UNTIL the creation of Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Choice (APIC) in 1989, Asian and Pacific Islander (API) women had no organized voice or visibility in the pro-choice movement. APIC co-founder Peggy Saika expressed the impetus for action in this way: "How much longer could we be invisible on such a fundamental issue as abortion? We needed to have an explicitly pro-choice vehicle to inject our voice into the movement."¹ Three years later, seeing the need for a broader framework to convey the organization's own definition of choice, APIC changed its name to Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (APIRH).

Founding Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice

Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice was part of a new wave of pro-choice organizing catalyzed by the 1989 Supreme Court decision in Webster v. Reproductive Health Services. In the wake of Webster, large numbers of abortion rights supporters from diverse communities felt the fragility of abortion rights and were inspired to organize. In California, Mary Luke, executive director of Bay Area Planned Parenthood, called together a group of educated, professional East Asian women who were active in both feminist and Asian Pacific progressive organizations,² because she felt it was time for API women to become visible on the choice issue and to mobilize to defend reproductive rights. This meeting led to the creation of Asian and Pacific Islanders for Choice (APIC). Of the founding group members, only Peggy Saika and Audrey Shoji remained throughout the organization’s evolution. Like other APIC founders, they were experienced and respected activists, but Mary Luke was the only one who had focused her activism on
reproductive rights before. However, as threats to abortion rights intensified, they felt compelled to act.

APIC was immediately welcomed by API women and the national mainstream pro-choice movement. Saika remembers:

It was exciting. Wherever we went there were API women who wanted to do something... We understood that having a presence could not be achieved with one or two voices. So we looked for opportunities to increase the number of API women involved in the movement. For example, we were invited to send a representative to a conference organized by the Ms. Foundation for all of their state coalitions. We agreed to participate on the condition that [the foundation] would fund a delegation of six women. And they did.³

APIC was run by volunteers until 1992, when Mary Chung, a young activist, was hired to perform administrative work for the board. Over the next two years she went on to become APIC’s state coordinator and then the organization’s first executive director in 1993.

From APIC to AIPRH

APIC’s mission originally focused on abortion, family planning, and better access to reproductive health services for low-income and immigrant API women. However, as the group engaged with other API organizations, its outlook changed. Peggy Saika remembers:

We soon realized that “choice” conceived solely in terms of abortion access did not address the myriad of ways in which reproductive choice for API women is limited. We saw that the mainstream reproductive rights movement did not consider the ways in which racism, class segregation, patriarchy, and immigration status impact and limit the multitude of reproductive choices a woman must make in her lifetime.⁴

APIC chairperson Audrey Shoji also notes the complexity of reproductive rights for API women: “The reality of our lives is that Asians and Pacific Islanders face reproductive health choices as only one aspect of a complex struggle to survive in a society where we are often still perceived as ‘foreign.’”⁵

Shoji saw reproductive rights as civil rights. From this perspective, API women could connect their definition of choice to “the historical denial of rights and liberties suffered by sectors of our community as well as the community as a whole.”⁶ For Shoji, the connection was painfully apparent: “For communities who have been forbidden from
immigrating to this country, owning land, interracial marriage; who have endured internment based solely on ancestry, and forced or coerced sterilization and birth control, access to reproductive health care is indeed a basic civil right essential to self-determination and survival.”

Chung shared the perception articulated by Saika and Shoji that APIC needed to adopt a larger reproductive health frame in order to work with Asian community and health organizations. The women believed that other issues, including access to basic health care, language and cultural barriers to access, and poverty, ranked much higher on the community’s agenda than abortion alone. In 1992, reflecting the need for a broader framework and a shift in focus, APIC became APIRH—Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health. The name change delivered the message that the organization had a wider vision and program. Throughout its existence, APIRH has continued to develop and build on its expanded vision. That same year, APIRH co-founded the Women of Color Coalition for Reproductive Health Rights, in which Chung played a key leadership role (for more about WOCCRHR see Chapter 2, page 40).

