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# 21

## CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

### *The Comics Shop As Cultural Clubhouse*

Brian Swafford

*Nestled between a coffee shop and a Middle Eastern restaurant is a non-descript door that marks the portal into the local comic shop. Having been in my fair share of comic shops, the sights and sounds were familiar enough. Along the wall next to the door are the racks of new comics on display. The latest issues all greet an entrant into the shop. While these comics represent an industry that earns billions of dollars annually, there are still some . . . troubling . . . items. In particular, the heroines that share the covers with the heroes have a particular look: tall, with narrow waists, curvy hips, and ample bust lines.*

*The cover art and representations of women may be designed to appeal to a particular male audience, yet they also serve as a deterrent to "unwelcome" entrance by outsiders, in this case women. Looking around the shop, the four patrons playing a tabletop game, the two employees behind the counter, and the three other patrons leafing through the wares of the shop are all male. As I stand there, taking in the scene, the entrance bell clangs and a man, with a woman in tow, enters the shop looking for his latest comics. As she hides behind his arm from the other patrons, I overhear her ask why she had to come inside.*

*"I'll just be a minute. It's okay."*

*"I don't belong in here. Why do you always drag me in here?"*

*"Whatever. I've got 'em. We can go."*

In a typical trip to the local comic shop, an avid reader will likely scan the new releases for interesting titles, ask for pulls (reserved items), and purchase the desired comics before leaving the shop for the week. Yet the preceding story takes a step back from the routine to explore how the comics themselves and the community members enact practices that ostracize others. In this case, the female visitor to the shop said she didn't belong and hid from view. This is a brief example of the type of work done through critical ethnography. Critical ethnography is defined as a qualitative research approach concerned with relations and power inequities between individuals and the sociopolitical framework, transformation of these relations, and attention to the research process

as a form of action.<sup>1</sup> The researcher will go to a locale and observe the behaviors of community members before attempting to explain how the community practices entrench certain power relationships.

In this chapter, critical ethnography will be utilized to examine one local comic book shop to see how the practices of the patrons craft a particular culture within the shop. Unlike other methods that focus more on an analysis of some text, critical ethnography is more focused on the process of observation with an eye toward uncovering how the everyday practices of people perpetuate and reinforce greater societal power relationships and standards. As such, there needs to be a greater focus on how a researcher will observe a setting and then report the findings. This chapter explains how the commonplace practices that are often taken for granted can reveal a great deal about the underlying assumptions of the way the world works. Before getting into the key points about fieldwork and writing the analysis, certain fundamental assumptions of critical ethnography must be considered.

### UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Ethnographic research emerged out of anthropological studies that asked researchers to go out into the field, live in a location, and observe and report the behaviors of the indigenous people. The focus of this conventional ethnography has been on cultural descriptions and analysis, with meaning coming through the interpretations of the researcher.<sup>2</sup> In many ways the ethnographer's goal is to "make the familiar strange, the exotic quotidian."<sup>3</sup> In other words, the ethnography observes the everyday experiences of a particular location and then attempts to provide meaning for the behaviors that were observed. While the critical ethnographer may utilize many of the techniques and practices of the traditional ethnographer, critical theory moves to the forefront of the analysis.<sup>4</sup> Dwight Conquergood claims that critical theory "is committed to unveiling the political stakes that anchor cultural practices."<sup>5</sup> Critical ethnography is a way of challenging conventional narratives of cultural inquiry through a more reflective style of thinking about relationships between society, knowledge, and social power structures.<sup>6</sup> In his musings about critical ethnography, Jim Thomas claims that critical ethnography should not be thought of as theory, but rather as a perspective. Critical ethnography provides value premises which lead to particular questions and establish a means of challenging the powerful forces of society.<sup>7</sup>

The first assumption of critical ethnography is that behaviors can only be observed by being there, in the field. Good ethnographic work requires a researcher to go out into the field to observe behaviors. George Marcus says that an ethnographer should focus on a strategically selected locale that will provide greater insight into the happenings of a particular community.<sup>8</sup> Ethnography has been called an embodied practice because it relies on the researcher taking careful notes about observable behaviors.<sup>9</sup> Before any analysis can occur, a researcher must go into the field and observe until behaviors become repetitive.

