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# You *can* be too thin (but not too tall): Social Desirability Bias in Self-Reports of Weight and Height

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## Highlights

Reasons for self-reporting errors in weight and height are tested using NHANES data.

Self-reports of weight offer robust evidence of social desirability bias.

However, lack of awareness of weight may contribute to self-reporting biases.

Results have important implications for survey design and for clinical practice.

**Abstract:** Previous studies of survey data from the U.S. and other countries find that women tend to understate their body weight on average, while both men and women overstate their height on average. Social norms have been posited as one potential explanation for misreporting of weight and height, but lack of awareness of body weight has been suggested as an alternative explanation, and the evidence presented to date is inconclusive. This paper is the first to offer a theoretical model of self-reporting behavior for weight and height, in which individuals face a tradeoff between reporting an accurate weight (or height) and reporting a socially desirable weight (or height). The model generates testable implications that help us to determine whether self-reporting errors arise because of social desirability bias or instead reflect lack of awareness of body weight and/or other factors. Using data from the National Health and Nutrition

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