**Challenging Assumptions About API Communities and Reproductive Rights**

While APIRH members were committed to an expanded definition of reproductive health, they remained vocal abortion rights advocates. They wanted to demonstrate that API communities supported abortion rights. There was no printed information about API views on abortion. “No one was talking about these issues in our communities. We were activists. We wanted to do something right away, even though we had very few resources. We weren’t waiting for the grant to come in.” APIRH decided to do a reproductive health survey, the first study of its kind conducted by the API community about API attitudes toward reproductive health. This was a genuine grassroots, community-based effort. Approximately 20 women, all volunteers, carried out the survey, interviewing 1,215 adults in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Francisco. “Everyone pitched in to do the survey. I brought the results to Christmas dinner. After we ate everyone helped sort them by zip code.” The survey confirmed APIRH members’ view that API women and men supported abortion. Results showed that 85 percent of those surveyed “supported a woman’s right to choose abortion under varying conditions.”

In 1993, for the 20th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, APIRH held a press conference to present the survey results. Beckie Masaki, executive
director of the Asian Women’s Shelter, pointed to the importance of the survey results:

Without this kind of data, the myth that Asians are not largely pro-choice... is prevalent. Therefore, services have not emerged for Asian Americans as a priority. What the finding points to is that there is strong support and interest in the Asian American community for a woman’s right to choose, and services, community education, and advocacy must begin to match that.\(^{11}\)

APIRH gained tremendous publicity for the survey. Coverage by the *San Francisco Examiner*, *Nichi Bei Times*, and *Hokubei Mainichi* stressed the findings that API communities are pro-choice and that poor access to health care limits their choices. Mary Chung and APIRH board chair Audrey Shoji emphasized that language and cultural barriers, poverty, and the lack of health information all contribute to depriving API women of early abortions.\(^{12}\)

In her remarks at the press conference, Shoji highlighted the importance of respecting diversity when she said, “While *Roe* was intended to protect the rights of all women in this country, the fact is that API women face problems that even the wisdom of the Supreme Court could not comprehend... API women come from 30 distinct populations and each of these ethnic populations has its own language, culture, and customs.”\(^{13}\) Failure to understand the distinctions among the different communities obscures the issues facing each one. For example, compared with other racial groups, teen pregnancy rates appear to be low when API communities in California are lumped together. However, if the rates are broken down by ethnicity and poverty statistics, there are significant differences among API communities.\(^{14}\) Policy recommendations based on the survey called for further research to address the appropriate cultural perspectives of the 14 largest communities identified by the 1990 US Census.\(^{15}\) The recommendations underlined the need to conduct research in native languages by native speakers, and for it to reflect different socioeconomic backgrounds.\(^{16}\) The APIRH report was widely circulated among pro-choice organizations.

**Getting to the Grassroots**

As APIRH’s report circulated, Chung and APIRH gained national visibility. Chung was sought out by mainstream organizations and groups of women of color alike to bring an Asian voice to the choice issue. She quickly became a prominent spokeswoman in national and international reproductive rights politics. In turn, APIRH’s
organizational ambitions grew. Inspired by the organizational chapter structure of the National Black Women’s Health Project (NBWHP), APIRH began to think nationally. Chung and the APIRH board created a plan to become a national organization with initial chapters to be located in Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, and New York City.

The expansion plans were put on hold in 1993 when Chung left APIRH and founded the National Asian Women’s Health Organization (NAWHO) to promote the health and reproductive rights of Asian America. Those interviewed for this book who were involved in APIRH at that time provide differing accounts of the separation. Some saw it as the result of disagreements between Chung and the board over the vision and future of the organization. Others disagree, saying that because the reasons were never clarified, it is only speculation to conclude that such differences were the cause. Still others saw it as a split that was divisive within the API women’s activist community. There were concerns that the organizing base was not large enough to support two organizations focused on API women’s reproductive rights and health and that there would be competition for funding and about which group would be the authentic voice of API women. After an unsuccessful effort to reconcile the two organizations, a few board members of NAWHO resigned. As we shall see, APIRH and NAWHO have evolved quite distinctively, with differences in priorities, leadership models, and strategic focus.

Following Chung’s departure, APIRH’s board reorganized, several of the core founders moved on, and new, younger women became involved. Once again the volunteer board ran the organization until Yin Ling Leung, who had been a volunteer board member, was hired in 1997. At that time, APIRH decided that it could best serve the API community if it was grounded in a grassroots strategy of community organizing and leadership development, focusing on those API women and girls most in need of “choice” in their lives. The chapter model was set aside with this shift in priorities from national concerns to grassroots engagement, and community organizing became central to APIRH’s programmatic work.

