

“I was just
following
orders.”

The “defence” of Adolf Eichmann, who had planned the extermination of European Jews, when he was on trial for his atrocious crimes

**Stanley
Milgram
wanted to
determine the
extent to
which...**



Stanley Milgram

**...people
would follow
the orders of
perceived
authority
figures.**



Stanley Milgram

The Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg after the Second World War said that they were just doing what they were told. Their defence was obedience to their superiors.

**But hey, they were
Nazis.**

Americans would never
behave like that.

Or would they?

Milgram was determined
to find out.

Milgram's Obedience Study (1963)

“monumental
contribution to
science”



“dangerous,
dehumanizing
and unethical
research”

Two extreme opinions - where do you stand?

Obedience

Definition:

Performing a behaviour in response to an order given by someone in a position of power or authority



Do it!



OK, OK...

Imagine that you are in Milgram's Experiment...



Yale is your basic prestigious institution. You know, turrets, towers, old brick, green lawns. Wow, you think.

- You volunteer to be part of a study on learning and punishment.
- You report to Yale University, where the experiment is taking place.

Milgram's experiment



- You are greeted by an authoritative-looking man in a grey lab coat.

You imagine with a kind of awe that such a man would never suggest anything illegal, immoral or shabby.

Power symbol

Hey, I get to be the teacher.

Hey, I get to be the learner.



In what appears to be a random occurrence,...

...you and your fellow participant are assigned roles.

TEACHER
REAL PARTICIPANT

LEARNER
FAKE PARTICIPANT

In reality, the
actual participant
is always selected
to be the teacher.

PARTICIPANT



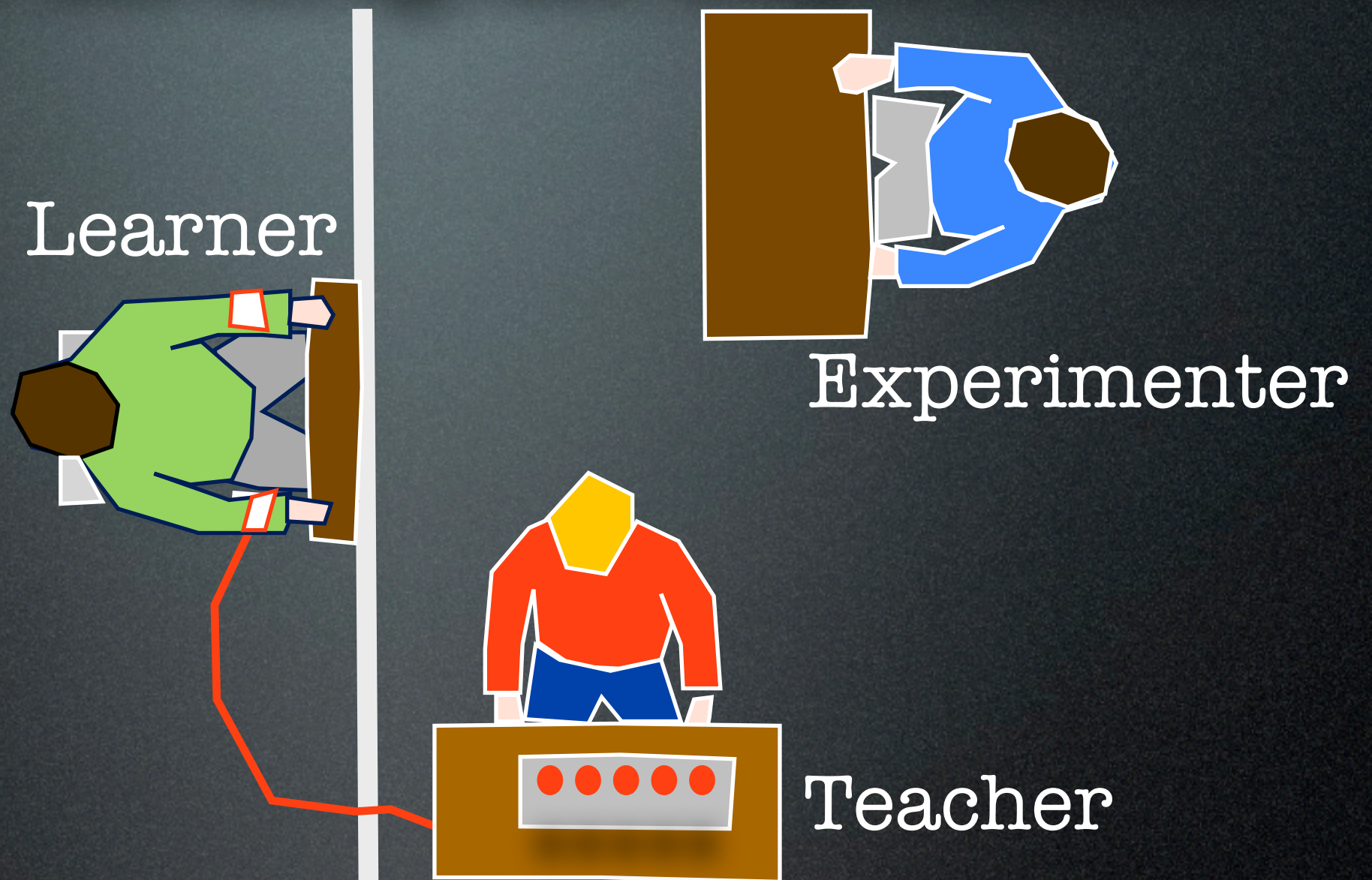
The learner is an
actor and a
stooge of the
experimenter.

