Sport, leisure, and social justice in an age of uncertainty: Investigating the relationship between power, precarity and the rise of the prosumer

Dr Spencer Swain

*York St John University*

**Abstract**

Power's relationship with social justice represents a critical area of scholarship, highlighting how progressive political movements challenge social injustices relating to human rights, poverty, and civil liberties. The chapter provides an overview of power and its relationship with social control, starting with definitions from political thinkers such as Steven Lukes and Michel Foucault. Before analysing literature exploring power as a form of authority within industrial modernity, unpacking research that has positioned sport and leisure as a mechanism of disciplinary power built around the idea of panoptic surveillance. From here, the chapter introduces perspectives that connect power with an evolution in the cultural landscape of modernity that has seen disciplinary authority replaced by the principles of seduction, precarity and synopticism. This idea links sport and leisure to a culture of idolatry that has come to symbolise consumer society, the increased phenomenon of celebrity and the political ideology of free-market capitalism that together have seen the state's frontiers recede, fuelling increased individualism over collective security.

Keywords: sport and leisure; power; social justice; panopticism; synopticism

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**Introduction**

The concept of power has been a source of interest amongst social and political thinkers since the Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (2003[1513]) introduced the phrase into the cultural lexicon at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the intervening years, definitions have sought to understand power as the capacity of an individual or institution to influence the actions, beliefs, or conduct of others. Consequently, such thinking has resulted in two distinct yet radically different understandings. The first focuses on power from a personal perspective, connecting with the idea of individual agency to narrate interpersonal conflict whereby people in authority control the opinions and behaviours of others (Lukes, 2005). This micro-sociological account exposes how power manifests through various forms of interpersonal interaction, whether in corporate environments or through the techniques used by sports managers and coaches to exert influence over their players through inspiring half-time team talks or fine systems (Law and Bloyce, 2019). The second understands power as a form of authority that aligns with social structures to help legitimise, normalise and control behaviour (Castells, 2016). This macro-sociological account explains how power instils a sense of discipline through regulating and normalising behaviour to comply with the wishes of elites. Such thinking, led by the French social theorist Michel Foucault (1970), has sought to expose the ubiquity of power as a productive force used to increase efficiency and organise the population around tasks such as work or reproduction.

However, social theorists, such as the British sociologist Anthony Giddens have questioned this dichotomy between structure and agency by blending the two. In his theoretical work on structuration, Giddens (1986) argues that just as social structures influence an individual's autonomy, these very same social structures are maintained and adapted through an individual's agency. Such thinking exposes how modalities of power are established, challenged, and reformed as they impact members of Society who adapt and contest such structures. This rationale helps articulate how methods of exercising power are constantly in flux, being created and renewed to align with changes in political thinking that influence the structure of economic and social policies. The context behind this insight exposes how the implementation of power changes to adapt to service different societal systems. This point is documented by Zygmunt Bauman, who explains how the strategies involved in controlling populations have evolved from the production-based principles of industrial Society to the post-industrial setting of a consumer society (Bauman and Haugaard, 2008). Through this lens, power is understood as an entity open to transformation. One that helps us better understand leisure's relationship with social justice, namely how oppressive power structures challenge the quest for equity, diversity and inclusion. Here, past wrongs can be connected to ongoing conflicts within the present, showing how sport and leisure represent a site in social life where inequalities are exposed, challenged and contested, repeating themselves cyclically (Riches, Rankin-Wright, Swain and Kuppan, 2017). Through this lens, the chapter seeks to define social justice as a movement that is agile as opposed to static by exposing how structural inequalities manifest through power dynamics open to reformulation and the subsequent need for progressive movements to adapt to such changes.

