

Don't Dismiss the List: The Value of Writing Extraordinary Issues Into Ordinary Forms

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On a recent gray day, I pulled on a raincoat I haven't worn in several seasons and stuffed my fists into its deep pockets, only to find a wrinkled grocery list written in my mother's small, steady hand. The list, read line for line, called for kidney beans, chili powder, tomato sauce, and ground beef, among other items. The list, read as a whole, told me that my mother was making taco soup. I was taken aback by my quick interpretation and deeper reading of my mother's words. I knew that this list would be essentially meaningless if found by a stranger on the street, but because I had context, I could read beyond the literal grocery list in front of me. I could stay wrapped in the memory of my mother's fragrant home cooking, the conversations we'd shared together over bowls of soup, a little while longer.

I come from a mother who spent much of my childhood making lists. In my undergraduate work, I've developed a passion for alternative styles of writing, and now view the lists that punctuated my childhood as such. Each list offered a kind of shorthand, a code, a roadmap to some final product that only the writer—and perhaps few others among the writer's in-group—might know how to interpret. But what if the list was self-containing? Could it be possible for the product the list traditionally promises to actually exist within the framework of the list? What if the outline did not just hold the promise of the essay, but actually held the entire essay instead?

I am well aware of the alternative nature of this notion. Perhaps Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki summarize it best when they write,

certain kinds of texts (and voices) are labeled “alternative” because they do not conform to some analysts’ expectations for standard academic writing. Because they do not conform, the argument proceeds, they are marginalized and/or go unheard... An alternative text may be widely accepted if the writer conveys to the reader a conscious awareness that he or she is constructing a different kind of text and if the reason for using an alternative form is clear (9).

I've written the entirety of this essay in annotated list form in an effort to mirror, exemplify, and advocate for the rhetorical effectiveness of list-making as seen in Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," and Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw*. In these pieces, the list is used as a familiar framework to discuss difficult or jarring content. From issues of race and identity to sexuality and cultural differences, each author chooses to invoke the list, a deceptively simple form, as they attempt to tackle controversial and potentially taboo topics. My essay closely examines these decisions and promotes list-making as a successful, alternative approach to more academic

analyses of rhetorical moves. Here, I acknowledge the alternative nature of this essay, the way it does not conform or yield, in hopes of it being taken seriously by the academy, but mostly, of its voice—my voice—being heard.

In her article “Learning the Trade: A Social Apprenticeship Model for Gaining Writing Expertise,” Anne Beaufort writes, “How texts are shaped, what they say and do not say, is directly connected to the text’s function in communities of practice—as its status relative to other texts routinely produced in the discourse community” (188). I am as much interested in what lists do not say as what they do. What white privileges does Peggy McIntosh leave off her list? How might I, as a white woman, fill in those gaps, interact with and add to a text that already exists? So much of our dialogue about racial inequalities, cultural variants, and sexual orientation has been produced in academic language, taught and implemented in academic settings. What does this say about access?

For example, if, statistically, people of color have less access to higher education, it follows that they will have fewer interactions

with academic articles about racial inequality. Are we, white folks, not then doubly privileged in studying an experience that is not ours and, while doing so, talking in a way that does not always offer that marginalized person permission to join the conversation? Why not start looking to alternative forms, more approachable forms, that allow those without years of experience in academic literacy to speak up, to share their stories, to identify with texts that directly address their daily experiences?

I give you this essay, “Don’t Dismiss the List: The Value of Writing Extraordinary Issues into Ordinary Forms,” as an alternative to traditionally academic discussions. Like any list, I hope you interact with this essay; write on it, circle things you’ve yet to do, experience, or learn, and cross off topics with which you have already familiarized yourself. Make notes in the margin. Fill in any gaps that I’ve left. But don’t dismiss this piece as trivial based on its form. If you do, you might not just be missing out on the ingredients, but the soup itself, and the entire experience of the meal that goes with it.

Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" and its Rhetorical Moves in Careful Annotation¹

✓ *Non-threatening format*²

✓ *Visually appealing*³

✓ *Interaction*⁴

✓ *Omission*⁵

✓ *Self-implication*⁶

✓ *Matter-of-fact tone*⁷

¹The heart of Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" is comprised of a numbered list that details "some of the daily effects of white privilege in my [McIntosh's] life" (2). The list attempts to demystify the elusive and oft-cited "imaginary" privileges that white folks experience daily simply based on skin color. McIntosh's list includes 50 items written in succinct, casual, accessible language.

²Issues of race are traditionally hotly debated and can be perceived as threatening (almost exclusively by the racial majority). In this instance, McIntosh utilizes a familiar form to make a potentially volatile subject more palatable. The form itself is non-threatening while the content could cause a stir. Formatting the subject in this manner seems to be McIntosh's attempt at having her work heard and heeded by the masses (the racial majority), increasing the likelihood of her message being swallowed. McIntosh gets away with talking about the "taboo," with talking about racial inequalities at all, by utilizing the list.

³There is great visual attraction to the list form as it suggests a quick read. Although McIntosh's content and theme are dense and not to be taken lightly, the numbered points are written in an easily understandable manner without flowery language or rich metaphor. As a reader, I am more likely to pick up and engage with a text that incorporates white space and smaller paragraphs—two of the rhetorical moves McIntosh makes—as they are more visually interesting and offer at least the appearance of an "easy read." This is a way to entice readers, to get them hooked.

⁴For many, lists are naturally interactive, an immediate way of looking inward. Did I complete that item? Can I check it off the list yet? Do I identify with this kind of privilege at all? Should I cross it off my knapsack list entirely? McIntosh allows me to participate in her work. She trusts me to engage appropriately and maturely, to ask questions of the text, to make it mean something to *my* life. As an adult reader, as a white reader, I take neither this responsibility, nor this invitation, lightly.

⁵For every point McIntosh makes, an equal and opposite point remains very intentionally unmade. McIntosh writes, "13. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability" (2). If this is an example of white privilege—of *my* privilege—what must this item in the knapsack look like for a person of color? What does an accusation of fiscal irresponsibility look, sound,

and feel like? In this scenario of privilege, is it even appropriate to suggest that a person of color has a knapsack at all? If not a knapsack, then what? McIntosh utilizes the unsaid to allow readers the opportunity to make inferences, extrapolate on the included experiences, and draw their own conclusions. McIntosh utilizes the unsaid as a way of forcing readers to investigate further, to sleuth, to solve.

⁶It is inarguably harder to be on the receiving end of racist acts than it is to be called a racist, although the reactions elicited from the latter might indicate otherwise. I imagine that very few folks take pride in being racist—not even a little bit racist, not even a closeted racist, not even a whispered racist—which can make race-based conversations extremely sensitive and delicate. In her own way, McIntosh treads lightly and implicates herself in the conversation about white privilege so as not to point fingers and make white folks feel singled out. McIntosh sensibly ingratiate herself with her audience so that her message can be better received, or perhaps, so that her message can be received at all. The list format is more than familiar—it is comforting. It is something we look to for answers, for order. Thus, by implicating herself *within* an already gentle format, McIntosh works doubly hard to make her message about privilege relatable and peaceful.

⁷To counterbalance this, the tone of the essay remains serious and matter-of-fact throughout, so that it becomes significantly more difficult to brush aside McIntosh's structure as trite or elementary. With a list format and moderate tone, no white person can reasonably be upset that McIntosh's all-caps scolded them for their privilege or wrote a dull, didactic piece about privilege that no white person could bear reading for fear of placing their white knapsacks beneath their drooping white heads and falling asleep under a white, hot sun. I imagine that McIntosh has structured her essay as she has in the hope of reaching as many white people with one piece as comfortably as she can.

Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" and its Rhetorical Moves in Careful Annotation⁸

✓ **Single sentence**⁹

✓ **Inclusion of listener's voice**¹⁰

✓ **"This is" as mode of instruction**¹¹

✓ **Bookended format**¹²

⁸Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" is a genre-defying litany that utilizes an extended list format to provide a series of instructions from a nameless speaker to a nameless listener. Kincaid's title and inclusion of many domestic chores gives me, as a listener, the sense that this piece is inherently feminine—written by a woman, for women. The amount of items on this list that I am not privy to because of my culture and my geographic location make me believe that this piece is not written explicitly for me, but that I am still permitted to have access, and relate, to the piece because of my feminine identity.

