



Evidence that Empowers!

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Content warning: Racism, eugenics, forced sterilization

Pelvimetry is the study of pelvis size and shape.

This 19th century practice has led to a belief that certain people cannot give birth, and should be prevented from trying. In the 1930s, forced sterilizations and (at the time, dangerous) Cesarean sections were automatically performed on some Indigenous people in Mexico, based on their smaller stature. These patients were labeled “biologically inferior” and “unfit for motherhood” (O’Brien, 2013).

Scientific racism is the use of flawed data to “prove” distinct biological races and justify unequal treatment.

Throughout chattel slavery and the Holocaust, non-blinded studies of skull and nose sizes on Black and Jewish people were used to support a false idea of race as a genetic, biological category (which persists in some medical practices to today). In the words of Dr. Joia Crear-Perry, “*There is no Black gene!*” Race is a social construct. Still, this myth fueled the eugenics movement of the 20th century, which supported sterilization and immigration limits, in order to “improve humankind,” end social ills, and create a “perfect” human race.

How does scientific racism persist in pelvimetry today?

The 1930s Caldwell-Moloy classification system still appears in textbooks such as standard *Williams Obstetrics*:

- Gynecoid = “woman-type” or wide hips
- Android = “man-type” or narrow hips
- Anthropoid = “ape/human-like” linked to “primitive” races
- Platypelloid = “flat-type”

New research debunks pelvic shapes

In 2015, an Australian study sought to re-test the accuracy of Caldwell-Moloy’s classifications of the 4 shapes (Kuliukas, Algis & Kuliukas et al. 2015). CT scans showed that pelvises do not cluster into 4 types, but instead form a “nebulous cloud of variation,” where many pelvises combine multiple shapes.

The Bottom Line: All pelvises are mixed in size & shape!

Some may ask: “What about this ultrasound study of pelvic shapes?” or “What about this anthropological study of bones from different countries? Our response: none of the studies were blinded. All evaluators knew the race of the people they were studying, which could easily bias each pelvis measurement toward their pre-conceived notions. As far as we know, no high-quality, blinded study has ever shown that pelvic shapes vary by ancestry. We are all one species - homo sapiens - with 99.9% identical DNA!

How can you change the conversation?

If you’re in midwifery, nursing, or medicine, please share this research! Request that pelvic shapes be taught as examples of scientific racism in birth work. Labor is impacted by the baby’s ability to move through the pelvis, however, it is not evidence-based to assume someone’s pelvic shape, size, or ability to open, based on skin color.

Learn more about how the the pelvis becomes more mobile in pregnancy, how chiropractic care can lead to a smoother birth, and practice birthing positions! Check out our [Signature Article on Birthing Positions](#), our Podcast Episode #196: [Pelvic Biomechanics in Labor](#), Podcast Episode #224: [Failure to Progress or Failure to Wait](#), or sign up for our free EBB Research Newsletter at evidencebasedbirth.com!

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Android



Anthropoid



Gynecoid Pelvis Type



Platypelloid

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4. O’Brien E. (2013). Pelvimetry and the persistence of racial science in obstetrics. *Endeavour*, 37(1), 21-28.

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