A contemporary example is the Black Lives Matter movement and how it has used the media influence of sport and the celebrity of athletes like Lebron James and Colin Kaepernick to challenge racism and police brutality towards people of colour. Building upon the work of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the Black Nationalist writings of thinkers like Marcus Garvey and the UNIA movement in the early 1900s (Christian, 2008), these player activists have sought to challenge racialised oppression by seeking equal opportunities and treatment within Society. Nevertheless, there are distinct differences in how such movements have enacted this call for justice and the techniques used by ruling elites to subvert such challenges. This perspective can be seen in how both the Civil Rights Movement and the UNIA[[1]](#footnote-1) focused their efforts on challenging social injustices enacted through scientific racism that plagued the legislative and administrative structures of the United States. Such structural racism and its cancerous growth within the United States legal system saw the propagation of racialised segregation through Jim Crow laws that separated sports arenas and leisure spaces such as swimming pools on the classification of 'race' (Carrington, 2010; Mowatt, 2017). This led Civil Rights leaders to call for social reforms, enacting legislative and administrative changes to the constitution that challenged the instrumentalised rationalities of white superiority. In short, this approach sought to change attitudes by changing the law, which, in turn, it was hoped would bring about equality.

In contrast, the Black Lives Matter movement has sought to expose the insidious workings of cultural racism that use the hyperbolic function of the media to portray people of colour as deviants and vagabonds. The context behind such thinking exposes how such communities continue to find themselves subjugated to racial oppression, a point seen in the brutal murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Moreover, the cruelty of such murders has sought to expose the legacy of scientific racism and its impact on the lives of people of colour, whereby despite being seen as equal within the doctrine of the law, such incidents serve to expose how this does not translate into cultural attitudes. Here, the cultural significance of sport has been mobilised to highlight the complexity of such racial discrimination, communicating the plight and lived experiences of people of colour to consumers worldwide who follow the athletes who protest such treatment. As a result, sports' position as a global commodity has helped to galvanise support by educating consumers about the lived experiences of people of colour and the injustices they face. However, at the same time, these same sports stars find themselves open to a new form of attack from the political right, portraying such protests as unpatriotic and ungrateful to the fans who pay to watch them (Edwards, 2017; Trimbur, 2019). This situation exposes the consumer dynamics associated with power in modern Society, demonstrating how the fight for social justice has transitioned from changing the legislative dogma of social institutions to controlling the media optics put before the consumer and the message this portrays.

To this end, the chapter seeks to provide a detailed overview of existing theories on power, starting with the epoch of modernity and the systemic workings of power in industrial societies through Foucault's (1977; 1991) idea of panoptic surveillance. From here, the discussion introduces the work of the late social theorist Zygmunt Bauman and his reconceptualisation of power. This idea connects power to the idolatry of consumer-based economics and a shift towards excessive personal freedom that has seen the state retreat from people's daily lives (Bauman, 2006). Here, sport and leisure are no longer seen to solely represent a site in social life used to instil disciplinary control. But rather a cultural space used by citizens to look at the actions of significant others, that is, celebrities, style gurus or elite athletes who saturate the public consciousness (Swain, 2019). This system, it is argued, highlights how post-industrial societies have moved away from disciplinary control to a subversive form of seduction driven by an economic model that exudes uncertainty and the need to follow the example of others. In short, power is no longer enacted solely from the top down but increasingly from the bottom up (Bauman, 2000).

**Power as authority: The transition from feudalism to modernity**

The epoch of modernity commonly associated in sociological discourse with industrialism emerged from an event known as the Enlightenment that occurred in Western Europe during the mid-eighteenth century[[2]](#footnote-2). At its core, the Enlightenment represented an intellectual and philosophical movement that brought about considerable change, most notably through its values of championing the sovereignty of reason and exploring the social world through the human senses instead of spirituality and divinity. Such thinking, in turn, led to the principles of science and reason supplanting religion as the dominant authority used to explain social phenomena and instigate a separation between the state and the church (Bauman, 1988). Importantly, for the upcoming discussion, this change saw the emergence of many social institutions that we take for granted today. These include parliamentary democracy and constitutional sovereignty, the judicial system, economic and financial structures such as banks, and the idea of territorial sovereignty that eventually gave birth to the nation-state (Giddens, 1991; 1998). In sports and leisure, these changes have been documented through concepts such as parliamentarisation and sportisation. Terms taken from the figurational sociology of Norbert Elias (2000) to explain the emergence of governing organisations and the subsequent implementation of rules, leagues and codes of conduct designed to civilise previously disorganised games (Cock, 2018; Mierzwinski, Cock, and Velija, 2019).

