

Is it Defensible for Women to Play Fewer Sets than Men in Grand Slam Tennis?

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IS IT DEFENSIBLE FOR WOMEN TO PLAY FEWER SETS THAN MEN IN GRAND SLAM TENNIS?

Lacking in the philosophy of sport is discussion of the gendered numbers of sets played in Grand Slam tennis. We argue that the practice is indefensible. It can be upheld only through false beliefs about women or repressive femininity ideals. It treats male tennis players unfairly in forcing them to play more sets because of their sex. Its ideological consequences are pernicious, since it reinforces the respective identifications of the female and male with physical limitation and heroism. Both sexes have compelling reason to reject the practice.

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Introduction

Notably lacking within the body of work on gender in sport over the last few decades is discussion of the fact that women play fewer sets than men in Grand Slam tennis tournamentsⁱ. Plenty has been written on the rationale for sex-segregated sport, a subject to which we have ourselves made a small contribution (Davis and Edwards 2014). The question we address is why, given the segregated arrangements, women play the best-of-three sets in Grand Slam tournaments, Singles and Doubles, while men must play the best-of-five in Grand Slam Singles and in fact play best-of-five in Wimbledon's Men's Doublesⁱⁱ. While women footballers (soccer players) and women rugby players, for instance, play ninety and eighty minutes like their male counterparts, the state of affairs we interrogate is not entirely without echo in other sports. Women do the heptathlon rather than decathlon, run shorter distances than men in cross country races, use a smaller basketball, tee closer to the hole in golf and contest rounds of only two minutes in boxing, albeit some change is afoot.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our focus, however, is not that women's tennis contests are *a priori* best-of-three sets and men's best-of-five, because that is not the case. Alongside Men's

Doubles in Slams other than Wimbledon, numerous Men's Singles tournaments (e.g. the pre-Wimbledon Queen's Club event) are best-of three, and as we see later, women have played best-of-five. Our focus is that in tennis' Broadway shows – the Grand Slam of Wimbledon, US Open, Australian Open and French Open – women categorically play the best-of-three sets and men play the best-of-five in all Singles and some Doubles.^{iv} We consider a few arguments for the current arrangement in Grand Slams, find them wanting and conclude that the different number of sets for women and men is indefensible.

The Capability Argument

It might be argued that women are, physically or psychologically, not up to four or five sets of tennis. Although, again, we know of nowhere in the academic literature that this argument has been made, it is continuous with historical social beliefs about women and retains appeal among some members of the practice community^v. We find scarce reason to consider this argument sound. Again, there is evidently no physical nor psychological impediment to women's completion of ninety minutes of football, eighty minutes of rugby, eighteen holes of golf, 10,000m of competitive running or twenty-six miles of competitive running. Moreover, alongside the fact that five sets of female Grand Slam tennis have not been tried, it stretches credulity to believe that the super-fit players who play in women's Grand Slam tournaments could not survive another one or two sets of tennis beyond the three which is their current maximum. Indeed, it seems even more dubious when one considers that women like Martina Navratilova, Steffi Graf and Monica Seles, among others, played a five sets format in the WTA tour – Chase Championships from 1984 to 1998. Based on the available evidence, we should proceed as though there is no

physical or psychological impediment to women playing five sets of Grand Slam tennis.

The Argument from Tradition

In a previous essay (Davis and Edwards 2014), we endorse Janet Radcliffe Richards' observation (1980, 186-190) that some sex-based differences in practice are 'innocuous cultural preferences, the end of which might significantly diminish the happiness of human beings'. We agree with Richards that people find cultural differences especially attractive when they are rooted in tradition. And we agreed, finally, with Richards that feminists must be committed to attacking all cultural distinctions which degrade women. The sets disparity between males and females can be fairly considered a cultural tradition. Is it an innocuous cultural distinction or one which degrades women?

There is strong reason to believe that the practice degrades women. It reinforces a precise and almost certainly false notion of female physical or psychological incapacity. Discussing sex-segregated sport, McDonagh and Pappano (2008, 20) note appositely that 'hiding the women who can compete with men reinforces the false assumption that no women can meet the challenge', and the current sex-based arrangement of sets in Grand Slam tennis similarly reinforces the improbable notion that professional female tennis players are incapable of four or five sets' intense competition. It offers in the process some last-minute resuscitation to a dying notion of femininity which runs conspicuously counter to what we see female tennis players do for two or three sets, numerous times in a fortnight, in their Grand Slam matches, and again, to what we see many women do routinely in other

sports. Given the symbolic hegemony of physical strength and stamina, it therefore reinforces male symbolic power, a reinforcement strengthened by placement of the Women's Singles final before the Men's, which casts the women's final as a taster for the main feature next day^{vi}. Burke (2010) has reiterated eloquently that the liberal ideal of female access to historically male spaces is a necessary but not sufficient condition of opposition, since the permissions, prohibitions and framings to which females are subject when they inhabit these spaces can ideologically fortify male domination. He (2010, 20) invokes MacKinnon's suggestion that 'liberalism is blind to the kinds of systematic subordination of women that radical feminists ... take to be the *real* (our emphasis) source of women's inequality,' as well as Hirschmann's summary that '...rights have been inadequate in tackling sexist barriers, because the framework in which they exist often cannot see harm to women as harm...' Though Burke is addressing the question of segregated competition, the present case, again, seems a clear example: while the liberal feminist can affirm women's access to elite tennis, that they play fewer sets than men in its most prestigious tournaments may be observed by the radical feminist as illustration of systematic subordination in sport and society, and as something the patriarchal order fails to see as a harm.