The second assumption is that critical engagement emerges through dialogue with community members in the field. Unlike traditional ethnography that focuses on observations, the critical ethnographer seeks to engage in dialogue with the members of the locale.<sup>10</sup> The reliance on dialogue is important for a few reasons. Initially, it breaks down the barrier between the observer and the observed. Through the use of critical theory,

scholars began questioning the usefulness of findings that came only from observation without any attempt to find out how the community members might explain their behaviors.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, dialogue challenges the subjectivity of the researcher by raising questions about representations, bias, and subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> When engaging in dialogue, it is very difficult to ignore the lived experiences of the community members.

The third assumption is that power relationships are expressed through our lived experiences. Disparities based on sex, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic, and sexual orientation are all around us. The critical ethnographer is charged with seeking to uncover how the everyday practices of the selected locale maintain and reinforce hegemonic and oppressive forces.<sup>13</sup> A great deal of research has been done to explore how language choices and important cultural artifacts have been used to oppress the feminine.<sup>14</sup> By unmasking the hidden power structures that maintain the oppressive practices of the community, the critical ethnographer can then begin providing a means of working toward social change.

The fourth assumption is that the critical ethnographer must engage in reflexivity. Reflexivity is the practice of critically engaging with the fieldnotes and observations to ensure that what is being written up is an accurate reflection of the community practices.<sup>15</sup> With so much of ethnography being tied up in the writing, it is important for the critical ethnographer to take into account biases and personal viewpoints that creep into the analysis. As the author of the text, the critical ethnographer has a great deal of power to shape the discussion of the community practices. Yet we all know of the wise words of Ben Parker: "With great power comes great responsibility." Making sure to support claims through the observations from the field are vital to this process.

### PROCESS

With an understanding of the underlying assumptions of critical ethnography, a greater discussion of the process of investigation can commence. The next section will explore major ideas that help guide the fieldwork done by the researcher in the selected locale.

#### Field Practices

It should be clear that critical ethnography is a *process* of investigation. Perhaps the easiest way to think of doing critical ethnography is to divide up the process into two major procedures that make good ethnography: The field practices, or the going into a particular locale and observing behaviors and entering into dialogue with community members, mark the first stage of critical ethnography.<sup>16</sup> Without being there in the field to observe and converse with the community members, it is impossible to make any substantive claims about community practices.<sup>17</sup> Then comes the writing phase, where the investigator will write up the observations and findings, making sure to utilize critical theory or theories that are most relevant to the study as a lens to view those findings.

Prior to going out into the field, it is important to do some background research and planning.<sup>18</sup> Before selecting a locale, a researcher must first think about the questions and topics that will guide the research. For example, Matthew Pustiz was interested in comic book culture.<sup>19</sup> Pustiz claimed that comic book fans were different than the ordinary American and the most important site for the comic fans was the comic book store. As such, he selected two comic book shops in his area for his investigation. In addition to thinking about the locale, it may also be helpful to find an insider in the community

to serve as a guide to help negotiate entrance into what could be a closed community. A researcher could accidentally offend community members through inappropriate behaviors, comments, or questions, which is why an informant can smooth this process and prevent these mis-steps.<sup>20</sup>

An informant or insider from the community not only can provide background information on the group being studied, but can also make introductions that will facilitate the ethnographic dialogue that is key to this type of study. Unlike traditional anthropological studies where the researcher keeps a distance from the observed community, critical ethnography invites the researcher to participate in the community being studied.<sup>21</sup> This participation came about after what has been dubbed the "Crisis of Representation."<sup>22</sup> One of the major criticisms of traditional ethnography is that the study author speaks for the community members but may never have had any direct interactions with those community members. By being an active participant, the researcher is able to both ask questions about community practices and behaviors, as well as provide a more informed voice for the community.

Being in the field and participating in the community are very important, but it is also vital that researchers take detailed fieldnotes of their observations and interactions.<sup>23</sup> With fieldwork often lasting for extended periods of time, the fieldnotes are the only way to ensure that the thoughts of the researcher will be available from the first moment in the field to the last. While in the field, it is important to review and edit the fieldnotes once away from the locale and keep a separate copy in a safe location.

In any ethnographic work, the fieldwork is vital to understanding what is going on in the selected locale. It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide sufficient detail for a reader to understand what community life is like in the designated locale. Upon completing the fieldwork, the researcher must then turn the fieldnotes into a document that readers will use to gain insight into the community. The next section explores the writing-up process of critical ethnography that converts the observations and conversations into a final product.

