

WHY
DO THEY
DO IT?

HENRY EARL



Henry Earl is, according to all available sources, the most arrested individual on record, at least in recent times. Hailing from the area of Lexington, Kentucky (Fayette County), Earl was born in 1949 and has since done quite an impressive job of getting himself arrested, especially after he turned 21. Specifically, Earl is on record for being arrested well over 1,300 times since 1970. Although the actual number is disputed, and likely growing every month, recent official reports from the local jurisdictions show that Earl has been arrested for more than 1,352 offenses and has spent more than 15 years in jail. Despite being jailed for much of his life, Earl appears to make up for lost time when he is not incarcerated, as the data show.

Although many of his arrests were for public intoxication, he also had a number of more serious charges, including third-degree trespassing, and various charges of disorderly conduct. Readers are probably wondering how this man could still be on the streets, but the most likely explanation is that virtually all his arrests were for nonviolent, nontheft, and nondrug (except alcohol) violations, which tend not to get much jail time. However, one would think that after the first hundred arrests, not to mention the first thousand, the judges would try to put this public nuisance away for a long time. Apparently, that is not the case. Earl's last reported arrest was in November 2013, so he is seemingly still active and perhaps trying to achieve a record of arrests that may be hard for anyone to beat.

This goes to show a couple of things that relate to this chapter. First, if someone is highly motivated to commit crime, he or she can easily find ways to do so. After all, anyone can simply leave the house and commit numerous felonies against neighbors, people driving by on the street, and so forth—not to mention what that person is capable of outside of his or her neighborhood. Second, there is virtually no way to deter or stop a person from committing



United States Department of Justice.

Henry Earl, arrested more than 1,300 times, is widely considered the most arrested individual in U.S. history.

a crime he or she is highly motivated to commit, especially if that person has nothing to lose. Obviously, Earl has nothing at stake in terms of conventional society.

This case is notable in the context of developmental/life-course criminology. Although a highly extreme case study, it reveals that normal development, such as key transitions in life, as noted by Sampson and Laub's theory, clearly don't apply in this case. Some individuals have an extremely high predisposition to offend, an even higher disposition than Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory of low self-control may have imagined possible. Regardless, this amazingly strong disposition toward such antisocial behavior is likely due to major failures in all areas of development throughout Earl's life course, beginning with his genetics, early development, and adolescence.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Can you apply the life-course persistent label from Moffitt's theory to Henry Earl?
2. Can you think of any intervention or policy that would help Mr. Earl reduce his consistent arrests