*Flag Waving*

"It used to bother me people would stare, people would say things. At times, almost behind your back; sometimes literally behind your back."

Diana Denisova is not only my twin sister, but also a member of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) born into a Russian conservative family. Currently studying at University of Hertfordshire, she identifies as a homosexual.

Like many members of LGBT, she faced numerous obstacles since finding out that she is attracted to the same sex. Currently twenty-one-years-old, Diana spent her first decade in a small Russian town on the Western border, called Taganrog. The town and the people were still under the recent and prevalent USSR mentality, harbouring very conservative ideology shaped by the government. However, being a child, she rarely paid any attention to the social structure around her. Instead, she enjoyed a lot of typical activities that girls her age were into. Dressing up, dolls and especially arts, were just some of the things.

In fourth grade, a new chapter began in her life. Her family moved to Vienna, Austria. Here she went to an American school, a far more liberal environment than her hometown. Within a few years, she began to notice a change. Having never previously been exposed to LGBT, nor considered such a development a possibility, it took her time to fully understand and come to terms with her preference for other girls.

"Even Austria wasn't very open, you still would get stared at. The way I look now, people would still stare. It started changing only two, three years ago, once I left and went to university."

Throughout her years in Austria, she secretly dated a number of other LGBT girls. She also came out to her siblings, friends and online strangers, while overcoming the fear of possible repercussions for her actions. During her high school years, an LGBT club was formed and Diana found herself on the committee within a year. That was the first support and likeminded group for LGBT at the school and it offered a sanctuary to those who, otherwise, wouldn't know where to go.

"No one was really out then. I came out for the school in one of the meetings, so yes I was out, but I was the only one; the only gay in the village."

*Video One*

While on the surface it might have seemed that everything was working out perfectly, it was not. Through her teen years, Diana struggled with her insecurities, fears and depression. She had to go to therapy to help her deal with those problems, all the time hiding the real reason why she felt that way. She had to hide her identity from her family and friends for years, fearing the repercussions that coming out could have caused. In fact, it wasn't until few months ago, that she told her parents about her preference for girls.

Things did pick up once Diana went to England to study Character Creation, a special effects-type of a course, at University of Hertfordshire.

"In university people are generally more accepting I feel. First of all, they come from an English background, that's always a plus. Second of all, I feel like once they are at university, the more educated you are, the more accepting you are."

The atmosphere here was more open than Austria, and she no longer had to depend on her parents or hide such a massive part of her life. As is the case in the UK, LGBT communities were openly accepted here. Her behaviour was viewed here as completely normal and as her first year was coming to an end, Diana met Debbie Nicole Devaney. They began dating and within a year and a half, were engaged.

Just recently, she has gone back to Austria to tell her mother about her homosexuality and her upcoming marriage. It was a lot to absorb, but her mother promised to support Diana in her choices. Later, her mother revealed the secret to Diana's father. While neither were overjoyed, both accepted their daughter for who she was. No doubt their time in Austria helped them come to terms with Diana's sexuality, since Russia maintains a hostile opinion of LGBT. With her wedding months away, Diana finally seems to have her life, at least in the LGBT side of it, sorted out. Yet not everyone is so lucky.

(side quote) "On individual basis, I feel like Russians are almost ok with individual gays, but they are not ok with them as a group or as potential parents. Just generally, you know, parts of society. As long as it's not this particular person, they are not ok with them."

*Second video*

So what if society held you responsible for something you have no control over?

Unfortunately, for LGBT, that is commonplace. They face discrimination on regular basis, even in the countries that view themselves as more tolerant. Although they have, over the years, become more acknowledged, intolerance still runs high for many. One of the most vulnerable subgroups of the LGBT community are the youth, like Diana when she was growing up. Dependant on their family and friends for support, they might be socially ostracized, or even worse, should they reveal their gender identity or sexual preference.

Young members of LGBT can become alienated by those in their social circles after coming out. Many decide to keep these traits a secret and hence have few places to turn to. Support and charity groups exist, for example LGBT Foundation or Stonewall. However, the social pressure and the country's view on homosexuality might make such options difficult to utilise. More and more governments support the LGBT, but many more condemn and restrict the rights of those groups, especially in religiously-dominant countries. This leaves the youth in a dangerous situation, with little assistance outside of online communities or secret support groups.

