**Tuck:** Before we start the show let me tell you about our sponsor this week: the Bistitchual Podcast is brought to you by John and Kelsey, two crafty, queer comedians. Tune in biweekly for real-life ramblings, Zodiac quizzes, work-in-progress check-ins, and tips, tricks and other fiber tidbits, along with the occasional crafty guest to discuss all things yarn related. Come hang out in the Bistitchual Discord server to make new, queer, fiber friends; show off your work; and pop in to the bimonthly Stitch night. Find them on Instagram @BistitchualPodcast or at Bistitchualpodcast.ca, link to this in the show notes.

(theme music plays)

**Tuck**: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

(theme music stops)

**Tuck**: Hey everyone, happy LosGBTs, hoping you’re all hanging in there. I’ve already warned you that Season 7 is going to be a bit of an experiment, and part of that, as you know is that we are catching up with guests from past seasons, but that is not all. So this week we’re trying something weird, or actually two somethings weird, instead of one hour long episode we’re doing two shorter episodes and instead of talking to a trans person about gender, we are talking to two self-identified cisgenders. Maddy Court, a.k.a. Xena Worrier Princess, John Paul Brammer, a.k.a Hola Papi, are my absolute favorite queer advice columnists, no offense to the other queer advice columnists, they’re great too, but they have both gotten me through some tough times in my relationships and in my brain, so when I saw that they both had books coming out around now, I selfishly created this excuse to chat with them.

We’ll hear from J.P. later this week but today we’re listening to my chat with Maddy Court. This is a short interview but we pack a lot in, including how to meet new people in real life, like not on Tinder, why being single is not actually a bleak hellscape, whether everyone has had more sex than us, and just like generally why we’re all like this.

**Maddy:** There’s something like kinda endearing about people who go into relationships with no common sense and no sense of just basic logistics.

**Tuck**: But before we get to that, just the quickest of reminders that we have merch for sale. It says things like “Hot Trans Summer,” “More Kink at Pride,” and “I Don’t Know Any Straight People.” It’s available this month only at bit.ly/gendermerch and all proceeds go to trans people and trans organizations, again that’s bit.ly/gendermerch. And if you want to support these trans people and this trans organization we are patreon.com/gender and just 1$ gets you access to our weekly newsletter.

We’ve got a theymail message for you this week. Theymail is a program where someone sends us a little bit of money and we read a little message. This message is from Shop Enby and it says, “Sometimes shopping for sex toys can feel overwhelming or dysphoric but ShopEnby.com aims to create a better experience for the queer, trans, and gender nonconforming community. As a black and trans owned sex toy company the cuties at ShopEnby.com are sensualists with a mission. 2% of all proceeds are donated to organizations focused on improving the lives of queer, trans people of color. Shop Enby is also a carbon negative company and every sale funds renewable energy and forest conservation projects. Again that’s ShopEnby.com, S-H-O-P-E-N-B-Y.com” And with that, it’s time for This Week in Gender.

(music plays)

**Tuck:** Okay, I was gonna do a fun Pride bit this week but some news happened, so I guess we’ll do the news part of the news segment. So, last Wednesday the US Department of Education announced that under the Biden administration they will interpret Title IX as protecting LGBTQ students from discrimination. As you likely know, Title IX says that no student in federally funded schools can be discriminated against based on sex. When Title IX was first written, in the 1970’s one of the effects was that girls suddenly had more access to school sports, you see where this is going. Well, the Department of Education says that its interpretation of Title IX as protecting kids on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, as well as biological sex is based on last year’s Supreme Court decision Bostock Vs. Clayton County which found that similarly, Title VII protects employees from discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation as well as biological sex.

If I lost you there, that’s on me, but also what is a Title, I’m lost too. And let’s get lost again because this update by the Biden administration is a reversal of a Trump administration policy, which is itself a reversal of an Obama era statement that directed schools to allow kids to use the bathrooms and changing rooms that align with their genders. This directive by the Biden administration allows the Department of Education to pursue Title IX complaints from LGBTQ students such as complaints about the 8 different laws passed by 8 different states in the past 6 months barring trans athletes from playing on school sports teams that match their genders.

However, some experts, per the New York Times, think that this will not actually happen, like the Biden administration will not actually pursue these complaints. According to a professor named R. Shep Melnick, who wrote a book about Title IX, “Some schools, especially in the states where there is legislation will simply ignore what the federal government says and then it becomes a question of whether or not the federal government wants to take enforcement action, which I think they may be somewhat reluctant to do.” But then the very next paragraph of that New York Time articles is like, but actually maybe Biden will do something. And then I looked at another news sources and they were like, there’s actually no way to know how this will play out.

