilt and started Khmer Girls in Action in 2002, towards the end. Then that's when I got hired, probably—[the branching off] was probably between 2002-2003—and then I got hired in '03, at the end of '03.

But it was a really hard time for us, I think, especially for the members. Because this was a space that they felt like it was home, and it was the reason why people joined, it was a reason why folks stayed in the organization, and it was a relationship we had with the organization and with the staff. And to see it gone, it was really hard for our community, for our members. But also to see that there were folks who still stood by us and wanted to give us that kind of space again and work closely with us. And those were the people that I mentioned—

KWON: Right, right, right.

CHUM: So they were able to do that in a short period of time. And I think that's what makes KGA really unique and special is that—because of what had happened in history, it makes us who we are now. In terms of, we're able to really fight through anything, you know, get through anything. At that point, we're just like, We can do anything. We did this in like less than a year, and then also to see so many dedicated young folks who came back. But also to see that it was a need in our community and that because APIRH or the HOPE project didn't exist anymore, it doesn't mean that the community doesn't need this type of resource or this type of leadership program, and it was definitely a need in our community. After that, we

really built up our base, and we had a lot of members who wanted to be part of KGA. Even till now, we have to turn down applications because we don't have the right capacity, we don't have the space. But definitely, it was just a good chunk of time for us to rebuild. That's what makes us stronger, you know, that's what makes us who we are now, and that's what makes us really stand by our values and our beliefs, and we really do believe in youth and adult-led organization, and being able to have our youth be in the forefront of their issues and of their work. So like a lot of the decisions organizationally are made by our youth. There are campaign decisions, there's the solutions, the type of campaigns they want to run is really driven and led by our youth. Yeah.

KWON: I think that's something special. I see a lot of organizations that are run by women who are really experienced, and I think that's something that's needed, too, but a lot of youth bring that energy and that vitality. It's something special, yeah.

I think I also wanted to talk a little bit about—let's see. I don't know if you went to this, but apparently there was a convening to discuss the future of the organization in October of 2001. Do you remember going to a conference or a convention or something to discuss how KGA was going to move forward—or how HOPE was going move forward?

45:19

CHUM: Was it—oh, was it HOPE or KGA?

KWON: It was HOPE, because it was in 2001.

CHUM: I was probably not in that meeting. I don't think had any youth rep[resentative] in that conference or that convening. But I think that might've been the reason why we kind of had to break off. I think there was staff that was representing—there was Long Beach staff, and then there was Bay Area staff that were probably there.

KWON: Okay. So APIRH had two different branches?

CHUM: Mhmm

KWON: Okay.

CHUM: Yeah. They had two different branches.

KWON: And then they just had to shut down the Long Beach one, and they continued in the Bay Area?

CHUM: I think they continued in the Bay Area, because they were working on the issue of teen pregnancy. But yeah, once we got shut down, I think it really

came from that meeting—it might've come from that meeting, where people talked about things and the direction of the organization. People weren't at consensus, there weren't any compromises, and then from there—I think our Long Beach staff actually did a really good job bringing that back to us, because I remember them giving us a report-back of what they talked about, because that's how we found out that [APIRH] wanted to work on certain issues, and that they wanted to go in certain directions. And when the staff actually brought that back, that was when the members really held back, and they were like, No. We don't want to do this. And when you think about it, you're developing these young women to feel empowered, to voice their opinion, and to be politically conscious. They know their communities better than anyone else, and for them to say like, No. This is something that doesn't apply to us. This is not an issue we currently want to work on, our staff really backed us in that. So our staff during that time, they were like, Okay. So you don't want to do this? You don't want to go into this direction? And we're just like, No. So then they took it back to their—to I guess the—

KWON: APIRH?

CHUM: Yeah, took it back to APIRH and then APIRH said they wanted to have a meeting with us. And I remember *clearly* that they came down to our office, and they met with some of our youth, and—

KWON: The APIRH's very high [ranked] staff members?

CHUM: There were some staff. I think it was the board, too. It was staff and board who came from the Bay, and then they sat down, and they met with us for a little bit. But I don't think they were listening to us, from what I remember and from what other members said. They probably weren't really listening to us, because they just wanted to come and say, We're here. And pretty much they were like, We're going to do this, and they made that call, and that's when we were like, We're not. So then they said, Well then, we're shutting you down. And then one of the days, we came to the office with one of our staff, and then the doors were locked. They changed the locks, and then they got rid of all of the carpets, because we were sitting on these Cambodian carpets, and then they were donated—I guess they were donated to another organization called Californians for Justice.

KWON: So you went there, and you found the rugs there?

48:51

CHUM: So we went to one of their meetings, Californians for Justice, and they were stepping all over the rug. Because there's this thing around, culturally, you're supposed to take off your shoes before you step on the rug. And that was a really nice rug that members felt like, That's our rug

that we did training in, and we sat on, and we took care of. And then for it to be gone and to find it at a different organization, all dirty and being stepped all over, it was disrespect—and not from that organization, but just how things ended and the lack of communication and the lack of—I think it was more of members not being able to be—how do you say it—during that time, as a member, you weren't in the loop of everything, and because you weren't in the loop, you were left behind. It was like I was a child, you know. Your parents get a divorce, and you don't know what the heck is going on. You're just going with the flow, but you're affected by it. Big time. It's like you're hurt. It hurts you when your parents get a divorce. It was just kind of like that. It was like a bad divorce, and you saw the whole thing, you were part of it, and then it stays with you for the rest of your life kind of thing.

KWON: That's a perfect analogy.

CHUM: And then that sticks—that's [an example of] what you don't want to do. You want to make sure you communicate everything to a young person who's a part of it and who's affected by it, and that they understand why things ended up the way it ended up. Or else their perspective of everything is going to be like, It was horrible! It was really bad and dadadadada, you know? It's always good to make sure people understand certain decisions that were made. I don't think [the decision by APIRH to shut down the HOPE project in Long Beach] was a clear—I don't think it was a great decision, but on top of that it wasn't a clear decision. It wasn't understood by everyone.

KWON: Yeah. That's funny, because their program was all to empower young women to speak out. Then when you guys did speak out, they were like, Oh no. We're actually not going to listen to you.

50:42

CHUM: Yeah, and we felt like we could do that. Because we were like, You know what? We could say something back! We could really debate this. We could really express ourselves. As young people, we weren't looking to argue, we weren't looking—we were just saying what we felt was right at the moment. We were just expressing ourselves, and we represent our community. And we were like, This is how we feel, and it didn't just come off the way we thought it would, so (laughs).

KWON: So what kind of programs around youth do you have like currently at KGA?

CHUM: Yeah, so currently we have our leadership pipeline, which is made up of two programs. Our entry program, which is called the Young Women's Empowerment Program. They do similar stuff to what we did in the past, when we were part of the HOPE projects, but more intensive around

reproductive justice and looking at the gender roles, their identity as young women, and their sexuality, and being able to do a lot of that through art and crafts—and creativity. Like they made a zine, and I wanted to give this to you.

(Hands interviewer a zine)

KWON: No way.

CHUM: This is one of the three zines that they made, and this is the second one, and the second—the first issue was just on, What is YWEB? Their program's called YWEB, so what do they do? And they get to talk about all the different trainings they do. The second one is on reproductive justice, and their training's focused on, What does reproductive justice mean to you? What does it look like? What are the issues that you're affected by? So I can give this to you, and they define reproductive justice in their own way through art, through pictures, through writing, through poetry—

KWON: They're so talented.

CHUM: Yeah, and then—

KWON: It's got Powerpuff Girls on the back.

CHUM: Yeah! Oh, that's kind of our signature girl. Our thing is like KGA, we always say, We're Powerpuff. You know, the Powerpuff Girls represent strength and—

KWON: Yeah, they're tough girls.