ACCOMPLICE
or
CONFEDERATE

Setup of the Milgram Experiment

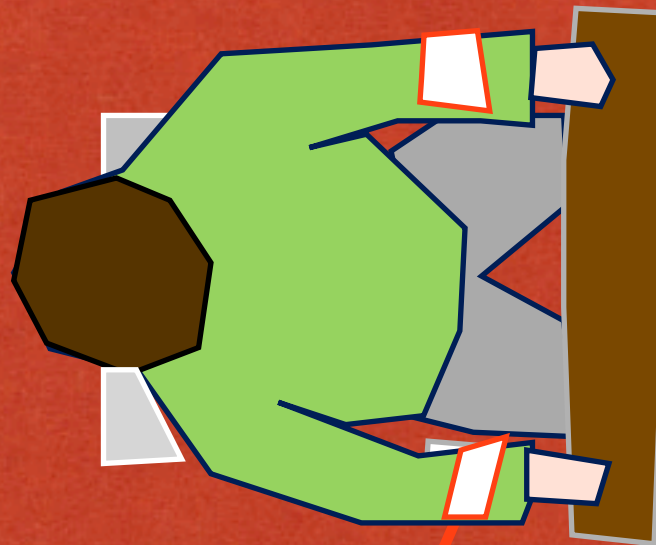
The **learner** is seated in another room.

Electrodes are attached to his hands in your presence.



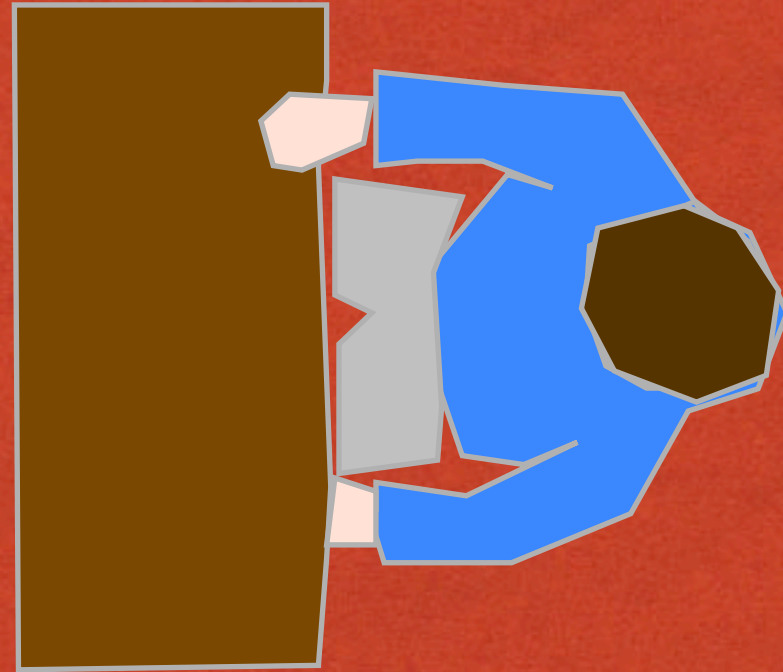
You, the **real participant**, are asked to “punish” the learner with increasingly painful electric shocks whenever he makes a mistake.

