

David Michael Rorvik (1944–) ^[1]

By: Blight, Alysse Keywords: [David Rorvik](#) ^[2] [Conception methods](#) ^[3] [Shettles Method](#) ^[4] [Family planning in literature](#) ^[5] [science journalist](#) ^[6]

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](#) ^[8] [fertilization](#) ^[9], and human [cloning](#) ^[10]. 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.

Rorvik was born on 1 November 1944 in Circle, Montana, to Frances 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](#) ^[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 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, which are studies of women's reproductive health. At the time, Shettles worked at [Columbia University](#) ^[11] and was conducting research on sex determinants in [sperm](#) ^[12] cells. He looked at how male [sperm](#) ^[12] cells contributed to the sex of the developing [fetus](#) ^[13]. 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](#) ^[14]. According to Rorvik, Shettles claimed that he could accurately predict the sex of a child by observing the size and mobility of male [sperm](#) ^[12] cells that would potentially fertilize the female [egg](#) ^[15]. One year later in 1970, Rorvik and Shettles co-authored the book titled *Your Baby's Sex: Now You Can Choose* in which they elaborated on the methods that would ultimately enable couples to choose the sex of their [fetus](#) ^[13]. The book consists of various tips for couples to utilize during intercourse to increase their odds of producing [aetus](#) ^[13] of the desired sex.

In 1971, Rorvik published his own book titled *Brave New Baby: Promise and Perils of the Biological Revolution*. In that book, Rorvik states that mankind will inevitably alter the course of human [evolution](#) ^[16] through the use of contraceptives. He describes how [birth control](#) ^[17] can be used to combat a lack of resources, which, according to Rorvik, contributes to the rapid increase in human population. By selectively enforcing the use of contraceptives, [humans](#) ^[18] would shift the course of [evolution](#) ^[16] to their desire. Rorvik suggests that, if evolutionary processes did not occur naturally and reproductive processes were disrupted, [humans](#) ^[18] would have the ability to radically increase life span and utilize drugs to enhance intelligence. The claims Rorvik makes in *Brave New Baby: Promise and Perils of the Biological Revolution* began his contribution to the writings on the future of reproductive health.

In addition to writing his own books, Rorvik often co-authored publications with physicians and researchers on their methodologies. In 1973, Rorvik co-authored a book titled *Decompression Babies* with O.S. Heyns, a physician who specialized in obstetrics and gynecology in South Africa. In that book, the authors present the benefits of prenatal abdominal decompression, which is a method that reduces the atmospheric pressure on a pregnant woman's abdomen to increase blood flow, and therefore access to oxygen and nutrients for the [fetus](#) ^[13]. The book demonstrates how this method can prevent the development of mother's high blood pressure during [pregnancy](#) ^[19], premature birth of the infant, and labor endangerment for both mother and child. At the time of publication, more than 10,000 healthy infants were safely born to mothers who used decompression methods during [pregnancy](#) ^[19].

On 15 September 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](#) ^[8] [fertilization](#) ^[9]. [In vitro fertilization](#) ^[9] is a [fertilization](#) ^[9] technique in which an [egg](#) ^[15] and a [sperm](#) ^[12] 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](#) ^[20], the process of implanting an embryo created within [in vitro](#) ^[8] [fertilization](#) ^[9] 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. He also claimed that all three pregnant women gave birth to healthy infants who were developing normally. In his article, 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](#) ^[21] and [Robert Edwards](#) ^[22]. 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](#) ^[20]. 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 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 *In His Image: The Cloning of a Man*, in which he describes the successful scientific endeavor of [cloning](#) ^[10] 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](#) ^[10] was realistically possible. Many scientists, who had previously claimed that human [cloning](#) ^[10] was harmless and that the [cloning](#) ^[10] technology could be utilized in the near future, were publicly 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](#) ^[10], 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](#) ^[10], 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 Bromhall reduced his charges to invasion of privacy and agreed to a settlement of \$100,000. J.B. Lippincott Company publicly addressed the lawsuit and announced that they deemed Rorvik's book was fraudulent. Despite the outcome, Rorvik maintains that the book is legitimate.

In 1983, Rorvik founded a literary agency called Proteus, Inc. and as of 2018 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 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 Supplements*, which provides evidence-based information on nutrient supplements such as vitamins and minerals.

As of 2018, Rorvik lives in Portland, Oregon.

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Subject

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Topic

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