52:50

CHUM: Yeah, and tough girls, and they get through anything. So that's our KGA girl. All of our members—that's the person that we use. But [YWEB]'s what they get into first, so they learn a lot about themselves and who they are, and their identity and things like that. And then after that they learn about their communities, so learning about the Khmer community, and this is where they learn about Khmer history and deportation and more of the broader issues that impact their communities, and then connecting it to themselves. So I think it's always good in the beginning to bring young people in, where they get to talk about themselves and have a space to be themselves and feel comfortable, and the way [is] through reproductive justice, through that lens, and then talking about all these other issues that impacts their families.

And then from there, they get riled up. So they get mad, and they're like, Oh my god. These are all the issues that I'm affected by. I'm mad. What are we going to do about it now? So it's looking at how do we

fight back, and our second tier program is called the Youth Organizing Long Beach, and they actually do campaign work. They stay in the program the longest.

So our first program, they're in there for a year, and then they move into doing organizing work right away. We want to make sure it doesn't take them too long to move up the leadership pipeline and that they get to organize right when they get into the program, because it takes some—it takes a longer—we used to do it when it was like four years, three years, then they get to do [organizing]. But then now, we're just like, Our youth are ready. They've been asking, When are we going to organize? We're—so we try to do that hand in hand, actually, where they get the hands on experience of doing organizing, and they get the political education. And both of them together are leadership development for us. So they get the skill set to do organizing around outreaching, recruitment, public speaking, facilitating, and then most of the basics like the basic 101s, and then they also get all of the PE [political education] around—they get PE on capitalism, on patriarchy, and then—what was the other one? Sorry, my mind—I don't do the trainings anymore. Yeah.

KWON: Imperialism?

55:06

CHUM: Yeah—well, actually not imperialism right now. They get a lot of understanding around—well, those two key issues for sure, so—yeah, they get to learn about those issues. I think the racial lens we're still working on, because we know a lot of that has to do with history and colonization, and [imperialism], so we're working on that. But definitely getting them to do campaign work and organizing their community right after [they join the program] and then they actually get to develop that campaign. So whatever campaign we're currently in, they get involved right away and they learn about those issues or why we started working on that campaign, because there's a history, if it's a long term campaign, and then there's also smaller wins that we're trying to get, and they get to be part of that too, so—

KWON: How old are these girls?

CHUM: The girls range from fourteen to eighteen.

KWON: So high school?

CHUM: Mhmm. So they're high school students, and then after they graduate high school is when they move into my program, and right now, it's an alumni network. So we call them alums, but we figure, you know, they're still members. They're just older members. So we're right now in the process of renaming our alumni network and developing it into a program, so that the older girls can do more of the fundraising and the parent engagement

work with us—so a lot of the base building and fundraising, and then the election work. Because we know that one way to build political power for our community is leverage—is, you know, just gaining—is changing policy and then being able to get our community voice out there, or for other people to listen to our community is really to get our folks out there to vote. So we're working on that, and we're always doing election work.

A lot of the ways that we talk about reproductive justice is through our electoral work, because our electoral work has been around the different propositions that talked about—I don't know if you heard of [California] Prop[osition] 4, Prop 73, and Prop 85 in the past. Those were different propositions that came out around if a young person, under the age of eighteen, wants to get an abortion that they need a parent consent. That was a big deal for us, because we felt like it violated teens rights, and young people also have rights to make decisions over their own bodies and that it shouldn't be controlled in that way. So we really fought for that, and we won all three propositions that came out. It came out three times, and we heard it's coming out again for the fourth time.

KWON: They just don't quit, huh?

CHUM: They just don't quit, because people believe that young people shouldn't have rights, and there's a lot of that ageism that exists. So for us, we're really working on that, and every time it comes out during the election, we want to make sure we take that on. As a group who fights for reproductive justice, it's looking at how do we protect teens' rights—current rights that are out there for young women and also for women in general—and then also getting rid of those initiatives that come out that are counterattacking us in that way, taking away our rights to choose. So that's important for us, and then in our alumni network, we'll focus more on getting more voter registration, getting more young people to come out and vote, because in the next four years, they can shift and change how things can look like in the next general election. So that's important for us to get our community out there and to know that they have a voice, and it could be through—it's through organizing your community and also through electoral work, just as a form of organizing. So that's kind of like our third tier that we're building up right now, and then hopefully from there, we see our members moving into staff roles and becoming staff and being an intern—so we have a couple interns here—and then definitely taking on different roles in the organization and leading program, leading projects, as a way for them to see that this is a career opportunity as well, and then you're also giving back and healing at the same time.

57:57

KWON: Mhmm. Are you the only one out of the staff members who grew out of the KGA programs?

59:49

CHUM: Who's currently here still?

KWON: Yeah.

CHUM: Yeah.

KWON: Oh wow.

CHUM: Yeah. So I'm the person that they—I'm the go-to person, you could say, but at the same time, I'm definitely ready to pass the baton. I'm just pretty much here, because I love the work that I do. I love working with young people, I love working on the issues that KGA is working on and being able to be a community member and [to] be part of that process is a blessing, and I just love being around the members. I don't know. I come across so many members, in my ten years of KGA, and when I go out in the community, it's so nice to see them—like to run into them and say, "Hey, how are you doing?" and they're like, Wow. You're normal. Because you know, they see me in KGA, and they're like—and a lot of the other staff, they don't really see around, but to see me outside and just to know that I'm a community member, also. I'm affected by the same issues you are affected by, and I stand right next to you. I stand beside you. I stand for the youth, pretty much. So definitely thinking about how do we build our leadership pipeline to bring our young people to do organizing work, and whether it's volunteer, it's a part-time thing, or it's a full-time thing, or something new for them, whatever it is—it's just being able to provide that space for their development and their growth. That's important for us, and that's the key thing that we do and the issues—we categorize it differently, but the issues are still the same. The stories are different, the experiences are different, they're unique in their own way, but we're able to be that place for our members to express that and talk about those issues and heal at the same time, so.

KWON: Yeah. You also have men in the organization as well, right?

1:01:51

CHUM: Yeah, yeah. So that's another way we're also talking about reproductive justice. When we talk about how women are affected by these issues, one of the key things that grew from some of our org[anization] planning meetings was thinking about, How do we also think about how young men can support young women in the movement for reproductive justice? And we know that it's important—that if our young women get the right support from these young men, that they will thrive, and that if young men are supporting these young women, they're politically conscious and they're aware of these issues, and it can eliminate and dismantle patriarchy.

Our program right now is led by Seng that you met earlier, and it's our Young Men's Empowerment Program. It's a yearly program, too, and the



folks who come through our program are between the ages of eighteen to twenty-four. It's a wider range of—a group of people, because we only have one program versus the other program, we have multiple. Their training is specifically on patriarchy, so being able to think about how do you dismantle patriarchy. They get to talk about their experiences as young men who actually are more privileged than young women and how sexism plays in their lives. And then also thinking about how that impacts women in their lives, and then taking that with them into the community and practicing it. So that's important for us, in a nutshell, to be able to think about gender justice and how do we see that play out. It's being able to provide the training for our young men and building the political consciousness, so that they can take that with them and pass that on. And then treat women differently and see women differently, and have a different relationship with women [than] the way the media portrays them or our society portrays women in general. Trying to dismantle all the gender roles and expectations and—

The cool thing about our two programs, the Young Women's Empowerment Program and our Young Men's Empowerment Program, they have some collective meetings where they actually get to talk about how they're impacted by those issues. The young men get to listen to how these women are impacted by the issues and then what they can do to support each other, and they do [this collaborative work] through the retreats—they have gender retreats every year. They have trainings that they do together, but they also get their own space to reflect. Especially for the young men, some of them don't know that they do this and how they're—how do you say it—how they carry themselves every day really impact the women in their lives. It's a time where they get to reflect, so—it's really nice. It's a really cool process that we created, and they get to reflect together and they get to reflect on their own and in their small groups. So Seng and Justina are leading that right now, and it's really powerful. I can't wait to see how it unfolds, in terms of how our community will respond and how things are going to shift in our community for our young people.

