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## Qualitative Researchers as the Avant-Garde of Democratization: A Modest Proposal of a Sporting Analogy as Methodological Fiction

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# Qualitative Researchers as the Avant-Garde of Democratization: A Modest Proposal of a Sporting Analogy as Methodological Fiction

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## Abstract

A modest proposal of a sporting analogy is offered as methodological fiction about the democratization of research and the great mission such an ideal places upon qualitative inquiry. With apologies to Jonathan Swift.

## Keywords

democratization, obligations of researchers, qualitative inquiry, sport

Increased democracy is required in all aspects of social life. Not only do people have an equal right to engage in political decision-making, irrespective of who they are, but also there must be equality of representation more broadly, across all social fields. In this spirit, it has been suggested that research must be democratized. This requires that members of marginalized and oppressed groups become researchers in place of those from privileged sectors of society. And this must surely be extended beyond blinkered restrictions: not just children but pedophiles; not just the victims of crimes but the criminals too; not just the subaltern but the fascists as well. On grounds of equality, all the disparaged must have representation. Of course, democratization demands even more than this: the very distinction between researcher and researched must be erased. It is a power relationship, and the fundamental principle—here as elsewhere—is that all differences in power should be eliminated. Powerlessness is the entitlement of all.

Yet it is the responsibility of researchers not only to advance the process of democratization in their own realm but also to do this in the fields they study. They should be the avant-garde, the storm troopers of the people. Take the study of sport as an illustration: there is much to be done in this field to achieve full democracy. A first requirement is that participation at the highest level of sports must be opened up to all, irrespective of personal characteristics. This includes differences in sporting ability, since the distribution of this is socially, and therefore unequally, determined. It is long overdue that a social model of disability be applied here. Those

with differing degrees of sporting ability must be able to compete on a level playing field; or, rather, one that is sufficiently tilted to allow those with less ability to have the same success as those with more. All necessary handicaps should be applied: such as knee-capping for those who are able to run faster than the rest of us.

But democratization must go still further: the very distinction between sports professionals and mere spectators should be abolished, since it is discriminatory. So, in team sports, the selection of players for each match would be made by the fans, not by head coaches or team managers, thereby undercutting the authority structures that currently prevail. A next move would be for the players actually to be selected *from* the fans, rather than there being professional teams. Fans could be elected or chosen by lottery to become players for a particular match. Indeed, the barriers between players and spectators might be broken down even further if, throughout the match, there were a continuous rotation of new players coming on to the field and others leaving after their allotted 15 minutes. Referees and other officials could also be elected or selected by lottery.

This is just an illustration of what would be possible in a particular field, one that is of great symbolic significance, shining the way forward for democratization in yet other

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areas, such as piloting airliners or brain surgery. It is the great calling of qualitative inquiry to remake the world in its own image.

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