

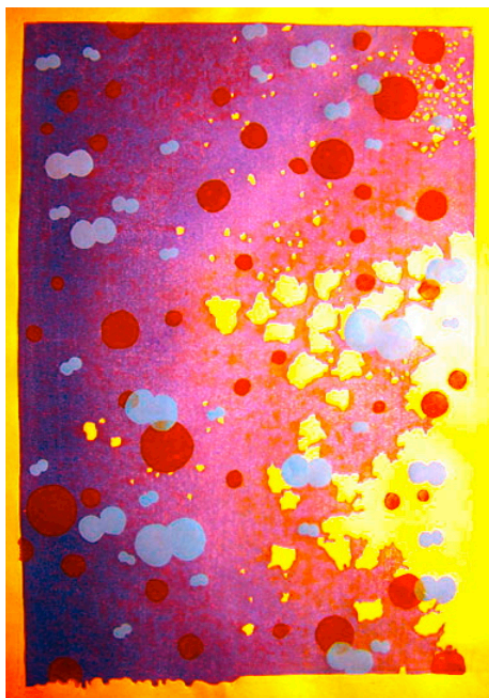
**We must leave evidence. Evidence that we were here, that we existed, that we survived and loved and ached. Evidence of the wholeness we never felt and the immense sense of fullness we gave to each other. Evidence of who we were, who we thought we were, who we never should have been. Evidence for each other that there are other ways to live--past survival; past isolation.**

**Leaving Evidence is a blog by Mia Mingus.**

<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/>

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## Access Intimacy: The Missing Link



There are many ways to describe intimacy. For example, there's physical intimacy, emotional intimacy, intellectual, political, familial or sexual intimacy. But, as a physically disabled woman, there is another kind of intimacy I have been struggling to name and describe, what I have been calling "access intimacy."

I have begun using the term loosely and am still realizing different aspects of it. This is in no way a complete describing of it, instead, this is an initial naming and the beginnings of giving it shape. I am offering it as something that has been

useful for me and I hope is useful to others to describe all different kinds of access, not just in relation to disability. I think Access, as a framework, is powerful for so many of our lives. Here, I am speaking from my own lived experience as a physically disabled person but I know access intimacy can also happen in many different ways for mamas and parents, women of color, queer and trans folks, etc... Anyone can experience access intimacy.

I have never had words for access intimacy before. For years, I would feel it or crave it, but not know how to describe it. It has always been just out of reach; just beyond my grasp. I have mistaken it for emotional or political intimacy, sexual attraction or romantic desire. I have mistakenly assumed that it would be there based on one's identity or experience. I have grappled with how to describe the closeness I would feel with people who my disabled body just felt a little bit safer and at ease with. There have been relationships that carried emotional, physical and political intimacy, but sorely lacked access intimacy. And there have been relationships where access intimacy has helped to create the conditions out of which emotional, familial and political intimacy could grow.

Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else "gets" your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years. It could also be the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are being met. It is not dependent on someone having a political understanding of disability, ableism or access. Some of the people I have experienced the deepest access intimacy with (especially able bodied people) have had no education or exposure to a political understanding of disability.

Access intimacy is also the intimacy I feel with many other disabled and sick people who have an automatic understanding of access needs out of our shared similar lived experience of the many different ways ableism manifests in our lives. Together, we share a kind of access intimacy that is ground-level, with no need for explanations. Instantly, we can hold the weight, emotion, logistics, isolation, trauma, fear, anxiety and pain of access. I don't have to justify and we are able to start from a place of steel vulnerability. It doesn't mean that our access looks the same, or that we even know what each other's access needs are. It has taken the form of long talks into the night upon our first meeting; knowing glances shared across a room or in a group of able bodied people; or the feeling of instant familiarity to be able to ask for help or support.

In my life, access intimacy is something that has been hard won, organic or at times even felt magical. It has taken me by surprise, showing up with people that I never would have expected to have that kind of "access connection" with. It has been exciting and relieving, like a long slow exhale. I don't know where it comes from or how it happens. It has felt like an unspoken, instinctual language between different people, like an entirely unique way of being able to communicate and connect. Similar to meeting someone you just "click with," access intimacy has felt like a distinct form of attraction, desire and energy on to itself.

Access intimacy is something I am coming to understand that I need in my life; something that I cannot (and don't want to) live without. I need it to literally be my whole self because access is such an intimate part of my life as a queer physically disabled woman of color adoptee. Without it, relationships exist under a glass ceiling or split by thick frosted windows, with huge pieces of myself never being able to be reached. Without it, there is survival, but rarely true, whole connection.

Access intimacy is not just the action of access or "helping" someone. We have all experienced access that has left us feeling like a burden, violated or just plain shitty. Many of us have experienced obligatory access where there is no intimacy, just a stoic counting down of the seconds until it is over. This is not access intimacy. There have been numerous relationships in my life where I have loved people very deeply, but never fully felt safe with them around my access. So many relationships where I knew I could only ask for or share so much, without getting snapped at, chided or being punished with reluctant passive aggressive access. So many times where I was too afraid, because of the lack of access intimacy, to speak up and voice what I needed or what I couldn't do, resulting in being isolated or getting very badly physically hurt from pushing myself too hard, in some of the worst cases.

Access intimacy is not charity, resentment enacted, intimidation, a humiliating trade for survival or an ego boost. In fact, all of this threatens and kills access intimacy. There is a good feeling after and while you are experiencing access intimacy. It is a freeing, light, loving feeling. It brings the people who are a part of it closer; it builds and deepens connection. Sometimes access intimacy doesn't even mean that everything is 100% accessible. Sometimes it looks like both of you trying to create access as hard as you can with no avail in an ableist world. Sometimes it is someone just sitting and holding your hand while you both stare back at an inaccessible world.

It has looked like relationships where I *always* feel like I can say what my access needs are, no matter what. Or I can say that I don't know them, and that's ok too. It has looked like people not expecting payment in the form of emotional currency or ownership for access. It has looked like able bodied people listening to me and believing me. It has looked like people investing in remembering my access needs and checking in with me if there are going to be situations that might be inaccessible or hard disability-body-wise. It has looked like [crip-made](#) access. It has looked like [crip solidarity](#).

In the last half decade of my life I have been able to experience many different forms and levels of access intimacy. Before that, I was not even in a place where I could have had access intimacy with anyone. It has only been in the last seven years that I have come into myself as a [politically disabled](#) person enough to begin to experience or desire access intimacy, even on superficial levels. Looking back, there have been only a handful of relationships in my life where access intimacy has existed. And in most of them access intimacy was not instant, but built and cultivated, with me bearing the brunt of the work.

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For the first time in my adult life, I am experiencing access intimacy that is not just painstakingly built over years, conversation by conversation, but is already in fertile existence, ready to grow. For the first time in my life I am in disabled community meeting sick and disabled folks and experiencing a kind of mutual access intimacy that feels like family. For the first time in my life, I am in relationships with able bodied queer people of color experiencing access intimacy that is beyond explanation and belief. For the first time, this year, I am experiencing a level of access intimacy in my intimate relationships and home life that I have never experienced before. It has been both amazing and saddening, now having something that actually cares for me. And it, like emotional intimacy, is also a deep risk because it would be devastating to lose and requires maintenance.

Now, when I describe relationships, I include access intimacy along with my many other descriptors. I am watching it, studying it, bearing witness to it as it grows, evolves and shifts and as I learn all the different ways that access intimacy can exist.

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