Throughout its history, APIRH’s analysis and vision of reproductive rights within the context and realities of API communities has been evolving. A comprehensive definition of reproductive freedom for API women and girls is at the core of its work. APIRH’s 2003 vision statement builds on earlier definitions:

Women and girls have Reproductive Freedom when we have the social, economic, and political power to make healthy decisions for ourselves and our families at home, work, and
in all other areas of our lives. Reproductive Freedom is not just a matter of individual choice. Reproductive decisions are made within a social context, which includes inequalities of wealth and power.

Reproductive Freedom is central to quality of life issues for API women and girls—having reproductive freedom allows women to have self-determination for herself, her family and her community.

Regulation of Reproductive Freedom of API women and other women of color has been a central aspect of racial, class, and gender oppression in the US and continues to become more restrictive and punitive.\(^\text{18}\)

Eveline Shen, who became APIRH executive director in 1999, talked about the implications of this definition for APIRH's organizing:

We are looking to address reproductive freedom within a social justice context. This means that we can bring people into discussion with us on a variety of issues that intersect with reproductive freedom, including immigrant rights, welfare rights, queer rights, and environmental justice. Our definition of reproductive freedom allows us to work on the issues that are most pressing or important to the people we work with in our communities—parents, youth, service workers, churches, schools, etc. while using an API feminist framework.\(^\text{19}\)

Today APIRH is "a social, political and economic justice organization fighting for Asian and Pacific Islander women's and girl's liberation through the lens of reproductive freedom."\(^\text{20}\) The organization's evolution shows that it has been consistently guided by an integrated approach to social change using eight core strategies: community organizing, leadership development, popular education, participatory action research, community building, movement building, policy analysis, and advocacy. The success and extent to which APIRH's organizational agenda has been grounded in priorities identified by the community provides a working model for other reproductive rights organizations looking to do similar work. Connection to the community was critical at every stage—identifying needs and problems, researching the issues, developing organizing projects to address needs, and setting policy goals.
Identifying the Issues, Grounding Their Activism

Opening Doors Project

In 1994, APIRH created the Opening Doors Project, a community organizing approach to gaining information about API women's health. The group worked for one year with a wide range of community-based organizations, community activists, legal and legislative advocates, direct service providers, and community leaders from the fields of health care, social services, mental health, domestic violence, children's health, alcohol and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, environmental health, and job training programs to develop a network of individuals and organizations willing to do the hard work of helping API women improve the quality of their lives. Together, these groups held numerous community forums, focus groups, and roundtable discussions throughout California, gathering information about the needs of API women and the barriers to meeting them. Through this inclusive process, APIRH wanted to develop a multilingual, multicultural community organizing model and establish an API women's health agenda articulated and defined by API women in California.

Hosting an Unconference

In April 1995, APIRH held a landmark conference, "Opening Doors to Health and Well-Being." Over 150 API women came to Sacramento to be part of this first statewide gathering on API women's health. Because of APIRH's commitment to involving the community in the definition of problems and in efforts to solve them, the gathering was organized in a nontraditional way. The organizers talked about it as an "unconference." The community women participating in the gathering were acknowledged as the experts best qualified to talk about what it would take to move the community on issues of choice and reproductive rights. Thus, everyone was both an expert and a learner:

We want to "open the doors" between those of us on the same side of the door (Asian and Pacific Islander women and other women of color) and invite and encourage dialogue, so that we may inform and educate ourselves about our health and well-being...We want to develop strategies to "open the doors" leading to those currently holding positions of economic and political power to ensure that our voices are heard and fundamental changes are effected. We want to develop mechanisms by which those on the other side of the door (those in positions of power) will eventually want to eliminate the door altogether, and
recognize, respect and incorporate our perspectives as Asians and Pacific Islanders and people of color. 22

The unconference was well attended by women from many different parts of the community and various ethnic groups, including Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Mien, Pacific Islander, South Asian/Indian, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, Tongan, and Vietnamese representatives, and those of mixed Asian heritage. Most participants were born outside the US and described themselves as immigrants. Their ages ranged from 12 to 74, with the majority between the ages of 25 and 50.

Participants discussed the need for training, resources, and services to help recent immigrants adjust to life in the US. Widespread depression and other mental health problems and the prevalence of violence against women were associated with adjusting to life in a new society. They noted that elderly Chinese and Japanese women have the highest suicide rates of all racial and ethnic groups, including whites. 23 Furthermore, women in immigrant and refugee families who are cut off from help by their inability to speak English are especially vulnerable to domestic violence.