The arrival of such bureaucracy constructed through the rationality of reason brought an end to the feudal order that had implemented traditional methods of imposing power based on the divine rights of the Monarchy and the implementation of physical acts of violence to justify divine opulence (Foucault, 1977). This traditional approach to maintaining order can be seen in the emblematic use of gladiatorial games within ancient Roman Society and the role of sport in symbolically affirming the relationship between Emperors and their Gods. Here, deciding who should die or be spared in gladiatorial contests helped confirm the Emperor's position as a messenger to the Gods, as someone who could do their bidding and speak for them on Earth (Spracklen, 2011). Analysing such power relations through the prism of social justice exposes how leisure in traditional societies centred on implementing power by harnessing the mystique of the spiritual world. This perspective is communicated poignantly by Giuliannotti (2015), who explains the role of mob football in the Middle Ages as a spiritual event constructed around the belief that the winning team would carry favour with God and bless their village with a good harvest. Interestingly, from the point of view of the relationship between power and social justice, such a system exposes how tradition, in the form of long-standing beliefs and practices, elevated specific individuals, such as the Monarch or tribal chief, above others in Society, forging a theocracy whereby one's association with religious customs and traditions symbolised power.

However, the power structures associated with feudalism began to disintegrate around the middle of the eighteenth century. The first of these challenges came from the emergence of science as a disciplinary system that had started supplanting religion as the dominant authority to explain social phenomena. An example was the emergence of scientific disciplines like geology to rationalise environmental catastrophes, such as the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. Similarly, as science supplanted spirituality, calls grew louder for an equal distribution of power and wealth within Society, culminating in the French revolution of 1793 that saw the theocratic link between Monarchy and God broken with the execution of King Louis XVI by the proletariat-led French National Convention. Subsequently, early modern societies found themselves in a state of transition due to the decline of religious authority (Bauman, 1991), creating a state of anomie (Durkheim, (1997 [1893]), whereby in the face of the declining role of religion in the public sphere, individuals lacked the ethical and emotional guidance needed to govern their lives. Furthermore, these populations also faced extreme uncertainty, characterised by the German philosopher Erich Fromm (2001) as a form of 'negative freedom' whereby men and women were stripped of their communal togetherness and forced to embrace a feeling of moral aloneness without the doctrine of religion to guide them. Subsequently, modern societies sought to construct structures to enforce order and implement power to counteract such insecurities (Swain, 2017) through a method of public administration that neatly mirrored scientific methods of investigation used to document the natural world. In so doing, these rationalities sought to counteract ambivalence by suppressing:

everything ambiguous, everything that sits astride the barricade and thus compromises the vital distinction between inside and outside. Building and keeping order means making friends and fighting enemies. First and foremost, it means purging ambivalence (Bauman, 1991, p.24).

Consequently, such logic sought to organise Society around bureaucratic reason, a method of organisation that replaced the spiritual guidance of religion (Bauman, 1988).

This change has led many social theorists working within the theoretical tradition of the Frankfurt School of critical theory (see; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Spracklen, 2009) to position modernity as an ambivalent project. Here, such ambivalence stems from promoting the enlightened virtues of liberty and democracy that instigated a break from the serfdom of feudalism. While simultaneously invoking a totalitarian attitude that has sought to order the world around the ideological views of its architects (white, middle-class men) (Bottomore, 2002).