*First infographic*

Even with the fortunate upbringing and safe environment that she grew up in, Diana faced numerous problems because of her sexual identity.

"In our life we had everything, we had really nice parents. They are; and we had supporting older sister. None of the experiences I had were the same as those kids."

It could have been much worse though, as it is for many other young LGBT members around the world. The distressing statistics show that more than 90% lesbian women or gay men report being targets of verbal abuse or threats. Over a third report being targets of violence because of their homosexuality, while transgender individuals face even greater aggression. The situation is made worse since LGBT members have reduced access to medical care.

These numbers are reflected in the youth communities too. Gay teens are 8.4 times more likely to commit suicide, 5.9 times more likely to suffer depression and also more likely to use illegal drugs. Many face negative parental reactions when coming out, with 25% to 50% of homeless youth being LGBT, and homeless due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"I feel like a lot of people that are against LGBT in other places are frowned upon by the West. There are different versions of it though. In Austria, it's not that people hated gays, they just were uncomfortable with them until recently. That is totally different to what is happening in Russia, where, because of the West, they are afraid of this liberal influence and they are implementing these ridiculous laws. The Russian LGBT propaganda law in 2013, for example, and now they are just pushing more sub clauses to it."

The LGBT communities suffer because of the opposition they face. In many countries, their rights are restricted or violated, for example they can be evicted by their landlords, denied services or fired due to their sexual preferences or gender identity. Same-sex relationships are not recognised by most countries. Nor are rights like adoption, parenting, anti-bullying legislation, immigration equality, anti-discrimination, hate crime laws, and many more. The restriction of their rights and the homophobic views that citizen might hold, result in the LGBT communities facing bigotry, humiliation, or even violence. However, while there is never any excuse for cruelty, there are numerous reasons why certain members of the public oppose the increasing rights of the LGBT.

"Of course there are particular laws that allow discrimination and other horrible things. There are so few countries, percentage wise, that don't do that. Everywhere else, LGBT people are treated badly."

*second infographic*

As the rights of homosexual people have been increasing, others have been taking a stance against these changes. Some major reasons for the opposition include feeling threatened by homosexuality, religious views, unyielding moral or political beliefs.

"You look anywhere and LGBT are basically being abused by the society, because the society doesn't treat them as equal, and they have to survive by any means possible."

Heterosexism, a belief that everyone is or should be heterosexual, suggests that other forms of sexuality are unacceptable. It can be underpinned by homophobia, or fear of homosexuality. The anxiety over homosexual acts, fear of being or becoming homosexual, or the distaste for those forms of sexuality leads to people advocating against those practices or even lashing out at LGBT members.

Religion is one of the biggest reasons for opposing homosexuality. Not only is marriage a controversial topic in many countries, but statistics show an increase in homophobia in regions with higher number of religious practitioners. A number of Eastern and Abrahamic faiths believe that homosexual acts are a sin and forbid such practices. Such religions include Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism and Islam, among others. Islam is especially strict, with a number of countries still carrying the death penalty for homosexual acts. In Iran for example, over 4,000 people were charged and executed for homosexual within the span of 37 years. Other religions are more obscure about homosexuality. Hinduism, Buddhism and religions prevalent in those parts of the world do not outright condemn homosexual relationships, but promote heterosexual relationships and the act of having children.

"In Middle East, obviously people are treated... not even differently. They never had LGBT as part of their culture. At the same time I don't know enough about Middle East to really say."

Political and moral beliefs also play a role in people's views of homosexuality. Anti-LGBT movements are usually associated with right-wing, conservative politics, especially in US. The primary reason for political parties to fight against LGBT rights is to appeal to their voters. Oppositions claim homosexual marriage violates 'natural law', creating a sterile union that requires artificial methods should the family want a child. Other reasons play into religion, suggesting homosexuality violates some of the major religious points. However, in UK for example, it was the conservative government that oversaw marriage equality in 2013. British voters no longer view sexual orientation or gender identity as politically relevant.

*Third infographic*

Although there is already a wide acceptance of LGBT communities in many countries throughout the West, places where these people face unfair disadvantages still exist. Thankfully, more and more countries are offering similar rights to their LGBT citizens as their heterosexual counterparts boast. Keeping up with the modernisation and internationalisation, LGBT communities are becoming the norm. Times are changing and UK is very progressive towards its LGBT population. While not perfect, members of LGBT are slowly closing the gap in rights that most of the other citizens enjoy.

