David Michael Rorvik (1944-)[1]


David Michael Rorvik is a science journalist who publicized advancements in the field of reproductive medicine during the late twentieth century. Rorvik wrote magazine articles and books in which he discussed emerging methods and technologies relating to reproductive medicine, including sex determination [1], in vitro [1] fertilization [1], and human cloning [1]. During that time, those topics were controversial and researchers often questioned Rorvik's work for accuracy. Rorvik contributed to the field of reproductive medicine by communicating methods of reproductive intervention and contributing to the controversy around new developmental medical technologies.

Rorvik was born on 1 November 1944 in Circle, Montana, to Francois Rorvik and Alan Rorvik. In 1962, he enrolled at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana, where he majored in journalism. During his undergraduate career, Rorvik worked as a reporter and editor of The College Daily, the University's student-run newspaper. The topics of Rorvik's articles included the University's peace rallies during the Vietnam War and caused controversy, as they challenged what he described as the provincialism of the region. Rorvik's stories caught the attention of the college president, who often threatened to discontinue the publication of the newspaper under Rorvik's leadership as editor. In 1966, Rorvik graduated at the top of his class with a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism.

In 1967, Rorvik graduated summa cum laude with a Master of Science degree in journalism from Columbia University [1], Graduate School of Journalism in New York City, New York. Immediately after graduation, he became a reporter for Time magazine in New York City. Later in 1967, Rorvik received the Pulitzer Traveling Fellowship and traveled to South Africa to investigate the structure of the country's press, which was segregated under the government at that time. Upon returning to Time in New York, Rorvik shifted his focus to science writing and worked as a medical reporter for the next two years. In the early 1969, he left Time and began freelance writing.

In May 1969, Rorvik published an article in New York Magazine titled "Your Baby's Sex: Select, Don't Settle." In that article he wrote about Landrum Shettles, a physician who specialized in obstetrics and gynecology, who are studies of women's reproductive health at the time. Shettles worked at Columbia University [1] and was conducting research on sex determinants in sperm [1]. He looked at how male sperm [1] cells contributed to the sex of the developing fetus [1]. In "Your Baby's Sex: Select, Don't Settle" Rorvik describes how Shettles developed a method that reportedly enabled couples to directly affect the probability of producing a male or a female child prior to conception [1]. According to Rorvik, Shettles claimed that he could accurately predict the sex of a child by observing the size and mobility of male sperm [1] cells that would potentially fertilize the female egg [1]. The year 1969 also describes the work of two physicians from the UK who contested Bevis — who were leading the field of reproductive intervention at the time. Some predicted that Steptoe and Edwards would be the first to accomplish human embryo implantation [3]. Rorvik notes that Steptoe discredited Bevis because his claims were not supported by scientific evidence.

In 1967, Rorvik received the Alicia Patterson Foundation Fellowship to study the politics of cancer research in the US. At the time, few journalists each year received that award in the amount of $35,000, which enabled them to pursue independent projects on their topic of choice. With the fellowship, Rorvik traveled around the world and investigated the politics of cancer research in different countries. He published his work in The AFPR Reporter, a quarterly magazine by the Alicia Patterson Foundation. Despite the fact that Rorvik was a widely-read writer in the reproductive health field, the researchers often questioned the validity of his work. In 1978, Rorvik published a nonfiction book titled In His Image: The Cloning of a Man, in which he describes the successful scientific endeavor of cloning [1] a human. In that book, Rorvik states that a group of researchers attempting to clone a man recruited him to report on the project. Rorvik's claims caused a debate within the scientific community on whether or not cloning [1] was realistically possible. Many scientists, who had previously claimed that human cloning [1] was harmless and that the cloning [1] technology could be utilized in the near future, were publically invalidating the possibility.

On 11 May 1974, Rorvik published an article in The New York Times titled "The Embryo Sweepstakes," in which he questions the news of the first successful human in vitro [1] fertilization [1]. In vitro [1] fertilization [1] is a technique in which an egg [1] and a sperm [1] are combined outside of the body of an organism to create an embryo in a laboratory setting. In that article, Rorvik describes how Douglas Bevis, a physician and researcher at Leeds University in Leeds, United Kingdom, gave a presentation on embryo implantation [1], the process of implanting an embryo created with in vitro [1] fertilization [1] into a human female. Earlier that year, at the British Medical Association conference, Bevis claimed that three embryos were created in test tubes and successfully implanted in the wombs of three women. Rorvik states that other than the press release, Bevis offered no further information on the matter and did not attribute that work to anyone, including himself. In "The Embryo Sweepstakes" Rorvik suggests that Bevis's claims were fraudulent due to the lack of information. Rorvik also describes the work of two physicians from the UK who contested Bevis – Patrick Steptoe [3] and Robert Edwards [3]. They were leading the field of reproductive intervention at the time. Some predicted that Steptoe and Edwards would be the first to accomplish human embryo implantation [3]. Rorvik notes that Steptoe discredited Bevis because his claims were not supported by scientific evidence.

Sources

David Michael Rorvik is a science journalist who publicized advancements in the field of reproductive medicine during the late twentieth century. Rorvik wrote magazine articles and books in which he discussed emerging methods and technologies that contributed to the progression of reproductive health, including sex determination, in vitro fertilization, and human cloning. During that time, those topics were controversial and researchers often questioned Rorvik's work for accuracy. Rorvik contributed to the field of reproductive medicine by communicating methods of reproductive intervention and contributing to the controversy around new developmental medicine technologies.

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- People

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