SES variable creation

The adult SES variable is the SES that people had when they responded to the 50+ health survey. This survey was completed only once by each respondent, when they were close to turning 50. This health survey was completed between 2008 and 2014. So the SES measures that make up the adult SES variable are not all recorded in the same year. The variable “H50\_SOURCEYR” records what year each respondent completed the 50+ health survey.

The method used to make the adult SES variable was similar to that used by Herrnstein and Murray to derive childhood-SES (1994) in the Bell Curve (see Appendix 2). In other words, Adult SES is an average of z-scored adult education, income, and occupation status. Higher scores on the composite adult SES variable and on each of its constituent components indicate more advantaged socio-economic position.

The variable used for adult education was the ‘Highest Grade Completed’, in the year the respondents completed the 50+ health survey.

The variable used for income was ‘Total Net Family Income In Past Year’, for the year the respondents completed the 50+ health survey. The NLSY truncated the high end of earners to the mean income of the top 2% of earners. To be consistent with Herrnstein and Murray (1998), a minimum standard income of was set for those with income less than $1,811 and income was logged and z-transformed.

The third component of the adult SES variable was occupation status. This was coded according to the US 3-digit, 2000 census code, which is explained in NLSY-79 Attachment 1: Census Industrial & Occupational Classification (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). This was then used to derive an Occupational status hierarchy. Herrnstein and Murray used the 1960 Duncan SEI scale but because many changes had been made to the census occupation classification system between 1980 and 1990 (Frederick, 2010), an updated version of the 1960 Duncan SEI scale was used. This scale was developed by Hauser and Warren (1996) and was constructed in a similar way to the Duncan SEI (Frederick, 2010).

I have attached a secondary file that has the income, occupation/census, and education variables from each survey year (NLSY\_SES). This file also has the reference numbers in the NLSY79 database.