### Writing It Up

Upon leaving the field, the next phase of the critical ethnographic process is the writing up of the findings. There are multiple levels of this phase where the researcher must provide the stories of the community members as evidence for the claims being made. Initially, the researcher must analyze the fieldnotes and observations to uncover themes and power relationships.<sup>24</sup> Critical investigations are often concerned with representations of social structures as seen through the eyes of a disadvantaged group.<sup>25</sup> The critical ethnography will focus on how existing power structures are used to oppress groups and promote the hegemonic powers of others. Feminist scholars have examined the practices and structures that oppress women, as an example. The fieldnotes should help to reveal the community practices that demonstrate the taken-for-granted social hierarchies. It is through this analysis that the researcher can begin to formulate ideas about the critical theories that would best inform the findings. For example, if the fieldnotes revealed that the community objectified women through the portrayals of women in stories and representations, a feminist lens would help reveal the ramifications of these practices.

Reflexivity is a key component of critical ethnography. Through the writing process, it is important for the researcher to account for the reactions, feelings, and reflections that the researcher may have that could taint the findings.<sup>26</sup> New experiences, personal

feelings, and inherent biases are all possible. A good researcher does not simply ignore those feelings. Instead, the researcher should begin asking questions about why those reactions, reflections, and feelings are coming up. Through careful self-examination, the researcher can provide more insight into how entrenched certain ideas have become within the community being studied.

After drafting the findings, the researcher should take them back to the community and ask if the report accurately represents community life. In the appendix of his book *Sidewalk*, Mitchell Dunneier points readers to the fact that he started over after having completed a manuscript about his fieldwork when his study's primary participant pointed out that Dunneier was focusing on the wrong issues.<sup>27</sup> While this may have been a frustration for Dunneier, it does point out an important need to go back and check with community members about the accuracy of statements and the representations of community practice. The ethnographer does not want to write up "incorrect" findings. However, it is important to remember that not all feedback is valuable, since some community members will wish to portray themselves in a more favorable light.

Having discussed the underlying assumptions, field practices, and the writing-up process of critical ethnography, it is now time to turn to a piece of sample analysis. The next section will outline an actual ethnographic investigation. This sample will walk readers through the project rationale, highlight some of the fieldwork, and provide a brief analysis of the findings.

### THE SELECTED LOCALE FOR SAMPLE ANALYSIS

For the comic book reader, there may be no more important locale than the local comic book shop. The local comic book shop, in general, is the place where readers can pick up new comic releases, find missing back issues, purchase comic paraphernalia, and even hang out with other comic readers and patrons. These shops become safe havens for fans to gather and participate in comic fan culture. Patrons of the comic shop are free to interact with other fans and be open in their fandom while in the shop. However, once the fan leaves the shop, that fan must hide, or at least minimize, his/her fandom in public. Thus, the local comic shops serve as a cultural clubhouse. This sample analysis utilizes the metaphor of the comic shop as a cultural clubhouse. To understand the clubhouse metaphor, I have employed ethnographic methods of participant observation at the local comic shop in a Midwestern college town over the span of several months. At the local comic shop, I had the opportunity to talk with patrons, read suggested comics, and become part of this local cultural enclave. Through the stories and actions of fans, as well as the physical space of the comic shop, I argue that the clubhouse metaphor is both appropriate and enacted through the practices of the fans.

### SAMPLE ANALYSIS

There is just something special about the local comic book shop. Yet few have taken the time to explore the comic shop as an important cultural locale for the comic book fan community. In his investigation, Pusitz visited his local comic shop in Ames, Iowa to see how that particular store created a "safe space" for comic fans that might shield those patrons from the views of the greater society.<sup>28</sup> For me, the comic shop was a bit different. From the outside, it was hard to tell what occupied the space until you were

standing in front of the store. The marquee for the store was a wood board, painted dark blue and covered with drawings of several comic characters. An entrance to the store was just off to the side of the display window, which featured a few posters of major comic sagas. Putting all of this together, the comic shop exterior blended into the surrounding shops.

Whatever the exterior did to discourage entrance to the random passers-by, the interior was warm and inviting. In the middle of the store were two brand-new couches made of supple brown leather. Behind the couches, bookshelves covered one wall, and the shelves were filled with graphic novels. The tops of the bookshelves featured a mix of toy figures, some open, some in the box. This mix of toys satisfied both the collector and the little kid inside me. As I perused the graphic novel section, I found several comics I wanted to add to my collection. Since I was there to observe the interactions at the comic shop, I decided to sit down with a stack of graphic novels and begin reading.