What was another thing I was going to mention? Oh yeah, and then the young men also work on a campaign. They have their own campaign, because they also have a different set of issues that they're affected by, and one of them is getting pushed out of schools into prisons. So they're currently working on the school-to-prison pipeline, and they're talking about it in a way where our schools need to change the disciplinary policies, because they're actually pushing students out. There's the willful defiance where you can get suspended for any reason. There is a range of reasons: you could be chewing gum, you could be talking back to a teacher and you could get suspended. And then a lot of times when students get suspended, they don't come back to school or they miss out on certain classes or certain assignments and they get held back. And that affects a lot of people in our community. On top of that, they don't get the

support from their families, because their families are also suffering and dealing with a lot of personal issues. So it really connects and it really links, and we want to make sure that our schools are supporting our young people and that they change their disciplinary policy and look at restorative justice.

Restorative justice is a way for people to understand why young people act and feel a certain way when they're in the school environment and how to respond to that and giving a space for young people to talk about what they're affected by. For example, a young person can come in and be really angry and lash out in class, but you suspend this person and this person never comes back to class, and then he or she drops out of school, and that's really bad for the school, but also really bad for our community and for the student. So looking at, What is this young person going through? How do I better support this young person? And creating a [restorative] justice circle to have those kinds of conversations. The [restorative] justice circle works for a lot of things. It works for when young people fight or they argue, like a lot of youth violence, suspension—[there's] just different ways that you can use the circle to understand what a person is going through and provide them the right resources and support, versus kicking them out of school. And then they can end up in prisons, and that's criminalizing our community, in that sense, and our young peoples, especially. Young people, and especially in high school is where there's a lot of transitions in their lives—so if you think about how our organization has transitioned and has grown, there's a lot of challenges that come during that time. We want to make sure our young people are being supported as they're transitioning in high school, during that time and that age.

KWON: Tough times, tough times.

1:08:05

CHUM: Yeah, so that's another campaign that Seng is working on. It's a collective—it's a local and state-wide campaign actually. So locally—

KWON: Is it for Khmer men?

CHUM: No, it's actually multiracial youth, so they're focusing on Latino, Southeast Asian, Asian—I know Khmer folks are there, because we were part of that conversation, and we're in the mix—and then also African American youth. We get to see a range, hear a range of stories and experiences that they have in the schools, and [be] able to share that with the schools, like the school board in Long Beach and in LA. They're working on trying to get Long Beach to redefine “willful defiance” and look at RJ [restorative justice] circles as a solution, so—

KWON: Could you tell me a little bit more about the RJ [restorative justice] circles? What exactly goes on there?

CHUM: Okay. Yeah, so the RJ circle's pretty much—there's a topic that you're talking about, and there's some item that you get to pass around in a circle. Whoever has the item is the person who gets to speak, and that everyone—and there's ground rules that are set up—and that everyone is really there to actively listen and understand where people are coming from. So whoever has that item, they actually get to talk about their experiences and what that looks like for them, and then you get to pass it on, and then everybody gets to share something. There's facilitators—sometimes there's like one facilitator, but there's facilitators there who actually move the conversation, so that at the end, there's a solution to the problem. So whatever the problem is, let's say it's some type of harassment that happened, that at the end, the person who harmed that person gets to come up with solutions to better the situation. And then the person who's being harmed actually gets to give suggestions as well as be okay with the solutions that are being put on the table. So it's a really good way to practice good communication and practice how to resolve problems so—

KWON: And this is the restorative justice circle?

1:10:26

CHUM: Mhmm. Restorative justice circle, and it can happen anywhere as long as both parties are willing.

KWON: Yeah, yeah. When did the Young Men's Empowerment Program start? Was that alongside when KGA first started?

CHUM: No. Actually that grew from conversations that we had around talking about gender equity, and then looking at, How do we address the gender roles and expectations and look at gender justice? We had that conversation when we were part of the NGECC.

KWON: I know you talked about it—

CHUM: The National Gender & Equity Campaign that AAPIP [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy] put out, and Peggy [Saika] was one of the lead staff [as well as] Cyndi Choi. They gave us that space to talk about this and reflect on where we're at organizationally. So we looked at where we were at organizationally and how do we move forward, what we needed to do to move forward, to be where we wanted to be. There were some hard decisions that we had to make and some challenges along the way, but definitely what came out of it is the Young Men's Empowerment Program, and being able to shape that curriculum in the way that we needed [it] to look like for our community, knowing that we have our Young Women's program, who talked about all these different issues that are affecting them, and aligning our Young Men's

Empowerment Program curriculum to that. So really looking at, like our organization, our young women are in the center of this organization and [we understand] that they lead the work—

KWON: Definitely.

CHUM: —but [we] also [need to be] making sure that young men are involved. And then also during that time that we were actually having this conversation and thinking about how do we bring young men in the work, it was clear that it was a need in our community. Because young men were coming to us and saying, When are you going to do a boys' program? because KGA—one, KGA got really popular.

KWON: Right.

CHUM: So all these young people wanted to be a part of KGA—all these young women. And then on top of that, their friends were coming to our events, were coming to KGA, because it's an open space for people to do homework, to come and use supplies and hang out, and things like that. Our members have cousins, have friends, have family, who are hearing about this, and they're like, When are you going to do a Khmer Guys in Action? KGA. Khmer Guys in Action? So they were really interested and then during that time, we were like, It makes sense. It totally aligns with what we're trying to do. It's just a matter of making sure that [the Men's] program suits what our community needs, and what we need to dismantle patriarchy and to develop our young men to support our young women in their lives—and organizing together, you know, that's what it's really about. So that was how it got started and from there, we're still working on how we can make the curriculum better, of course, and to suit the needs of each member who comes into our program. That's important for us. And since then, I believe it was—it's—I'm going to say two years that we started—that we had that conversation two years ago, and we built up the [Men's program] last year.

1:12:25

KWON: Oh wow.

CHUM: We piloted it last year.

KWON: So it's brand new.

1:13:46

CHUM: It's pretty brand new.

KWON: Yeah.

CHUM: We piloted it last year, and then we're still crafting it and figuring it out, because there's different campaigns that Seng—well, there's the Every

Student Matters school discipline campaign that I just mentioned, that's happening currently, too. So we're trying to make sure they get a good understanding of those issues and then the issues that impact our community, in the sense of, around sexism and like gender roles.

KWON: Well, this is the last question that I have because I know you're busy, but—it seems like the organization's already crafting its way forward, but what do you envision for the future of the organization, and what kind of work still needs to be done?

CHUM: Yeah. Definitely, I see our organization really growing, in the sense that it's huge. It's like our base is made up of different folks—multiracial youth as well as parents and alums. So growing outside of KGA and bringing KGA into the schools, into the different parts of the communities and being able to share with people the Khmer history and the Khmer story and the current struggles and the current issues. And just being able to organize multiracial youth on the issues that are impacting not just Khmer youth but in general. Because the issues came from our Khmer youth, but being able to connect that to the broader Long Beach and the broader group of young people. So that's what we're currently doing now with our wellness center, [it] is looking at how this wellness center will benefit all young people in Long Beach. And getting more people involved in KGA and being able to do—on top of that, still be fun in the sense that we still do a lot of arts and crafts, and we do a lot of expression and a lot of community events to bring people together, and seeing that as a way to heal our community.