Through discussions, research, and the unconference, APIRHH identified these and other health concerns of Asian and Pacific Islanders. Underlying all of the specific issues were recurrent themes: the fact that ethnic identity affects a woman’s mental and physical health; the difficult challenge women face in reconciling dominant US values, norms, and beliefs with API cultural roots; the need for culturally appropriate information and services; and the desire for a holistic view of health which encompasses the need to care for body, mind, spirit, and emotions. 24 Participants in the project wanted to utilize both Western medical knowledge and traditional health care systems.

While there was an understanding that addressing the underlying issues requires long-term organizing to build and sustain empowered and healthy communities, participants also sought concrete ways to move forward immediately. Women asked for assistance with banking and money management, job seeking, legal matters, and educational resources, including one-on-one mentoring programs and outreach. Teens wanted their schools to provide them with resources about sexuality, family planning, contraceptives, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). 25 These suggestions were part of a grassroots effort to deal directly with the daily challenges of living life in the US as immigrants with limited English language ability and financial resources.
After the unconference, APIRH released *The Health and Well-Being of Asian and Pacific Islander American Women* as “a counterpoint to health agendas define by others on behalf of [API] women...It is but one response to address the paucity of Asian or Pacific Islander ethnic- and gender-specific information.” The report highlighted the importance of researching and understanding health problems from the vantage point of API populations, rather than extrapolating findings from other groups. This is imperative to understanding health practices as well as to designing health and education programs and services. In explaining why they did not always seek care, API women pointed to difficulties in communication, being treated disrespectfully, and not knowing where to go for services.

The women also emphasized the tremendous need for more health information. One survey showed that although almost all the women interviewed had heard of cancer, over half thought there is little one can do to prevent it. When public health information is not presented bilingually or in other culturally inclusive ways, it can be misleading.

Internal cultural values and the externally imposed stereotypes discussed in Chapter 9 are also relevant. The report found that modesty and shame prevent API women from seeking breast and cervical cancer screenings, as well as information on birth control, STDs, and HIV/AIDS. Because the public expression of women’s sexuality in their communities is perceived as dangerous and inappropriate, Asian women are less likely than white women to speak about sex. Chinese women, for example, tend to be reluctant to share reproductive health problems with male providers. Such sociocultural considerations are critical to understanding and trying to change women’s behavior.

**Shifting the Focus to Southeast Asian Women and Girls**

In 1995, APIRH decided to focus on youth in Southeast Asian communities and to adopt grassroots organizing as its primary tool for social change. This decision was based on APIRH’s understanding of the economic situation of recent Southeast Asian immigrants to the US, who had come as political refugees and whose communities’ health needs were largely invisible. APIRH felt a moral and political imperative to assist these people. The founders of APIRH were East Asian, from the most privileged of the API communities. APIRH board chair Lisa Ikemoto explained that the “ethics of privilege” require people with relative privilege to assist people who have the least. The decision to focus on young Southeast Asians was an acknowledgement of the changing contours of Asian America and
APIRH's belief that improving life for the most marginalized people would help the entire community.

Further, APIRH thought that youth would be more receptive to organizing. They saw that young people were open and engaged in the US and as such, would be able to help connect APIRH to the adults in the community. Youth are more at ease speaking English, not as influenced by religion in their daily lives, and less afraid of political activism.²⁹

APIRH was well positioned to work with Southeast Asian youth. Through the Opening Doors Project, it had developed connections to Southeast Asian community organizations. APIRH had learned a good deal about influential institutions in those communities, including mutual aid societies and churches. Churches have tremendous credibility in the community because they provide direct assistance such as food pantries. The churches are then able to use their legitimacy to disseminate anti-abortion politics. Yin Ling Leung sees the need for progressives to do more community investment and empowerment work. “My feeling is that we do not do enough of this kind of work...We are often too driven by our own agendas and not able to hear and listen and respect the agenda of the community first.”³⁰

In the years following 1995, APIRH created three projects that reflected their commitment to Southeast Asian communities: the Health, Opportunities, Problem-Solving, and Empowerment Project (now called HOPE for Girls), the HOPE Environmental Justice Initiative, and the Asian and Pacific Islander Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. All three projects demonstrate APIRH's integrative approach and its efforts to develop leaders and activists who work for social change and reproductive freedom within their own communities. The HOPE for Girls project was the first effort towards realizing this goal.