So I guess we just have to wait and see if children are allowed to play sports and be trans. Speaking of the Biden administration though, I have some military information for you while we’re here, the VA Secretary announced recently that they are “taking the first necessary steps” to cover gender confirmation surgeries through the VA health insurance. Currently, VA health benefits include HRT and therapy but not surgeries. Any expanded coverage of trans related healthcare is good in any context, I think, right? But I’m also thinking about how many trans people work for Starbucks because Starbuck’s health insurance is allegedly good to trans people and thinking about how it’ll suck if even more trans people will have to join the Imperialist Death Machine in order to get vaginas and whatever.

Trans people are already disproportionately represented in the military because trans people are disproportionately poor and unemployed and out of options. For more on that, I suggest listening or relistening to our episode with Paige Kreisman from I think season 5. In the meantime this has been This Week in Gender.

(music starts and stops)

(theme music plays)

**Tuck:** Maddy Court is a writer and zine maker from Wisconsin. Her first book “The Ex Girlfriend of my Ex Girlfriend is My Girlfriend” a book of queer relationship advice with art and illustrations by Kelsey Wroten is out in bookstores everywhere.

(theme music stops)

**Tuck**: The way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

**Maddy**: I’m a cis woman.

**Tuck:** And I feel obligated to ask, how do you know?

**Maddy:** I’ve just always felt excited about being a girl and then a woman. If anything I felt maybe a lot of pain surrounding feeling like too big, or too fat, or like not enough of a woman. But I’ve never experienced any kind of strife or conflict around my body.

**Tuck:** Well, you have a Master’s degree in Gender and Women’s Studies, talk to me about studying gender. What did you study? What did you learn? Did you figure out what gender is?

**Maddy:** No, I love to think I’m more confused about what gender is, also like what feminism is. My research was, I was really interested in lesbian history but like how lesbians in pop culture become these manifestations of runaway feminism, or feminism that’s like grotesque because it’s so extreme. So, I was really interested in these comics from the 90s called “Hothead Paisan” about his lesbian who describes herself as a “homicidal lesbian terrorist.”

This is kind of before the word terrorist, before, I mean the word terrorist has always been scary but it didn’t have the same connotations before 2001. And it’s this woman who is just so angry that she can’t really function in the world. She goes outside to get a cup of coffee and she sees a man beating his girlfriend and she’s so infuriated that she like literally can’t move on. So that’s what a lot of the plot points are, her being angry, in public.

**Tuck:** Did that feel relatable to you at all, is that why you were drawn to it?

**Maddy:** It did feel relatable, I think everyone feels like that. I feel like shit about the news and things I see all the time, in my life. And I love working with historical queer texts even though I know the 90s isn’t that long ago, it kind of is when it comes to how people are talking about things like gender and trans issues. So much has changed. Which you can look at as pessimistic but I think there’s a lot of hope in that.

**Tuck:** Yeah, it always stands out to me how much has changed, but also how much has stayed the same. There’s a lot of discourse, all the time, about what lesbian does or doesn’t encompass and since you’re like a famous lesbian, I would love for you to talk about what it means to you personally,

**Maddy:** You know it’s interesting because I think I like I see things, just on Twitter, that feel like so next level to me and that I’m really excited about but that’s not the most interesting question to me, creating like boundaries about what a lesbian is. I will say that I think that the term lesbian is a lot looser than people sometimes make it out to be. But those aren’t usually the people who are on Twitter or on Tumblr trying to like create these categories.

When we were putting the ex girlfriend book together, and selecting questions, we decided not to actually answer questions that were like, am I trans, am I a lesbian, because like I can’t say that. And I think what it really comes down to is what term that person is comfortable with. And also things are so specific to communities, you really have to ask yourself is the hot take that you’re seeing something that you hear from your real life friends and community? And if it’s not it’s probably not worth getting your druthers up about something.

**Tuck:** You said in your book that you’re a slow writer and that giving advice doesn’t come naturally to you, so I think the obvious question is how did you end up writing a series of zines, and now a book, where you are giving advice in written form?

**Maddy:** No, it’s really wild! I’m not someone who likes to tell other people what to do and I also don’t really like promoting my own work, so it’s very weird that I’m a writer, is what I’m trying to say, and then I do this. But I made my first zine because I was super broke in grad school. And I had made zines since I was a teenager and I had free printing and I had Instagram with just a couple of thousand followers at that point. So I would sometimes get questions in my DMs and I would answer them because I felt kind of badly for the person on the other end. Because if you’re at the point where you’re like DMing strangers on the internet you probably don’t know that there are resources out there.