The flip side of this coin seems to be a reinforcement of the 'masculine warrior narrative' (Anderson and Kian 2012, 152), the end of which might be considered a significant blow to the gender order. As Anderson and Kian (2012, 152) put it,

Of the multiple masculine scripts promoting professional players' hegemonic masculine status, sacrificing one's body for the sake of sporting glory is a key tenet. Sport journalists have traditionally used their media platform to reify this social script, an act which simultaneously promotes their own masculine capital.

The narrative thrives upon and arguably requires the mythical counterpoint of a femininity which is less physically and psychologically able.^{vii} The Slam sets asymmetry manifests narrative and counterpoint. It also arguably involves injustice towards male players, who need to play a greater number of sets purely because of their sex.

Normative Theories of Sport: Broad Internalism

It is similarly doubtful that any normative theory of sport can overcome the preceding problems and ratify the current arrangement. We soon consider and try to apply the Conventionalism most associated with Morgan (2012, 2015), but we first consider and try to apply Broad Internalism. Broad Internalism has a certain heterogeneity (see Simon 2000, 2015), but is defined by putatively internal elements of sport which function as 'standards that have a rational basis independent of cultural, linguistic or pragmatic considerations' (Simon 2004, 125). For most internalists, such standards are essentially related to the striving for bodily excellence, which promotes both the integrity of the sport and the human flourishing of the individuals. It is very hard to see how this manifesto could ground the disparate number of sets played by the sexes in Grand Slam tournaments. Indeed, Broad Internalism's affinities quite possibly sit uneasily with the arrangement. If we bleach out cultural factors, as the theory proposes, how does the striving for bodily excellence instantiated in Grand Slam tennis map on to fewer sets for women than for men? Are there specifically male and female bodily excellences in tennis, and do they take a form that requires longer male matches in Grand Slam tournaments? Coggon et al (2008, 9) have cited '...the markedly different style of men's and

women's tennis' as illustration of the value of sex-segregated sport competition. However, even if we press this argument for all it is worth, it is not clear how it supports longer male matches in Slams. Indeed, Coggon et al's rationale could be extended by arguing that if there is a distinctive women's style of tennis and people find it appealing, then there is a reason for having five sets a time. To this, it might be replied that fewer sets is a part of what makes the women's game distinctively valuable, since the lesser opportunity to mount a comeback heightens the tension. However, this reply, again, runs into the problem of Grand Slam Singles versus some other tournaments (including, again, Men's Doubles at Slams other than Wimbledon). It is not the case that male tournaments are universally the best-of-five sets. Consider, again, pre-Wimbledon Singles tournaments. Both male and female players typically play best-of-three sets. Is the female tournament diminished as a result of the equivalent male tournament's allowing no greater scope for comeback? Does the former lose an important part of its normative character as a *female* tennis tournament? Does the latter lose an important part of its normative character as a *male* tennis tournament? These would seem odd conclusions, but conclusions that seem entailed by the argument that the lesser scope for comeback is part of what makes women's tennis distinctively valuable. And if women's tennis is not *a priori* less valuable as women's tennis when it runs the same number of sets as male equivalents, then an independent argument is needed that Grand Slam women's tennis would be less valuable as women's Grand Slam tennis if it ran the same number of sets as its male counterpart.

Again, does tennis better preserve its integrity through its Grand Slam arrangements, and do its performers, similarly, better flourish as human beings? It is appropriate at this point to emphasise Simon's (2000, 13) key observation that

...broad internalists need not claim that *all* the principles to which they appeal are distinctive or restricted to the context of sport. Indeed, if the internalist analysis came up with principles that contradicted well supported and well known moral rules, we would be right to at least question the ethics of sport, not the traditional ethical theories.

The preceding structural connection between Broad Internalism's internal sport ethic and human flourishing emphasises that the theory takes the latter as normative, giving it luminous affinities with Aristotelian virtue ethics, as well as less obvious affinities with Kantian ethics and some versions of consequentialism. Genuine affirmation of human flourishing involves commitment to the conditions of humans flourishing. It is worth quoting Simon (2000, 11) at some length:

Broad internalists can argue that part of the explanation of why sports have the features they do ... is a conception of the good life for human beings. According to this conception the good life, or ... a significant part of it, consists of meeting challenges for their own sake and developing our capacities in order to do so ... In this regard, Drew Hyland has suggested that sports at their best can be part of a Socratic process of self-examination, in which we learn about our strengths and weaknesses ...

The commitment of Broad Internalism to human flourishing as just characterised by Simon entails the rejection of any arrangement that unwarrantedly limits the capacity of someone or some group (such as women) to meet physical challenges for their own sake, develop their capacities in the process and learn about their strengths and weaknesses. If we are correct that the sexed sets disparity within Grand Slam tournaments is an example of such unwarranted infringement (upon women), then

the Broad Internalist seems bound to reject it. Burke (2014, 47) is therefore premature in his allegation that Internalism is, in Laden's (2003, 134) language, 'blind', since there is 'nothing within its theoretical machinery that will allow it to see the oppression it is shown as oppression'. If the internalist is shown, for instance, that a group (such as women) are, in relation to another group (such as men), unjustifiably limited in the sporting opportunity for physical challenge and resultant self-discovery, then she is bound, by her preceding conception of the good life, to see that oppression as oppression.

Preferences, feminism and Broad Internalism

In her powerful and nuanced essay on mixed competition, Sailors (2014, 71-72) invokes Birrell's (1984, 26) distinction between separatism which is chosen or dictated. The latter is an exclusionary strategy from without, while the former can be based on strength and a vehicle of resistance and transformation. What is the upshot of this distinction for the present case?