⁹Kincaid's "Girl" is written entirely in one sentence. The items included in her litany are separated by semicolons. "Girl" might easily be rearranged and divided by numbers rather than semicolons. Its format could become a traditional list:

1. "Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap
2. Wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the line to dry
3. Don't walk bare-head in the hot sun..."

Here, however, we see the piece lose a significant amount of its impact. I credit the movement and pacing of Kincaid's piece less to its content and more to its craft. Kincaid does not chronicle one exciting event after another. Rather, the piece is full of ordinary moments and depictions crafted extraordinarily well. For me, Kincaid's "Girl" actually becomes quite dull and monotonous when put into the traditional numerical list form. The one-sentence decision Kincaid makes is brilliant. It signals to the reader to take this essay in one attempt, and, if possible, in one breath. The semicolons are there to separate ideas, but do not serve as end stops. As a reader, I do not wade through "Girl," but instead allow its waves to wash over me and send me further away from shore. By concluding with a question and referencing the entirety of the previous passage in her final lines with, "you mean to say that after all..." Kincaid circuitously sends me back to her opening line where I am struck with the desire to read the piece again, to make sure that I have caught every bit of "all" Kincaid's speaker refers to in those final moments. Kincaid's brilliant pacing makes me read quickly with a longing to return, to look again.

¹⁰Kincaid allows the listener only two interjections in "Girl," each of which is marked by italics. The first interjection comes early and functions as a moment of denial, "but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school," while the second comes significantly later and functions as a question, "but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?" Each doubly characterizes the speaker and the listener. When the listener interjects the first time, she pipes up early in the speaker's didactic sermon and goes completely unacknowledged by the speaker; the speech moves on without a second thought for the listener's concerns. This tells me that the speaker has significantly more power, experience, or authority over the listener. The listener takes the majority of "Girl" to muster up the courage to speak again. This tells me that she is stubborn, but cautious, fearful of consequence. She measures her interjections so that they do not seem rude, but become, instead, calculated risks of characterization. If each line alternated between speaker and listener, I would quickly lose my patience with the piece, despite its brevity. I imagine that bouncing back and forth between voices would actually give Kincaid fewer opportunities for characterization, as one voice would constantly be denying the other and no forward narrative movement would ever really commence. Had the listener never interjected at all, I would be left with questions about the nature of the relationship between listener and speaker, would have been left with questions about whether or not I was intended to be the sole listener. Had the latter been the case, I would have felt culturally and geographically excluded from the conversation and would have dubbed the story *beautiful, but not mine*. Kincaid tosses the plates labeled *speaker*, *listener*, and *audience* into the air and spins them expertly.

With the balance between speaker and listener, I feel allowed to participate in the piece as much or as little as I am able. Kincaid sets the table, but it is up to me to satisfy my hunger, to eat.

¹¹Kincaid's most commonly repeated refrain in "Girl" is "this is." In succession, she writes, "this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard..." Kincaid chooses neither to give us extended, detailed instructions nor to draw us in with extensive literary devices, painting a visual depiction of the tasks in practice. Kincaid's "this is" forces me to imagine the scene, the chore itself, the broom, the sweeper, the corner, the house, the yard. I am allowed to bring my personal experiences to Kincaid's task. Without specific details to anchor me, I am allowed to make this moment matter to my own life. I am allowed to put myself into the listener's place, to recall a time I was taught to sweep, to imagine what it might be like to teach someone else to sweep, to wonder what it might be like to be a woman and, somehow, not have anything to do with sweeping at all. Kincaid's litany—her list—makes room for me. Few authors risk their readers taking up space in their stories. I am grateful to Kincaid for taking a chance on me, for allowing me to fill in the empty places in her narrative with my own version of learned femininity.