So definitely that, and being that—also seeing us as a role model for other organizations as well, in the long run. It's like creating this structure, this leadership pipeline and also the way KGA does things, could be a way someone else who is starting up or who's currently in the process of change or transition [could] see us as a model, in terms of doing youth organizing work. So you know, in the long run, it's just being able to work with other people because the change is not going to happen if you isolate yourself. And we're really trying to build our capacity right now to be part of different coalitions and network and partner up with different organizations on the issues that impact young people in general. Definitely building capacity, getting more resources, and some things I really love is how fun and creative our space is, and that it's very youth friendly and that's what we really value and—in the long run, being able to give our community a face, kind of like—how do you say it—I guess, more visibility. More visibility for our community, and being able to be out there and represent Long Beach, represent for the Khmer community. It's always needed, you know?

1:15:58

KWON: Well, that's how I heard about the program, so I think you guys are doing a good job. And I know you got that ring on your finger, but I hope you still stay involved with the organization.

1:17:35

CHUM: (laughs) Yeah, of course. Yeah, I'm not going anywhere. It's been ten years. I'm like, Ohhh. I hope people aren't making bets of when I'm going to be gone. But definitely as an organizer, I think one of the things that I got from being part of KGA since I was a member is being able to see this as a way of life—as being able to organize people and continue to organize people and educate folks and work closely with other people. And [being able to] understand issues and the root causes of those issues really helped me to become a better person and grow in that way, where I'm actually going to do this for the long run, in the long haul. You know, it's *me*. It's who I am now. It's my identity, and that's what I hope for everyone else who's come in and out of our program. It's exciting to see—to come from a place where I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I applied to be a member—

KWON: Yeah, who knew, right? Ten years.

CHUM: Yeah, and then to come here, and then to see myself the way I am now or to talk about the work that I do now. It's like, Yeah, I am—it's been a long journey. It's been a good journey and a long journey. And I've come across and met so many great people who supported me through the way personally and professionally, so there's always room for growth. There's always room to learn, and I think doing organizing work is the best way to learn about your community, about yourself, and to be in a space with people who are so passionate and dedicated about change and social justice in general, so—yeah. That's all I have to say (laughs).

KWON: Yeah. Okay. Well, thanks so much for the interview. I'll just turn [the recorder] off right now then.

CHUM: Sure.

KWON: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

# Khmer Girls in Action

YWEP 'Zine \* Spring 2011 \* Issue 2

Why don't  
I feel like  
a girl?

Why am  
I attracted  
to girls?

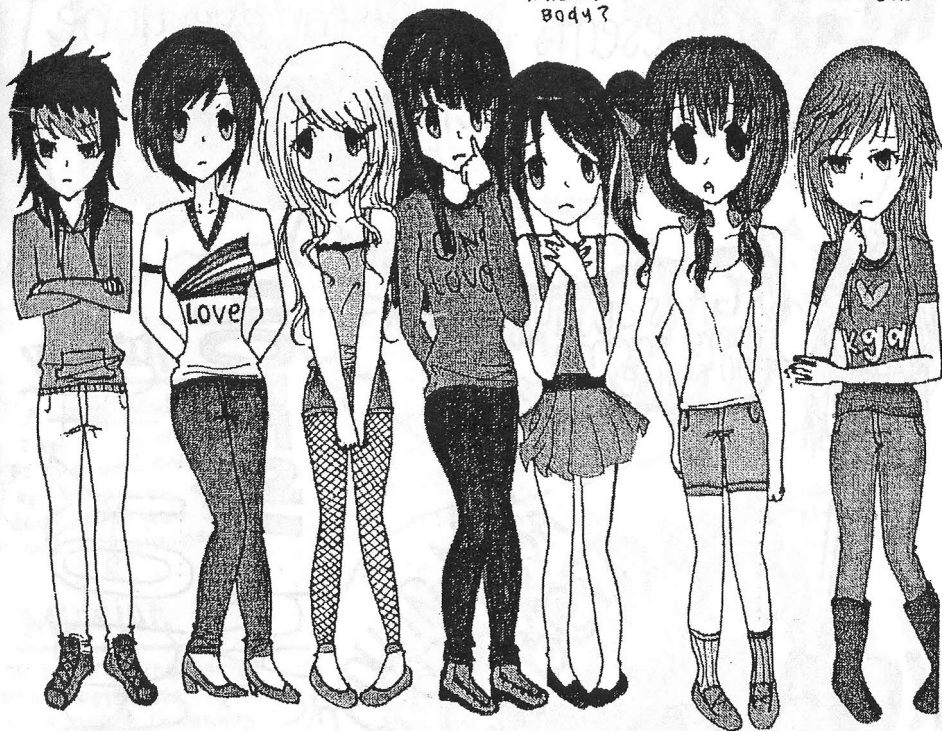
How come  
I'm treated  
as a SEX  
toy?

Why are boys  
treated better  
than me?

Why do I  
hate my  
BODY?

Why do I  
get my  
PERIOD?

What does it  
feel like to  
have SEX?



Everyone thinks that they have NO one to  
talk to about SEX and gender.

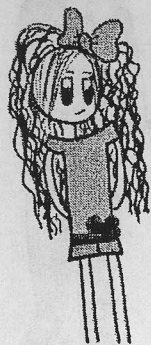
But in reality NO ONE is ever alone...

We are **Many** in a million.



# WHAT IS KGA?

KGA represents justice for everyone and stands up for their beliefs!



KGA is always there for me no matter what!

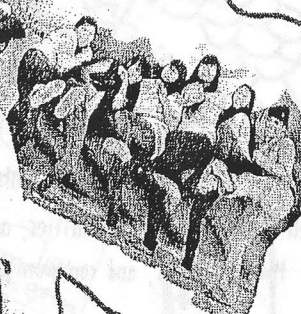
I AM ALWAYS ACCEPTED IN KGA! :)

Brittany L. Sibounheuang! :3

I GOT TO BACK! HOLLAR BACK!

KGA IS MY HOME! 

# YWEP



Khmer Girls In Action.

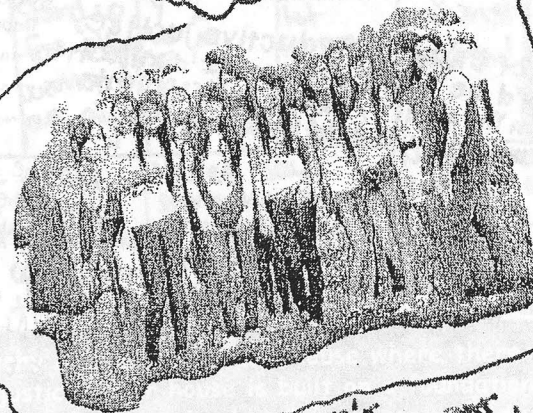
created By: Julie Comandy-Luy

## vision

A safe, healthy and trust world where all people are free from oppression and able to determine their lives and communities.

## Mission

To build a progressive and sustainable Long Beach community that works for gender, racial and economic justice led by southeast Asian and Khmer young women.



Young women's Empowerment programs! :)

# KGA



# Reproductive Justice What is it?

Reproductive Justice is when all people have the resource and power to make healthy decisions about their bodies, genders, sexualities, and lives for themselves, their families, and communities.