First, we don't know what female Grand Slam players would choose if the best-of-three or best-of-five question were put to them, and it would be foolish to assume they would all feel the same. Broadly and most obviously, some may wish to grab the chance of demonstrating ability to play five sets, and some of these may feel in addition that such a display is ideologically oppositional in character. Others may feel that visible structural difference from the men's game is, again, vital to any oppositional potential. That is, feminism's basic sameness/difference controversy is liable to rear its head; paraphrasing Young (1990, 85), there are liable to be some female players who want to be like men and others who don't.

There is no reason to deny that sport can function as an expression of gender identity, and perhaps keen reason to affirm it. Kretchmar (2015, 15) has compellingly defended a pluralistic internalism that affirms sport as a site of (among other things) 'individual identity, solidarity and community'. Celebration or expression of a gender identity is apt for inclusion in that list of values expressible in sport. However, alongside the inherent contestability of gender identities, there cannot be *carte blanche* for expressions of gender or any other kinds of identity in sport. Candidate identity expressions must reckon with an array of factors, such as, again, the sport itself and the ramifications of expressing the identity in the candidate way. Again, some female tennis players might keenly affirm their sport as a vehicle of gender identity, but reject the suggestion that this should take the form of fewer sets in Grand Slam tournaments. Moreover, female players who would wish to retain fewer Slam sets on the radical feminist ground of rejection of a 'male standard' need to reckon with the fact, again, that best-of-five is not a global male standard, since men often play the best-of-three. They would also need to reckon, again, with the radical feminist-flavoured observation that their exclusion from best-of-five contests is inscribed with male notions of female physical limitation, which women have typically learned and embodied, and which have therefore been a mainstay of male power over them.^{viii} Kane (1995) has called the modification of rules or conditions for female competitors 'sport typing', which Burke (2004) argues reinforces the view that sports need to compensate for female deficiencies.^{ix}

Another, obvious concern with the notion that female tennis players should choose the number of sets to play in Grand Slam tournaments is, again, that it would

seem unjust to confine such a choice to female players. If women were to be allowed to choose how many sets they play in Slams, then an argument is needed as to why male players shouldn't have the same choice. There might be some male players who would see best-of-three Slam contests as, again, an ideological strike against oppressively heroic ideals of masculinity, and if women are to be entitled to choices of ideological resistance, then there is no a priori reason why men shouldn't be entitled to equivalent choices. Furthermore, extending the choice to female but not male players, again, reinforces the othering of the former, since it seems to connote that the 'real' game out there in ludic space is the male version, with the female game a diminutive version that admits special dispensations, rather like asking an eleven-year-old at a social dinner if she would like adult or child portions.

More fundamentally, substantial argument is needed to show that the number of Slam sets should come down to player choice, and especially the choice of sex-based player groupings. There is much about tennis and every other sport which is given in the essential character of the activity. In tennis, for instance, no one playing Singles is given the choice as to whether they want a ball landing in the tramlines to be considered in, and there is no discussion about whether a different policy should apply depending on one's sex. In precise contexts, especially at the recreational level, players may agree to such deviation from the norm, but it is significant that this is regarded as 'relaxing the rules', and is, again, not something that tends to be grounded on the sex of anyone on court. Rule changes do happen, of course (see Simon 2000, 12); however, the Broad Internalist suggests that they should be motivated and evaluated by how the sport in question should be conceived. Again, it is not clear why tennis should be conceived as a sport whose most prestigious

tournaments require women and men to play a different number of sets, nor why this arrangement better achieves any conceivable and sustainable point of playing Grand Slam tennis. Instead, it might be that harmonisation would be an example, borrowing language from Russell's interpretivist treatment of games (2011, 267), of sport 'working itself pure', since tennis would be liberated from one of its inhibiting expressions of material and symbolic power, and therefore more just, more free and in turn more able to become what it really is. The content of this purification is not essentially a matter of player, spectator or, say, media or commercial choice, far less a matter of the choices of players as sex-based groupings. Nor can it brook practices that are unwarrantedly discriminatory. And such purification can, again, co-exist with expressions of gender identity in forms other than disparate numbers of sets in Grand Slam tournaments.

Normative Theories of Sport: Conventionalism

It is the alleged neglect of the social and historical situatedness of sports that motivates some, most obviously Morgan (2012), to (purportedly) reject Broad Internalism. Morgan awards normative primacy to what he calls 'deep conventions', which are socially and culturally situated normative frameworks which, uniquely, make rational debate possible, and which in turn do not submit to appraisal from a higher vantage point of transcontextual, shared principles – for there are, *pace* Broad Internalism, no such principles. Deep conventions are historically constructed and help us to determine the normative value of sport to certain practice communities. As Morgan (2012, 73) puts it, these deep conventions help us to understand 'what sport demands of us in our efforts to be excellent, to meet its challenges, and why such demands warrant our pursuing them in certain ways rather than others'.^x Examples

of such 'deep conventions' are amateurism and professionalism, which offer up different conceptions of athletic excellence. Paraphrasing Morgan, Simon (2014, 94) explains that the amateur and professional conceptions of sport 'provide a framework within which we can reason about the purpose, value and ethics of sport'. Thus, deep conventions give rise to shared norms and values that 'determine for particular communities of inquiry at particular times what counts as a reason, a good and compelling intellectual consideration, in favour of one conception of athletic striving over another' (Morgan 2012, 73). We can from this perspective make normative progress with regards to conflicts that come into view within a particular sporting community. However, Morgan (2012, 75) contends that 'when extramural disputes break out, rational inquiry and the deep conventions that authorize such inquiry lose whatever intellectual purchase they enjoyed when confined to a particular community of inquiry'. Deep conventions seem then to eschew the possibility of rational resolution to normative disputes that arise between rival accounts of sport (for example between amateurism and professionalism). When such disputes arise, Morgan (2012) concludes, there is no rational way forward, and to move past the inevitable impasse, practice communities need to rely on imagination rather than reason or argumentation. Imaginative solutions come in the form of 'moral entrepreneurs', able to 'divine altogether new normative conceptions of sport', which are made attractive to both communities (Morgan 2012, 76). Morgan (2015, 49) also dubs these new normative conceptions 'gestalt switches'.

