



Writer, speaker, broadcaster, photographer, politician

“I know that one day I’ll kill myself, because I don’t know how to stop feeling this way, but it won’t be today. In the meantime I’m going to do my best to enjoy every single day, and then on the day that I die, in many, many years time, I’ll realise that I never got around to doing it.”

On the surface, father-of-three Steve Cook’s life couldn’t have been any more macho. An RAF engineer, part-time guitarist and amateur motorbike racer – as well as a photographer of a world-famous rock band and a top English football club – he seemed the archetypal ‘man’s man’.

However, for almost five decades, he harboured a deep secret that almost tore his life apart and took him to the brink of suicide.



As a child growing up in Bournemouth, Steve had always felt a deep sense of confusion and dislocation, yet it wasn’t until his early adulthood that he realised that this profound unease stemmed from severe gender dysphoria. Identifying as a ‘female imprisoned in a male body’, yet unable to manifest this in public, he suffered serious bouts of depression, addiction and self-harm.

In his early thirties – and with the full support of his future wife, Dawn - Steve made the monumental decision to transition, undergoing hormone therapy and attending a gender identity clinic in London. However, a life-changing event unexpectedly forced him to re-evaluate his priorities, and his plans to live as a woman were suddenly abandoned. What ensued was fifteen hellish years in which Steve struggled to function as a husband, son and father, along with working as the official photographer for indie-rockers The Libertines and his favourite football club, AFC Bournemouth.

It was at the age of 48 – in a budget hotel, in the midst of despair – that Steve had an epiphany. He realised he could no longer fight his true feelings and, in early 2015, revived the transition process, relocating to Brighton to do so. It was in this cosmopolitan city – encouraged by the LGBT community – that she learned to live with her new identity and, for the first time in her life, was able to feel comfortable in her own skin. She tentatively introduced Sophie to family and friends back in Bournemouth – including her children and her mother - with responses veering from compassion to outrage.

With some degree of trepidation, Sophie also came out to The Libertines band members, her ex-RAF colleagues, and the playing and coaching staff at AFC Bournemouth. Eddie Howe's humane response ("What can I do to make things easier for you?") exemplified the love and support offered by each one of these male-dominated preserves, and demonstrated to Sophie how far society had evolved. What followed was a truly remarkable eighteen months, culminating in her selection as a Labour Party candidate for the Conservative stronghold of East Worthing and Shoreham in the 2017 snap election. Against all odds, Sophie transformed this safe Tory seat into a marginal, attracting much support and many plaudits along the way.

As she says herself, 'My life before transition was like being in Kansas, all black and white. Now I'm in Oz, and it's turned Technicolor...'

The Themes

Poignant and heart-rending, yet at the same time inspiring and uplifting, Sophie's speeches trace a journey from private torment to personal triumph. Told with honesty, candour, warmth and intimacy she explores the mindset of a transgender woman. Outlining the huge emotional and social toll of gender dysphoria and chronicling a voyage towards truth, validation and authenticity. Sophie's compelling story portrays the fragility and fortitude of human emotions, demonstrating how – by conquering fear and summoning strength - a person is capable of making the progression from loathing themselves to loving themselves.

With clarity, credibility and insight – and by drawing upon her personal experiences – Sophie scrutinises a variety of contemporary transgender issues, from prejudice on the high street to discrimination in the workplace, and from sensationalism in showbiz to demonisation in the media.

Her own story challenges perceptions and preconceptions of masculinity, femininity and womanhood, and offers a fresh perspective on this much misunderstood, oft-stigmatised human condition. Through her speeches, Sophie aims to broaden listeners' minds, expand their knowledge and shed new light on the way that we all think and behave. Sophie's tale resonates with people across the generations who appreciate an honest, uplifting and inspirational story.

That being said, Sophie is keen that her work is framed, but not defined, by her transgender journey. With a pacy narrative that spans nearly five decades – and travels across three continents - she also reflects upon a certain time, place and culture. Sophie's storytelling is unashamedly frank and forthright, and her wry, self-deprecating brand of humour lightens even the bleakest moments. This is the untold story of an extraordinary life, communicated by a voice that deserves to be heard.