The HOPE for Girls Project

In 1997, APIRH launched HOPE. Designed for girls between the ages of 14 to 18, HOPE is youth driven. Its major goal is to “develop the capacity of API young women and girls to take action to improve their lives and their community.”³¹ In HOPE, members connected reproductive freedom with other social justice issues, including environmental justice, welfare rights, school safety, and teen pregnancy prevention.

APIRH first piloted a model project in Richmond, California, an industrial community north of Berkeley, and then took the project to Long Beach and Oakland. The overall goals and strategies were the same in each site and included leadership development, popular education, community-based participatory research, and community building. Through HOPE principles and the support of the staff,
the girls were empowered to make important decisions and to take action.\textsuperscript{32}

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) model was essential to keeping the girls at the center of all aspects of the project.\textsuperscript{33} For example, in Long Beach the girls conducted a survey to determine the extent of sexual harassment. "This survey report therefore embodies the leadership of Cambodian American young women who identified an issue affecting them personally—the problem of sexual harassment in school—and took initiative to investigate it with the hope of making school safer for all students."\textsuperscript{34} In HOPE and through PAR, girls articulated their problems and developed the skills and confidence to address them.

Transforming the girls into organizers was part of the community organizing strategy. In order to support their organizing efforts, APIRH offered support and resources. For example, APIRH staff offered tutoring, college preparation, counseling, writing classes, and a summer program with stipends. Sometimes they helped by talking to the girls’ teachers, dealing with possible pregnancies, and assisting the girls in getting to doctors’ appointments. HOPE offered training programs to develop grassroots organizing and critical thinking skills as well as political analysis. These programs enhanced the girl’s political and self-awareness. They created a cohesive group that serves as a resource for support, problem-solving, and development.

In each community where HOPE has operated, the program has evolved according to the priorities of the girls involved in the project. In Richmond, the focus was on Laotian girls and young women, and it evolved as a collaboration between APIRH and Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN). HOPE created its popular education and leadership development model through this partnership. Because of HOPE, a strong young women’s component exists within all of APEN’s work, and young women are in leadership positions in the organization. HOPE in Long Beach initially took up issues of deportation, civil rights, and racism, which were particularly pressing after the events of September 11, 2001. In Oakland, HOPE functioned as an environmental justice and reproductive freedom initiative, specifically documenting and organizing against community exposure to toxic emissions. All the projects placed reproductive rights in a broader context.

In 2002, APIRH discontinued its HOPE work in Long Beach. Eveline Shen cited the reasons for this as "the challenges stemming from maintaining large projects in two very different geographic locations as well as increasing tension among board members, staff, and participants over organization strategies and direction." Fortunately, the work HOPE took up has continued with young women in Long
Beach via the organization Khmer Girls in Action. APIRH's only continuing youth organizing is the HOPE project in Oakland.

About 80 percent of the girls stay in the program through high school, and APIRH wants to find ways to keep them involved after graduation. In one effort to capitalize on the leadership and activism cultivated through HOPE, APIRH is currently developing a Youth Advisory Committee. The committee will consist of youth who have graduated from the HOPE program and, with over 200 graduates, it will have a large base group to draw upon. The goals of the Youth Advisory Committee will be to guide the ongoing youth organizing at APIRH as well as to support current youth leaders in their development as activists. Furthermore, APIRH works with other API, social justice, and reproductive rights organizations to apply and replicate aspects of the HOPE model and expand the base of the reproductive rights movement. APIRH is also using its experience with HOPE to develop a strategy for organizing adult women.

Whether its participants learn their own history, set out their vision of reproductive freedom, or get schools to improve sexual harassment policies, HOPE's ultimate goals are to empower API girls and develop a new generation of activists with a political perspective that uses reproductive rights as a framework for analyzing the issues that affect their lives.

Environmental Justice and Reproductive Rights

APIRH has a long history of linking reproductive rights and environmental justice. Since APIRH members have roots in both movements, they can build an integrated understanding of the connections between the two and create innovative organizing projects.

In the Oakland HOPE project, environmental justice issues were integral to the understanding of reproductive rights. The girls developed a Reproductive Freedom Tour, highlighting sites in the community that have an adverse impact on the reproductive health and overall well-being of API girls and women. Tour stops included a toxic medical waste incinerator, a garment factory, the prisons, a local high school, and the welfare office. In addition to the abandoned houses and dilapidated buildings, the tour highlighted the fact that there are 29 liquor stores and only one food store, nine check-cashing places, and one library. The girls produced a tour guide that provided graphic images of these problems. The tour brought 20 organizations and 100 activists together to learn about key environmental health issues in the Oakland School District. HOPE's work dovetailed
with APIRH’s participation in an environmental justice coalition in Oakland.

