David Michael Rorvik (1944–) [1]

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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 fertilization [8], 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 study, Rorvik participated in the school's student-run newspaper and was selected for the New York Times Syndicate. After his graduation, he became a reporter for the student 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 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 [11], 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 and Rorvik's 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 [12], 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 Rorvik and Shettles co-authored the book titled Your Baby's Sex: Now You Can Choose which they elaborated on the methods that would ultimately enable couples to choose the sex of their fetus [14]. The book consists of various tips for couples to utilize during intercourse to increase their odds of producing a baby 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 [18] 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 populations by selectively enforcing the use of contraceptives, humans [13] would shift the course of evolution [19] to their desire. Rorvik suggests that, if evolutionary processes did not occur naturally and reproductive processes were disrupted, humans [12] 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 this 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 Conception Babies with O.S. Heys, a physician who specialized in obstetrics and gynecology in South Africa. In that book, the authors present the benefits of in vitro fertilization, 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 [11]. The book demonstrates how the method can prevent the development of mother's high blood pressure during pregnancy [14], 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 decapsulation methods during pregnancy [10].

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 fertilization [8] and in vitro fertilization [8] techniques. In vitro fertilization is a technique in which an egg and sperm are collected outside of the body of an organism in order 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 [8], the process of implanting an embryo created with in vitro fertilization [8] 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 work to anyone, including himself. In “The Embryo Sweepstakes” Rorvik states 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 [11] and Robert Edwards [11]. 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 [8]. Rorvik notes that Steptoe credited 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 AFR Report, 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 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 micronutrients 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.

Sources

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