¹²Another noteworthy rhetorical move Kincaid makes is that of bookending "Girl" with more innocuous advice and weaving harsher moments of femininity into the central body of the text. Kincaid's advice begins with doing laundry by hand and ends with shopping for bread in the bakery. The piece never strays far outside the cult of domesticity, save for moments like, "this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it..." Before this, Kincaid lingers on the notion of motherhood and writes, "this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child..." Motherhood is not all smiles and soft cooing. Sometimes motherhood does not need to be motherhood at all. Kincaid quietly and apolitically touches on the notion of abortion. The speaker does not draw attention to herself as we do not linger on this subject, but succinctly move on as the essay has previously taught us to do. A second moment of harsher femininity comes soon after the paired lines about abortion when Kincaid writes, "this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you..." Kincaid manages to incorporate the very real issues of premature motherhood and abuse in a single piece that both avoids a pedagogical tone and does not allow itself to linger. As the piece is bookended with seemingly harmless and familiar notions of femininity, Kincaid's woven incorporation of the more sinister moments of womanhood reinforce the idea that some conversations between women must be earned, are not automatically given. If I skimmed this piece, I would report that it is a brief essay about how to be a woman in Kincaid's culture with a heavy focus on domestic tasks and duties. Kincaid's moments of dark, vulnerable honesty are so lean and spare that you might miss them altogether if you do not know what you are looking for. Kincaid trusts her audience to pick up on these moments, to explore them without exploiting them, and to move on, considering them just as much a part of womanhood as sweeping and ironing and fishing.

“High-Achiever”

Imitation of Kincaid's rhetorical moves

Write the creative nonfiction essay on Friday and give it the weekend to settle; write the academic essay on Sunday and let it rest for half a week; don't forget to contribute to the discussion board; study the science of feminism until you become pink in the face; unfold any dog-eared pages in your used textbooks before reading; when buying pens to handwrite your poetry, be sure they are blue or black ink, because that way folks will take your stories seriously; use only one coffee filter to brew the strongest caffeine; is it true that you earned an A- last semester?; always raise your hand like a question mark so that boys won't be intimidated by your participation; in group projects, try to soften your voice and your opinions so that no one calls you the bitch you are so bent on becoming; don't bring home another low grade this semester, you mustn't sleep more than you study, not even if your eyes thud shut; don't speak poorly of past professors—a bad reputation will follow you; *but I don't earn poor grades at all and never last semester*; this is how to make a powerful metaphor; this is how to craft an entire stanza around the metaphor you just made; this is how to speak to classmates without a hint of condescension in your throat to prevent yourself from sounding like the bitch I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you read critically so that your professors warm to your essays; this is how you read critically so that your peers warm to your intelligence; this is how you study for a psychology exam—far in advance, because brain anatomy is difficult to master; when you study communications, make sure you take good notes or you won't earn high marks on your quizzes; this is how you pass

a midterm; this is how you pass a whole class; this is how you surpass your mother's expectations; this is how you speak to a classmate you don't like very much; this is how you speak to a classmate you don't like at all; this is how you speak to a classmate you like completely; this is how you write a first draft for practice; this is how you write a final draft for grading; this is how you write a poem for publication and accolades; this is how you write a poem on little sleep; this is how you write a poem on no sleep at all; this is how to shut up during group project meetings with new partners, and this way they won't recognize immediately the bitch I have warned you against becoming; be sure to read every day, even if it's just your own name; don't boast about your academic scholarship—you're not someone important, you know; don't boast about your publication—you might become unlikable; don't write anything after drinking, because you might not be writing sense at all; this is how to make a living as a writer; this is how to make your mother smile; this is how to make straight A's; this is how to make mistakes at eighteen that do not send you to jail; this is how to make mistakes at twenty that send you to therapy; this is how to take laps between hours spent behind heavy desks; this is how to take laps between hours spent behind heavy desks and never return to them, and that way you keep your sanity; this is how to teach a child; this is how a child teaches you; this is how to love a child, and if this doesn't work, there are endless ways, and if they don't work there are years left to grow a fat, maternal heart; this is how to shout out the car window at stoplights if you feel like it, and this is how to roll the window up fast if the policeman turns his attention to your song; this is how to graduate college; always ask for help when

you need it; *but what if the professor isn't available to meet with me?*; you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of student who the educator won't make time for?

