**Interview with Alec Scott Rook,**

**Extract 1**

I mean first noticed I was different when I was about six, and that was a long time ago, and I knew I was a bit different, but it really came to a head when I was in, sort of before I reached my teens, erm, and I knew that something wasn’t quite right, and I kind of liked girls and, but back then I kind of liked girls but I didn’t want to be, I didn’t want to be um, a girl with a girl. That’s not …not how I felt it was, should be for me. Erm, and back then, um, my only, erm, my only knowledge about lesbians was like Martina Navratilova, and … and people like that, and I didn’t find them attractive at all.

And we had a local … we had somebody local who was a lesbian and I didn’t find her attractive and so I’d assumed that obviously I wasn’t meant to be one. I didn’t realise that lesbians come in all different shapes and sizes and um, and within themselves are very diverse. So er, so that’s when I first realised um, that I was different. But it took many, many years until, in fact until I was 40, for me actually to acknowledge, I felt able to acknowledge, that um, er, I was, at that time I came out as gay. I came out as lesbian and um, it felt right for, probably a few years, I felt OK about it, um, it just never felt, it never sat right with me. I never felt very comfortable, erm, and it wasn’t long before I met somebody who was a trans man, and it was just like a thunderbolt. It was erm ... I was … I think I was just kind of shocked really, that I could transition and it just, it just … I found out lots about it. I did an awful lot research and I met up with quite a few trans men and I realised that actually this … this was what I wanted to do, erm, and there … there started a kind of whirlwind I suppose, I mean coming out at 40, and I think by 42, 42/43, I was already on the road to transition um, and then, I think it was, I was aged 44 when I started taking hormones, um, so really I mean in the space of like four years, I just kind of went from not knowing who I was to transition, which is very … is quite quick really.

**Extract 2**

I waited till I was … yeah, I mean that was a huge space of time. I … I kind of just resigned myself to the fact that I had to live a heterosexual life. I didn’t know what else to do, really. I just wanted to fit in. I think that’s the thing, I wanted to fit in, and so I made myself do it, and it wasn’t easy. It was very frustrating, um, and I had a lot of different relationships, a lot of flings, and I think for the last … for the last few years before I was 40 I was in a relationship with a ... with a guy, and for the most part it was a really good relationship. Erm, you know, we had a good time and we did lots of things and we had motorbikes in common, and it worked very well, but there just, there was just something missing for me. I just felt that I couldn’t, I couldn’t fulfil, um, I couldn’t fulfil the whole female role, of being really feminine and dressing up *(Laughs)* and I did, whenever I did dress up on special occasions, you know like birthdays or whatever, in a dress or a skirt whatever, I just felt … I felt like I was in drag. I couldn’t carry it off. It just didn’t feel good. It felt really false, um …

**Extract 3**

JA: OK, and how were your relations with your family during all these changes? Were they supportive?

ASR: Remarkably good. They were. I mean originally when I was 40 and I came out as a lesbian and I remember being, erm, I remember the first moment that I thought to myself “This is it. This is … I have to do this” and I came out. I remember I did get quite drunk to phone my mum and it was kind of a non-event really. It was just like “Oh, OK then, that’s nice” *(Laughs).* There was just … there was no shock or anything like that, it was just … accepted. Erm, so that was fine and then when I … when I, a few years later, when I came out as transgender, that was equally as accepted. Both of my parents said “Well, we always knew you should always have been a boy” and I was going “Well, I wish you’d told me” but they’d always thought that that’s … that how I should be, and my father had always said that when he looked at photographs of me, and I always doing boys’ things, and it was always “She should have been a boy.”

So they … they were fine, they were absolutely fine with it. I think the only thing my mother had reservations about was, she was worried for me. She was worried that maybe things would be very difficult for me, that it would be hard, that I might face abuse from people. That was the one thing that she was mostly worried about, um, you know? But my father was, he just took to it straightaway and got my name right immediately, got my pronoun right immediately. I mean my mum still gets it wrong, and er, and my brothers, um, both my brothers, have been fine about it. My younger one, erm, I don’t know, I’m not really, I don’t really have much contact with him. I haven’t had for a while now, and I’m not really sure if there’s something to do with that um, in it, which is kind of sad. I don’t think he really gets it. I think he’s struggled with it, um, but you know, it’s my life and that’s it, I’m happy. I’m happier than I’ve ever been in the whole of my life, so it’s kind of, in a selfish way, it’s kind of “Well, sorry, but this is for me. If you don’t like it, then that’s kind of tough, to be honest.” And he’s had plenty of time to get used to it.

**Extract 4**

JA: And you’re now training to be a counsellor?

ASR: I am, yes, yes. *(Laughs)* That’s, yeah, that’s brought out a whole load of other sort of dilemmas with the whole sort of transgender thing, because contrary to belief the counselling community in general don’t really know an awful lot about transgender and I’ve kind of come up against it with my … my peers in college. I’ve had, there’s been quite a lot of, not exactly directed at me, but there’s been conversations which have been quite transphobic, and that’s been very, very hard to listen to and also have the courage to challenge it.

It’s quite hard in the moment when you … when you hear something being said, and you … you’re not out to the rest of your classmates, so what do you do in that moment, do you, how do you challenge it and keep yourself safe? So it’s been, it’s been quite challenging but, you know, I’ve, I did a presentation not long ago and, on transgender, and I outed myself in the process, which was fine, that was … I chose to do it, and it actually went down incredibly well. People were quite … I’m not … I don’t think they were shocked. I think they were surprised, but in a good way, and it’s opened up an awful lot of dialogue. A lot of … a lot of my … my peers have actually gone off and done their own research and come back to me and said “Oh, you know, I looked at this and I’ve seen that television programme,” and so it’s really nice that they’ve gone out and, you know, sort of talked about it and looked for stuff. So I kind of feel that I … what I set out to do was accomplished.

JA: And are you intending to specialise in counselling other people that are transitioning or not necessarily?

ASR: That’s kind of my um, my hope that I want to do that, because, counselling, LGBT counselling is, especially the transgender side of it, you don’t find many counsellors who … who are transgender. There’s not many that I’ve personally know of, and by all accounts with agencies I’ve spoken to there’s … there aren’t very many at all, especially, well certainly open, openly transgender, and it’s very, very difficult for the transgender community to get counselling, to get appropriate counselling. I mean counselling *is* expensive anyway and if you’re on a low income which a lot of transgender people are, it’s … it’s impossible, unless you can get a concession.

And, so the other thing of course with counselling is getting a counsellor who knows something about transgender, because not all of them do. It’s not something that is part of the training. It’s a choice to sort of learn more by taking extra courses afterwards, so a lot of counsellors, and I’ve experienced them myself as well, where they don’t know anything about it and they use *you* as a source of information for *their* learning, or they think that you’re there *because* you’re transgender, or all of your problems are because you’re transgender. And that’s, that’s … that’s kind of hard because transgender people also have the same problems as people who aren’t transgender. So I’m hoping that yeah that I can specialise, and er, it’s going to have … be a lot of work though, that’s the thing, ‘cos even though I’m transgender, I don’t know everything, so there’s going to be a lot of hard work in the future, without a doubt.