

## A Lesbian's Guide to Cruising in Ambiguous Contexts

# How To Tell a Lesbian from a Drag Queen at 40 Paces

By Nancy Henry

Let's say you've spotted a really attractive, large-boned woman across the room, but it's a mixed crowd and you don't want to be insulting — or insulted — or *too* direct.... What if she's married, or doesn't like women? What if she's not even a she? Oh so casually, ease over to stand near subject and follow these 10 easy tips on how to tell a woman from a drag queen at 40 paces:

1. Look at the throat: first, from the front (the "Adam's Apple" is accurately named);

2. If that's not conclusive, try a side view: Electrolysis and make-up may remove or disguise a beard, but men's necks generally are still not as smooth as women's. (If subject is wearing a high collar or has spent a lot of time in the sun, these methods may be of little use, so move on to Step 3):

3. Introduce yourself. If the name you get in response is Joan or Barbara, chances are very good that there was a lot of pink at this person's christening; if Clarissa or Tiffany, you've either met a queen or an actress; if Amanda or Stephanie, subject requires further investigation.

4. If this is the case, extend your hand in greeting. A less-than-hearty handshake means either subject is trying too hard to overcome a male upbringing ("Come on, son, shake hands like a *man*"), or is a woman you wouldn't want to know better, anyway. (Research shows that people who shake hands like dead fish usually hug that way as well — and who needs that? You'd be better off curling

up tonight with Mary Tyler Moore re-runs — at least Rhoda's not wishy-washy.)

5. If clasp is indeterminate, try offering subject a drink. If she asks for Perrier, don't start planning a weekend for two in the country. However, subject *could* be on a diet — or might be a recovering alcoholic — so this may not be a definitive answer. A pink lady is pretty conclusive, as is an apricot sour, but Scotch or wine may only add to the confusion. If the order is for Campari and root beer, start warning up the car. (No matter the gender of this creature, you don't want to be in the same county.)

6. By this point, you've probably overheard some tidbits of subject's conversation with whom-ever else had (so casually) sidled up. This may help...be particularly alert for phrases regarding past loves; pronouns may be of little use, but names will most likely assist you (see Step 3). If not,

7. Engage subject in conversation. Try to steer discussion towards area of origin, from which you can easily move to education. ("Bargonia? I have cousins there. Maybe you know them. Say, which school did you go to?") Obviously, if the answer is "Holy Angels Academy for Girls," your work is over, and perhaps the fun is just beginning. This is a long shot, however, especially if subject attended school post-'60s when most had gone co-ed.