Kate Bornstein's Gender Outlaw and its Rhetorical Moves in Careful Annotation¹³

✓ **Self-implication**¹⁴

✓ **Taboo content**¹⁵

✓ **Normalization, ironic structure**¹⁶

✓ **Clarity, interaction**¹⁷

¹³Kate Bornstein utilizes the list format most notably in *Gender Outlaw* when attempting to differentiate between sexual attraction and gender. She writes, "There are plenty of instances in which sexual attraction can have absolutely nothing to do with the gender of one's partner" (35). Cue the shock. Cue the confusion. Cue the questions. Bornstein utilizes the list format for clarification and, like McIntosh, for deftly maneuvering the sometimes taboo—or, at the very least, divisive—subject of sexuality.

¹⁴Like McIntosh, Bornstein utilizes the list format to ingratiate herself with her readers, to make them feel included and invited to participate in conversation, and to lessen the intensity of her message with the list acting as a buffer between heavy content and an audience that may or may not be ready to receive its messages.

¹⁵On subsequent pages, Bornstein adds that "Sexual preference *could* be based on genital preference" or "based on the kind of *sex acts* one prefers" (36). For many, this is an innovative and potentially threatening way to describe attraction. From a young age, society conditions us through media messages and social interactions with parents and peers that our sexual options include either men or women, and that this attraction can be defined by a feeling arousal at the thought of either the presence or absence of a penis. This dichotomy erases "deviant" sexualities that include attraction to both or neither of these types of genitalia. This dichotomy erases intersexed, genderqueer, agender, and genderfucking individuals, those that do not neatly and succinctly belong in one camp or the other. We are not conditioned to have more options than two, than either/or. We are not conditioned to define attraction by acts. Thus, Bornstein's message might be subversive and difficult to wrap our minds around.

¹⁶The handkerchief system that Bornstein outlines on page 36 (a visual list that includes some possible sex acts and their assigned handkerchief colors i.e. a red scarf worn on the left arm is a fist fucker, a red scarf worn on the right arm is a fist fuckee) feels like a more familiar way of discussing preferences. When I am asked about my favorite foods, I rattle them

off, I list them. The same can be said of my favorite movies, favorite musicians, favorite coffee shops. These lists are “normal,” predictable, or expected. Bornstein’s incorporation of the “radical” into a more traditional or commonplace format does a nice job of normalizing “radical” sex acts and “radical” conversation. Bornstein’s list is organized and appears to adhere to the societally beloved idea of categories with the left column reserved for the active partner, the right column reserved for the passive. Bornstein intelligently and ironically attempts to soften the blow of her binary-breaking content by keeping the information neat, succinct, and sorted for ease of reading.

¹⁷Again, simple (although perhaps significantly more uncommon) language contributes to Bornstein’s rhetorical device of list-making for understanding and clarity. Bornstein gets away with this idea of preference as binary-breaking because she steers away from theory, convoluted language, and dense arguments. She uses a simple, visually interesting, neutral, easily understandable form to illuminate key examples efficiently so that readers may choose whether or not to agree with Bornstein’s system, but cannot reasonably argue that they feel personally implicated in her list. Bornstein might say *It’s just a list. Not exclusively mine. Not exclusively yours. Maybe your preference isn’t on here yet. Interact. Cross out the places where you don’t belong. Circle the things you like. Check off the things you’ve tried. Write other preferences below.*

Writerly Benefits to Implementing a List Format¹⁸

✓ **Clarity, emphasis**¹⁹

✓ **Pacing**²⁰

✓ **Elevation of a common form**²¹

✓ **Process within the product, access**²²

¹⁸McIntosh’s, Kincaid’s, and Bornstein’s list formatting is innovative and fresh. As a writer, I might look to its model for several points of inspiration. (Alternatively titled: Praise Be Peggy, Jamaica, and Kate.)