Morgan's proposed illustration of amateurism and professionalism is not unpersuasive, albeit Simon's (2015: 30-32) quizzical reflections ground caution at the least. Morgan could be right that amateurism and professionalism are irreducibly

different normative frameworks that trigger reasons and arguments not apt for adjudication from a vantage point above each, since there is no such vantage point. He could be right that stand-offs between these frameworks therefore cannot be negotiated by further rational argument, but demand another kind of (creative) discursive move. However, it would not follow that any of Morgan's other proposed illustrations of deep conventions, moral entrepreneurship and gestalt switches are successful. Nor would it follow that radical social and cultural change entails a gestalt switch, resulting from moral entrepreneurship, to a new normative conception (or 'deep convention') of a region or sub-region. We revisit each of these non sequiturs.

Morgan (2015, 49) regards sport's historical, systemic masculinist bias, like amateurism and professionalism, as a deep convention, and one challenged by those moral entrepreneurs he dubs 'athletic feminists', who redescribed 'the aim of sport, what skills, virtues and features qualify as athletic excellence, and, not least of all, what kinds of bodies are properly regarded as athletic bodies'. According to (the earlier) Morgan (2012, 93), athletic feminists such as Iris Marion Young (2009) sought to overturn 'what they rightly saw as the heretofore conceptual and practical exclusion of women from sport'. In the process, they 'argued persuasively that such exclusion diminishes the full humanist potential of sport itself', a potential unleashed by the happy fact that they successfully redescribed sports in 'non-masculinist ways that decoupled athletic excellence from masculinist talk of the "gentleman" athlete and the manly (strenuous) striving for athletic glory'. Morgan (2012, 93-94) concludes his athletic feminism illustration with the proviso that 'the success of morally entrepreneurial efforts like this one to break the crust of past conventions by redescribing the point of athletic competition ultimately depends on whether these at

first counter-intuitive, unconventional, non-masculinist ways of talking about and pursuing sport, become as intuitive and conventional as their predecessors’.

Exactly what impact deep conventions in general and athletic feminism in particular have on the topic of this essay is less than clear. Areas of uncertainty, again, include (i) the credentials and limitations of Morgan’s (Deep) Conventionalism, and (ii) the status and ramifications of ‘athletic feminism’, the purportedly rival normative framework fashioned by Young (2009) and others.

Perhaps a profitable route into the interstices of this discussion is to reflect upon some comparatively recent historical changes to gender ideology and practice.^{xi} That radical change happens, over different periods of time, is undeniable. That such change sometimes ushers in and is in turn influenced by new linguistic expressions, such as ‘sexual harassment’, ‘date rape’ and ‘no-fault divorces’, is undeniable. That such change results from and reinforces shifts in discursive power, as well as improvements in epistemic and other kinds of justice, is undeniable. What might be denied, however, is that such change entails new normative frameworks resulting from ‘gestalt switches’, modes of thinking incommensurate with what has gone before, the genesis of which therefore requires (the preceding) moral entrepreneurialism. That is not to say that some radical change with the preceding features might involve the latter; it is to say only that the former does not entail the latter.

Before trying to illustrate and then apply to the case of women in sport and ‘athletic feminism’, it might be helpful to propose an analogy with a case on the more subjective level. It is not particularly uncommon for people to change from devout

theism to atheism. Such a change is by any standard a radical one. It is liable to have considerable consequences within a life, some obvious and immediate (such as stopping going to church) and others less visible and sometimes more incremental. The individual might eventually come to barely recognise themselves in the former devout theist, and this might be accompanied by some combination of astonishment, nostalgia, amusement and relief. However, it is not clear that the change depends upon the abandonment (temporary or permanent) of one's extant form of rationality in favour of a new form that is ushered in by a supra-rational imaginative gambit. It might instead depend upon the re-employment of recognisable canons of critical reasoning, through which previously accepted premises and arguments are more deeply interrogated for their respective truth values and soundness. The incipient atheist might come (perhaps gradually) to believe that previously unrecognised flaws attach to previously accepted premises or arguments, and that she had therefore reasoned inadequately in the past. Despite the personally radical character of the change, there is no 'gestalt switch' (cognitive entrepreneurship?) entailed. There is a change of mind resulting from reasoning afresh and in a (putatively) more meticulous way. The previously accepted theistic arguments do not become unintelligible to the new atheist unless she makes a rationally ungrounded imaginative leap into a dialectically self-contained theistic framework.^{xii} There is an epistemic vantage point from which the agent can evaluate both theism and atheism. (The illustration would work as well if the change of mind were in the other direction.) Before closing this analogy, it is profitable to briefly reflect upon one in the same ballpark that Morgan himself (2016, 38) tries to use for his own purposes: in asserting that our own social situatedness will prevent us taking lots of views of sport seriously, Morgan states that 'sport is hardly an exception in

this regard, since, for instance, progressive liberals would similarly have a hard time taking seriously the views of, say, fundamentalist Christian theocrats'. Critically neglected, again, in this analogy is that progressive liberals think there no reason whatever to entertain the *defining beliefs* of fundamentalist Christianity. The entire framework of the former sits on that (among other things). They think fundamentalist Christians very likely to be badly mistaken about what exists, about the diary of their key putative existent (God), about what God demands of humans and about the consequences for humans if they fail to comply with those supposed demands. Again, they reach those conclusions from an epistemic vantage point that is equally available to fundamentalist Christian theocrats, and from where interlocutors on both sides can and do argue the toss.