**Modernity and the panopticon: Sport and leisure as a site of discipline**

This purging of ambivalence connects with the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1970), who wrote about how 'technologies of power' operate ubiquitously to control individuals from afar through a technique that he would later term governmentality (Foucault, 1991). Central to such thinking is a focus on how governments and other forms of the state apparatus, like prisons and schools, implement power psychologically by entwining citizens within a 'web of power' built around discourse patterns. Such communication and debate help to control, judge, and normalise the actions of citizens by allowing power to reach "into the very grain of individuals, touching their bodies and inserting itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1977, p.39). This idea exposes how state institutions normalise behaviours that conform to their ideologies, creating rationalities that guide and control the population's behaviour. At the centre of this method is an apparatus known as the panopticon, a term first brought into the academic idiolect by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (2009 [1791]) in his writings on penology and the criminal justice system. Bentham explained how the panopticon represented a circular prison controlled through a central guard tower, blinding lights, and observable detainment cells, allowing correctional officers to view prisoners without inmates knowing. Paramount to this method of control was the need to instil discipline through surveillance, ensuring institutionally verified behaviours were followed due to inmates being unaware if their actions were being observed. The effect of such a system served to structure inmates' behaviour into a pattern set by the rationalities of the prison authorities, creating a normalising gaze that socialised inmates into behaviours deemed appropriate by those in charge. This method of control interested Foucault (1977, p.201), who applied this thinking to explain how state institutions disciplined their citizens through the constant spectre of surveillance, a method that he argued helped to induce "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power". Thus, helping to normalise expectations and create a population of 'docile bodies' disciplined to act in a manner endorsed by the bureaucratic rationalities of state institutions.

Within leisure studies, panoptic power structures have been understood to represent a 'technology of dominance' used to exclude, classify, regulate and normalise behaviour (Lang, 2010). The work of Kirk (1998) and Hargreaves (1987), in particular, has been pivotal in taking Foucault's ideas and applying them to physical education settings, explaining how teachers use surveillance to control students through disciplinary tactics designed to instil institutionally appropriate behaviours. This approach focuses on the 'teacher's gaze' and its influence in getting students to behave appropriately for fear of being punished for not conforming to the type of behaviour legitimised in the cultural sphere of the gymnasium and the broader school. At the same time, it is also documented how such rationalities encourage behaviours centred around competitiveness and obedience, designed to discipline young people into the behaviours coveted by capitalist societies. Scholars writing in sports coaching have also used Foucault's ideas to explain coach-athlete relations (Lang, 2015). Here, the use of surveillance by coaches has been documented to enhance their athlete's performances, culminating in tactics designed to instil a feeling of constant surveillance within the psyche of their charges to improve performances (Marcula and Pringle, 2006). Moreover, such insights document the ambivalence associated with modernity (Swain, 2019) in how such tactics have been shown to have had a tremendous impact on athlete performance by disciplining many to become world-class competitors. While at the same time coming under significant scrutiny for creating an uncritical environment regarding the authoritative power exercised by coaches, namely in the form of sexual abuse and issues regarding athlete well-being (Webb and Macdonald, 2007).

Such insights help us better understand the relationship between power and social justice within the epoch of modernity. Namely, exposing modernity's need to control nature, create hierarchical bureaucracies, implement rules and regulations, exercise control and remove personal insecurities, to make the chaotic aspects of human life that appeared in early modern societies seem both ordered and familiar. Yet, this same disciplinary gaze enacted by state institutions is also problematic, as the rationalities it sought to maintain promoted the interests of its architects - white, cis-gendered, middle-class men. An example of such thinking and its impact on social justice within the arena of sport can be seen in boxing, where a 'colour line' was erected in the early 1900s to divide fighters using the pseudo-science of 'race' to attribute genetic differences and behavioural characteristics to a person's skin colour. This approach documents how baseless claims built upon empirically impoverished science were rationalised by the institutions of modernity to divide professional sport on the categorisation of 'race' (Hylton, 2009; Ratna, 2015). Similarly, women's engagement in sports, physical activity and male-dominated recreational activities have been policed by the same institutional bureaucracy, positioning such behaviours as an affront to social expectations of femininity. The consequences have led to women being excluded or marginalised from sporting activities, physical education lessons, and clubhouses due to the expectation that their behaviour conforms to feminine cultural tropes of submissiveness and passivity (Scraton, 1992; Flintoff, Fitzgerald and Scraton, 2008).