Hopefully Diana, her fiancé and other LGBT members around the world can soon stop worrying about their sexual preference or gender identity, as the world accepts them for who they are.

"I am better off for all the experiences. We are very happy now!"

Quotes:

Even Austria wasn't very open, you still would get stared at. The way I look now people would still stare, it started changing only two, three years ago. Once I left and went to uni, it started changing.

It used to bother me people would stare, people would say things. Clearly, almost behind your back. Sometimes literally behind your back. Like random strangers, because you look a specific way. I remember hanging out with one of my friends and he said, 'why do people stare at us?' Cuz he was with me and with my black friend and he just said, everybody is staring at us. Because she is used to it, I was more used to it, but he wasn't.

The new generation is growing up.

In our life we had everything, we had really nice parents. They are, and we had supporting older sister. None of the experiences I had were the same as those kids.

Then no one was really out. I came out for the school in one of the meetings, so yes I was out, but I was the only one. The only gay in the village.

In university people are generally more accepting I feel, cuz they come from first of all English background (that's always a plus) and second of all, I feel like, once they are at university, the more educated you are, the more accepting you are.

The movement started in the 70s with Stonewall and on from there.

A lot of people that are against LGBT in other places are frowned upon, I feel like, by the West. There are different versions of it. In Austria, it's not that people hated gays, they just were uncomfortable with them until recently and that is totally different to what is happening in Russia, where because of the West, they are afraid of this liberal influence and they are implementing these laws. The propaganda law in 2013, and now they are just pushing more sub clauses to it.

Even on individual base, I feel like Russians are ok with individual gays almost, but they are not ok with them as a group or as potential parents. Just generally, you know, parts of society, as long as it's not their hairdresser or this particular, often the stereotype is, waitress. As long as it's not this particular person, they are not ok with them.

In Middle East, obviously people are treated, it's not even differently, they never had that as part of their culture. At the same time I don't know enough about Middle East.

Of course there are particular laws that allow discrimination and other horrible things. There are so few countries, percentage wise, that don't. Everywhere else, LGBT people are treated badly.

You look anywhere and they are basically being abused by the society because the society doesn't treat them as equal and they have to survive by any means possible.

With a lot of people, there is that spectacle about coming out. Oh whoever came out and it's all over the news, and it's just, it shouldn't be a big deal and yet it is.

D: Which we are, we are very happy! Aren't we?

Debbie: Ye

D: That's good, at least we can agree on that \*laugh\*

I am better off for all the experiences.

With my parents, cuz I came out to everyone else in my life, even if they didn't accept me, I'd still get married, I'd still go to England.

Debbie: My mom was supposed to be fine with it and not have a problem, cuz she was fine with gay people in general just not me being gay. Yes she came around a few months later, but I expected her to be fine from the get go.

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http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40743

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\_rights\_by\_country\_or\_territory

LGBT rights are considered [human rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights) by the [Amnesty International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amnesty_International)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory#cite_note-AI-1) and [civil rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_rights) by some.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory#cite_note-Becker-2) LGBT rights laws include, but are not limited to, the following:

* allowing [men who have sex with men to donate blood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MSM_blood_donor_controversy)
* government recognition of same-sex relationships (such as via same-sex marriage or similar unions)
* allowing [LGBT adoption](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_adoption)
* recognition of [LGBT parenting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_parenting)
* [anti-bullying legislation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-bullying_legislation) and student non-discrimination laws to protect LGBT children and/or students
* [immigration equality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_equality) laws
* anti-discrimination laws for employment and housing
* hate crime laws providing enhanced criminal penalties for prejudice-motivated [violence against LGBT people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_against_LGBT_people)
* equal [age of consent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_consent) laws
* equal access to [assisted reproductive technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assisted_reproductive_technology)
* access to [sex reassignment surgery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_reassignment_surgery) and [hormone replacement therapy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hormone_replacement_therapy_%28transgender%29)
* [legal recognition and accommodation of reassigned gender](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_aspects_of_transsexualism)
* laws related to [sexual orientation and military service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_orientation_and_military_service)