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 that contributed to the progression of reproductive health, including sex determination [7], in vitro [9] fertilization [10], and human cloning [12]. During that time, these 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.

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. His 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 [11]. 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 1960s, 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 [14] and was conducting research on sex determinants in sperm [15] cells. He looked at how male sperm [16] cells contributed to the sex of the developing fetus [17]. 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 [18]. According to Rorvik, Shettles claimed that he could accurately predict the sex of a child by observing the size and mobility of male sperm [19] cells that would potentially fertilize the female egg [20]. The year after, Rorvik and his publisher, J.B. Lippincott Company, were charged with a $7 million defamation suit because of the claims made in the book. Derek Bevis, a physician and researcher at Leeds University in Leeds, United Kingdom, gave a presentation on embryo implantation [21], the process of implanting an embryo created with in vitro [22] fertilization [23] 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 pregnant 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 reports 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 [24] and Robert Edwards [25]. 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 [26]. Rorvik notes that Steptoe’s experiments Take Bevis’s 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 AFP 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 Your Baby’s Sex: Now You Can Choose 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. 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 was realistically possible. Many scientists, who had previously claimed that human cloning was harmless and that the cloning technology could be utilized in the near future, were publically invalidating the possibility.

On 11 May 1978, Synapse, the student-run newspaper at the University of California San Francisco in San Francisco, California, published the first statement that Rorvik made in response to the adverse public reaction to his book. In His Image, the Cloning of a Man. In that statement, Rorvik defends all claims and protects the identities of the individuals in the book. He also questions the motives of the scientists, who once supported human cloning, but began speaking out about the dangers and difficulties of the process once Rorvik’s claims were publicized.

Shortly after publishing In His Image, the Cloning of a Man, Rorvik and his publisher, J.B. Lippincott Company, were charged with a $7 million defamation suit because of the claims made in the book. Derek Bromhall, a British scientist who at the time conducted research on cloning [27], brought the suit against Rorvik. Bromhall claimed that Rorvik copied the methods described in the book from Bromhall’s dissertation without permission. In a pretrial ruling, the judge said the book was a hoax because Rorvik refused to provide the real names of his sources. The lawsuit lasted four years until 7 April 1982, when Robert Edwards reduced charges to invasion of privacy and agreed to a settlement of $100,000. J.B. Lippincott Company publically addressed the lawsuit and announced that they deemed Rorvik’s book was fraudulent. Despite the outcome, Rorvik maintained that the book is legitimate.

In 1983, Rorvik founded a literary agency called Proteus, Inc. and as of 1988 maintains his role as President. He co-authored a second book with Shettles later that year titled Rites of Life: Scientific Evidence for Life Before Birth, in which they present the argument that developing embryos are living beings and have certain rights. Year 2006 marked the thirty-fifth consecutive year of print for Your Baby’s Sex: Now You Can Choose. That year Broadway Books in New York City, New York, published a revised sixth edition of the book titled How to Choose the Sex of Your Baby: The Method Best Supported by Scientific Evidence by Bevis, Shettles and Rorvik. As of 2018, Rorvik’s most recent work was in collaboration with Sheldon Saul Hendler, a scientist and physician who studied micronutrition and the impacts of diet on human health. In 2008, the authors published the second edition of the book PDR for Nutritional Supplement, which provides evidence-based information on nutrient supplements such as vitamins and minerals.

As of 2018, Rorvik lives in Portland, Oregon.

Sources
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