Learner

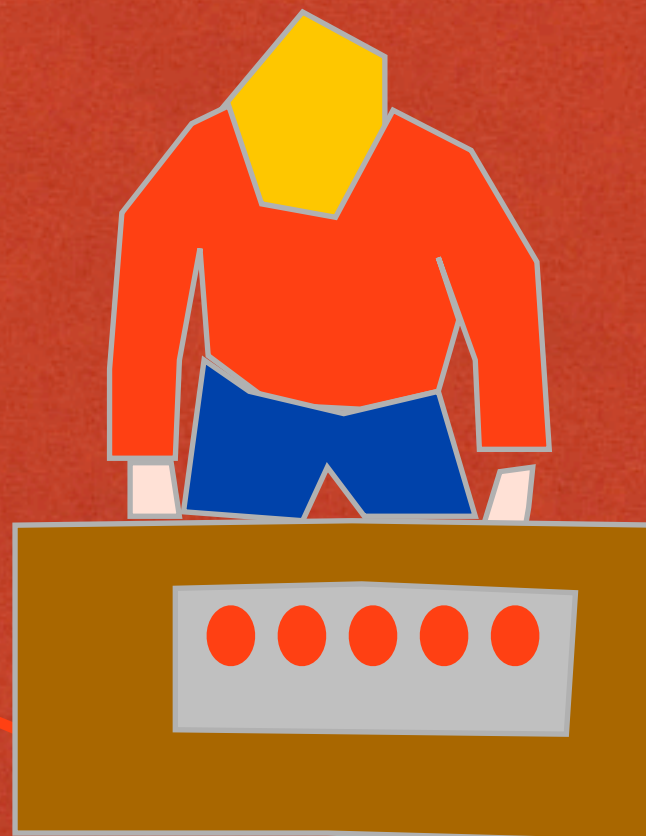


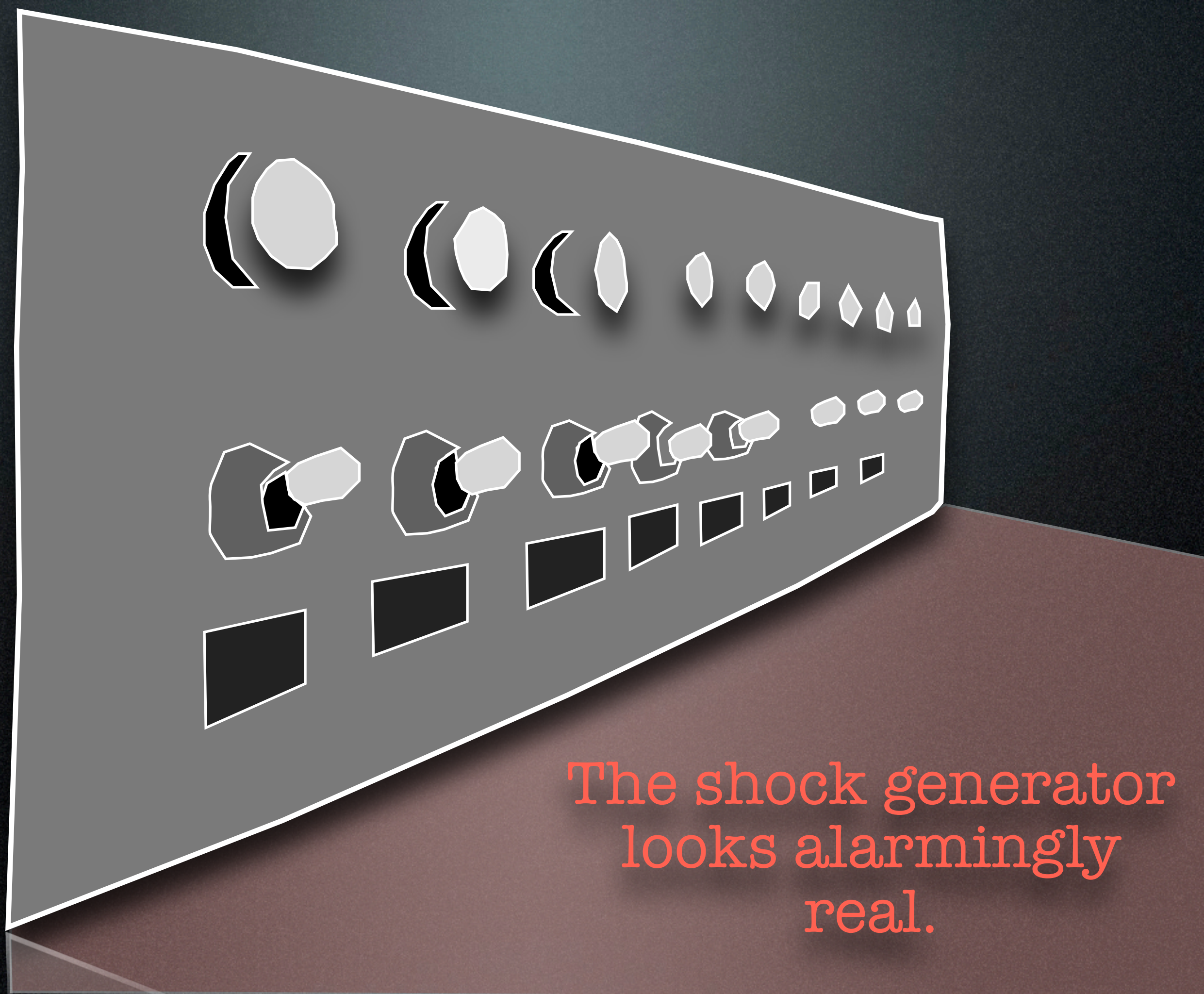
Experimenter

The experimenter informs you that the shocks will be painful but will cause no tissue damage.