¹⁹First, incorporating a list into an essay or longer piece of writing can add greater clarity and emphasis. Bornstein uses the list to illuminate her idea of sexual preference over sexual orientation even further. Especially with sensitive or convoluted topics, lists can help get to the core of an author’s ideas and intentions efficiently and effectively by including examples, simplified language, and clipped or fragmented sentences for quick reading.

Although Kincaid’s litany is low on both white space and breathing space, her list is impactful in its own right, visually inundating readers with a series of rapid-fire women’s issues that leave us asking, “My God, how is there still more?” The intensity of Kincaid’s chosen form and pacing give me few places to pause, no place to hide from the reality of the feminine identity. This rhetorical choice is bold, but startling and effective.

As a reader, dense paragraphs with little white space can be intimidating and difficult to traverse. Bornstein's and McIntosh's lists are effective because they reward readers with further understanding and act as incentives to engage with the text. I find myself breathing a sigh of relief when authors allow me to use a list as a place to rest, to ensure my understanding, to check in and make sure I am following along with their words in the right way, at the right pace.

²⁰Here, lists are doubly powerful, as they act either to speed up or slow my reading pace. The author can control how quickly I consume material; while Bornstein's list includes examples for clarity, McIntosh's list includes examples for emphasis. The latter's lengthy list reads quickly and horrifically—as a white person, on any given day, I experience fifty more advantages than a person of color. McIntosh's list moves quickly for staggering effect. For us to say, “No, there cannot possibly be more than this,” turn the page, and read on in discomfort. All at once, the list format is enlightening and in control. The list lends itself to a work saying, *Read me like this* or *Readmelikethis*, alternating between emphasis and pacing for a more dynamic reading experience.

Jamaica Kincaid's “Girl” utilizes pacing to alter readings of the essay. In my reading, the essay actually moves more slowly as I make my way through it. In the beginning, Kincaid moves through her list quickly, as though it is a grocery list, each new item distinctly different from the former. Kincaid might as well be writing *buy rotini*; *buy ricotta*; *buy tomato sauce*; *buy ground beef*. Each item on the list is a sentence capable of standing alone, but does not necessarily have a distinct tie to the items on either side of it. When I read something like a grocery list, something that is all at once discordant and entirely sensible, I mentally ask, “Yes, and what next?” I am always prepared to move on to the next item. In the sample list above, no item holds much weight individually or looks radically connected to the items surrounding it. But when the list is held at arm's length, it is easier to see that the grocery buyer has Italian food on the brain, is maybe planning a lasagna baking session this evening. Kincaid's “Girl” can be read much the same way on two distinct levels, the level that asks, “Yes, and what next?” without really seeing anything but pasta and cheese (but red ants and khaki pants), and the level that pulls back and catches the bigger picture, the Polaroid snapshot of Caribbean culture Kincaid is perhaps attempting to slide across the dinner table to me.

As we move away from this initial, quick pacing that jumps from one new item to the next, Kincaid transitions and devotes more consecutive sentences to singular points. Perhaps the most powerful example comes in Kincaid's litany of instructions on “making” things. The speaker voice addresses the listener, “this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make a good medicine for a cold; this is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child...” We understand that Kincaid's kind of “girl” is deeply tied to assembly, to stitching things together. Kincaid allows us four sentences to settle into this pattern of creation before she ingeniously inverts this theme of creation and gives it a new purpose—this is how to make something that destroys. I wonder, then, if making medicine “to throw away a child” is inherently unfeminine or the most feminine thing on this list.

As a reader, Kincaid's pacing asks me to take my time here, to ask more questions of her writing, to push it further. I am not allowed to ask, "Yes, and what next?" I am allowed only to grapple, to wrestle with Kincaid's new notion of Caribbean femininity, to take my time, to unpack all that is happening on the page before me. It may take me several readings to arrive at any conclusions at all. I imagine that this is what the text asks of me, to take my time, to look again, to walk away with Kincaid's words still on my mind.

