1 Relating Intimacies: Power and Resistance
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*Intimacy implies close familiarity, close in acquaintance or association, often pertaining to sexual relations.*

This set of phrases serves less as a definition of the meaning of intimacy than as a start-point of enquiry into this topic. Does the closeness mentioned above refer to spatial proximity, affectiveness or kinship ties? Does the presence of one form of closeness automatically result in another of the forms? What rights and responsibilities are associated with different forms of closeness?

The term ‘intimate relationship’ can be used to describe a multitude of associations. Although, as shown above, in common parlance it is utilized as a substitute phrase for a sexual relationship, acknowledgement of a broader definition allows the term to also encompass non-sexual relationships such as those of parent and child, including step-parents, kinship networks, such as siblings or cross-generational linkages and adult friendships. Some of these relationships will be mutually created; many will be formed as a consequence of the actions of other, usually close, associates. This latter is particularly so in the case of children. The inclusive definition of intimate relationships hence allows sociologists to consider, within this topic: sexual relationships (both heterosexual and same-sex and looking at affective and material dimensions), aspects of parenthood (mother/father/step-parenthood) and inter-generational obligations. It also raises the issues of identity, citizenship, violence, moral panic and negotiation and, as a result, stresses the continuing necessity highlighted by C. Wright Mills (1973) to examine the linkages between private troubles and public issues.

The present-day formation of intimate relationships is presented by some authors as an exercise of active construction in a time of late
Individuals are presented as consciously rejecting traditional models 
of association in favour of relationships whose form, boundaries and 
content are the subject of continued negotiation between participants. 
This applies in sexual, parental (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and 
kin (Finch, 1989) relationships. Such active construction is conceptu­
alized most explicitly in Giddens’ analysis of the ‘pure relationship’ ; 
one ‘where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what 
can be derived by each person from a sustained association with 
another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both 
parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay 
within it’ (1992: 58). The ‘pure relationship’ may seem at first most 
applicable to sexual, non-parental kin and friendship associations, but 
Giddens also extends this definition to incorporate the relationship 
between parent and child in as much as, in its contemporary form, it 
relies less on traditional social obligations and mutual expectations of 
assistance than was previously the case.

Concern as to the extent to which such models of fluid and flexible 
associations represent the reality of everyday intimate relationships 
has been expressed in three areas. Nearly a decade ago, Morgan 
(1991) was questioning the extent to which models of ‘companionate 
marriage’ were as much a product of professional discourse as a 
reflection of changing marital types. More recently, commentators 
have suggested that the emphasis on the egalitarian nature of the 
‘pure relationship’ has diverted the focus of researchers from the (still 
unequal) material and structural conditions in which most intimate 
relationships take place (Dunne, 1997 and this volume; Seymour, 
1999). As a result earlier work, particularly by feminists, examining 
the more mundane but equally important, issues of the gendered 
domestic division of labour and distribution of resources in house­
holds (Brannen and Wilson, 1987; Morris, 1990) has been, to a large 
extent, sidelined. Finally, recent publications which have empirically 
rather than theoretically examined intimate relationships (Bittman 
and Pixley, 1997; Jamieson, 1998) conclude that the ‘pure relationship’ 
remains in the realm of ideals rather than reality. These criticisms 
notwithstanding, there is evidence, as this volume shows, that indivi­
duals are involved to some extent in processes of creative construction 
with regard to their intimate relationships.

The shift in view suggested above from ideals to reality presages a 
change in focus from the form of intimate relationships to their 
content and nature. It is perhaps here that the theme of the 1997 BSA