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0521481120 - Lifelines and Risks: Pathways of Youth in Our Time

Robert B. Cairns and Beverley D. Cairns

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## Foreword

Fifteen years ago we gambled that we could plot the course of social development of individuals from childhood to maturity. Our goal was to identify some lifelines that could be made available to vulnerable youth. We believe that developmental investigation is the backbone for behavioral study; it yields information on the pathways of life that can be obtained in no other way.

We also feel that behavioral research and social policy should be mutually supportive. To this end, we hope to make our findings accessible to an informed public. On this score, we think that the most important ideas can be clearly stated, and the simplest statistics are more often than not the most robust.

Several technical reports of our work have appeared, or are due to appear, in archival journals. This means that the methods and analyses have already passed the filters of peer review which evaluate rigor and reliability. One happy side of this investment in technical articles is that we are free to be less technical in this book. We have tried to keep the quantitative presentation to a minimum, although we slip from time to time. Colleagues should consult the technical reports for critical details. A companion volume, *Methods and Measures for Longitudinal Research* provides detailed information on the psychometric properties of the measures and how to use them.

Our research vision has remained constant through the years. The work is ongoing, now funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Earlier we received support from the National Science Foundation, the W. T. Grant Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. The Spencer Foundation has been our own lifeline at critical times. Marion Faldet deserves our special thanks. When we began, few federal or private foundations in the United States wanted to

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commit funding for more than two or three years, much less the span of a generation. The lack of continuous support required us to convince critical peers every two or three years that the work was worthy. That helped keep us focused. Each of these grants is a public trust and we are grateful for the confidence that they represent.

This book represents the efforts of a dedicated team. Besides ourselves, key members over the years have been Tamara Ladd, Holly Neckerman, Lynda Ferguson, Lori Musick, Becky Premock, Man-Chi Leung, Adrienne Himmelberg, Lynne Marschke, Kate Raiford, Lisa Buchanan, Louis Gariépy, Scott Gest, Shane Greene, Laura Sadowski, and Gary Peterson. Each one made distinctive and important contributions to the research, including the preparation of this volume. Not only was there a melding of disciplines – psychology, social work, education, internal medicine, psychiatry – there was a unity of purpose. At earlier stages, Jane Perrin and Kathryn Hood were especially helpful.

Our professional colleagues have been invaluable. David Magnusson has been an inspiration and a friend, providing personal and intellectual support over the past ten years. Beyond advice, he has opened to us the raw data files of his longitudinal project in Stockholm, and helped us understand its relation to our own data. Urie Bronfenbrenner and Norman Garnezy deserve our appreciation for their insights into the discipline and personally for their wise counsel and support. We thank Harry Yamaguchi for criticizing an early version of the manuscript and for urging us to complete the task in ways that would enhance the science. Tokio Honda, Carlos Santoyo, and Keith and Sheila Holly spent their sabbaticals in our laboratory. Their research contributions and critical comments on earlier drafts of this volume were invaluable.

The title of this book was suggested by British ethologist John Macintosh on a stroll down Franklin Street in Chapel Hill several years ago. John suggested “The Life Line”, a title that seemed well suited for the stories of the lives of 695 persons from childhood through adolescence.

The volume has taken seven years to write. The central ideas have remained, though the data have grown richer. Editor Farrell Burnett deserves credit for holding us to the task and helping us through the final stages of preparation, review, and publication. This first volume is concerned with vulnerability and resilience in development. Succeeding volumes will focus on successful adaptation, families, and the multiple roles of social networks.

The help and cooperation that we have received from teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents, probation officers, judges, and county clerks across the country cannot be overestimated. A special kind of assistance came our way when Dwayne Powell, the nationally

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syndicated editorial cartoonist for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, donated an original drawing to this study to become the logo and to provide identity for the subjects. It is still uniquely theirs and continues to generate pride in participation. Our thanks to Jan Powell in helping with special needs.

Ultimately, however, the success of this work reflects the willingness of children, adolescents, and young adults, along with their parents, friends and spouses, to open the windows of their lives to us. We began by giving them small gifts, and by the end, it came full circle; they have begun to give us small gifts. The real gift was their cooperation and trust. It is to them that this volume is dedicated.

Beverley D. Cairns  
Robert B. Cairns  
Chapel Hill

While the incidents and cases described in this book are based on studies of real persons, the names, locations and other biographical details about the participants have been changed to preserve their privacy and anonymity.