

Compare and contrast Goffman's and Foucault's explanations of how social order is maintained

[Transportation](#), [Road](#)



Social order is the way individuals fit together with others and things around them (E. Silva, 2009, page 311), it's what keeps society running smoothly. Order is the implicit (unwritten and unspoken) and explicit (laws, written and spoken) rules that control society's behaviour and make individuals courteous and respectful to one another. These rules usually go unnoticed and it is only when something happens that is against the norm (earthquake, car accident, and mugging, among other examples) that people begin to question the rules that keep them in order.

Both Goffman and Foucault made attempts to explain how order is made and remade. Goffman used a micro approach to explaining order; that is, he concentrated on the individual and patterns of everyday interactions while Foucault used a macro approach, looking at wider society, genealogy and power to explain order. There are many similarities and differences between their approaches. Goffman's work on interactional order argued that individuals are performers, who act, adopt a mask or follow the norm in their everyday lives (S. Taylor, 2009, page 172).

He argued that order is made and remade through every day interactions and that the order is created by repetition and improvisation. He believes that social change comes about due to actions being built and rebuilt (E. Silva, 2009, page 317). Goffman examined rituals and interactions in everyday lives and saw how tact and trust were shown through the use of actions, gestures and language between strangers. Strangers exchange a number of codes of civil indifference through implicit contracts which both allow acknowledgement and protection.

However, order breaks down when these codes are misinterpreted or misread and on some occasions punishment follows. First impressions are important and Goffman believes that individuals 'put on a show' to try and manage the impression they are giving which helps us to read the situation and categorise people to make a sense of order. Foucault however, looked at discourse (a set of shared ideas used to view the functions of society) and how order is controlled by knowledge and power.

Foucault looked at how the knowledge of order comes about (E. Silva, 2009, page 319). He argued that the authority to intervene is allocated to certain individuals (or institutions) and is instigated through practices of law, punishment and education and that different institutions (school, family, workplace for example) have different powers of intervention to regulate behaviour and order. Discourses help shape society towards popular attitudes and allow people to know if they are 'normal' by behaving in a certain way.

Foucault disputes Goffman's idea that the individual is self-aware, coherent and in control, he believes that individuals have very little control and that we behave according to knowledge gained through socialisation that we 'pick up' as we age. Foucault sees individuals as docile and passive who cooperate in subordination. Foucault believes in a disciplinary society dominated by professionals (experts) who use discourse based on knowledge and power to make and remake social order. Foucault believes there are three different types of power involved in making social order.

Sovereign power (power of society's ruling authority; monarchy, state or political authority) exercises power through the ability to visibly punish wrong-doers. The second form of power is surveillance, where information is gathered and held to keep people in line, to control their behaviour and make them conform to social order. People understand they are under constant surveillance and begin to adjust their behaviour to regulate conduct to be 'normal'. The third form of power is self-directing and active. This is when individuals believe they are unique and as a result of internalised discipline they order themselves (E.

Silva, 2009, pages 321-322). A good example of social order in process is road traffic and road design. The Buchanan Report (Ministry of Transport, 1963) was commissioned to produce a new design for space and roads in the towns around the UK. It was produced in response to the rising number of traffic in towns and residential areas and was about the needs of individuals to live with motor vehicles (E. Silva, 2009, page 327). Buchanan used the argument of scientific rationality (the universally accepted standards that are understood by knowledge), claiming that '...

Guesswork and intuition can be largely eliminated; given the necessary information... ' (Buchanan cited in E. Silva, 2009, page 329). Buchanan concluded that traffic and pedestrians need to be segregated and bound by rules through visible displays (such as signs, speed humps and so on). Buchanan's report is an example of the modernist approach, where space is controlled by rules, prohibitions and orders requiring motorists to adapt to

known systems of motoring. Buchanan uses scientific rationality to explain how road users know the rules of the road.

He believes that through visible signs and knowledge people learn how to use the road orderly and safely. Foucault claims that people learn order through the knowledge of discourse. He believes that individuals are docile and subordinate and follow rules that have been taught through power by 'experts'. The Buchanan report shows individual intuition has been eliminated; Foucault also believes that individuals are not in control of their own destinies (E. Silva, 2009, page 321). In contrast to the Buchanan report and Foucault's order of things approach, Monderman's thesis allows for individual thought and awareness.

Monderman, after years of segregation between vehicles and pedestrians suggested a theory of 'shared-space' for road and path users. Starting in the Netherlands in the early 80s, Monderman carried out experiments on road design to show that by creating areas where pedestrians, vehicles and cyclists share the same space to move around, road safety can be improved and awareness of motorists can be increased. Monderman believed people moved round in 'zombie-like' states while driving on traditional road designs (segregation of motorists and pedestrians) and are taught to blindly follow instructions and not to think for themselves.

He believes this is when accidents occur (order is disrupted) (Monderman cited in E. Silva, 2009, 334-335). In his experiment in the town of Oudeshaske, Netherlands, he removed all road signs, barriers, etc and

created an even surface with no road or path markings. He replaced these with trees, flowers and in some areas even fountains to help control behaviour on the roads by psychologically calming traffic by reducing speed and making motorists and pedestrians alike more aware of others around them.

Both motorists and pedestrians have to make eye contact before moving/crossing thus making them responsible and aware of their own behaviour. Monderman's flexible approach of the shared-space scheme, allow for individuals to act of their own accord and to make their own decisions on social order. This is similar to Goffman's interactional order, where he believes everyday interactions are responsible for making social order. Monderman believes there is a redistribution of expertise, with individuals becoming experts in road safety and their abilities to negotiate shared space (e.

Silva, 2009, page 341) and Goffman also believes that individual performers are responsible for creating social change to produce order. In his work, Goffman used participant observation and ethnography to support his theory. By using these methods he studied current issues to find invisible social order to capture the understanding and manifestation of how society is ordered. Foucault however, studied historical documents to question familiarities in the present and found that through processes of social development, social order was created (E. Silva, 2009, page 323).

Their methods of investigation differ and this can also have an effect on outcomes. Participant observation can be biased. However, searching historical evidence can only be as reliable as the record keepers at the time. Overall, both Goffman and Foucault have produced theories on how social order is created and maintained, they both agree that society is an integration of fragments being ordered differently, for Goffman these are individual interactions and Foucault believes they are discourses organised by knowledge and power (E. Silva, 2009, page 323).

By looking at the present and the individual, Goffman fails to allow for historical influences to factor in to how order is made, Foucault however, allows for historical influences, but fails to allow for the impact of individual personality in the creation of social order. Foucault's macro theory looks at wider society to explain how social order is formed, this can be beneficial because he looks at historical evidence to see how present social order is formed. Goffman's micro theory looks at smaller everyday actions and interactions and shows how individuals are responsible (to some extent) for creating social order.