When the Harvard behavioural psychologist, B.F. Skinner, was a graduate student at Indiana University (USA), he used pigeons as research subjects. They were cheap, did not require research permission forms, and worked hard if you treated them right.

One class with Professor Skinner was all I needed to know that I wasn’t interested in data about pigeons. Fortunately, my twin brother (Ralph Kirkland Gable) was also a graduate student, and after watching the movie *Wes Side Story*, he had the idea that the life of the protagonist might have been saved had there been a way to warn him of the danger of a gang fight. ‘How about trying to set up a communication/ monitoring system with juvenile delinquents?’ he asked. It didn’t take long to realise that juvenile and young adult offenders would be perfect research subjects: they are cheap, do not require research permission forms, and will work hard if you treat them right. Shortly after my brother had his inspiration, he met an electronic engineer (William Sprach Hunt) at a cocktail party. Thus, his idea of tagging (electronic monitoring) started to take physical shape.

The first project location was a cozy, hallowed out space with stone walls in the basement of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The small room had thick carpet and some coloured lights, a desk, and a few chairs. It had the feeling of a ‘nest’. The minister of this very liberal church was also the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School. An antenna was installed on the steeple of the church for the tagging system. Most of the seriously delinquent youths enjoyed coming for interviews because they carried the equipment. Within the first several days, participants either tended to adjust to the system or reject it.

Generally, the lab became a community attraction among wayward youth and young adults. First, there was the high-tech equipment. For example, the control panel of the missile tracking equipment had three buttons ‘Search’, ‘Track’, and ‘Destroy’. The youths particularly enjoyed pressing ‘Destroy’ when someone was being monitored. (The ‘Destroy’ button had been humanely disabled by the experimenters.) Second, the participants were being paid by the hour for interviews which gave them social status as ‘employees’. Most of the interviews were conducted in a confidential, supportive, non-directive manner by psychology and theology graduate students. Third, bonuses of various types (e.g. cash, food, sports tickets) were given to participants for meaningful interviews and pro-social behaviour (e.g. attending classes, going to work, being sober). The bonuses were given in accord with operant conditioning principles. Fourth, the participants’ ankle bands were programmed to work only on an 8-hour interval schedule. In brief, the lab was a place of fun, novelty, and competition.

Because participants could leave the project without legal consequence, one measure of the power of the reinforcement contingencies of 24-hour tagging was the number of days that they carried the equipment. Within the first several days, participants either tended to adjust to the system or reject it. About half of the participants returned the equipment after five days. The equipment was heavy and cumbersome, and a source of potential embarrassment among moderate-risk offenders. Some participants did not like the idea of carrying a ‘tether’ and turned homes into prisons instead of turning homes into prisons instead of

Favourable reactions resulted in a national magazine article, a book contract, and a movie script play. Negative reactions were similarly vigorous. An early manuscript, submitted by my brother to the U.S. government publication, Federal Probation, was returned with a note from the editor that read, in part: ‘We don’t want material of this type in our office’. Inaccurate reporting by a few journalists resulted in a myth, still circulating on the Web, that tagging was used to monitor a network of inexpensive transceivers in a neighborhood or city sector. Location-specific tagging can allow real-time positive reinforcement of pro-social behaviour along a digital pathway.

I do not regret the naive enthusiasm of our early experiments. I do regret that so much of contemporary tagging has turned homes into prisons instead of making public spaces into areas of positive excitement.

In 1987, Professor Marc Renzema of Kutztown University in Pennsylvania (USA) initiated the professional newsletter (now a journal) *Offender Monitoring*. In his first editorial, he concluded that electronic monitoring of offenders was ‘an oddity with great potential’. It still is.

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