**Liquid modernity: From discipline to seduction**

While Foucault's work on panopticism has garnered interest, his ideas have also been critiqued within contemporary social theory, namely by theorists who have sought to chart a change in the constitution of modernity (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; and Bauman, 2000) and the impact this has had on the workings of power. For example, Zygmunt Bauman (2006) investigates how the structural workings of power have changed in the period he refers to as liquid modernity, whereby the economic base of Western democracies has transformed from being centred around industrialism and production to now being consumer-orientated. Within leisure, this can be observed in the emergence of privatised industries run to maximise profits through selling products to consumers in a global marketplace. An example is the English Premier League, which has a global fanbase and private television contracts for exclusive broadcasting rights. This level of commercialisation shows how the leisure industries are no longer solely controlled by public sector organisations but instead open to free-market forces and the vast revenue streams they can sustain (Chadwick, Parnell, Anagnostopoulos, Widdop, 2018). Bauman (2007) attributes this transformation to three pivotal events. The first is the emergence of New Right economic policies championed by thinkers such as Milton Freidman and Freidrich Von Hayek, which led the U.S. Federal Reserve and many European governments to abandon Keynesian welfare strategies during the 1980s (Bauman 2000). This ideology has seen the welfare system stripped back and sold off to private companies (a shadow state, so to speak) who run services around the motive of profit instead of any perceived benefits to Society (Blackshaw, 2005; Swain, Lashua and Spracklen, 2021). Examples of this change in leisure provision can be seen in the proliferation of corporate gym companies that have saturated the fitness industry at the expense of public-owned facilities that successive right-wing governments in the UK have sold off through compulsory competitive tendering (CCT)[[3]](#footnote-3).

Secondly, Bauman (2000) explains how such policies have created a culture of excessive individualism initiated by the scaling back of the welfare state, which has placed a greater emphasis on individual responsibility. As a result, members of the polis find themselves increasingly left to their own devices by managing personal risk through consuming, emphasising individual decision-making and forward-thinking (Smith 1999; Swain, 2017b). The precarity involved in deciphering information provided by 'experts' and 'expert systems' underlines how fluid and forward-thinking liquid modern consumers have to be to manage their lives, highlighting how such excessive freedom can lead to a crisis in personal security and the need to look to others, namely celebrity role models for guidance (Bauman 2007). Lawrence (2016) provides an example of this in his research on racialised male body image that explores how white men exercise a sense of embodied control over their bodies by reaffirming their jurisdiction and supremacy by looking to white masculine male bodies in men's health magazines. Similarly, Swain (2021b) has attributed this social climate to the political success of former elite athletes such as Vitali Klitschko and Manny Pacquaio by theorising how the precarity associated with consumer capitalism has led the electorate to seek security in the strength projected by such sporting celebrities.

Finally, capitalism in liquid modernity has become truly global, with multinational corporations no longer being welded to the nation-state, as in industrial modernity, but instead free to conduct their operations across borders, reducing the Government's ability to regulate them in the process (Bauman, 2000). In addition, technological advancements in communications and media have allowed cultural flows of information to cross borders, permitting consumers in different countries to access media and sports from all over the globe. This point is evidenced in how sporting celebrities are no longer tied to local or national geographies but instead genuinely global in their appeal, allowing them to become global icons backed by major sports companies who invest heavily to have such personalities endorse their products in the hope of spreading their brand into new markets (Gilchrist, 2004). Furthermore, this same process of global commodification is seen in leisure cultures such as hip-hop, which has seen both the sounds and the styles associated with such music spread far beyond the inner-city conurbations of the United States where it first emerged. The cultural impact of such music has led to the forging of distinct syncretic sounds, whether within First Nation communities in Canada (Lashua, 2006) or among inner-city grime artists in the United Kingdom (Swain, 2018).