As background to discussion of changes to the gender landscape, it is worth confessing that the older half of the pair writing this was a child in the 1960s and early 1970s, and teenager from the mid-1970s (and is not in therapy – yet). The sociocultural changes since the storied 1970s are monumental, with the result that the decade is mythologised as, variously, a cuddly toy, a horror film and a museum piece. It might therefore be tempting to consider the changes since then the result of a gestalt switch in the preceding sense. But such a conclusion is premature. It is vital to observe that there was in the 1970s a robust and audible constituency of dissent towards those elements of the culture that would nowadays be considered objectionable by almost everyone, e.g. crass sexualisation and other trivialisation of women, dehumanisation of blacks and ethnic minorities, and indiscriminate smoking.^{xiii} (Remember, for starters, that the 1970s was the heyday of Second Wave feminism.) They advanced largely the same arguments that would now be widely

accepted. And it seems misplaced to cast the discursive moves of this constituency as dependent upon a shiny new, dialectically self-contained normative framework, incommensurate with an extant framework that could not serve its purposes. Instead, its definitive moves are recognisable as moves made from within the existing moral rationality. Those listening to them, whether in agreement or not, understood without having to learn a qualitatively different mode of normativity available only through an imaginative leap. (Again, there was robust argument over the issues in question.)^{xiv} These moves included the argument that while women are, for sure, sexual beings, they are human in every other way too, therefore their social reduction to the one, preceding quality is unjust and unfaithful to women's character as human - with a point of view, a will, diverse capabilities, reasoning and deliberative capacities, affective capacities, etc. They included the flagship themes of respect, equality, human worth and (therefore) opposition to objectification and unjust repression. Again, these arguments were not doomed to unintelligibility unless one made a supra-rational imaginative leap into a hitherto alien and closed normative framework; for all their radical character (and prodigious consequences), they were perfectly intelligible within the existing normative framework. Following Edwards and Jones (2009, 339), they grounded themselves upon a more nuanced, non-patriarchally inflected application of concepts and principles of the established framework, such as (again) respect, equality, human worth, rationality and autonomy, signposting what Giddens (1999) later called, in a Kantian-sounding principle, 'democracy of the emotions'. Robust illustration is provided by excavation of the comparatively recent concept of date rape. Although this expression did not exist in the 1970s, the assumptions that ground it, and the notion that a woman could be the victim of rape on a date, were perfectly intelligible. Again, there was in that era robust interrogation

in what tends to be termed 'progressive' circles of the dominant ideology of dating, e.g. the tacit assumption that by paying for everything, a man buys access to a woman's body, in turn confirming and reinforcing gendered economic inequality, as well as hierarchical notions about the performance and enjoyment of sex itself. Opposition to this ideological framework was not only considerable and distributed between the sexes, but again, wholly intelligible within existing and easily recognisable resources of moral rationality. This opposition, again, deployed a more nuanced application of universal moral principles, therefore urging the rest of us that (for instance) a woman's perspective matters as much as a man's, that women are therefore entitled to enjoy sex on their own terms or refuse to have it, that an unjustly gendered economic order needs overhauling, etc. There is, again, no moral entrepreneurship and resultant gestalt switch (in Morgan's senses) involved in these moral promptings, which are now considered banal and whose increased acceptance paved the way for the expression, 'date rape'. An equivalent and overlapping story applies to the term, 'sexual harassment', which first made its appearance in the UK in the early 1980s. Indeed, linguistic outgrowths such as those are possible only after prior discourse has created a climate in which they will enjoy significant recognition and generate substantial sympathy, including from those who are not typically the victims of the actions to which they refer. The spadework has been done already, albeit the new language can provide important reinforcement at both moral and legal levels. Useful illustration from this domain is also provided by the recent retroactive punishment and trial of people who carried out or were alleged to have carried out actions of sexual abuse in previous decades, including the 1970s. It has been observed that the culture in these times was significantly more tolerant of male sexual licence towards women. But, again, very few see that as a

reason why the said behaviour should not be punished. If the substantial changes in attitudes since the 1970s (say) owed themselves to gestalt switches resulting from moral entrepreneurship, then there would be a robust case that the culprits of previous eras did not even morally transgress – after all, they would be acting *prior* to the gestalt switch that is a condition of transgressiveness. But they did transgress. Again, a robust constituency of people at the time would have taken them to transgress, on the strength of arguments wholly intelligible and nowadays social orthodoxy. It betrays the truth in Grayson Perry's (year unknown) maxim, 'Originality is for people with short memories'.

What about 'athletic feminism'? Does it manifest, as Morgan has it, a gestalt switch, which is in turn the result of moral entrepreneurship? Does it propose a normative universe that cannot be normatively ranked against that it seeks to displace, because there is no encompassing normative framework apt for such ranking? Does it feature vertiginous flourishes, the performers of which can only hope that enough others will, over time, come to find attractive, on no ground that they can recognise from within their prior normative framework? Or does it propose changes from within an encompassing normative framework, the newly nuanced, non-patriarchal application of which purportedly yields reason to prefer the revised state-of-affairs? Morgan's attachment to the former picture is illustrated, not only in his comments above, but in his later suggestion (Morgan 2015, 49) that athletic feminists were among those who 'had to draw attention to their novel views by making what at the time were unwarranted assertions and counter-intuitive claims in the hope that their peers might out of curiosity take notice'. But there is, again, reason to query this account. First, it is worthy of note that Morgan offers no

