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Biological Anthropology

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Un-Essay: What We Hold In Our Hips

The hips and pelvis have been historically relevant both within anthropology and society. Within my piece, “What We Hold In Our Hips,” I seek to express the ways in which the pelvis is given value and how we understand its relationship with other processes like childbirth or trauma. The piece is separated into four boxes: top left is holding our history, top right is holding society’s expectations, bottom left is holding our own, and bottom right is holding trauma.

Holding our History goes into the use of the pelvis and other bone fossils as a means of understanding where we come from. The pelvis depicted in this box is from “Lucy,” an australopithecus afarensis skeleton. Lucy’s pelvis was concrete evidence that, long with the Laetoli tracks, hominins were adapting to bipedalism. For this image, I used the National Science Foundations visuals of the female pelvis bones of Lucy (Source 1) for my reference photo to get an anatomically correct structure of the pelvis. I then used the PBS Laetoli Tracks diagram for the footprints behind the pelvis (Source 2). This was intentionally placed in the top left corner of the piece because its where we started– everything beyond this point comes from our history. This then leads into *holding Our Own*.

Holding Our Own is a representation of childbirth and its relationship to the pelvis. Coming from Lucy, the modern human pelvis has adapted significantly to increase bipedalism and efficiency which in turn compromises the ability to birth children safely. This danger as a byproduct of bipedalism is depicted through a modern human pelvis holding a black outline of an infant. The black color of the baby is a demonstration of what happens to women’s bodies as a result of childbirth and the complications it can lead to, like fistulas. The child is being supported by the pelvis, but at what cost to the mother? Although not evolutionarily efficient for childbirth, wide or “childbearing” hips have been viewed as not only strong but beautiful and a point of attraction. Through this box, we begin to slowly shift from pelvis function to pelvis perception. A greater understanding of attractiveness in terms of pelvis size is then seen in *Holding Society’s Expectations*.

Holding Society's Expectations is a depiction of how the language of anatomy has shifted from positive to negative, leading to misconceptions and stereotypes about hip size and its relationship to behavior. Within the box, a modern female pelvis is shown with a tape measure around the waist. The body form is intentionally simple, as the focus is on the shape of the pelvis and the tape measure. This is meant to represent the constraints placed on individuals, women specifically, by society's beauty expectations and the relationship between promiscuity and hip size. The language shift from a wide pelvis being advantageous and helpful to being unchaste or loose is demonstrative of the psycho-social influence on anatomy (Source 3). Along the same lines of the psychological understanding of the pelvis, *Holding Trauma* is a depiction of the popular phrase "we hold trauma in our hips".

Holding Trauma is a personification of this common phrase and is meant to represent the internalization of pain and harm on oneself. Within the image, the modern pelvis is shrouded in darkness but also holds a piece of it within. This darkness is intended to feel oppressive and exhausting, which is how it feels to maintain a steadfast connection with trauma. The pelvis has now become a metaphor rather than a physical part of ourselves. This phrase was the initial idea behind this project, as we were discussing the pelvis within class and I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Sources

Source 1: National Science Foundation - Where Discoveries Begin. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://nsf.gov/news/mmg/mmg_disp.jsp?med_id=63174&from=

Source 2: Gbh. (2021, February 24). Laetoli Trackways Diagram. Retrieved from <https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/tdc02.sci.life.evo.laetolitrack/laetoli-trackways-diagram/>

Source 3: Pappas, S. (2014, April 25). Are Wide-Hipped Women Promiscuous? Study Births a Controversy. Retrieved from <https://www.livescience.com/45132-wide-hips-one-night-stands.html>

Source 4: Rosenberg, K. R., & DeSilva, J. M. (2017, April 12). Evolution of the Human Pelvis. Retrieved from <https://anatomypubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ar.23580>