#### *Setting the Scene: A Brief Review of Literature*

The expression of fan culture is "not meant for mass consumption," but intended to demonstrate "a high level of textual literacy within the fan group."<sup>29</sup> In the world of comics, the comic books "convey" the image that will illicit a response from the reader. The power of comics allows the reader to better conceptualize events on the page and how those events might be mirrored in real-world occurrences.<sup>30</sup> When fan groups come together around an idea, they work to produce mutual meanings.<sup>31</sup> The creation of mutual meanings by fans stimulates the production of norms and rituals that are hallmarks of fan cultures. Comic fan culture emerges from the interactions of the fans with their beloved comics and the fans with each other, frequently occurring at the local shop.<sup>32</sup> As Pustz notes, it is in the comic shop that the fans can be their "true" selves.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Doing Fieldwork: Discussion of Research Practices*

Ethnographic research requires an investigator to become deeply immersed in the field for a sufficient time period to gain a detailed understanding of how members of a community interpret their culture.<sup>34</sup> The data presented in this study were collected through participant observation during fall of 2008 at a local comic shop in a small Midwestern college town, covering 30 hours of fieldwork. My investigation led me to observe interactions between store employees and store patrons. I paid particular attention to the layout of the shop to determine the cultural significance of the displayed paraphernalia. I chose to take mental notes while inside the shop and then quickly return to my office to jot down my fieldnotes. I decided not to "interview" the shop patrons because I was afraid that the sight of my notebook and the thought of my questions might prevent the honest dialogue that was possible through my own membership in the greater "club" of comic fans. Yet I did talk with shop patrons, as well as listening in on their conversations while I was visiting the shop. In my observation of comic fans, I found that the stories of the comic shop evoke the metaphor of the clubhouse, a sacred space for members only that is characterized by a unique type of talk and unique expectations of behavior.

#### *Making Observations: The Clubhouse Metaphor*

After spending so much time immersed in the comic fan community, both as a researcher and a fan, I realized that the comic shop served as an important cultural site for community membership. Fans who regularly visited their local comic shop called it "an extension

of home," and a place "where we could be with those like us" and "not worry about how everybody else sees us." For shop patrons, the comic shop is a safe space, free of judgment and welcoming of the fan community—in essence, a clubhouse.

The comic book shop represents an important cultural landmark for the comic fan community. The notion of the clubhouse is fitting because it implies that creation of many American boys: A fort or stronghold that kept members safe from the outside world and outsiders at a distance. The comic book shop has been thought of as a location that is like home to the fans, but dark and daunting to the outsider. The clubhouse metaphor has four parts: a designated meeting space (fort); a secret code (passwords); a gender division ("no girls allowed"); and a member-based leadership ("no adults either").

#### *The Fort: Meeting Place for Club Members*

Initially, the clubhouse metaphor is based around a physical location for club members to gather. When kids build a clubhouse, it is typically some unused space that has been resurrected as a communal space. Treehouses and forts are commonplace for these secret clubs. The comic shop is no different.

Even though the brick façade of the shop blends in nicely with the rest of the downtown area, the inside is another matter entirely. When you walk through the front door, you come face-to-face with the new-release wall, filled with the latest issues of comics, and the overstock bins, boxes filled with older issues of comics. Directly in front of you is the cash register and service desk. There are display cases surrounding the register area, showing toys and comics of value. One of the most interesting things about the service desk is the pull files. Regular patrons can have certain comic titles set aside by the staff. Then, at their own convenience, the customers can stop in and pick up these titles without having to hunt through the new issues. While the outside of the shop is not necessarily inviting, the interior is a place where community members are rewarded for their patronage through special services like the pull lists.

To the left of the cash register is the lounge area. The couches and coffee table invite patrons to sit, read comics, talk with other patrons, and otherwise relax in the store. Having visited the lounge on several occasions, I can tell you that the couches make great places to sit and read comics.