examples of the 'unwarranted assertions' or 'counter-intuitive claims' that Young and other 'athletic feminists' supposedly made. What are these assertions and claims? Second, if we can identify respectively 'unwarranted' and 'counter-intuitive' assertions and claims, then we can properly ask *for whom* they are unwarranted or counter-intuitive, and what the answer avails. Radical social and cultural critique is regularly challenging and uncomfortable for many people, because it problematizes dominant thinking, habit and practice. It does not follow that such critique makes a priori unwarranted assertions and counter-intuitive claims. We hope that each of these points gets some illustration in our earlier account of some changes to the gender order in recent decades, which we argued betoken nuanced, warranted and persuasive (however popularly challenging) deployment of an established normative framework. Similarly, we each read Young's seminal and radical essay many years ago, found it compelling and did not consider it characterised by unwarranted assertion and counter-intuitive claim, far less by a novel, dialectically self-contained normative framework which we might try out if we find it grabs us in the right way. (We return soon to Young.) We thought instead that it argued coherently for radical change, from within a recognisable normative framework (which, again, had been standardly used in dissembling ways). Not only does Young's essay so argue, but Morgan's (2012, 93) account of athletic feminism seems to admit this and to self-unravel in his preceding attribution to Young and others of *humanist* arguments against women's practical exclusion from sport. In helping himself – reasonably – to humanist motifs in his exegesis of athletic feminism, he characterises the latter in terms of elements of a broader, identifiable and heavily embraced normative framework, from which we can rank the present against the vision of the athletic feminists, and find the former wanting.

The immediately preceding dovetails, indeed, with Broad Internalism and its preceding attachment to broader morality, especially its intimate affinity with human flourishing. The latter, again, gives the Broad Internalist ammunition to look askance at scaffoldings of sport's bodily excellences, which, for instance, symbolically annihilate, 'other' or tar as less-than-fully-human certain groups (e.g. women, the slight of build or the disabled). That, again, does not preclude the possibility that the Broad Internalist's foregrounding of bodily excellences comes into tension at pinch points with the broader moral framework that she affirms.^{xv} But it entails that she is not *a priori* a champion of the *status quo*, and specifically, that she is, again, not *a priori* inhospitable to the sociocultural critiques and prescriptions articulated by Young, Burke and other feminist contributors. Again, the universal morality upheld by the Broad Internalist contains the resources, squirrelled away for centuries, for the unsparing interrogation of structures of power (such as patriarchy) that warp it out of true and in turn limit the self-expression, epistemic authority and (consequently) human flourishing of discrete groups (such as women) in sport and elsewhere.^{xvi}

Again, the decontaminated operation of the preceding normative framework, including the unmasking of relevant non-moral facts, is heavily implicated in the present world of female sport, including elite female tennis, a world that seems incongruous with the gender asymmetry discussed in this essay. (While sport is a social world, it is also bound to have continuities with the rest of society. Some changes in the gender inflections of sport mirror broader social changes, most obviously the increased confidence and self-efficacy of women, which has, among its effects, the cultural overthrow of sexual harassment and date rape, as well as an increase in ruggedly active forms of bodily subjectivity.) When applied to sport, the

narrative, again, is not situated in an alternative, dialectically self-contained framework to which one might opt in because it grabs one in the right way (or, similarly, not opt in because it doesn't grab one in the right way). Its unremarkable habitat is illustrated by its constitutive arguments, which include the argument that women's bodies and emotions are not as fragile as was widely (and shadily) believed; the argument that women's reproductive systems will not be damaged by exertion of the kind typically required in sport (including elite sport); the argument that definitive moves in sport (e.g. hitting a ball with a tennis racket) are not (unlike giving birth or fertilising an egg) indexed to the sex of the performer; the argument that there is (again, on grounds of equal human worth) no defensible reason why women's realisation of their physical abilities should be artificially confined by their sex; the argument that there is nothing intrinsically sexed about muscle, speed, strength, power, sweat, endurance or determination, and sporting skills entwined with them; and the argument that physical capacities in which women typically excel over men are not *ipso facto* less authentic human physical capacities. The narrative also includes a diagnosis in terms of patriarchal power – itself a rational argument from a prosaic vantage point – of the previously popular and putatively false beliefs and accompanying ideologies it challenges. The clear fruit of the preceding for elite female sport, including tennis, is that strenuousness, power and muscular bodies are affirmed to a significantly larger degree. We expect Serena Williams and her rivals to hit the ball very hard, to ace regularly and to be sweating profusely at the end of contests, just as we do their male counterparts. We affirm that. We expect and affirm extraordinary feats of athleticism from the said players, just as we do of their male counterparts. And, we are arguing, we should not expect women to play fewer sets than men in Grand Slam tournaments, nor affirm it.

Young

Given Morgan's touting of Young (2009) as a pioneering athletic feminist and his foregrounding of her seminal essay, the latter repays a little further exegesis and consideration in light of our topic. There are two elements worth distinguishing. First, Young follows Merleau-Ponty's (1962) argument that the basic structures of human existence have their foundation in the body as acting and expressing subject. From Merleau-Ponty's insight, it follows that the (comparative) exclusion of women from sport constitutes a 'profound inhibition' of women's humanity and 'contributes in a basic way to a sense of weakness, body-objectification and physical timidity among women.'^{xvii} (Young 2009, 17) It is worth observing, again, that there is nothing unwarranted, counter-intuitive or in any sense opaque about these assertions of Young. Instead, they can be swiftly seen as warranted and persuasive. And insofar as the redress, to which Young is committed, of the preceding state-of-affairs is an ambition of 'athletic feminism' (Young does not use this term or cognates), then athletic feminism must reject any sporting practices that reinforce a sense of female weakness and physical timidity. If our treatment in this essay is sound, it must therefore reject the current Grand Slam sets disparity.