For example, most people don't like seeing gay/lesbian couples together because it is "gross" or "against god". If Reproductive Justice was in your life, wouldn't you want things to be easier and for you to stand up and say "It's my life & choice?!" **YES!**

if Reproductive Justice was in my life ...  
(collected writing from YWER spring 2011)

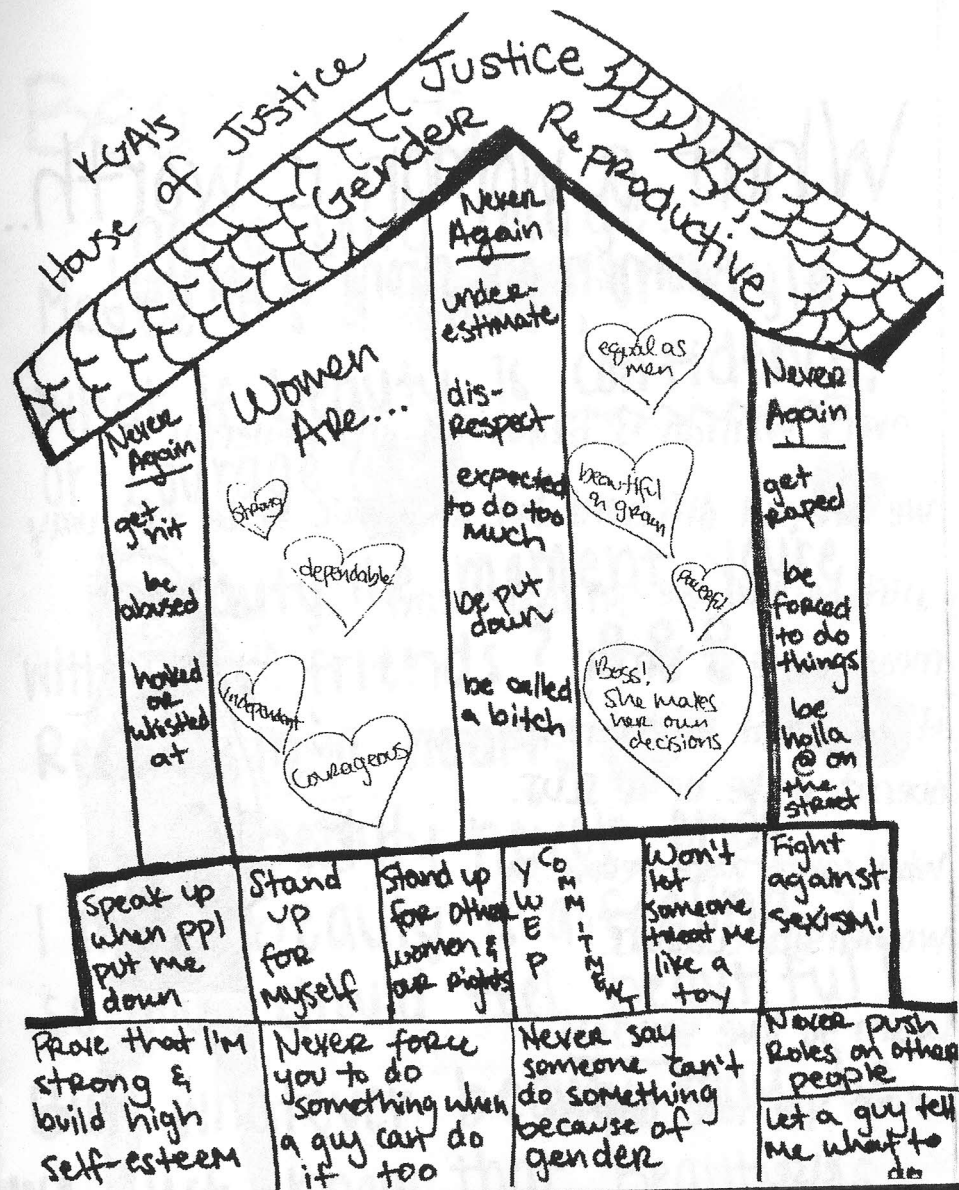
If I had reproductive justice, I'd be happy because I'd know I'm in a safe/happy environment and I'm surrounded by healthy ppl.

The main reproductive justice I want most is relationship advice. NOT too much, just if I have any questions.

If I had reproductive justice in my life, my whole life would be easier.

To have RJ in my life personally, I would be very pleased I want to make important decisions for myself so that I can be content about it. WOOOOO ~~Reproductive~~ / Reproductive system. I want to do me and live my life. I want someone who is willing to care about me be my support.

to be a tomboy. If I wanted to and be dressed as a guy and not being judged and called "gay"



KGA is smashing patriarchy and building a new house where there is gender and reproductive justice. Our house is built on a foundation of commitments members made to fight patriarchy. The house is held up by pillars that tell us what should never happen to a woman again. Inside the house women are respected and valued for who they are.

# What a woman is worth...

Women are strong & worthy!

every woman is beautiful and powerful

we are all different but we choose to be that way

just because we get mad doesn't

mean we're a BITCH.

if we want to experience more,

doesn't make us a SLUT.

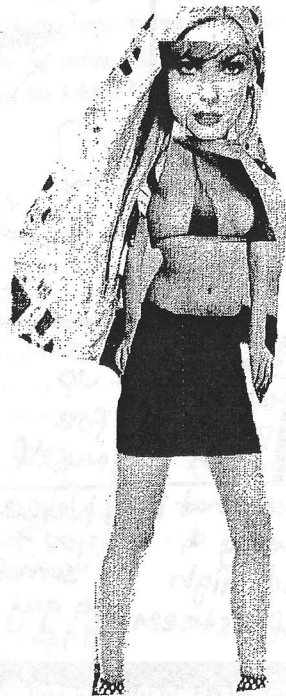
Who cares what people say!

women are Leaders!

Learn to love yourself

before you love anyone

else.



This is not the perfect woman!  
We have more to offer than our  
bodies! Our hearts and minds are  
parts of our body that deserve to be  
appreciated!

# Beauty is

not a solid image.

Maybe It's a smile, or style

What if beauty is confidence,  
or courage?

is beauty the moment you're  
with your friends? ♀♀♀

Really, in a heart?

beauty never ends.

I think beauty is a feeling,  
so you should feel beautiful!

But whatever beauty may be  
we just know that beauty is

# Beautiful

*Sex vs. Gender* what could that be?

Sex is the parts that I have on me!

Gender is how I think *and* feel,

It may not be seen, yet it is real.

Everyone thinks they mean the same, but they are **NOT**.

What you have on the outside may not be what its like on the inside

You can be a boy *and* still feel feminine

It doesn't matter to anyone.

As long as you feel free,

Everyone else should agree

to what you feel like you should be.

So, I guess I can say at the end of the day

Your **Gender** isn't your **Sex**.

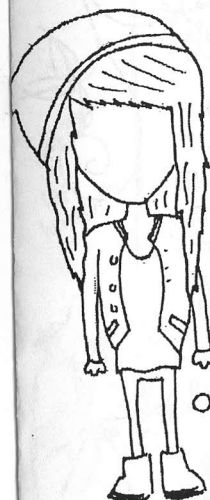
What I am doesn't decide **WHO** I am.



select:  
☐ **SEX**ual orientation  
is not the same as  
☐ Gender identity



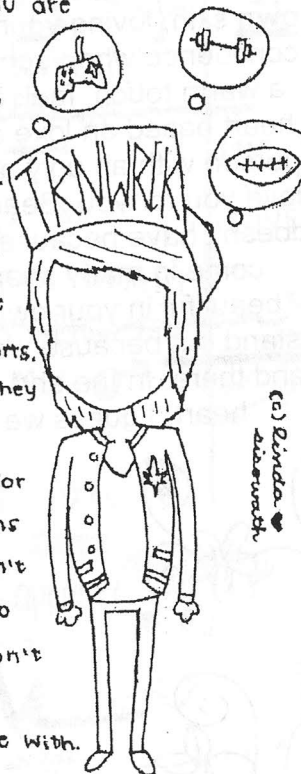
# GENDER ROLES



In society, genders play a role. Once you are born, depending on what gender you are, you are to live up to standard expectations.