**The viewer society, synopticism and the rise of the prosumer**

To understand this change in power and its impact on methods of social control, Bauman (2000) engages with the psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud and his notion of the 'pleasure principle', which he uses to explain the shift away from the disciplinary methods associated with the 'reality principle' that provide the foundation for Foucault's writings on panopticism. Here, Bauman articulates how the change to a consumer-orientated economic system has reconceptualised the relationship between the state and its citizens entirely, from a model centred on disciplining the population around the principles of a production-based economy grounded on social classifications of work (i.e. the working class/middle class etc.). To a system characterised by excessive freedom, accenting individuals to manage their lives through the procurement of information. In other words, the security provided by the command and control systems implemented by the state in industrial capitalism has been dismantled for the most part and replaced by a consumer-orientated system that permits individuals the freedom to choose (Bauman, 2006). This shift towards a more libertarian approach at the same time highlights a dichotomy in how liquid modern consumers trade security for freedom, articulated through a mentality that promotes a message that:

Security is disempowering, disabling, breeding the resented 'dependency' and altogether constraining the human agents' freedom. What this passes over in silence is that acrobatics and rope-walking without a safety net are an art few people can master and a recipe for disaster for all the rest. Take away security, and freedom is the first casualty. (Bauman and Tester, 2001, p.52)

This insight exposes the complexity of freedom, not solely as an ontological entity, but rather as a relational concept, connecting with philosophical debates led by thinkers such as Erich Fromm (2001), who sought to expose how human beings resent the unbridled freedoms of unregulated capitalism (Swain, 2021a). Bauman (2000) explains how such anxieties mirror those experienced in early modern societies when religious rationalities disintegrated in the face of scientific exploration and elucidates how a similar feeling of fear and uncertainty is now characterising liquid modern life. This perspective, in turn, is used to narrate the psychological impact of the welfare state's scaling back on individuals, leaving them alone to decipher information and make forward-orientated consumer decisions (Bauman, 2005).

This situation resonates with the Norwegian Criminologist Thomas Mathiesen's (1997) work on 'the viewer society', an idea that explains how the disciplinary system of the panopticon has been replaced in post-industrial consumer societies by the synopticon. The synopticon represents a system of power that encourages the consumer masses to watch the actions of the few, namely celebrity-style icons who saturate the public consciousness through various mediums, such as mass and social media. Bauman (2005) uses Mathiesen's analogy to articulate how liquid modern individuals find themselves trapped within the workings of the synopticon due to the need to find role models to help interpret the vast swathes of information they have to process daily. Through this system, individuals try to alleviate the insecurity of making choices by gravitating towards role models like celebrities, lifestyle gurus and social media personalities who can advise and guide their choices. A point articulated below:

It is now your task to watch the swelling ranks of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and watch them closely and avidly, in the hope of finding something useful for yourself: an example to imitate or a word of advice about how to cope with your problems, which, like their problems, need to be coped with individually and can be coped with only individually (Bauman, 2000, p.30)

This shift in power structures has impacted the area of sport and leisure, which is no longer seen solely as a site used to discipline the population into socially desirable behaviours. But instead, as a site in social life that provides the role models through which power now pervades itself through the spectre of 'precarization' (contingency) that characterises liquid modern Society and forces members of the public to look to such role models when consuming (Bauman, 2005; Swain, 2019).

This situation connects with the idea of the prosumer, a term coined by the American futurologist Alvin Toffler (1980) to refer to those who consume and produce value, either for self-consumption or consumption by others, and in turn, receive implicit or explicit incentives from corporate organisations for doing so (Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson, 2012). Interestingly, this concept documents the position of elite athletes as consumer role models that ordinary members of the public look to when helping them choose how best to navigate their lives (Bond et al., 2020). Contemporary research in this area by Hylton and Lawrence (2015) has sought to expose the impact of celebrity culture on the identity formation of white men by analysing how such consumers conceptualise body image by looking to examples in the form of the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo. An insight that discloses how the synoptic method of watching those in the public eye plays a pivotal role in helping to construct a sense of personal style and body image. In other areas of leisure, this is seen most notably in the form of YouTube influencers and lifestyle bloggers who use social media to provide advice to their followers on a whole range of personal issues, from health and fitness to tourism and travel (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Swain, 2017a).