From 1999 to 2003, APIRH played a leading role in an environmental justice campaign focused on the largest medical waste incinerator in California, which was located in Oakland. A coalition was created to document the fact that the company that owned it was using some of the most harmful technologies and methods of waste disposal, which are especially linked to endometriosis and ovarian cancer in women. The coalition publicized its findings in order to mobilize the community to take action. APIRH and the coalition held a series of forums and gave other presentations to raise awareness and draw new supporters. APIRH members also met with representatives of the company that owned and operated the incinerator, Integrated Environmental Systems (IES). The goal was to have IES adopt cleaner technology and reduce emission rates. Ultimately, this effort was successful. Not only was the facility shut down, but the general public and policy-makers were educated about environmental hazards and the need for cleaner and safer technologies, especially as they related to reproductive health. In the words of one APIRH member, "Before I came to APIRH, I had no idea about the toxins in our environment. Now I understand that we have to work together—with all races and everyone in our community—to make sure that we have clean air and water. We deserve it.”

The Asian and Pacific Islander Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative

API communities have been left out of the national focus on teen pregnancy. By aggregating the diversity of Asian populations, researchers have alleged that teen pregnancy is not a significant issue for API girls. Because of its community work, APIRH knew this was not an accurate picture; it was clear that teen pregnancy is an important issue for API communities. In 2000, the group developed the Asian and Pacific Islander Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (API-TPPI), a community research and advocacy project. They worked in collaboration with two programs at the University of California at San Francisco—the National Centers of Excellence in Women’s Health and the Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy. API-TPPI is another example of APIRH reaching out to Southeast Asian youth in an effort to both educate and learn from them.

The program engaged API women, girls, and community leaders in discussions about teen pregnancy and teen pregnancy prevention, in order to understand their perspectives on the issues and to develop policy recommendations. The focus groups with young API
women yielded important insights into how they saw healthy sexuality. While the girls included the ideas of monogamy, safe sex, and no STDs—themes from the mainstream teen pregnancy prevention programs—they also had broader perspectives. They related priorities like “taking care of your body,” being “proud of being a girl,” and “having freedom to make good choices” to not getting pregnant. They also felt that low self-esteem and lack of power encouraged teen pregnancy. One girl explained it this way:

I see a lot of my girlfriends who think lowly of themselves and don’t see a future. Sometimes, getting a boyfriend and doing what he wants no matter what is the most important thing in their lives. We have awful schools, no jobs, and no way out—at least that’s how it feels to me sometimes.

Community leaders and the youth made the connection between economic opportunities, the deficient state of welfare, and teen pregnancy in API communities. As one participant explained:

Families on welfare are in a system which doesn’t allow them to get out of poverty. If you have no economic resources, you aren’t able to access quality reproductive health care. Also, if teenagers feel that there is no hope of getting out of their situation and making their lives better, then they are more likely to engage in high-risk behavior, like having unsafe sex.

The power of API-TPPI was threefold. It provided a forum for API girls to talk about teen pregnancy and prevention and educated them on the subject. It synthesized the significant information garnered about teen pregnancy from API communities into a report and made important policy recommendations for future research and action.

Contribution and Challenges of APIRH

One of APIRH’s most significant contributions to the reproductive rights movement has been its analysis of reproductive rights at the intersection of multiple oppressions. APIRH’s comprehensive definition of reproductive rights is grounded in the community and is meant to be relevant to women whose lives are profoundly affected not only by their race, class, and gender but also by their experiences as refugees and immigrants. Through its struggles with issues of culture, power, and oppression, APIRH has a grasp on how to work in these communities in meaningful ways. The organization’s decision to organize in the most vulnerable communities is unusual in the pro-
choice movement and provides invaluable lessons for organizing and for developing a comprehensive and inclusive reproductive rights agenda.