Teacher



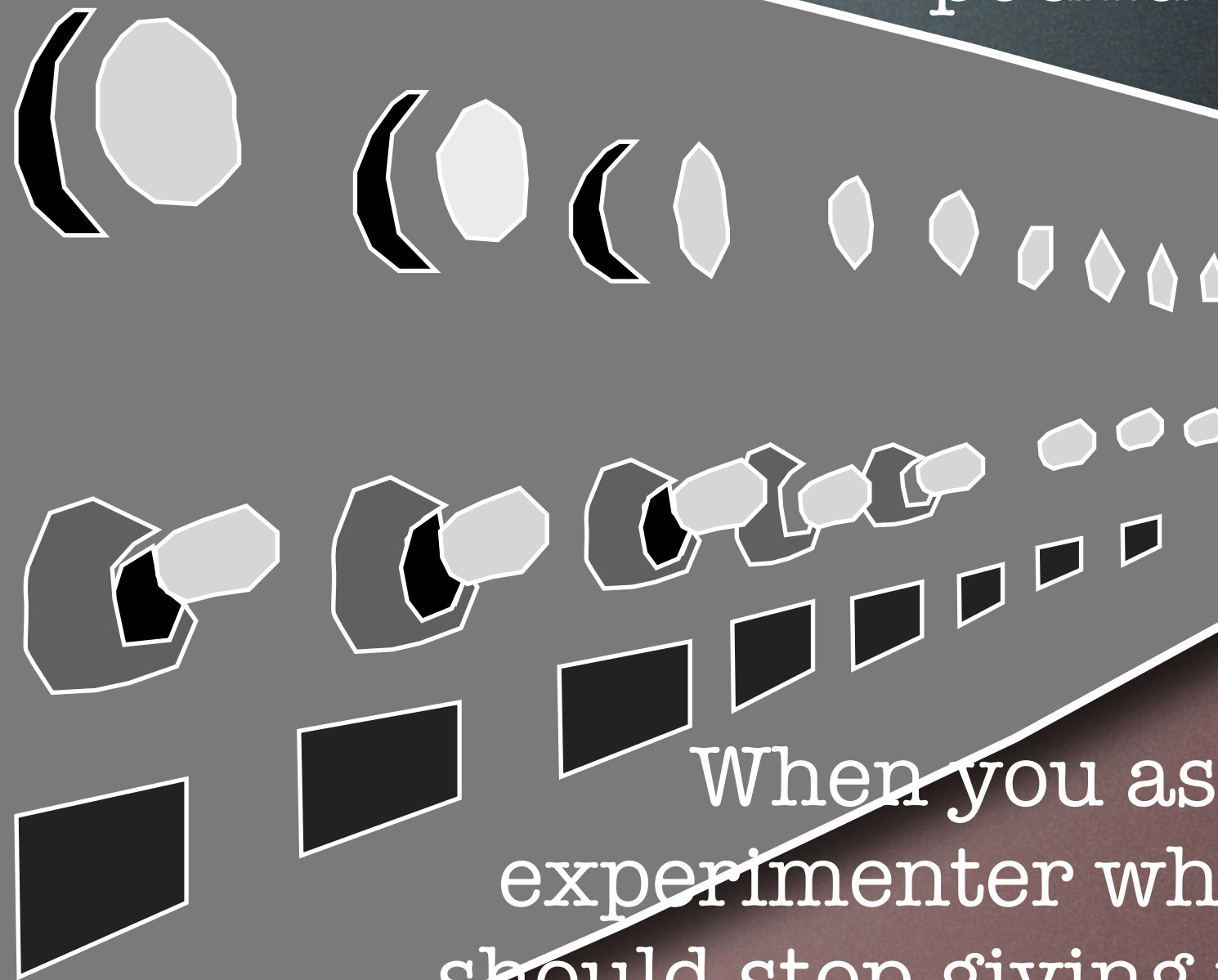


The shock generator
looks alarmingly
real.



It has 30 switches that deliver shocks from 15 shocks to 450 volts. At the high end, the generator is labelled: "Danger: severe shock".

At 300 volts, the learner begins to pound on the wall.



When you ask the experimenter whether you should stop giving the learner shocks, he tells you firmly,

“It is absolutely essential that you continue.”

What would you
do?

What happened
in the actual
experiment?

In the actual experiment...

the participants
groaned,
sweated, begged
to be allowed to
stop, stuttered,
trembled and bit
their lips,...

but they still obeyed.



65%
obeyed
right up
until the
450 volt
level.



Assumptions and Reality

- **0.12%** Psychiatrists predicted that 0.12% of participants would obey to the 450 volt level.
