

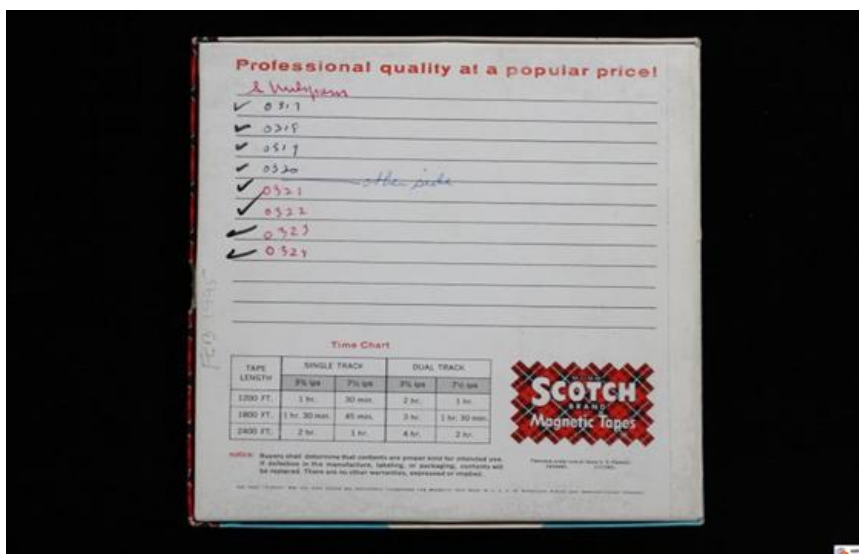
## Obedience to Authority in the Archive

Stanley Milgram, whose papers are held in Manuscripts and Archives, conducted the Obedience to Authority experiments while he was an assistant professor at Yale University from 1961 to 1963. Milgram found that most ordinary people obeyed instructions to give what they believed to be potentially fatal shocks to innocent victims when told to do so by an authority figure. His 1963 article[i] on the initial findings and a subsequent book, *Obedience to Authority and Experimental View* (1974), and film, *Obedience* (1969), catapulted Milgram to celebrity status and made his findings and the experiments themselves the focus of intense ethical debates.[ii] Fifty years later the debates continues.

The Yale University Library acquired the Stanley Milgram Papers from Alexandra Milgram, his widow, in July 1985, less than a year after Milgram's death. Requests for access started coming in soon after. The collection remained closed to research for several years until processed by archivist Diane Kaplan. In addition to the correspondence, writings, subject files, and teaching files often found in the papers of academics, the collection also contains the data files for Milgram's experiments, including administrative records, notebooks, files on experimental subjects, and audio recordings of experimental sessions, debriefing sessions, and post-experiment interviews.



Tape of Obedience to Authority experimental sessions, Condition 3. Stanley Milgram Papers (MS 1406).



Of particular note are the data files for the Obedience studies. The material is the most widely studied portion of the collection, despite the 75 year restriction (unless the subjects' names are redacted from the files) and a

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requirement that researchers pay to have the original reel-to-reel audio recordings reformatted if they want to listen to them. This last requirement was necessary to preserve the originals, and once a tape had been reformatted and redacted it is made available to other researchers at no cost. Over the last 20 years, researchers have funded the reformatting and redaction of approximately half the recordings. Manuscripts and Archives has just embarked on a two year project to digitize and redact the remaining audiotapes with funding from the University of Virginia. Newly available recordings will be described in the [Guide to the Stanley Milgram Papers](#) [1].

I recently had the opportunity to attend a conference of scholars from around the world whose research focuses on the Obedience experiments. The 2013 [Obedience to Authority Conference](#) [2] held in early August in beautiful Bracebridge, Ontario. The conference brought together scholars and students in a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, ethic, business, and law to discuss the experiments and their continued significance. I was struck by the fact that interest in Milgram and the experiments is still very high as demonstrated by the Bracebridge conference, another to be held at the Yale Law School in October, as well as the number of citations in the literature even today. Two works, *The Man Who Shocked the World: The Life and Legacy of Stanley Milgram* by Thomas Blass (2004) and most recently *Behind the Shock Machine: the Untold Story of the Notorious Milgram Psychology Experiments* by Gina Perry (2013) further attest to the staying power of the experiments in the collective consciousness. The story most often told is the story Milgram himself promoted. However, as researchers such as Perry delve deeper into the archives, a more rich and nuanced picture of the experiments and the man behind them is emerging.

[i] Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1963)

[ii] Arthur G. Miller, *The Obedience experiments: A Case Study of Controversy in Social Science* (1986)

**External link:** <http://mssa.common.yale.edu/2013/09/05/obedience-to-authority-in-the-archive/?u...> [3]

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### Links

[1] <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1406>

[2] <http://www.obediencetoauthority.com/>

[3] [http://mssa.common.yale.edu/2013/09/05/obedience-to-authority-in-the-archive/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=obedience-to-authority-in-the-archive](http://mssa.common.yale.edu/2013/09/05/obedience-to-authority-in-the-archive/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=obedience-to-authority-in-the-archive)