APIRH’s work, like that of other groups in this study, challenges the view that women living on the margins are not interested in feminism and reproductive rights. When the issues are defined by the women themselves and articulated in terms that are relevant to their communities, it is possible to involve them in organizing for change and advocating for themselves. APIRH is overtly committed to feminism and social justice. The organization’s ability to frame reproductive rights in terms that are meaningful to women in these communities is crucial for drawing these women to the movement. APIRH has managed to respond to the issues identified by the community and then connect those issues (sexual harassment, education rights, and environmental justice) to reproductive freedom. These connections are made not only in ideological or rhetorical ways but also concretely, in projects and policy changes at the local level.

Like other organizations that are closely attuned to the changing needs of their communities, APIRH is constantly evolving and refining its strategy and analysis. APIRH has had three major leadership changes through its 14-year existence—from Mary Chung to Yin Ling Leung to Eveline Shen—more than the other organizations in this study. These have not been easy. APIRH has had to go through intense periods of re-examination of leadership, organizational structure, and programmatic work, particularly as it has tried to figure out what an API feminist model of leading and organizing looks like. Eveline Shen, APIRH’s executive director for the past five years, sees this as part of APIRH’s ongoing evolution in developing culturally specific models of leadership and organization which facilitate staying in touch with API communities. An example of the organization’s evolution is the name change that took place in May 2004 when APIRH became Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ). Shen asserts that this change better reflected the reproductive issues and needs identified within API communities. The new name was symbolic for other reasons: “We have become ACRJ in solidarity with our sisters of color working on reproductive justice across the country.”

APIRH has consistently posed difficult questions for itself that are basic to its identity and efficacy as an API reproductive freedom organization. It asks: What does an API feminist model of organizing look like? What does it mean to organize the most marginalized segments of the API community? How can APIRH members relate to and work with mainstream reproductive rights and pro-choice organizations, given the complexity of issues they struggle with on a daily
basis? How can they stay focused on a community-rooted mission and locate API women's interests at the center of the larger reproductive rights movement? These questions do not necessarily have one right answer. As the organization grows and develops we can look forward to hearing their responses to some of these complex and yet important questions.

Both the challenges and APIRH's impact are seen in its major areas of work with youth, movement building, and raising awareness of reproductive rights in API communities. APIRH wants to develop young women leaders who have a feminist, class, and race analysis. Though mentoring, developing leadership in, and empowering girls are very hard to quantify or measure, APIRH has done significant work on this front. In a short period of time it has worked with many young women and girls who accomplished significant organizing in their communities. Fourteen-year-old Amy Saephan put it this way: "At HOPE I learned that I have another person inside of me who can stand up for herself." APIRH's success can also be measured partly by the impact it has had on public policy. For example, the Long Beach schools adopted ideas proposed by the girls in HOPE, including teacher and student training, monitoring, and addressing incidents of sexual harassment.

**Movement Building**

APIRH is committed to building the reproductive rights movement and to ensuring that issues that are at the core of women's existence will be an essential part of any vision of human rights and social justice. This makes reproductive and sexual issues less vulnerable to dismissal by those who want to characterize them as Western and middle-class preoccupations. Their analysis of the interconnections is one of APIRH's most important political contributions. APIRH works with reproductive rights, civil rights, environmental justice, and anti-racist groups. It is on the Management Circle of SisterSong and a member of the Reproductive Rights Task Force of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. It is also a member of the California Coalition for Reproductive Freedom and most often is the only API reproductive rights group in pro-choice coalitions.

In working with larger organizations, the inequality of financial resources can be a barrier to creating partnerships. While APIRH is called upon to work in solidarity and coalition with, for example, Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice California, it cannot be equal financial partners because of the disparity in their resources. As APIRH sees it, one of its roles is to challenge reproductive rights groups to think about race and class, to work with social justice groups
to include issues of gender, and to support API service providers to consider organizing as a strategy for increasing access to health care. This is no easy task, and AIPRH is rightfully concerned about crafting realistic goals.

Being a community-based organization is an essential part of AIPRH's identity and vision of social change. It is committed to listening to its constituencies and trying to balance this with its organizational commitment to feminism and reproductive rights. Within AIPRH there have been conflicts over strategies, pace, and priorities, exacerbated by the scarcity of resources.

At the same time, since AIPRH is one of only two API reproductive health organizations, it has been called upon to function in national circles. AIPRH's present director, Eveline Shen, is recognized locally, statewide, and nationally in reproductive rights circles as well as social justice organizing arenas. The breadth of issues and activism incorporated into the AIPRH vision is both a strength and a challenge. AIPRH is committed to movement building, organizing, and advocacy. Despite the fact that it is focused on grassroots organizing, it continues to be sought as a partner by state and national organizations and coalitions. For example, in spring 2004 organizing for the March for Women's Lives in Washington, DC, AIPRH was one of the lead organizers of a women of color contingent. The effort to engage in all of these arenas is challenging and within each area difficulties are confronted.