And I’m from Wisconsin, and I grew up before the internet was what it was today, so I know what it’s like to have questions that you just cannot google. So yeah, I would get those questions and I would answer them and sometimes I would show my friends and I would notice how excited they got to see the question and weigh in on it. And I was like oh, so people really love giving advice, for some people this is really exciting. And I realized that if I made a zine that was like question and answer at least the people who sent me questions would like buy the zine. Because it was like bad, I was like not able to afford underwear, like that kind of grad school poverty. And then it really felt like this movie or something that wouldn’t happen in real life because it just took off immediately.

**Tuck:** Yeah, cause it’s really good actually is the reason (laughs).

**Maddy:** Thank you so much.

**Tuck:** No, yeah, of course. You said the most common questions you get are basically like my open relationship is stressing me out, my long-distance relationship is stressing me out, do you think that those question are so prevalent because open relationships and long-distance relationships are just inherently really hard, do you think that it’s a lot of people getting into them for maybe no the best reasons, like why do you think that’s the most popular or common?

**Maddy:** I think that a lot of times queer people often operate from this pretty extreme sense of scarcity. Scarcity, also maybe relating to someone because you share the same struggles. You have more context for the other person, so their bad behavior is oftentimes more explained away, right? I think where people tend to be more understanding and compassionate towards others but there’s a bad side of that, which is that you’re dating someone that you keep making them excuses. And it’s like pop culture too, expecting relationships to be complicated and weird.

Though I also think that there is something kinda endearing about people who go into relationships with no common sense and no sense of basic logistics. Like yes, I will date someone 3000 miles away. I will give someone endless excuses, I think straight people are a little bit, speaking generally, are a little bit better at seeing things in black and white.

**Tuck:** Yeah, you also said the other most common topic is I’ve had less sex than I think is normal for someone my age. Do we just all have the perception that everyone is having more sex than us?

**Maddy:** Yes, absolutely, I think so many people have this perception that they have not had a normal amount of sex for their age. And they are the only person who has body hangups or weird body feelings. When really, most people that you’re interacting with feel insecure about the amount of sex they’ve had and their bodies.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I know that’s when your zines have been really helpful for me was like when I was going through a breakup and was like, I’m the only person who has ever gone through a breakup and then I read the zine and I’m like, oh everyone has felt this way and also people have been in much worse, wilder situations than I’m in right now, so actually I feel ok, because I’m not like a lone alien for not having this relationship work out.

**Maddy:** Yeah, questions kinda speaking to like people who feel shame for not having had sex before, not having had the kind of sex that they feel like all their friends are having, those questions of feelings sad for too long after breaking up. I feel like I get these questions of like, I’ve been sad for a year, and a year is a long time but it’s not actually that long to feel sad about someone or need to be on like a timeout from dating.

**Tuck:** Is there a question that you’ve answered, or a question that you’ve not answered, that has like particularly stuck with you?

**Maddy:** Well there was a question that came into the book about someone feeling really pressured to have sex. And when I finished actually writing my response, the question is in the book, I was like, fuck I should email this person, because I’m really afraid that she went ahead and had sex with someone that she didn’t want to have sex with. Yeah, questions where I feel like I could like prevent something are stressful to me because I often see them so much later than when they come in. And I definitely hope that if someone is putting together their question and sending it to me that they’re also talking to other people in their life, and ultimately I can’t be that kind of resource for someone.

I don’t answer questions that come into my DMs anymore and I don’t answer questions that people email me because it is just not appropriate for me to be emailing back and forth with someone. I don’t have that skill set, I’m not a therapist. And I’m also worried about something that I write being screenshotted or like if I say something wrong, you know. I don’t know if that’s something, I mean yeah, you probably think about that all the time.

**Tuck:** I mean, I don’t answer questions in DMs and I always just, if someone emails me, email back and ask if we can answer this on the show, it it’s like an advice question. But often we have not gotten to it ever or we answer it like a year later. So I think for the questions on the show, I never think of them as like this helps this particular person, I always think of it as, this is a sample question that we’re all engaging with together because surely this person has figured this out in the nine months since they sent this in, and if not, oh no (laughs). You know?

**Maddy:** Totally! I think for me, I want to create things that are queer but also fun, and I think you do that too. You’re creating trans content that’s not clinical and people can get something out of that, even if it’s not specifically for this one listener in Topeka, Kansas.

**Tuck:** Right, and interesting because people love advice and our advice episodes are our most popular episodes, even if the person who sent the question never listens to it, they’re still listened to by like thousands of other people who are excited about it, for some reason. I’m also not qualified to give advice but here we are.