As if when girls are supposed to stay home and clean while guys are expected to be tough and play sports.

But when one gender steps out of place, they get hit with being put down. for not doing what was expected of them. It isn't wrong for one to step out of place. We are all humans and we are perfect the way we are. We don't always live up to what people expect us to be. Just because we are our own gender, don't expect such high expectations. We are just people slapped with a certain role to live with.

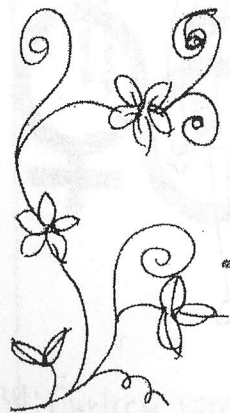


(c) Linda  
Aisworth



# BEAUTY is.....

Something we find on the inside rather than the out) because anyone can be "cute" based on appearances. True beauty doesn't have to do with makeup or style. Truly, it is being comfortable in your own skin, loving yourself otherwise. It is about having confidence when someone tries to put you down. It is a warm touch, feel, or smile, etc. It is what's in your heart based on love and kindness. If you're a 'pretty' person with an ugly attitude or personality no one will love you for you. Beauty is not what your body has or doesn't have because everyone is different and we all come in many shapes and sizes but, you're still beautiful in your own way. Everyone was made to stand out because we all come with little 'flaws' here and there. In the end...we're all human beings with a heart. I guess we're all called perfect flaws.



*Handwritten signature/initials*

©Chrissy sgM.(: art by C.C. ♡

Support others & their choices!!

Speak up against homophobia

stop homophobia

Accept everyone for who they are.



Don't use offensive words! like "gay"

No Homophobia! - irrational fear and hatred of LGBT

Don't be judgemental

♡ ♀

Love is LOVE

Sex organs don't decide your gender

There's a flower that blooms so fine  
People love and adore its fragrance

~but let's not stop here~  
people say that they like

## PERSONALITY

Why is it that if you're lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer, the shun you?



what makes things so different? flowers can transfer their pollen to other flowers, whether they are male ♂ or female ♀

But when a person likes some one of the same sex, society doesn't approve of their LOVE?

We're all human, we should have the right to love.



I'm a girl!

Society has  
built it as strong  
as a wall!

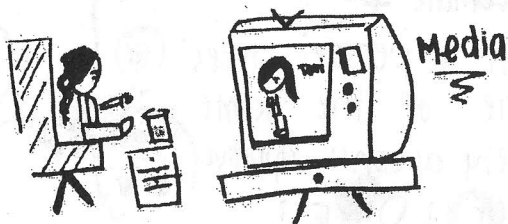
# SEXISM

Why can't  
we break  
the sexism?

Sexism is a system of ideas or beliefs that gives power and privilege to men over and oppresses women. Because of sexism, women aren't given equal opportunities or treatment in the world and are mainly seen for their abilities to cook, clean, take care of others, and their bodies :( We experience this oppression in three main ways:

## Institutional...

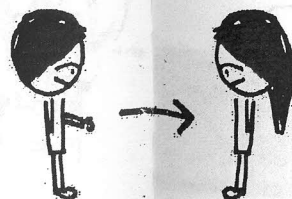
Institutions in society (schools, government, media, church, etc) where we get goods, information or services create laws, policies that oppress and put women down.  
Like how women get paid .75 cents to every \$1 a man earns



## Interpersonal...

When we act out sexism between each other! This can happen between men & women or between two women. Like when women get called sluts, or b\*tches or when we are only expected to cook and clean

Dad: Brittany, wash the dishes!  
Brittany: Why can't Brandon wash the dishes? He's sitting there watching TV.  
Dad: No, you're a girl! You need to do the cleaning, not the boy. He needs to be treated like a king.  
Brittany: ...  
Brandon: BUHAHA!



## Internalized...

Because women are bombarded with sexism all the time, we begin to believe the messages we hear and internalize them :( Like when we doubt ourselves or our intelligence, we think we are dumb, or place others before us



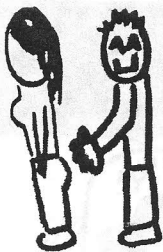
What she sees is  
UGLY. But to the rest  
of the world she's  
BEAUTIFUL

Chrissy: I wish I was Victoria Justice.  
She's perfect because she's skinny! ...  
Victoria J: Yes Chrissy I am! :D

# Sexual Harassment.

Is something guy should stop doing!

- Just because we are girls, doesn't mean you can do whatever you like with our body and looks.
- we girls don't need and want or deserve your sexual harassment!
- we care about our own **SAFETY!**
- Guys really need to stop acting like our body is just for them to touch. Our body is everything!



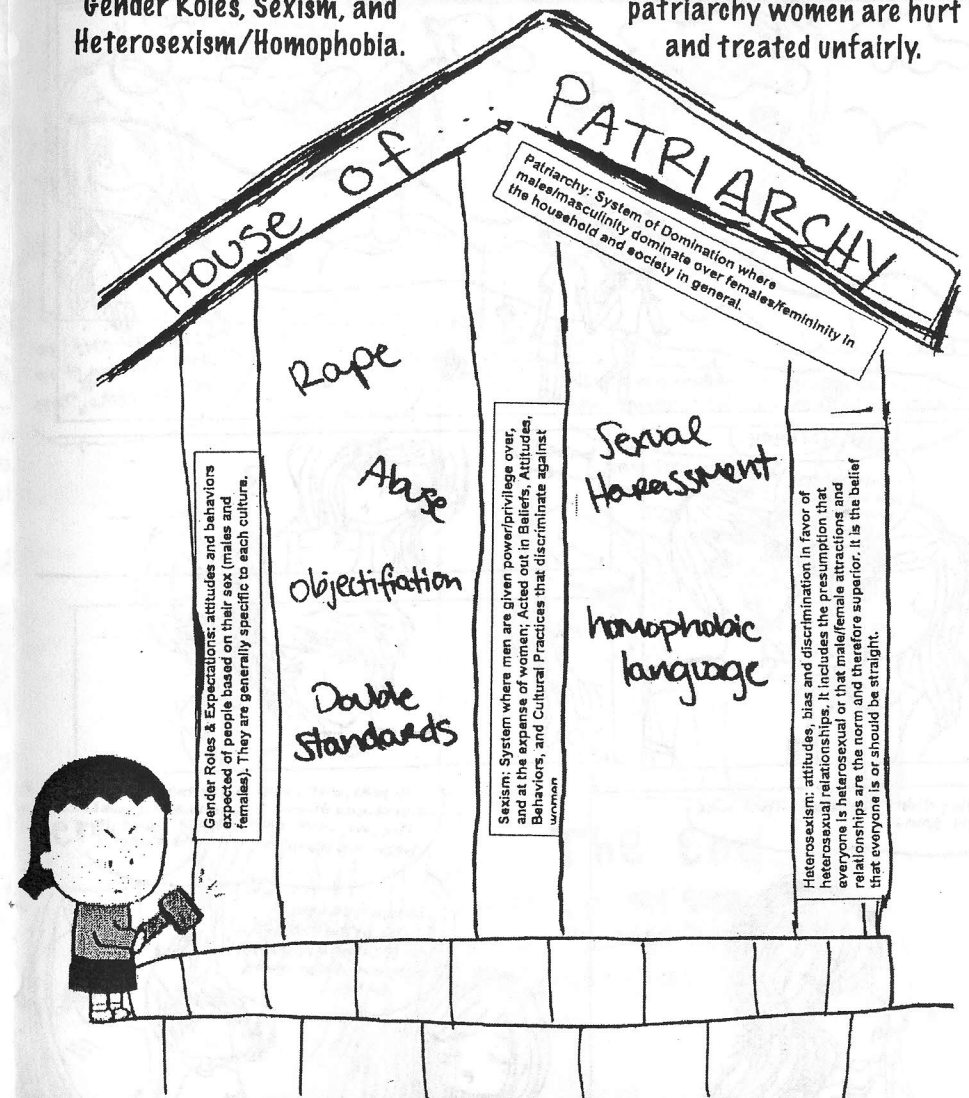
- our body is our biggest safety.
- we want our body to be treated with **RESPECT** and **CARE**.