²¹Both Bornstein and McIntosh utilize a form that is accessible to the masses and elevate it to a higher standard. Visually, their lists follow a more standardized form than Kincaid's. Traditionally, the list is used for common things, household things, and is classically gendered. Stereotypically, it is women who generate laundry lists and grocery lists. Even in romantic media portrayals, it is typically the woman that makes a "pros-and-cons" list to dating or refusing a given, typically male, love interest. Here, Bornstein and McIntosh refurbish a "feminine" mode of writing and bolster it, give it sturdier legs to stand on. No longer does a list simply determine which man to date or what meals to make. A list now serves to wag a finger at white privilege and, subsequently, enlist white folks as allies to people of color. A list now serves to further scrutinize sexuality, attraction, and their binaries. A list has been constructed by a woman. A second list has been constructed by a woman. Both serve exquisitely different purposes with one commonality: each list reminds us that writers should not be ceaselessly expected to make magic, to generate new, brilliant formats for their writing from thin air, but rather, may look to old, overlooked formats to more purposefully and effectively house their radical writings. A form—a list—that was once dubbed "womanly space" and "womanly task" has been shaped and molded in ways that defy its gendered origin and create an actively gender-neutral writing and reading experience. The content of these lists helps to further propel this form into an inclusive space, one that defies gender as well as age, educational ability, race, and sexual preference, among myriad other things.

²²McIntosh, Kincaid, and Bornstein all do an excellent job of making their writing process clear within the product of the work itself. Their lists serve as instruction manuals—when writing about emotionally turbulent, evocative, sensitive, dense issues, utilizing a list might help with clarity for both the audience and author. A list could be impactful for its sheer size, its content exclusively, or a combination of the two. As much as I would like to, I cannot earn an MFA in list-making. The lists' fragmentation, simple language, and avoidance of literary complications like simile and metaphor further drive home the form's accessibility to folks of all education levels. This means that all three women have stumbled upon a writing style that benefits authors and readers regardless of education level (which is, of course, often inextricably tied to race, gender, and socioeconomic status). By leaving their writing process blatantly inside the product of their work, McIntosh, Kincaid, and Bornstein allow readers who are also writers to model their work, to engage with it, to make it their own.

Worldly Benefits to Implementing a List Format²³

✓ **Experimentation**²⁴

✓ **Adaptation**²⁵

✓ **Communication**²⁶

✓ **Cultural commentary**²⁷

²³McIntosh's, Kincaid's, and Bornstein's list formatting is broad and bright; its benefits extend far beyond the writerly world. As a human, I might look to its model for several points of inspiration. (Alternatively titled: Peggy, Kate, and Jamaica Do Radical Things and Don't Apologize for Their Behavior.)

²⁴In "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," "Girl," and *Gender Outlaw*, McIntosh, Kincaid, and Bornstein all play with form in a way that is seldom explored. This idea of writerly experimentation can comfortably spill over into a good life lesson. As people, it is important to adventure, to travel, to try new foods, meet new people, experience other cultures. When we open ourselves to new opportunities, we inadvertently expose ourselves to personal growth. With experimentation often comes further understanding and empathy for others' interests, belief systems, political ideologies, and lifestyles. When we make ourselves uncomfortable by taking avenues we have never before tread upon, we push ourselves into uncertainty, we channel our trepidation, our nervous energy, and traverse onward. We hope to become bigger in heart and courage, we hope to become better than our best. With three authors making brave, writerly leaps, I feel more reassured about the idea of calculated risk-taking, thinking, *If Peggy, Jamaica, and Kate can endeavor—can risk falling flat on their authorial faces and failing miserably—so can I.*