Second, Young (2009, 18-19) argues that the primacy of masculine character touchstones, such as aggression and instrumental rationality, in the practice and symbolism of sport, in turn confirms the primacy of the sporting male and the othering of the sporting female. As redress, she recommends a practical and symbolic downplaying of the preceding qualities, alongside the corresponding elevation of virtues typically associated with women, such as expressiveness and

grace. She also recommends the invention of new sports and sport's inclusion of physical activities not presently considered sport. Though not unpersuasive, this element is not as compelling as that described in the last paragraph, and even if we press it for all it is worth, it still yields no support for the Slam sets imbalance. It isn't entirely compelling, because its identification of sport with a particular ideal of masculinity neglects the fact that even hegemonically masculine sports played in a hegemonically masculine way and confirmative of hegemonically masculine character qualities also celebrate a very different form of masculinity, defined by craft, nimbleness and virtuosity.^{xviii} And where tennis in particular is concerned, Olympian gods of the men's game include Roger Federer, John McEnroe and Stefan Edberg, all (especially McEnroe) heavily defined by and lionised for qualities of craft, expressiveness, grace and deftness. But if we do, for all that, strengthen the cachet of the 'expressive' qualities in sport, what follows re the tennis sets arrangement we are discussing here? It is not clear that anything follows. There is no clear reason why a tennis world defined more by expression and less by masculine aggression and instrumentality is one in which Men's Singles Grand Slam contests are best-of-five sets and the female equivalents best-of-three. Moreover, the virtues typically associated with women can (and regularly do) co-exist in women with a robust, powerful physicality. Indeed, Young (2009, 17) earlier commends sport and laments women's diminutive status in it because of sport's capacity for performers to experience themselves as a 'vigorous, powerful, skilful, coordinated and graceful body'. Again, expressive or not, playing fewer sets than men in tennis's elite tournaments cements an image of women's bodies as comparatively deficient in vigour and power.

Historical situatedness

Finally, before leaving Morgan's Conventionalism and its consequences (if any) for the question of Grand Slam tennis sets, it is worth a little reflection upon one specific facet. Morgan stresses the historically situated – as opposed to ahistorical and transcendent – nature of ideals (e.g. amateurism and professionalism) and consequent force fields of normative rationality. There is clearly a sense in which this is correct: ideals and, indeed, beliefs, emotions, language and arguably most content of consciousness is anchored in social, historical, economic, cultural and political conditions. After Hegel, Marx, Rousseau, Nietzsche and Bourdieu, for starters, there are few who would deny that. We would be unlikely to be discussing the topic of this essay were it not for the historically situated phenomenon of feminism, which in turn would not have arisen in the absence of enabling social, historical, economic, cultural and political conditions. Nor would we writers be doing it if we hadn't gone to school and then university, which in turn would not have happened without enabling social, economic and political conditions.^{xix} But we should be careful about what we conclude from these contemporary intellectual banalities. When we learn at school that two plus two equals four, the historically situated characters of the institution and our place in it do not mean that the truths of the basic arithmetic we learn are 'historically situated'. Basic arithmetic is true *tout court*. Similarly, the historically situated nature of feminism (including athletic feminism) coexists with the fact that some of the questions within its mighty purview have answers which are true or false *tout court*. For instance, it is either true or false *tout court* that women are physically damaged by strenuous physical exertion; it is either true or false *tout court* that women's reproductive capacities are undermined by the same; it is either true or false *tout court* that women's emotions are not up to sport to the same extent as

men's; it is either true or false *tout court* that female flourishing is not dependent on the exercise of one's capacities to the extent of male flourishing; and it is either true or false *tout court* that women qua women cannot withstand five sets of tennis. Benatar (2003, 195) has observed that confirmation of female ability to do a good many things is provided by the simple demonstration of such ability, e.g. given the chance to become lawyers, women have demonstrated the ability to do it. There is, again, nothing 'historically situated' about the fact that women are capable of being lawyers, even if the chance to confirm that truth requires a set of enabling, contingent historical conditions. Similarly, there will be nothing 'historically situated' about the truth – if it be so - that women can play five sets of tennis, even if the chance to demonstrate that truth requires a set of enabling, contingent historical conditions.

Conclusion

That women play the best-of-three Grand Slam Singles sets and men play the best-of-five, and that the arrangement is replicated in Wimbledon Men's and Women's Doubles, is indefensible. It is discontinuous with practice in a battery of other sports, and with both the turbo-physicality of elite female tennis players and the robust bodily subjectivity of many women in the modern liberal-democratic world. It seems unsupported at the level of physical and psychological capability, and seems to get no sponsorship from Broad Internalism or the universal moral principles such as human flourishing, justice, freedom and human worth, to which Broad Internalism subscribes. Nor can the policy find comfort from within the framework of Morgan's notion of deep conventions, since (i) some concerns attach to the notion's instantiation in 'athletic feminism', and (ii) the putative deep convention of 'athletic

feminism' seems to yield no support for the policy, and, contrariwise, contains motifs which would ground opposition.

The Grand Slam sex-based sets disparity is a cultural tradition which degrades women, since it reinforces a false stereotype of female incapacity and in turn a fast dying notion of femininity, which is starkly challenged, again, by what women do on the tennis court, in other sport spaces and in other sites of physical culture. Therefore, the liberal feminist ideal of access, while a necessary instrument of opposition, is insufficient in this instance. The tradition also reinforces the questionable narrative counterpoint of the masculine warrior, and is arguably unjust to male Grand Slam players, since it forces them to play more sets purely because of their sex.

