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## Prominent gay rights activist reflects on battles against hate

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• Discrimination

# Prominent gay rights activist reflects on battles against hate

By Krista Marrs  
Maine Campus staff

The media does not do their job in educating people about homosexual issues, an activist and member of the gay community told listeners Thursday night.

"Consciously or not, the media tries to keep gays divided and separated from the heterosexual community," Michelangelo Signorile said during his lecture titled "Queers in America."

An author of several books and a member of the gay activist group, Act-Up, Signorile spoke to students



Michelangelo Signorile. (Stef Bailey Photo.)

and members of the gay community as part of QueerFest '97. He told

of his experiences of coming out in the early 1980s and how the gay scene has changed in the last 10 to 15 years.

"In the early 80s, 'coming out' meant that you were out to your friends, yet still behind a screen to the rest of the world," Signorile said.

While working as a publicist in the entertainment industry, Signorile and all columnists were told to leave out and ignore all topics of homosexuality, even if the person they were writing about was openly gay.

See **ACTIVIST** on page 6

## Activist

from page 1

"Even though the industry is full of homosexual men and women, we had to heterosexualize them in order to maintain the image of a total heterosexual world," Signorile said. "Even today the media tries to keep people in power in the closet so that nobody will make any waves. But coming out is all about making waves."

Signorile also talked about the change in the gay scene since the spread of AIDS. He said it was no longer "hip" to be gay as he recalled how his friends, straight and gay, started to lose contact with one another and eventually stopped associating.

"After my best friend died of AIDS in 1988, now suddenly the whole issue of AIDS had hit home," Signorile said. "The whole gay scene dramatically changed as AIDS solidified, which is drawn through fear and homophobia."

"Then I found Act-Up, a group of activists from all professions and all walks of life, and I was completely transformed after the first meeting."

He said he finally saw how the media

were hiding information dealing with homosexuality and how much it was hurting the public, both gay and straight members.

With the help of other members from Act-Up, Signorile started "Outweek Magazine," in which he criticized various gossip forums of the media.

"Since people get most ideas from gossip magazines. It made more sense to go after those kinds of mediums rather than the mainstream outlets," Signorile said.

His magazine got much criticism and controversy with his articles, but Signorile said he was only setting the record straight. He felt there was no longer the need for homosexuality to be kept quiet in the media.

"With the criticism I got from my articles, it just shows how much the media puts a strangle-hold on the issue," Signorile said.

In closing, Signorile spoke of the closet and how gay have the right to come out and make everyone know their sexual orientation.

"We were forced into the closet for so long," Signorile said. "Now it is our right to get out of it."