

Dis/Enabled Queerness

Crippling “Coming Out” and Resisting Heteronormative Ableism in Taiwan

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Introduction / Purpose

This chapter examines disabled queer activism in Taiwan and its shift from visibility politics to intimate citizenship. Although scholarship on disabled queer life in Asia remains sparse, Taiwan’s activism has expanded—especially since marriage equality in 2019. Building on the long-standing presence of Disabled+Queer at Taipei Pride since 2008 and the emergence of Hand Angel, we analyze **how disabled LGBTQ+ people contest ableism and heteronormativity across public and private spheres.**

Findings Contextually Sensitive Strategies of Self-Disclosure

1) Coming Out to the Public Sphere

- 殘酷兒(Disabled+Queer) 2008

- participated in Taipei Pride, the first public coming out of disabled LGBTQ+ individuals in Taiwan (Ouyang 2023). “殘酷兒” (can-ku-er), blending the words for “disabled” and “queer,” while also subverting ableist and heteronormative language. Despite initial resistance—even from LGBTQ+ peers who said the term sounded “too cruel”—Vincent insisted on reclaiming this language as a source of strength, rather than shame or fear.
- Their participation triggered structural changes in the Pride event ramps were installed, sign language interpretation was introduced, and a designated accessible viewing area was created.
- In 2010, Vincent proposed a disability rights parade, shifting from celebration to confronting survival issues like transport and inclusion. This led to the Myriad-Barriers Alliance, which staged a wheelchair sit-in at Taipei Station. Pressured to resign over his sexuality by church-based groups, Vincent instead gained support from LGBTQ+ allies, marking a pivotal “coming out” for the disability movement and fostering cross-movement solidarity.



2) Coming Out in the Private Sphere

- shaped by cultural and familial contexts

Vincent: disability and caregiving to gradually introduce his same-sex partner to his family.
Carlos: disclosure at home due to conservative values but selectively comes out in safe spaces.

Julia: received a dismissive response but saw quiet political support from her father.

- These narratives challenge Western notions of coming out as a public act, showing instead a fluid, strategic process shaped by cultural norms and personal safety. They highlight the need for intersectional, context-aware understandings of identity negotiation in private spheres.

3) Relational, Coalitional Movement

- 手天使(Hand Angel) 2013

- advocating for the sexual rights of disabled people
- Facing exclusion in both movements, members like Vincent, Carlos, and Julia sought to address ableism and heteronormativity in public perceptions of disabled intimacy.
- empowers through both intimate experiences and the right to refuse, redefining consent, autonomy, and care. The shift from visibility-focused activism to deeper engagement with sexuality and self-determination marks a significant evolution in Taiwan’s intersectional queer-disability movement, centering lived experiences and challenging societal norms.

Method Walking Together and Listening to Them Carefully

This study employs qualitative methodology to explore how disabled queer activists in Taiwan navigate coming-out processes and influence social movements.

Data Collection: Participant observation and life-story interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2025.

Participants: Three key interlocutors—Vincent, Carlos, and Julia—offered insights into disability and queerness. All use wheelchairs due to physical disabilities.

Analysis: Their life trajectories and activist engagements highlight the complex dynamics of identity, resistance, and empowerment. Life-story methods were used to uncover these layered experiences and forms of activism.

Discussion Blurring Boundaries of the Public and the Private

	LGBTQ+ movements and communities	Disability rights movements and communities
Public sphere	II. Challenging ableism in the LGBTQ+ movements and communities via public strategies	I. Challenging heteronormativity in the disability rights movements and communities via public strategies
Private sphere	III. Challenging ableism in the LGBTQ+ movements and communities via private and interpersonal strategies	IV. Challenging heteronormativity in the disability rights movements and communities via private and interpersonal strategies

1) Creating Crip-Queer Spaces

Queer disabled activists in Taiwan navigate a paradox of hypervisibility and invisibility: disability is stigmatized as “discredited”, while sexuality remains “discreditable” (Goffman, 1963). For them, **“coming out” is not a singular act but an ongoing negotiation across public/private and LGBTQ/disability axes.**

- The coinage “殘酷兒” exemplifies this, reclaiming stigma as a collective identity rooted in Taiwanese contexts.
- Pride accessibility reforms and Vincent’s leadership in disability rights activism reveal how cross-movement solidarities challenge ableist-heteronormativity. Beyond marches, private intimacies illustrate everyday resistance.
- disabled queer activism emphasizes “creating crip” spaces, enacting transformative politics that remake the conditions of recognition for both queerness and disability.

2) Contextualizing “Coming Out”

Coming out for disabled queer people in Taiwan is not linear but relational, shaped by family norms of “家” (family/home), “和” (harmony/peace), and “孝” (filial piety/offsprings’ obedience), and by compulsory able-bodiedness. **Narratives show strategies of gradual negotiation, strategic passing, and activist-driven disclosure**, where disability shapes risks, protections, and recognition.

3) Undoing De-Sexualization

In Taiwan, the collaboration between *Disabled+Queer* and *Tongzhi Hotline* led to the creation of *Hand Angel*—a project that queers disability advocacy and cripps LGBTQ+ activism. ***Hand Angel* challenges compulsory asexuality and shifts the focus from visibility and legal recognition to bodily autonomy and sexual pleasure**(Martino & Campbell, 2019; Yau, 2019). Through sex education, peer support, and policy advocacy, it redefines intersectional activism around intimacy, access, and the right to sexual expression.



Conclusion

Disabled and enabled queerness highlights the tension between structural disablement and enabling practices by disabled queer activists. Strategies like Disabled+Queer and Hand Angel transform constraints into care, challenge sexual stigma, and reconfigure public and private spaces. Beyond “coming out,” these activists create crip spaces that interrogate compulsory able-bodiedness, fostering intimacy, empowerment, and relational justice in Taiwan’s LGBTQ+ and disability movements.



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