While AIPRH's national profile sometimes conflicts with its goal of community organizing, co-founder Peggy Saika thinks that the original APIC mission of bringing an Asian voice to the pro-choice movement is still necessary and largely unfulfilled: "We need courageous and cohesive organizations that will set out a new vision around choice and reproductive rights that is explicit. We can't let our fears of alienating some constituencies prevent us from being out there in the way we need to be." AIPRH has definitely brought an API women's voice to the movement by participating in coalitions in California and nationally. Perhaps the local/national distinction evaporates when we consider that 40 percent of all Asians and Pacific Islanders live in California. Hence, work done by AIPRH at the local level has a national impact.

AIPRH's infrastructure was too fragile to support its rapid growth. Its youth work puts relatively large resources into what might seem to be relatively few women. While AIPRH is committed to organizing on the issues brought forward as priorities by the communities it works in, foundations have their own agendas. The foundations which support reproductive rights organizations emphasize abortion rights. AIPRH has aimed at trying to balance all these pressures and
build the organization's core infrastructure. While the organization has been supported by some of the major reproductive rights foundations, APIRH leaders, like those of other nonprofit organizations, see the need to expand and diversify their funding base. They are currently trying to build an individual donor base. This work is very labor intensive.

APIRH is playing a unique and essential role in API communities and in the reproductive rights movement. It has a long-term social change vision for API communities and for building a reproductive justice movement. Its members want to expose people in the fast-growing immigrant communities to pro-choice and reproductive rights politics because they see reproductive rights as a central concern for women of color. They also see that API youth have no direct connection to the mainstream reproductive rights movement and see filling this gap as a critical organizational goal. All of this work is long-term and slow. As former staff member Rina Mehta observed, "I have no doubt that the girls in the Long Beach project will be pro-choice—but it doesn’t happen overnight."

APIRH’s vision includes reproductive rights for all women and builds the base of the social justice movement. Shen summed up APIRH’s view about the importance of generating a wide base of support for reproductive rights:

During these challenging times, it is more critical than ever that we invest in building a strong base of women of color committed to reproductive freedom, that we forge alliances across our differences and build new and innovative partnerships, and that we develop a strong clear vision of reproductive freedom for all women and girls.
NOTES

2. These organizations included Planned Parenthood, the Asian Law Caucus, and the Asian Civil Rights Organization.
3. Saika, interview.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Saika, interview.
9. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
17. Those who were involved in this transition provide differing accounts of it. Some saw it as the result of tensions between Chung and the board over vision for the organization. Others feel that the reasons have never been clarified.
22. Ibid., 12.
23. Ibid., 25.
25. Ibid., 38.
26. Ibid., 2.
27. Ibid., 19.
31 APIRH Newsletter, Summer 2000.
Que Dang, winner of the 2000 Ms. Foundation’s Gloria Steinem Leadership Award, was its first coordinator. Eveline Shen, APIRH’s current executive director, worked on the pilot curriculum and leadership training as an intern in Richmond and developed the project in Oakland. This became the APIRH’s Organizers-in-Training Program, which uses participatory action research to gather information and as the basis for analyzing issues.


33 Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a research strategy that is grounded in political context and which seeks social change. The key aspects of PAR include that it is a collaborative process, not a method, of researchers and affected community members working together; that its purpose is knowledge which will lead to greater access; that it is rooted in building relationships; and that the researcher and community members are co-learners.


35 Former APIRH staff member and HOPE creator Que Dang created Khmer Girls in Action.


39 Disaggregating the data was a necessary step. For example, while only 0.8 percent of births to Chinese women are to teenagers, 18.9 percent of births to Laotian women are to teenagers.

40 The information about the API-TPPI project and the direct quotations are based on “Summary Findings” in Teen Pregnancy Among Asians and Pacific Islanders in California: Final Report (Berkeley: The Regents of the University of California, 2001).

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 7.


44 Ibid., 8.

45 Eveline Shen, email to Marlene Gerber Fried, August 2004.


47 Oakland HOPE Project, flyer.

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.

Saika, interview.