Videos

- Keynote at the TUC - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDfauyj7oiw&t=7s>
- Premier League World film - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zu4k6QSJN0k>
- BBC Match of the Day film - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lvyy04GPM4>
- YouTube channel - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_5zsO9QtvNspmAUXjK98Eg



Bio

Sophie Cook is a media personality and an LGBT activist whose wide portfolio of work includes presenting, producing, writing and photography. In early 2017, Sophie's amazing story was spotlighted in a number of national newspapers and broadcasts, most notably the BBC's primetime *Premier League Show*. She received an outpouring of support after its airing, with presenter Gabby Logan poignantly tweeting 'I am Sophie' in recognition of this ground-breaking segment of the show. Sophie has since become an in-demand public speaker, delivering keynote talks and LGBT workshops for high profile organisations such as the TUC, Kick It Out, JP Morgan, Virgin Media and Stonewall. In April 2017 she was hand-picked by the Labour Party to contest the East Worthing and Shoreham seat, increasing the Labour vote by 114% and narrowly missing out on becoming the UK's first transgender MP, for now.

Marketing/PR

Since her transition, Sophie's public profile has risen considerably; this year, her story has been championed across many TV channels – including BBC1, Sky Sports and BT Sport - and she has been featured in every national newspaper. As the Labour Party's highest profile transgender candidate during the 2017 general election, she received extensive national media coverage and attracted a massive 21,000 votes from constituents on the day, which represented one of the largest swings to Labour in the UK.

She has garnered a large following on Facebook and Twitter (she has over 6,000 followers on @sophiecooktalks) and also uses her website, <http://www.sophiecook.me.uk> as an effective publicity platform for news, blogs and footage. Sophie delivers motivational speeches to large, influential audiences at many prestigious events and conferences across the UK.

Sophie Cook is currently working on her autobiography 'Not Today (How I chose life)'.

Testimonials

“I can honestly say that watching you speak changed me as a person. I came away wanting to enlighten other people as much as I could about the subject and I have since embarked on a quest to raise awareness, not just in the workplace, but down the pub and within my family and group of friends. Anyone who hasn't seen you speak won't have the benefit of that experience but I suppose I just wanted you to know that I changed last week, thanks to you. Thanks!”

Angela Melia, Head of Human Resources, Stewarts

“Sophie is a passionate, articulate, witty speaker on mental health and wellbeing. She is confident, forthright and knowledgeable. She brings a mix of her personal history alongside an admirable political awareness to inform, spark debate and raise awareness. I would have no hesitation in recommending her as a speaker for any event.”

Helen Jones, CEO, MindOut

“Sophie Cook is an inspiration. As a speaker she has the ability of telling her story openly, honestly and with a balance of grace and humour. As well as sharing her journey of coming out as a trans woman in the male dominated world of football to challenging a Tory ‘safe seat’ in the 2017 general election – Sophie also talks candidly about her ongoing battles with mental health and feelings of suicide. Sophie’s story is a human story and one that should be heard.”

Daniel Cheesman, CEO, Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard

“Sophie captivated the audience right from the start with her passionate, funny and often emotional talk. Sophie spoke honestly about her personal battle with mental health and her inspirational story of coming out as a trans woman.”

Philippa Thompson, Chief Executive, Sussex Oakleaf

“I was delighted you could join us for the closing panel at the Rainbow Laces Summit and share your story and experiences as a role model with leaders from across sport on the day. Your honest and articulate contribution really brought to life the personal impact of not feeling welcome or accepted whatever your role in sport, and how much of a difference vocal support and an open culture can make to being yourself.”

Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive, Stonewall

- ‘Sharp and witty delivery.’
- ‘Sophie Cook - insight and honesty.’
- ‘Very engaging, very candid. Really enjoyed her talk.’
- ‘Honest, often brutally, poignant and yes sad – Inspirational.’
- ‘Sophie Cook – delivered with humour and most importantly with impact – very informative and enjoyable.’

Contact

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