
Communicating Reproductive Biology: Claims to Human In Vitro Fertilization

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Abstract

Session: Making Modern Developmental Biology (Michael Dietrich, Nathan Crowe, Dmitriy Myelnikov, chair and commentator Sabine Brauckmann) The 2010 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine recognized the achievement of a human birth following in vitro fertilization (IVF) as one of the most significant innovations of the reproductive sciences. Now more than ever, the dominant histories trace a ‘path to IVF’ culminating in the work of the British team that delivered Louise Brown in 1978. Yet though she made global news as the first ‘test-tube baby’, she was far from the first to be announced. Repeated claims between the 1940s and the 1970s provide an opportunity to explore communication in a prominent and controversial science. How did researchers seek to convince their colleagues that they had done what they claimed, and that this was new, significant and should be allowed? How did reproductive scientists set and revise criteria as they assessed claims? What interplay was there between publication in media ranging from specialist journals to newspapers?

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