**Adiaphorization: Exclusionary power and social justice**

This transformation in power structures raises questions regarding how movements seeking to enact social justice can disrupt such a system. At the centre of this move to counteract calls for increasing collectivism is the concept of adiaphorization, a term used to describe the process whereby moral questions regarding the role of social institutions in the well-being of citizens are ignored in favour of individual consumer practices (Bauman, 2008). Under this system, the disadvantaged or 'flawed consumers' of liquid modern societies, a term used to incorporate the remnants of the working class, women, people with (dis)abilities or migrant communities, find the blame for their situation placed firmly onto themselves. This mindset conforms to the neoliberal doctrine of individualisation centred on consuming and personal responsibility, thereby causing the inequalities and high levels of destitution seen in contemporary Society to be attributed to personal shortcomings in managing individual agency, as opposed to structural disparities in resource allocation and the endemic poverty this facilitates (Bauman, 2000; Swain, 2021a). The use of this systemic form of exclusionary power exposes how the underrepresentation of marginalised groups in sport and leisure and the health disparities that emerge from such exclusion (obesity and mental health) is linked to the inability of individuals to select "the right commodities" (Bauman, 2006, p.86) to consume. Subsequently, a narrative has emerged that seeks to blame bad individual decision-making rather than the dismantling of social welfare programmes designed to prevent such injustices from occurring.

This reconceptualisation of whom to blame for inequality and personal suffering exposes how synoptic power maintains its control by decentralising accountability away from political elites by making such issues an individual rather than a societal matter (Bowling and Westenra, 2020). An example of this subversion of institutional responsibility and hyper-individualism can be seen in the academic literature on doping in sports, whereby the blame for athletes using performance-enhancing drugs is placed firmly at the door of the athletes themselves as opposed to the hyper-commercialised social structures influencing the cultural sphere of sport (Houlihan, 2016). This individualised perspective is evidenced in the proliferation of psychological explanations used to explain doping, whether that be through the language of burnout, anxiety, or perfectionism, all of which promote individualised causes and solutions that overlook, or are not aware of, broader social, economic and political forces (Waddington, 2005). The problem with this approach is that the social structures that impact the propensity of athletes to dope, such as sports offering a way out of poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, or the increased commercialisation of sport that makes an athlete's success fund entire sports science teams, promoters and marketing agencies, become overlooked. Subsequently, the public never questions how modern sports' commercialised and professionalised dynamics have led to a proliferation in doping, whether by enticing a poor athlete to take a steroid to enhance their performance in the hope of gaining a sponsor and a way out of the ghetto. Or a nutritionist who might prescribe a banned substance to an athlete in the hope of them winning a competition and frequenting their services again (Spracklen, 2014). Such examples highlight the condition of adiaphorization that haunts liquid modern societies by diverting questions of inequality and injustice away from social structures and instead onto the individual.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provides insight into the relationship between power and social justice through the lens of sport and leisure. First, the chapter has sought to explore the systemic workings of power as a form of authority within industrial modernity, unpacking research that has positioned sport and leisure as a mechanism of disciplinary power built around panoptic surveillance. From here, the chapter introduced a more nuanced perspective of power that has gained traction within the writings of the late Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman who wrote about an evolution in the cultural landscape of modernity, connecting contemporary debates on social control to ideas regarding precarity, excessive individualism and synopticism. This line of investigation has sought to expose how increased levels of individualisation and celebrity culture instrumentalise consumer solutions to members of the polis looking to alleviate the uncertainty they experience in their daily lives. The dynamics expose how sport and leisure no longer solely represent a site of disciplinary control whereby the few watch the actions of the many (panopticism) but rather as a commercialised arena in which the many now watch the actions of the few (synopticism). The concepts introduced here are designed to invoke debate and get scholars thinking about how power can be understood differently and how societal transformations can lead to new systems of power emerging. Given the current Covid-19 pandemic and the impending environmental crisis affecting countries all around the globe, the need to understand how new methods of social control emerge from societal changes has never been more needed.

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1. United Negro Improvement Association – A large Pan-African political movement that sought the strengthening of social, economic, and cultural ties between black communities in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The exact date referring to the start of ‘The Enlightenment’ is debated, however, there is a consensus that it took place within the mid-eighteenth century. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Compulsory Competitive Tendering - An initiative whereby local authorities were forced to open in-house services, such as leisure and sport services, to private competition in the 1980s to cut costs and improve value for money. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)