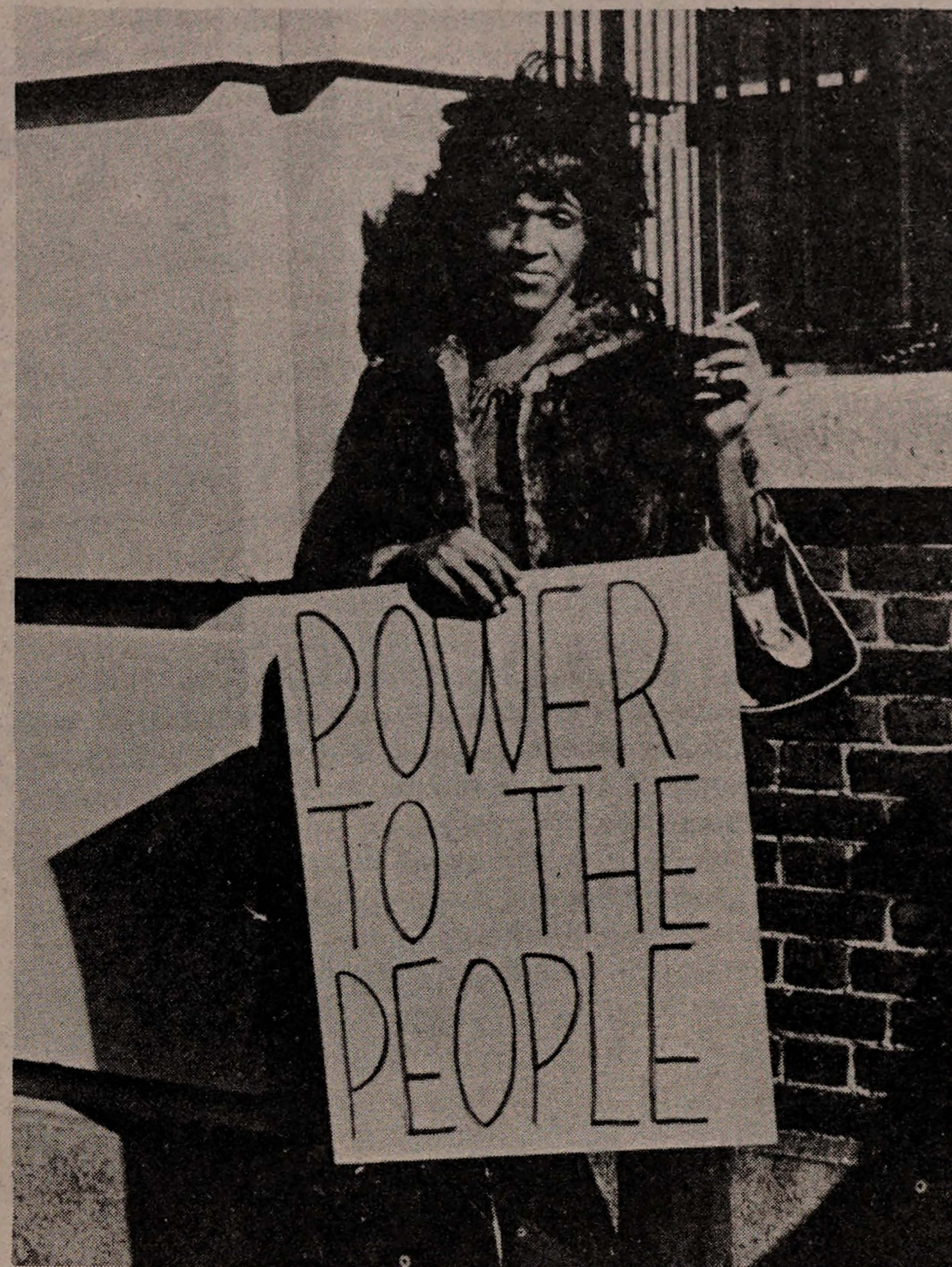
8. If conversation continues for some time with no clues, you may have to resort to drastic measures

such as the direct compliment. If you can work up the nerve, try, "I'm sure you realize this, but I have to tell you, anyway: You're the finest-looking woman in the room." This is the acid test. No matter how confident, a person born female in this society — not truly trained to accept compliments — will probably stammer a bit in response. At the very least, a careful observer will be able to detect a blush, however slight, beginning at the neckline.

A queen, on the other hand, who has spent years perfecting this appearance (or, at the very least, the last few hours getting the hair, make-up, and clothing "just right") will be so delighted you notice that she'll probably forget to act demure.

9. If none of this works, try kissing her hand. If it's a born-female hand, you can expect pretty much the same reaction as the compliment, but it will probably be accompanied by a quiet smile. If instead, you receive a slightly quizzical look, you shouldn't plan a big future with this person, at least not yet. A spontaneous snort, of course, is conclusive and tells you you can move on.

10. At this point, you've been conversing with subject for some time, so you must find her quite fascinating. (Unless, of course, your curiosity is just out of hand, in which case, you might as well come right out and *ask*.) So, wait for a slow song and ask her to dance. If she cocks her head to the side and looks at you quizzically, but accepts, ask if she wants to



Marsha P. Johnson, a lady and a queen.

lead. But if she smiles, then melts against your body so that you can't hear the music, call your mother and tell her there'll be company for dinner Sunday.

If, by the second stanza, you

haven't been able to make a determination, perhaps you should rethink your considerations. Maybe it really doesn't matter.