Behind the lounge and the cash register is the gaming area, where five folding tables have been set up to allow players to engage in games of *Magic: The Gathering* at any time. On every occasion I was in the store, at least one of the tables was being used to play. When not being used to play card games, the tables are also used as study areas. On one visit, a young woman sat at the back corner, working on a laptop. At the other end of that table, a man was eating his takeout Chinese food and reading an article. The dual use of the space as a study area and a gaming arena was fascinating. Yet there is no better example of the duality of group membership than the young man who was sitting on the couch reading a comic with his backpack within arm's reach. As he packed up his comics to leave the store, he also put the Greek tragedy that was hidden beneath his comic back in his bag.

The comic shop is used as a place for comic fan community members to frequent. While comic fandom is a component for seamless entry, the space is used as a commercial site, a lounge, a gaming hang-out, and a study hall. The uses of the clubhouse fit the needs of the club members.

*Password, Please: The Talk of the Comic Fan Community*

Often, the clubhouse is not secret per se. Community members can see the space marked off by the club. However, to gain access to the clubhouse, individuals must prove their membership. The easiest example of this is to speak the language of the club, or to know the secret code words. To fit in, community members must be able to talk the talk of the group.

In a comic shop, a clear way to identify community members from non-community members is to ask them about comics. For example, my visits to the local comic shop coincided with the release of the graphic novels chronicling the death of Captain America. As I was reading my copy, Jay, a visitor to the store, tapped me on the shoulder and asked about the book.

"Is that the one where Captain America dies?"

"Yeah."

"How do you feel about it? I'm a bit conflicted. I never really cared for Cap before, but now that he's gone, I miss him. And Bucky just can't fill Cap's boots."

"For sure. I liked it better when Cap only had a shield. Bucky carrying a gun just isn't the same."

For those who are fans of Captain America, the terminology used in this exchange is commonplace. "Cap" is short for Captain America and is used by readers as a sign of familiarity with the character. In the story arc, Captain America's one-time side-kick, Bucky, has grown up and assumed the mantle of Captain America. Those fans that are familiar with the saga still refer to Steve Rogers as Captain America and Bucky as the side-kick.

The talk of the fan communities create an inclusive-exclusive dynamic, with in-group members being privy to the talk of the community. To outsiders, the talk is jargon heavy and nearly incomprehensible. The talk of the fans at the comic shop demonstrates a unique form of secret code meant for group members only. While the sign on the comic shop window says "Open," the talk of the shop says "Members Only."

*No Girls Allowed: A Gendered Division at the Comic Shop*

Thinking back to those secret clubs children would form, gender was one of the lines demarcating the ability to become a member of the group. For boys, they were very vocal in their feelings toward female membership. Most depictions of the boyhood fort or clubhouse had the "No Girls Allowed" sign visibly displayed for all to see. Moving this metaphor into the realm of comic shops, there is a similar sentiment through the practices of the community members.

Walking into the comic book shop, you are greeted by a wall of newly released comics on one side of the room and comic character posters on the other. Jeffrey Brown notes that most comic buyers are male.<sup>35</sup> The resulting comics do prominently include women, yet the women that appear in the comic book pages are drawn with heaving bust lines and impossibly narrow waists. Much like the criticism of the Barbie doll for creating an impossible image of womanhood, comics regularly feature women as sex symbols for the male fantasy.<sup>36</sup>

While times may be changing, the comic shop is still a boys' club. Looking back at the story of the couple coming into the shop that opened this chapter, it is easy to feel

the woman's nervousness at being in the comic shop. She said that she didn't "belong in here" and she didn't want to come into the shop. Her words gave voice to the sentiment that the shop was really a space for the predominantly male readers of the comics. Yet her body language was even more telling than her words. She was dragged into the shop by her boyfriend as if to say she would rather wait on the street than enter the shop. When he finally stopped pulling her along, she positioned herself so that his body could serve as a shield between her and the rest of the shop patrons. She did not want to see the shop and clearly did not wish to be seen by those in the shop. Factoring this example with there being so few other women entering the shop and the idea of a boys' clubhouse is not a stretch of the imagination. Both the comics themselves and the patronage of the shop make this a "boys-only" zone, symbolically saying "no girls allowed."

*No "Adults" Either: Employees as Community Members*

Perhaps the hallmark of the childhood clubhouse is that there are no outsiders involved in the clubhouse. There are no teachers or parents to oversee what goes on. Instead, it is just the children together as club members. Looking at the comic shop, the employees are unlike traditional employees. They are likely to be mistaken for patrons unless you pay close attention, thus demonstrating the lack of traditional authority figures, or adults, to go with this metaphor.