- **2%** The general public predicted that 2% would obey.
- **65%** of actual participants obeyed to the 450 volt level



Milgram's Reactions

Milgram was **aghast**. He had never expected to obtain these results.

He set out to identify the factors that would **reduce** this dangerous tendency to obey...



Milgram's Comments on **Obedience**

“The essence of obedience is that a person comes to view himself as the instrument for carrying out another person's wishes, and he therefore no longer regards himself as responsible for his actions.”

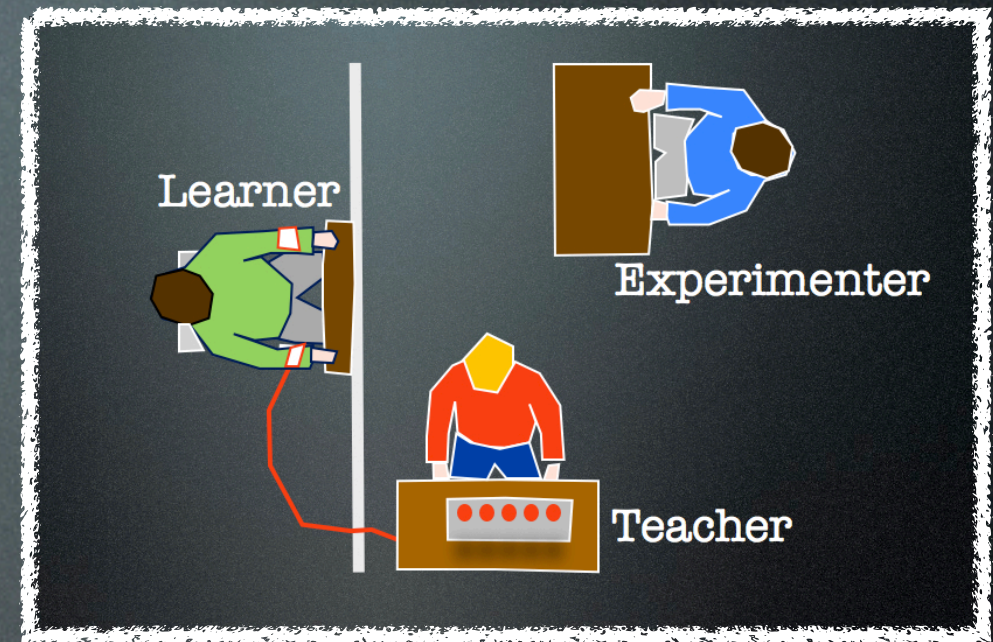
Conclusion

Milgram concluded that if the situational pressures and circumstances are right, anyone might obey orders to inflict harm on innocent strangers.



