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# Reviews

## TV Review: Coronation Street - Surrogacy in Weatherfield

07 October 2013

By *Professor Eric Blyth*

Appeared in BioNews [725](#)

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### *Coronation Street: Surrogacy in Weatherfield*

ITV, Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays



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The British TV soap opera, Coronation Street, has become an established national institution since the first episode was screened in December 1960. It is on several nights each week and is set in 'Weatherfield', a fictional working class neighbourhood in Manchester.

One of the programme's many plots this year has focused on a [surrogacy](#) arrangement made between intending parents Isabelle (Izzy) and Gary and their friend, Tina. This being 'soapland', there are various sub-plots. As a result, the overall storyline does stretch credibility to some extent, although as some 'real world' surrogacy cases illustrate, fiction is not necessarily stranger than fact (1,2).

Izzy is a wheelchair user and her boyfriend Gary, a former soldier who was injured in a bomb blast in Afghanistan, suffers from PTSD, has a history of alcohol abuse, aggressive outbursts and a record of petty crime. After Izzy suffers a miscarriage, future attempts at pregnancy are discounted. Since Gary's criminal history and mental health problems rule out adoption, his and Izzy's family-building plans appear doomed. Then they start to think about surrogacy. After other potential surrogates are ruled out, Tina offers to be their surrogate as a way of

extricating herself and boyfriend Tommy from the debts they have racked up. Izzy's father, Owen, agrees to pay Tina £15,000. Tina, in her early 20s, has no children although she had a pregnancy termination as a teenager.

Given that this is 'soapland', with its habitual overdose of pathological characters and dysfunctional relationships, the Izzy/Gary/Tina/Tommy story is as 'normal' as you are likely to get.

Izzy, Gary and Tina find a fertility clinic that is willing to transfer an embryo created with Izzy's egg and Gary's sperm to Tina. Tina quickly becomes pregnant but during the course of the pregnancy, the relationship between Tina and Tommy, who was never keen on the arrangement in the first place and had tried to sabotage clinic appointments, ends because of Tommy's inability to take the pressure.

Meanwhile, as her pregnancy progresses, Tina experiences increasing pressure of being subject to surveillance by Izzy, Gary, Owen and other family members.

After several weeks' absence, Tommy and Tina get back together, Tommy offering his total support to Tina. However this relationship is short-lived; an unscripted change of plan was necessary when the actor playing the role of Tommy was sacked from the programme after he was revealed as the performer of an offensive song that had been widely circulated on the internet (3).

At the same time, the relationship between Izzy and Gary starts to unravel. Gary's fondness for Tina and increasing time spent with her in the absence of Tommy – both attending antenatal classes and visiting her at home on the pretext of being concerned for her and the baby's health - culminates in his clumsy attempt to kiss her. Developing feelings for her unborn baby, distaste of Gary and concerns about the stability of Izzy and Gary's relationship (resulting in their separation when Izzy learns about Gary's advances towards Tina) lead Tina to decide not to hand over the baby, although not without considerable feelings of guilt.

Community reaction to Tina's change of heart is generally hostile. Izzy determines to challenge Tina and bring up the baby as a single mum. Emotions all around are tightened several notches when Tina goes into premature labour at seven months, the baby (named 'Joe' by Tina and 'Jake' by Izzy) is found to require bowel surgery and is placed in a Special Care Baby Unit. Tina is advised to breast feed him to enhance his prospects of recovery, as a result fostering mother/baby bonding. Izzy and Gary reconcile and reunite, but call off their fight for 'Joe'/'Jake' when they realise that the law is not on their side. However, in a decision worthy of Solomon (4), Tina decides to give the baby to Izzy and Gary after all.

As far as reflecting the real world, the scriptwriters appear to have imagined pretty well everything that could possibly go wrong in a surrogacy arrangement and made sure that this story had them all. However, despite the overload of adverse contingencies, many of the key issues in contemporary surrogacy arrangements were at least touched on and addressed sympathetically. British soaps have a dual role in providing entertainment and promoting moral messages (usually that - however long it takes – good prevails over evil). In this storyline the moral message was clear, if contentious. Tina was never cast in the role of the baby's 'real' mother, so she might well have been within her rights not to relinquish him, but she was certainly not doing right.

It is no doubt a sign of the times that infertility and assisted conception quite frequently crop up in the scripts of British soap operas. Some years ago in the long-running BBC radio

programme, The Archers, a young couple, Roy and Haley briefly considered egg sharing until Haley conceived naturally, while another character, Helen Archer, used DI to become a single mother by choice. At the time of writing in another British TV soap, Emmerdale, a lesbian couple, Ali and Ruby, have announced their decision to have a baby together.

Watch this space...

#### SOURCES & REFERENCES

1) [BBC News \(1997\) Biological father to fight for custody of surrogate baby](#)

BBC News | *03 November 1997*

2) [Panorama \(1997\) The Surrogate](#)

BBC | *03 November 1997*

3) [BBC News \(2013\) Coronation Street star Chris Fountain sacked over masked rap video](#)

BBC News | *20 August 2013*

4) [The Bible 1 Kings 3:16-28](#)

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