

Perspectives from Disability Advocates: Mia Mingus on Access Intimacy

Accessibility, Assistive Tech, & Inclusion Toolkit

Mia Mingus is an advocate for gender and disability activism. Her concept of “Access Intimacy” might be helpful to frontline workers supporting survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), including Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

Access intimacy is “**the [...] hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs**”. In other words, it’s a feeling of being understood and seen, and where a person’s needs are being met. Mia Mingus describes it as a feeling of “**closeness I would feel with people who my disabled body felt a little bit safer and at ease with.**” (Mingus, 2011). It looks different from person to person.

Access intimacy is different from the action of helping someone- it is a way of upholding and honouring the agency and dignity of people with disabilities. Some examples Mia Mingus provides include:

- Being **listened to and believed**
- Remembering someone’s **access needs**
- **Checking in** ahead of situations that might be inaccessible or difficult for a person



Access Intimacy vs. Forced Intimacy

Part of access intimacy is understanding the ways that intimacy might be or might have been unsafe for people with disabilities.

According to Mia Mingus, “Forced intimacy” is the opposite of access intimacy. Forced intimacy involves the ways that people with disabilities are often expected to share deeply personal parts of themselves in order to gain basic access.

Access intimacy, on the other hand, is conscious of the realities of violence that people with disabilities navigate, including that their consent may not have been taken as seriously or valued as highly as non-disabled peoples’.

Considering forced intimacy when we’re thinking about access intimacy can be helpful in identifying where power dynamics are at play, and how they might impact survivors with different experiences.

Building Safety

Access intimacy can be a helpful concept in building safety with survivors. It is one way to show solidarity for survivors with disabilities. It can help supporters to be allies even when faced with ableist systems or limited resources.

“Sometimes [access intimacy] is someone just sitting and holding your hand while you both stare back at an inaccessible world” (Mingus, 2011)

If you’d like to learn more about Access Intimacy or Mia Mingus’ work as we describe in this resource, you can view her articles [“Access Intimacy: The Missing Link”](#) or [“Forced Intimacy: An Ableist Norm”](#)

For our full toolkit, visit BCSTH’s [Accessibility, Assistive Tech, & Inclusion page](#).

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