Final Comments

The experiment has been replicated many times.

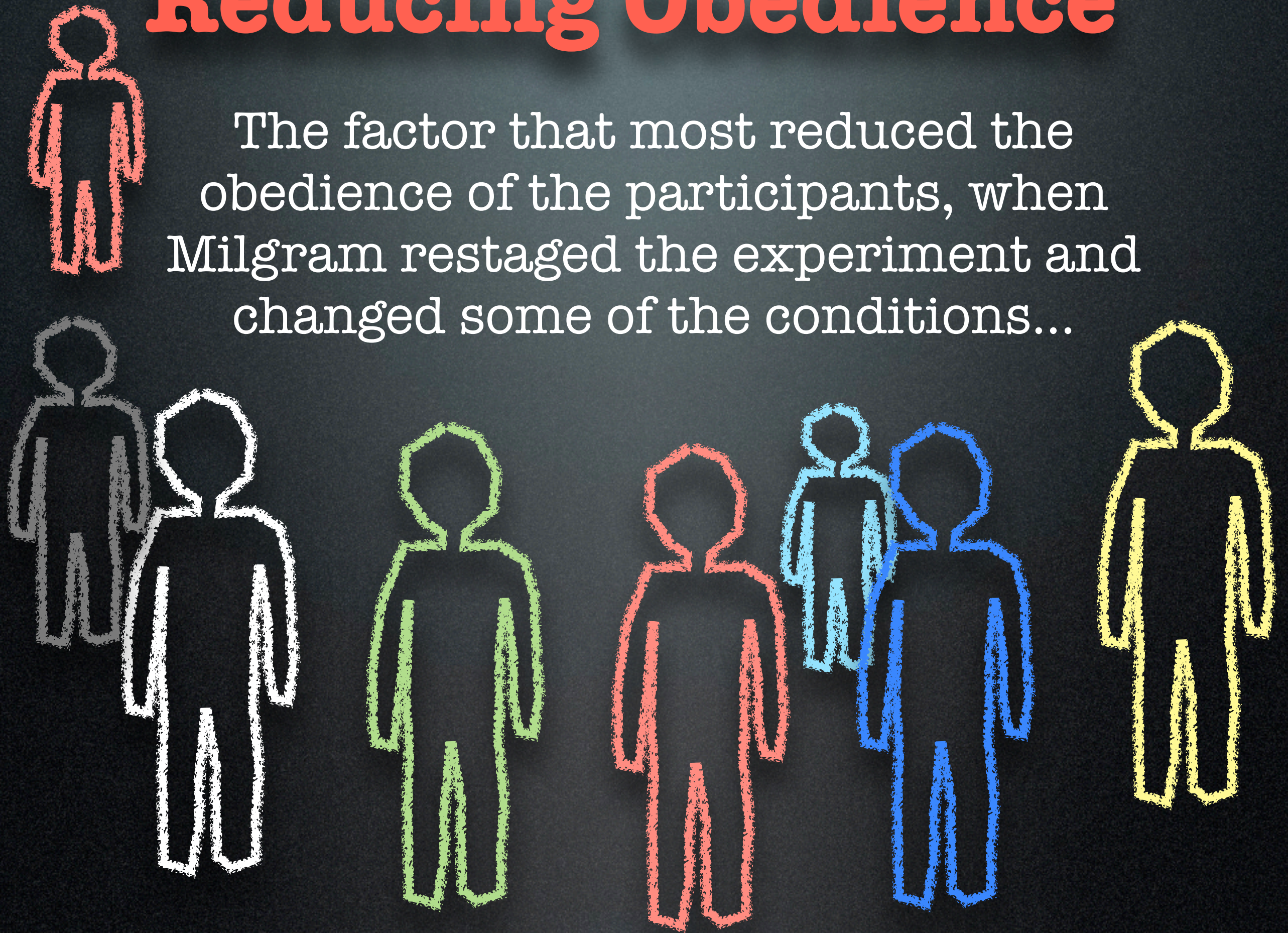


The results are distressing and disheartening, but perhaps they explain to some degree...

