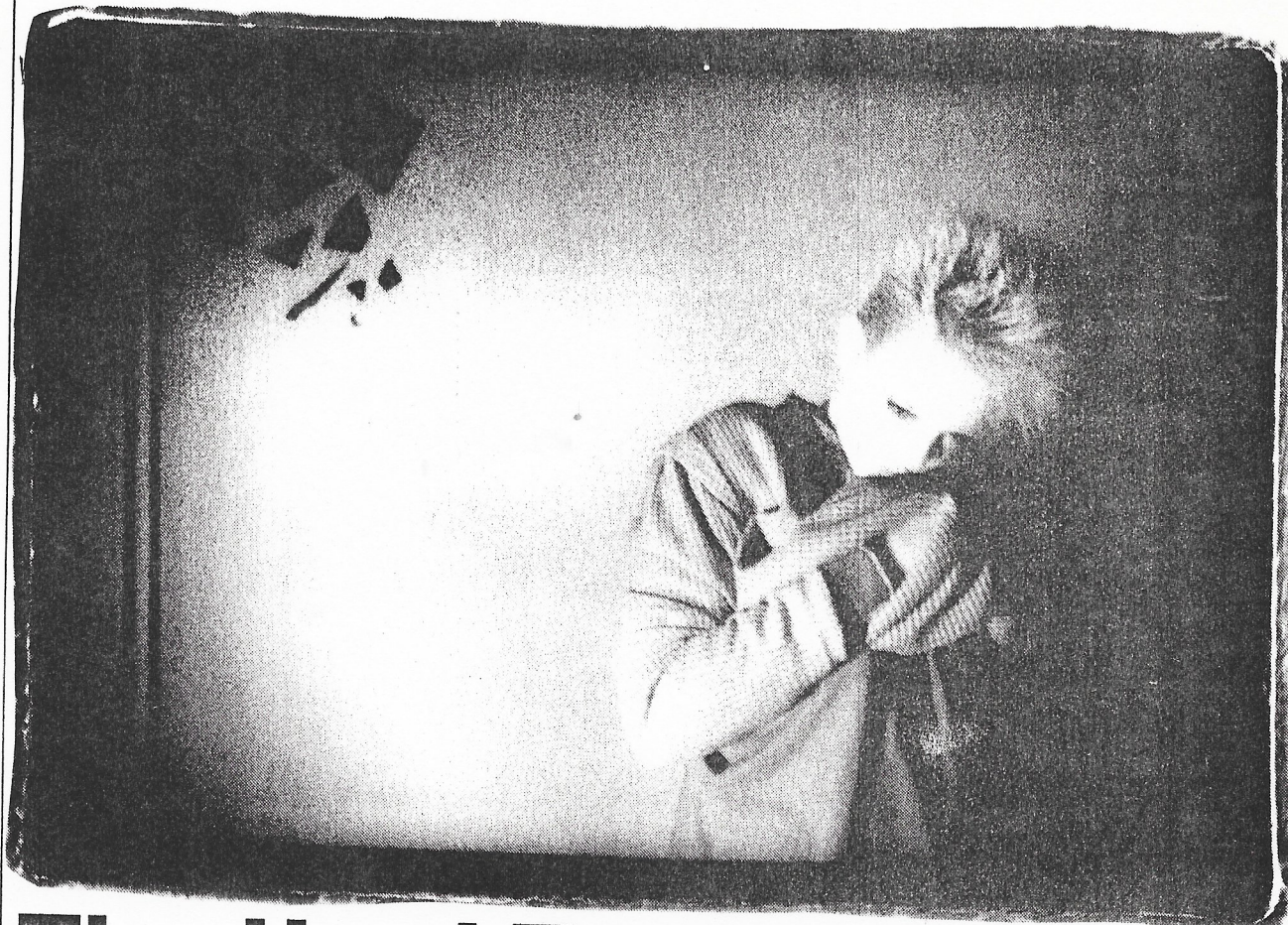


Video



The Hard Truth

Voices of Battered Lesbians. Available through: The Lesbian Caucus, MCBWSG, 107 South St., 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02111. 30-minute running time. \$5.00.

by Wickie Stamps

"I knew what freedom was—I was alive."

—statement by a formerly battered lesbian

Voices of Battered Lesbians is filled with the testimony of formerly battered lesbians, many of whom were permanently disabled by their lovers. Interspersed in their documentation of violence—which the survivors come to define as "a systematic set of coercive behaviors which the abuser always has a choice about"—are their deeply moving accounts of personal struggles against physical, emotional, sexual, economic and homophobic abuse.

Much of the material contained in this video, such as the myth of mutual battering, strikes political victories for battered lesbians against the lesbian community's ignorance. We are fortunate that the Massachusetts Lesbian Caucus—the

most radical wing of the shelter movement—produced this tape. A caucus with strong alliances with the shelter movement's state and national women-of-color caucus, they were the first to delete a negative comment about S/M from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's original document on lesbian battering entitled "To the Lesbian Nation." Reflecting this progressive political history, *Voices* women remind us that S/M dykes, bar dykes and butch-femme dyads are not synonymous with battering, and that—sorry, folks—feminists *do* batter. They further assert that battering crisscrosses all races, classes and lifestyles, and that the lesbian community's racism and anti-working-class sentiments trap many lesbians in violent situations.

Voices is an heroic accomplishment, given the wall of homophobia confronting lesbians in the shelter movement. When lesbian battering "came out" in the early '80s, an immediate warning was sounded by the shelters. Any overt focus on lesbian battering—and lesbianism—would scare away funding sources or threaten heterosexual clients, the women interviewed here report. Those lesbians who were "allowed" to broach the issue by their shelters (but were nonetheless

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closeted) began "political triple-time"—they did their "real" work on heterosexual battering, waged a high-intensity war against homophobia and then, often on their own time, tacked on "their" issue. It was increasingly apparent that in a movement built by lesbians, a majority of whom were women of color, sexual diversity was but tolerated and only if these women maintained a low profile and devoted their energy to heterosexual concerns.

The final blow came at the 1986 National Coalition of Domestic Violence conference when lesbians were told that lesbian battering was polluting the movement's vision, and that the issue was stealing money from heterosexual women and children. Four years later, little seems to have changed. There are only three workshops on lesbian battering at the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence conference—and they are all scheduled at the same time.

As a founding member of the Massachusetts Lesbian Caucus and a survivor of the shelter movement's homophobia, I was unsure if, once I finally agreed to review the tape, I could overcome my rage at a movement—and a community—that betrayed us when we really needed them. But there is shelter from lesbian violence as there is the testimony of these survivors in *The Voices of Battered Lesbians*.

If you are a battered lesbian and need help, it is available. Call 1-(800)-333-SAFE or 1-(617)-426-8492. ▼