When I entered the shop, an employee behind the counter was talking with three customers about a recent story arc in the Marvel Ultimates universe. As they were talking, a second employee came out of the back storage room with boxes of new comics and began stocking the displays. Once the conversations were completed, the only ones left in the shop were the two employees, a group of four gamers playing *Magic*, and me. As I browsed the graphic novels, the first employee told the second employee to "sit down and take a break. There's nobody here." This was a bit of a shocker to hear, since I was standing within ten feet of the register. And the gamers were loudly discussing each other's gameplay. Yet the second employee thought nothing of it, sitting down on the couch with a couple of comics. He immediately began reading his chosen comics.

If I hadn't seen the employee unpacking boxes earlier, I would have assumed that he was just another patron. The employees do not wear uniforms. The two that were working this day were wearing comfortable clothing. Subsequent visits to the comic shop revealed more of this laid-back work environment for the employees. The comic shop implicitly promoted a work environment where the employees served a dual role as employee and as patron. In the role of employee, they maintained the store, displayed merchandise, answered questions, and filled orders. Yet the more interesting role would be that of patron. The employees played the games other patrons played. They read comics during their shifts. And they lounged on the couches as any other patron might. In fact, there were times where it was difficult to tell who was working at the store and who was just hanging out.

Unlike more traditional organizations, the fan community of the comic shop is self-organized insofar as the employees are also patrons. Their workplace is their play space and their play space is their workplace. Thus, the notion of self-governance or group-member leadership is attained.

### Leaving the Shop: Concluding Thoughts

There is perhaps no more important location for the comic book fan than the local comic shop. With so many outsiders still considering comics to be for kids, comic fans have tried to gather together in places that foster, not hinder, fan community development. As the focal point of this effort, the comic shop has become a cultural clubhouse, providing safety and security for the comic fans. These safe havens allow group members to talk about, read, and enjoy comics. While the clubhouse metaphor may have issues with gender and access, for group members, it is a celebrated space of both commerce and community.

Critical ethnography is a process of observation where a researcher will go into the field, study the everyday practices of community members, and analyze how those practices maintain societal power relationships. To conduct this type of research, it is assumed that the researcher will go into the field, engage in dialogue with the community members, explore how the power relationships are expressed, and reflexively consider the accuracy of the observations. Since critical ethnography involves fieldwork, it is important to find the key location for the group being studied. I have argued that the comic shop is one such location for comic fans. Upon completion of the fieldwork, the next step is writing up the findings, paying particular attention to the stories of community members. It is our stories that shed light on what we find important and valuable in the groups with which we are associated. Through careful consideration, we can peel back the layers of the fan culture in order to understand how the relationships in and among group members establish and maintain power. The critical ethnographer will uncover the power disparity and offer comment about how the power relationships are maintained or could be challenged.

### NOTES

1. Colleen Varcoe, "Abuse Obscured: An Ethnographic Account of Emergency Nursing in Relation to Violence Against Women," *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research* 32 (4) (2001): 98.
2. Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1993), 3-4.
3. James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2.
4. Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Toward a Critical Cultural Politics," *Communication Monographs* 58 (1) (1991): 179.
5. *Ibid.*, 179.
6. Jim Thomas, "Musing on Critical Ethnography, Meanings, and Symbolic Violence," in *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods*, ed. R.P. Clair (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 45.
7. *Ibid.*, 46.
8. George E. Marcus, "Contemporary Problems in Ethnography in the Modern World System," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 172.
9. Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 180.
10. D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 8.
11. Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 179.
12. Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 9.
13. Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 4.
14. There are perhaps too many examples of feminist ethnography to name, but some books that provide a wealth of voices include Kamala Visweswaran's *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds. *Women: Writing Culture* (Albany:

15. State University of New York Press, 1995); and Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
16. Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 191.
17. John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 14.
18. It should be noted here that any study involving human participants will require some form of institutional approval, normally in the form of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. IRB approval ensures that you do no harm to your participants and that your research is based in sound scholarship and field practices. The actual IRB process will vary from institution to institution, so be sure to contact your IRB personnel prior to going into the field.
19. Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 34.
20. Mathew Pustz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), ix.
21. Harry F. Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork* (2nd ed.) (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005): 80.
22. Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 191.
23. Clifford, "Introduction," 8.
24. Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 39.
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