The harmonisation of sets would be an example of sport 'working itself pure'. The sex-based disparity in sets played should be ended. Should cessation improbably reveal women incapable of four or five sets, the change could be reversed. Finally, sets harmonisation could be accompanied by an end to the ritual playing of the Women's Singles final before the Men's. The easy solution here is to alternate from year to year^{xx}.

If we have been successful in demonstrating that the current situation is indefensible, then a question arises about the intrinsic merits of best-of-three and best- of-five sets contests. Is one format intrinsically superior to the other? Does one better test the defining skills of tennis? This discussion, although fascinating, must wait until another day.

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Notes

ⁱ See Kane (1995) for an excellent discussion of sex based rule differences in sport, including a brief discussion of the set disparity between males and females in tennis. More recently, Flake et al. (2012) briefly discuss the set disparity between the men's and women's games in professional tennis as a popular rationalisation for the pay gap between the sexes.

ⁱⁱ Grand Slam Men's Doubles matches, Wimbledon excepted, are the best-of-three sets. In fact, the only fixed rule is that Men's Singles matches are the best-of-five sets. The 2017 official Grand Slam rule book states that, 'All Men's Singles Main Draw matches in Grand Slam Tournaments shall be best-of-five (5) sets. All other matches shall be the best-of-three (3) or the best-of-five (5) sets unless otherwise determined by each Grand Slam Tournament.'

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/boxing/39594187>

^{iv} The best-of-five format is also played in the men's Davis Cup. The women's equivalent of the Davis Cup is the Federation Cup, which follows a best-of-three format.

^v For instance, 2013 Wimbledon Women's Singles champion Marion Bartoli told BBC News channel's HARDtalk that women should not play the best of five sets because of the physical differences between men and women. She opined, "You can't ask a woman to play for six hours." (BBC News, February 5, 2014)

^{vi} Similarly, the women's Olympic marathon race takes place one week before the men's.

^{vii} For compelling argument that sexism which disadvantages women is undetachable from sexism which disadvantages men, see Benatar (2003).

^{viii} MacKinnon (1987, 118) has said, 'If you ask, not why do women and men do different physical activities, but why has femininity *meant* physical weakness, you notice that someone who is physically weak is more easily able to be raped, available to be molested, open to sexual harassment. Feminine means violable.'

^{ix} For a more extensive discussion of male and female versions of rules in sport, see Kane (1995), McDonagh and Pappano (2008) and Burke (2010, 2014).

^x Simon (2015, 30) observes that ‘Morgan’s approach is quite compatible with, and may even presuppose, broad internalism, in that it requires us to find the best overall interpretation of sporting practices within given sociocultural contexts.’

^{xi} We are indebted to a reviewer of an earlier version for prompting us here.

^{xii} The point of this example is reinforced by the vigorous public discussion of this topic in recent years.

^{xiii} British television has recently and repeatedly shown a couple of programmes entitled, ‘It Was Alright in the 70s.’ The title could mislead, since there were a significant number in the period (from a diversity of standpoints) for whom the practices shown were not alright.

^{xiv} In the UK, the Miss World contest of 1973 was immediately followed by the discussion programme, The Dimbleby Talk-In, about the sexualisation of women putatively inscribed in the Miss World contest. Moreover, Miss World was an established site of controversy since the 1970 contest was disrupted by activists of what was then called Women’s Liberation, who (among other things) threw smoke bombs, ink bombs and leaflets onto the stage.

^{xv} If, as McNamee et al. (2003) and Flanagan (1991) affirm, virtue is many and morality intrinsically conflictive, it can be neither surprising nor disqualifying that a defining principle of an internal sport ethic sometimes clashes with elements of a broader normative framework with which the ethic conceives itself continuous.

^{xvi} Burke (2014, 50) is mistaken to say that ‘for groups who do not have epistemic authority, realism has often been a terrible starting position’. It is not realism that is the problem for groups deficient in epistemic authority, but realist forms of truth skewed by those who do have epistemic authority. Eagleton (1990, 372) proffers a polemical yet penetrating articulation: ‘The avant-garde’s response to the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic is quite unequivocal. Truth is a lie; morality stinks; beauty is shit. And ... they are right. Truth is a White House communique; morality is the Moral Majority; beauty is a naked woman advertising perfume. Equally ... they are wrong. Truth, morality and beauty are too important to be handed contemptuously over to the political enemy.’

^{xvii} It is worth observing that one of broad internalism’s flagship concepts, human flourishing, might be among those vulnerable to patriarchal inscription. However, if Young is correct, then an active and skilful body subjectivity is as integral to the flourishing of the human female as it is to that of the male.

^{xviii} See Giulianotti (2005, 99) and Davis (2015, 147).

^{xix} Shafer-Landau (2003, 258-260) has observed that most of our beliefs are contingent. For instance, our belief that ‘the earth is many billions of years old, roughly round, not at the centre of the universe, and the site of millions of generations of evolutionary activity depends on our living when and where we do.’ Yet ‘the fact that one’s views would probably have been different in other contexts does not defeat whatever justification one’s beliefs presently enjoy.’

^{xx} It might be argued that the fortnight allocated to slams doesn’t allow both the men’s and women’s tournaments to house best-of-five set matches. The most obvious suggestion is to make Grand Slam tournaments longer. An alternative which is in the round more attractive is to stagger the number of sets in both men’s and women’s matches. For instance, in one year the opening men’s rounds could be best-of-three sets and women’s best-of-five, with reversal the next year. Where one round in any year involves women playing more sets, the next round could have men playing more sets. And this could proceed until the semi-finals, when both sexes must play the best-of-five sets.