- why such dreadful atrocities occur during wars and invasions
- why racism can lead to genocide
- why people are sometimes coerced into acting against their morals and values

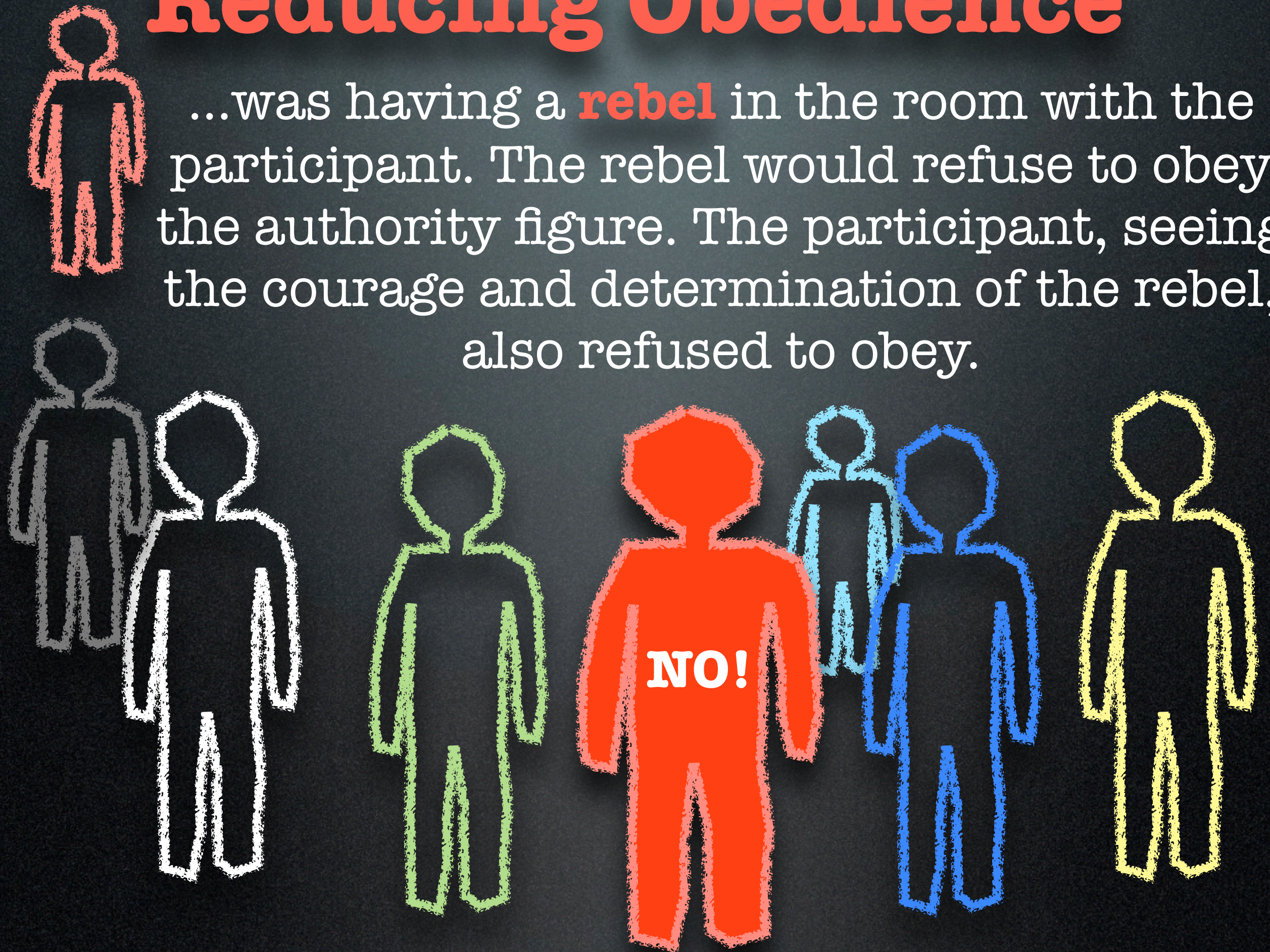
Reducing Obedience

The factor that most reduced the obedience of the participants, when Milgram restaged the experiment and changed some of the conditions...



Reducing Obedience

...was having a **rebel** in the room with the participant. The rebel would refuse to obey the authority figure. The participant, seeing the courage and determination of the rebel, also refused to obey.



The effect of the rebel...

If there'd been more rebels, there might have been fewer atrocities in the history of humanity.



Will you be a rebel?

I hope so.