²⁵Here, it is important to note that none of these authors can be credited with the invention of the list itself. Rather, they can be credited with using the list in writerly ways that have the potential to both pique and maintain readers' interest and, therefore, reach a wider audience. Each of these authors is capable of adapting to their readers' needs, interests, and desires. This is an incredibly valuable life skill. There is great merit in avoiding stagnation in our lives. It is easy to settle into routines, to declare our relationships good enough, our educations furthered enough, our bodies healthy enough. To live a passive life is to be imbued with apathy or to hold opinions without the desire to express them. I wonder whether McIntosh, Kincaid, or Bornstein would consider either of these options as fulfilling and rewarding living experiences. To live a passive life is to allow others to correct course, to steer us in wayward directions. Bornstein and McIntosh encourage us to take a stance with their work, to avoid passivity and stagnation and adapt to our surroundings. Kincaid teaches us to write our own narratives; in our own voices; in our own styles; as uniquely and quickly as possible. She emphasizes the importance of the one-of-a-kind self, the individual self, a self that can learn from those selves that came before it and bolster its spirit accordingly. As a writer, I see great emphasis in these works regarding recycling and refurbishing—a desire not to preserve the old, but to make the old better, to make the old new. As a human, I am, of course, my old self and my current self all at once. I am sixteen

and nineteen and twenty one. Rather than admonish the girl I was at sixteen, I imagine that these authors, Kincaid especially, might encourage me to have conversations with my younger self. What might I learn from her? How can I take her more positive thought patterns and engage them in my education today? How can I take her interests and re-shape them, make them more powerful, more dynamic, more useful? How can I adapt my sixteen-year-old self? How can I make her better today?

²⁶McIntosh, Kincaid, and Bornstein make it clear in their work that there is value not only in what we say, but in careful consideration of how we say it. Each takes note of their audience and writes with their readership in mind. Beyond the page, I might take this strategy into my daily life. I imagine trying to effectively express female-identified perspectives of consent in my Gender and Communications class when several football players from our school's team become enraged over the Tommy Armstrong (Cornhuskers quarterback) news story in which "another girl cried rape and ruined his [Armstrong's] reputation." How can I make complicated content, messy narratives more palatable to a broader set of people? As a feminist, I cannot guarantee that I will speak about consent with other feminists exclusively in all future circumstances. Thus, I need to develop strong communication skills and learn how to rhetorically "package" my ideas in adaptive ways that simultaneously inform and do not put people off. At this thought, McIntosh, Kincaid, and Bornstein might clap their hands over my shoulders, share knowing looks, and remind me that patience is a virtue.

²⁷Finally, Kincaid utilizes the list format to succinctly expose readers to the culture of womanhood, especially what it might mean to be a woman in the Caribbean. I believe, very firmly, in the power of exposure and perspective in education. As a white, female-identifying student, I understand the value of listening to voices that are not the majority, that are not mine. Studying in what is often a patriarchal, egocentric system of education, many students have not been taught to share these same values. As a minority voice, Kincaid certainly understands this. Her essay is brief but packed and easily accessible, the list form lending itself quite nicely to this latter point of access. Kincaid's incorporation of cultural expectations of femininity give us at least a sampling of what it means to grow up "girl" in Caribbean culture. Kincaid's essay is a starting-off point, a piece that raises questions and does not always endeavor to answer them. What is doukona? What is dasheen? Okra? What about all this business of taking care of men and squeezing bread? Kincaid lets us know that dasheen and okra are some kind of vegetation, but does not take the time to describe each in detail. In this way, Kincaid's writing is open-ended and potentially investigative. She challenges her readers to take her work further. Her writing draws us in, sets the table, and serves us the first course, but, if we are curious readers, we will leave hungry, asking for second helpings, asking for more. Kincaid's list offers just enough with space for sleuthing if we so choose to read through an inquisitive, close lens. I imagine that this is the hope all authors share. To be read, to be shared, to be asked for more, to be understood.

As a writer, all I want to do is generate conversations—about art, mental illness, suffering, relationships, the self. I want people to read my writing, understanding it from their standpoint and, if I'm lucky, from my standpoint as well. I imagine that this is the kind of

achievement Kincaid wants—not medals or plaques or honorary degrees, but a piece of text—one that is multifaceted and lustrous, that is only fully understood when you hold it up to the light just right.

And, as humans, isn't that all any of us asks of this life? To be bathed in light, the bright glow of understanding shining through all the cracked flaws of our silly, small selves.

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