- Jessica King ♥

The house of patriarchy is held up by 3 pillars:  
Gender Roles, Sexism, and Heterosexism/Homophobia.

Within this house of patriarchy women are hurt and treated unfairly.

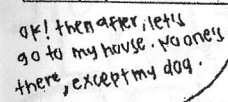
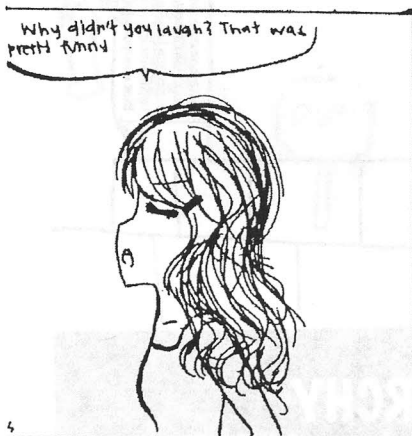


We want to  
**SMASH PATRIARCHY**  
and free everyone from its oppression & build a house of JUSTICE instead!



# LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

a comic strip by: Towery, Chrissy, & Sodany



## The End.

If you have any questions, please contact Planned Parenthood at 1-888-633-0433



created by:  
Towery, Chrissy, Sodany

# PLANNED PARENTHOOD

© Jenni Kall

## What I learned:

- You can get tested for free.
- Everything there is confidential.
- Everything is free except abortion.
- They're willing to use code names.
- There's counseling.
- [FREE CONDOMS]

## Facts:

- 1 in 3 (33%) youth identify themselves as (LGBTQ)
- 1 in 3 believe that the only way to prevent pregnancy is to not have sex. Majority of women.
- 1 in 4 youth don't know where to get tested for pregnancy, STI, STD, or HIV/AIDS.
- All facts are from LGBTQ Listening session.

# MY BODY IS A TEMPLE

## Confidence

"I am me and no one can change that!"

"My Body isn't some sort of mix making game. You can't choose how many body parts and features can look like. And you definitely can't play around with my body like it's a toy you can fool around a lot with."

"Don't listen to other opinion, they don't know the FACT."

"Don't let judgement get to me"

"embrace beauty inner & out"

## Unique

## Faithful

"my body should be respected and cared for. inner beauty!"

"You are beautiful"

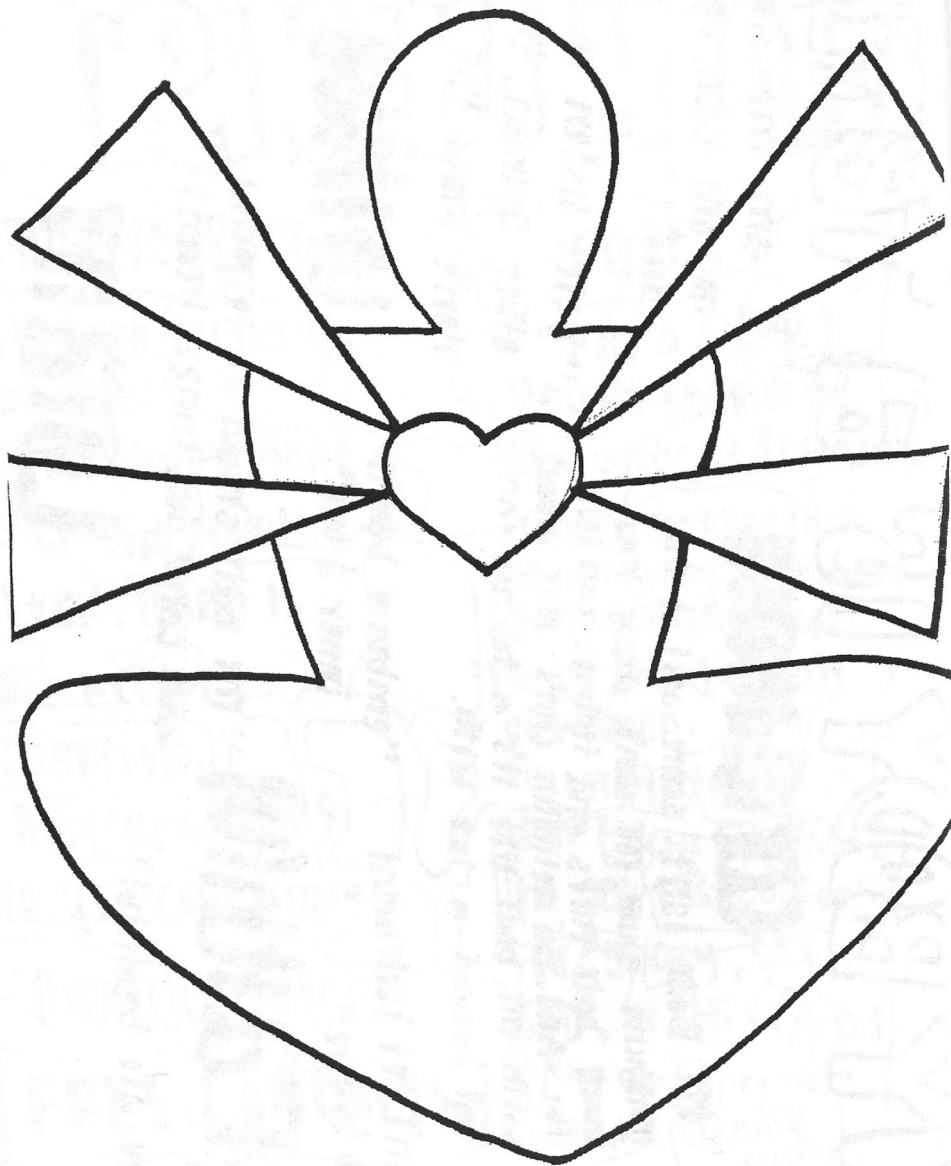
## Lorain



# • My Body is a Temple •

How do you want your  
body to be treated?

