

## Colt Meier St. Amand

Pronouns: he/ they

*Colt Meier St. Amand is a clinical psychologist and Texas's preeminent researcher on transgender issues. Just 30 years old, Colt was the first researcher in the country to demonstrate the psychological effects of testosterone therapy in trans men over time, and his findings informed the American Psychological Association's first guidelines for the clinical care of transgender patients. He currently is finishing medical school and plans to work as a family practice psychologist-physician. Colt's story was originally reported by Francesca Mari and is found at <https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/gender-bender/>. Reprinted with permission from Texas Monthly, March 2016.*

Boy. Girl. Man. Woman. These terms reflect a binary, two options only, view of gender. Our language doesn't allow for the in-between or outside of. As the trans community has become more visible, it has become clear that gender, like sexuality, exists on a spectrum.

The very first thing that Colt's parents, Bob and Pam Meier, learned about their only child was which distinct category he fell in. "It's a girl!" the obstetrician announced as she delivered Colt into the arms of his mother one August day in 1983. And it was on this bit of information that Bob and Pam began hanging their dreams and expectations.

Colt's understanding of himself would turn out to be considerably different. Like many who are transgender, he felt the devastating disconnect between, as he put it, "the gender others tell you, you are, and the gender you know yourself to be."

As a child, Colt hated Barbie dolls, long hair, and anything overtly feminine. Because he wriggled out of dresses as soon as his mother had slipped them over his head, Pam got permission from the principal of his Catholic school to fashion him a modified school uniform: overalls made of the same plaid fabric used for the girls' pleated skirts. Before his first confession, at the age of seven, Colt prayed in his pew: *God, please don't make me a lesbian.*

In high school, Colt was a straight-A student, a Eucharistic minister, and a black belt in tae kwon do. He still refused to wear dresses, but to avoid scrutiny, he grew out his hair. Though he had boyfriends, he never wanted to be intimate with them. It

wasn't until the summer after his sophomore year at Rice University that his best friend, a girl in his Catholic youth group, helped him figure out why. Standing in the upstairs hallway of Colt's parents' house late one night, the friend leaned in and kissed him. Then she ran down the stairs, afraid of how he might react. He stood in shock for a good minute, his body lit. Then he ran down the stairs to kiss her back.

Colt was ashamed of what this meant because the church had taught him to believe that "homosexuality" is a sin. Yet the love he felt suggested otherwise. More than a year later, when he told his parents about the relationship, they were accepting, though Bob was certain it was a passing phase. Then at the age of twenty, Colt made a discovery: he was not a woman, as he had believed.

In 2006, several months after Colt graduated with a degree in psychology, he and his partner attended a one-man show at the Rice Student Center. Scott Schofield, an actor on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, took to the stage to dramatize how he had come out as a lesbian and then later as a trans man. Colt had only ever heard the word "transgender" used as a slur, but looking at Schofield—who was blond, Texan, and transgender—Colt saw himself.

Later that fall, Colt phoned his father, a psychologist, and told him that he'd read the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—at that time, the fourth edition, known as the DSM-IV—and found that he met every single criterion of what was then called "gender identity disorder." His dad tried to comfort Colt. Then Colt told his mother. "That makes sense," she said. "I never had a little girl."

In the spring of 2007, Colt began six months of therapy in Galveston. He also underwent ten months of counseling in Houston. "It was overkill," Colt said, "but I wanted to be really sure about transitioning, because the church said that God will always see you as your assigned sex."

Colt started wearing a "binder," a nylon-and-spandex vest, to compress his breasts. He attended his first trans support group, and while everyone went around the room introducing themselves, he racked his brain for a masculine name, quickly picking "Colt." Faculty and students at his graduate school addressed him using male pronouns. He used the men's restrooms on campus without any issue.

Finally, in October, after Colt's sixth month of therapy in Galveston, a psychiatrist handed him what people in the trans community call "the letter," which permitted testosterone therapy, and Colt received his first prescription.

Over the next year, Colt kept an online journal about his transition. After three months, fuzz sprouted on his arms and legs. A small cropping of acne burbled on his face. By six months, his shoulders had begun to broaden and his voice had deepened. Less obvious were the subtle changes to his mood and personality. "When you're transitioning, it's like you're going through puberty."

Bob and Pam, meanwhile, went to Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meetings in Houston and attended monthly gatherings at a church in Nederland for Catholic families of LGBT youth. "Knowing you're not the lone ranger is very helpful," Bob said.

Though Bob had been slower to accept Colt's gender identity than Pam, he had eventually thrown himself into researching trans issues and was now educating others through videos he posted to YouTube. Meanwhile, Pam, an OB-GYN, opened her Beaumont office several Saturdays a year to Colt's trans friends so that they had a safe and respectful place in which to receive gynecological exams.

At his therapist's recommendation, Colt penned a letter in which he came out as trans. He sent it to members of the community he had grown up in, including his childhood priest.

"This has not been easy for me, as things that are true for me are not mainstream nor are they socially acceptable in many parts of the country," he wrote. "I am very different, and I did not ask to be."

His parents sent out their own letter as well. Though a couple of Bob's fishing buddies maintained that changing genders was a choice, and a self-destructive one at that, the majority of people whom Colt and his parents heard back from were supportive.

"I will try my best to walk with you," wrote a friend of the family. "We are led by God in this to where He wants us to be." Another friend sent Bob and Pam an email that said, "Thanks for your willingness to educate others by sharing your experience. I believe God has a plan for all of us and this seems like it may be part of God's plan for you."

But the biggest solace came from Colt's childhood priest. "That is a brave letter by a brave person," the priest wrote. "I have never particularly paid attention to your gender, but you have and that is entirely what you must focus on."

Sitting in a pew on Palm Sunday in 2008, Colt listened to the reading from the Book of Mark. In it, Jesus commands two disciples to untether a colt on the outskirts of town so that he may use it to ride into Jerusalem. Colt leaned forward—*a colt!*—so as not to miss any of the words that followed. "Untie it and bring it," Jesus instructs. "If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, 'The Lord has need of it.'" Colt knew then that the name he thought he had chosen for himself had really been chosen for him.

"My work is nowhere near done. We are just getting started."