Center for the Demography of Health and Aging
University of Wisconsin-Madison
with support from the National Institute on Aging since 1991
Why the WLS is So Special

- The longest running cohort longitudinal study in the United States.
- The breadth and depth of the data
- SAMPLE RETENTION!!!!!!
- It’s more generalizable than you’d think.
- A select sample can be a ‘good’ sample.
- ANY truly longitudinal study (from birth to death) will face these issues.
The “Happy Days” cohort
The “Happy Days” Cohort
Sample Selection

- One Out of Three
- Original Sample Size
  = 10,317
relational structure of data in the WLS
Surveys

- 1957 (10,317)
- 1964 (short mail survey of parents, 87%)
- 1975 (telephone, 89% response rate)
- 1977 (2000 randomly selected siblings, telephone, 80%)
- 1992-4 (telephone/mail; 85%/80% response rates for graduates/siblings)
- 2004-6 (telephone/mail; 86%/89%)
- 2010 (in person and mail)
Data Domains: Education

- Complete Educational Attainment History (1957-2010)
- Classes in high school, perception of parents and teachers, aspirations, aspirations of friends (1957)
- Administrative data: Henmon Nelson IQ scores, Class rank, elementary through high school resources
Data Domains: Employment

- Employment aspirations (1957-1992)
- Jobs and job characteristics (1957-2010)
- Earnings (1975-2010)
Data Domains: Social

- Attractiveness, school activities (1957)
- Involvement with organizations (1975-2010)
- Time spent with family/friends and quality of relationships (1975-2010)
- Religious affiliation and participation (1975-2010)
- Caregiving (1992-2010)
Data Domains: Family

- Parental background (1957)
- Marriage plans (1957)
- Full marital history, marital quality, many details about spouse, including interviews in 2003 (1975-2010)
- Time spent with family (1975-2010)
- Children (1975-2010)
- Siblings (1975-2010)
Parents who lost a child early to death, have a child with a significant mental illness or a child with a developmental disability

Special interviews 2004-2010
Data Domains: Income and Wealth

- Parent’s occupations, income, and education (1957)
- Earnings, household and individual (1975-2010)
- Total income, household and individual (1992-2010)
- Full Assets (1992-2010)
- Intertransfers (1992-2010)
- Financial Literacy measure and Economic Games of which a subset of cases play for real-stakes (2010)
- Social Security records are coming
Data Domains: Cognition

- Henmon Nelson, grad and sibling (1957)
- Cognition (1992-2010)
- Subset given additional cognition measures
  - E-Prime ACASI
    - Single word reading
    - Word recognition
    - Picture naming
    - Category verification
  - Cookie Theft
Data Domains: Retirement

- Pensions (1992-2010)
- Retirement aspirations (1992)
- Changes in standards of living related to retirement (1992-2010)
Data Domains: Mental Health

- Personality (1992-2010)
- Psychological well-being (1992-2010)
- CESD (1992-2010)
- We know if child has significant mental health issues
Data Domains: Physical Health

- General health, Chronic conditions (1992-2010)
- Health Utilities Index (2004-2010)
- Health insurance (1992-2010)
- Medical use/costs (1992-2010)
- Retrospective childhood health (2004)
- Medicare Records/Tumor Registry
Physical Functioning
- Grip Strength, Timed Gait test, Chair Rise, Peak Flow measure

Anthropometric measures
- Height, Weight, Waist and Hip circumference
- Photograph

Health Literacy
- STOFHLA
- Newest Vital Sign (NVS)

Visions Screeners

Medication Inventory
Data Domains: Physical Health

- DNA from spit samples
Future Endeavors

- Networks
- Survivors of Deceased
- Children
Telling the Story of Wisconsin's Class of 1957
How heavy is this person? ---->

Click the point on the scale that best represents how heavy you think he is.
How heavy is this person? ----->

Click the point on the scale that best represents how heavy you think she is.
Why Longitudinal Data Matters

- We can better understand what shapes peoples’ lives (their employment, their families, their health) all the way across the life course.
- In short, things that happen when we’re children can have profound impacts on the rest of our lives.
- “What are the things you need to do early on to give people happy, healthy, and long lives?”
Data Domains

- social/family
- educational history
- employment history
- job characteristics
- marital history
- children (non-normative)
- physical/mental health
- mortality
- income and wealth
- retirement and pensions
- cognitive performance