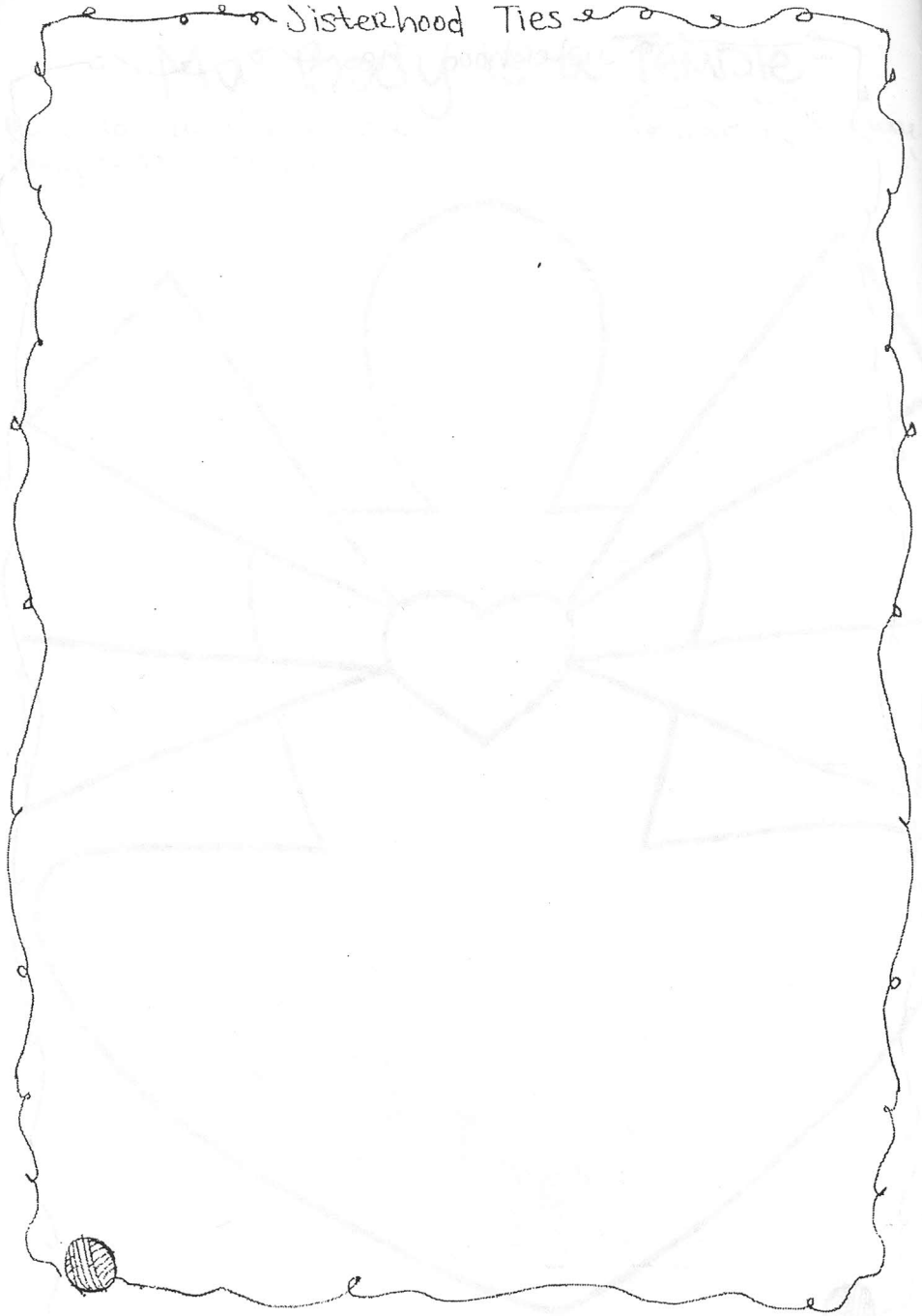
→ Treat it that way



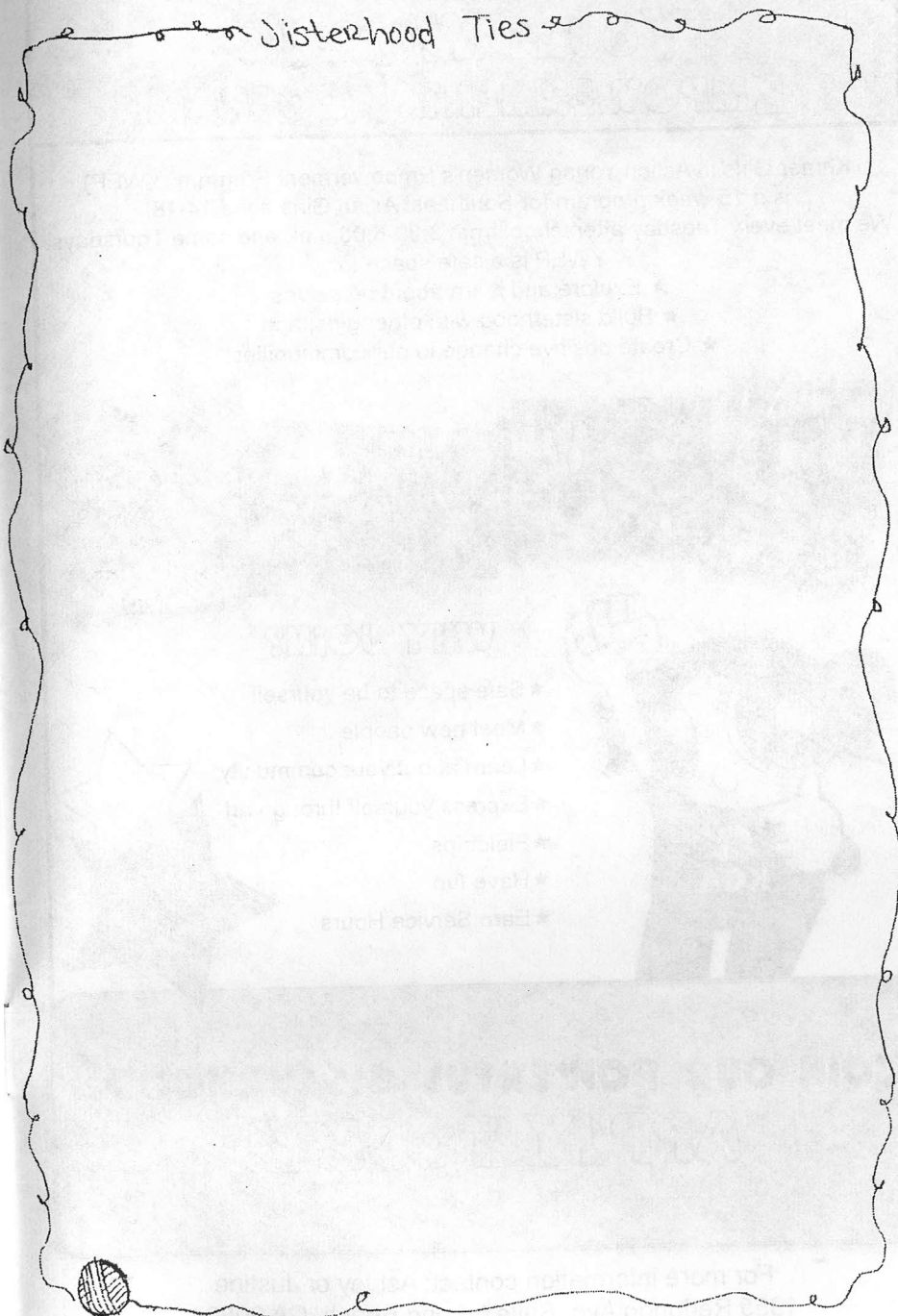
Sisterhood Ties



# Sisterhood Ties



# Sisterhood Ties



*Khmer girls in action's*  
**YOUNG WOMEN'S  
EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM**

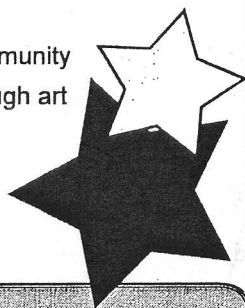
Khmer Girls in Action Young Women's Empowerment Program (YWEP)  
is a 15-week program for Southeast Asian Girls ages 14-18.  
We meet every Tuesday afterschool from 3:00-6:00 p.m. and some Thursdays.  
YWEP is a safe space to:

- ★ Explore and learn about ourselves
- ★ Build sisterhood with other girls; and
- ★ Create positive change in our communities.



### WHY JOIN?

- ★ Safe space to be yourself
- ★ Meet new people
- ★ Learn about your community
- ★ Express yourself through art
- ★ Fieldtrips
- ★ Have fun
- ★ Earn Service Hours



**JOIN OUR POWERFUL SISTERHOOD!**  
**APPLY TODAY!**

For more information contact: Ashley or Justine  
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