**Maddy:** Yeah, I feel like that all the time. I actually did an interview for somebody else’s advice column about how some people are calling this summer “quarnsummer” is that the official, quarnsummer?

**Tuck:** Yeah (laughs) sure.

**Maddy:** And it’s like an advice column about what to do if you feel like intimidated by that, or you’re not someone who likes to actually date, but you’ve just been through a pandemic, you want to get out there. And I truly was like, I had nothing for this interviewer (laughs). I was like people should be honest with themselves, I think a lot of people don’t want to casually date, they just feel like they should but I didn’t’ have any hot tips.

**Tuck:** I mean that seems like good advice, just to listen to yourself and do what you actually want is like the number one advice in general for dating. Especially for queer people because we’re trained to hate everything that we want. You know?

**Maddy:** Yeah, I think when you’re emerging and you’ve just come out and you’re making friends for the first time and you’re consuming queer media for the first time you’re really susceptible to this sense of everyone else likes this thing that I don’t like.

**Tuck:** Yeah, has it been strange because the timeline of writing the book to having it out in the world is so extended that you wrote this book sort of like pre-quarantine life and now all this advice is out there as if the world exists? Does that feel strange at all?

**Maddy:** It does. Because we finished the book, I finished the text of the book like last June and I asked my editor do I need to write a new chapter, do we need to acknowledge it, and she was like there’s no way we even know enough about the situation to acknowledge it that it wouldn’t come across as dated (laughs). Yeah, no, it’s super weird, but I’ve had a really good dating year, strangely.

**Tuck:** That’s great, because I know you mention several times in the book you’re like, I live in a small city and it is hard to find people to date, so it’s fun to hear that for you.

**Maddy:** Yeah, and with the book, I’d never done a creative project that was like 3 years long before, so just looking back to where I was before I signed the contract in 2019 to here in 2021, I never would have imagined that I would be seriously partnered.

**Tuck:** Well as someone who has lived in both small areas in the Midwest and I know you lived in Portland and other, well Portland is not a big city, but other very queer cities I guess I’ll say. I’m curious how that feeds into how you give advice because I know for me when trans people are like how do I meet people, how do I find people that accept me, I’ve been in Portland for like almost 10 years so I’m like, well they’re everywhere, all around you, all the time and it’s hard for me to tap in to how to give advice for people for whom that’s not true at all.

**Maddy:** Right and it is true that some people are just naturally great at making new friends and meeting new people, they can just casually date, and then other people need more time to process and it doesn’t feel good to constantly be in new social situations. Maybe post-pandemic that category of shy people has expanded but what I always tell people, so that kind of questions, the questions about friendship too I get a lot, people who are like I don’t know how to meet people, you really have to get yourself in the same place as other people, and not just any people, people who you have potential to be friends with, who share like hobbies and interests and values on a regular basis, and you have to do some kind of constructive activity together. So volunteering right, or doing a book club, activities that maybe seem high school but that is how you meet people. Because people don’t really meet other people at bars, it’s a lot harder.

**Tuck:** Or just messier and less productive I think. You can meet a person in a bar, I think, but who the fuck are they? So you said that you are seriously partnered now but I know that you wrote in your book that as you were single for the making of this book, you noticed that a ton of questions depicted single as being a bleak, irredeemable hell. Can you, for our single listeners who are scared or embarrassed by being single, talk about some things you like about being single or some ways that it feels redeemable and not like a bleak, dark hell?

**Maddy:** Yeah, I think being single is the time to spend with friends, to spend on personal development, but also just to me there’s nothing worse than being in a relationship that is bad or that you don’t want to be in. Being single is like 100x better than dating someone who is a jerk or not even a jerk, just a relationship that you can’t grow in or get anything out of. A question that I get a lot is how do I break up with somebody because people are so afraid to do it, and it is infinitely worse to drag somebody along or ghost them than it is to send a text message that’s like this isn’t working for me anymore.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I sometimes have to force myself to think about it from the other person’s perspective and would the other person enjoy knowing that they’re dating someone that they know doesn’t want to be dating them? No, they would feel terrible, so it is kinder to cut that off than to just drag someone along because you think it feels better?

**Maddy:** Yeah

**Tuck:** Where can people find your book?

**Maddy:** My book is anywhere that books are sold. Which is very cool to say because I’m used to making zines where I have to stuff an envelope and mail it and do a lot of work so it’s exciting that someone else is doing the ground work for me. And I write a newsletter called Xena Worrier Princess , that you can find on Substack.

**Tuck:** I have to always over enunciate when I am talking about your newsletter when I’m like Xena Worrier Princess. (laughs)

**Maddy:** Yeah, as in one who worries. I still get messages where people are like oh it’s a pun! I’ve been following you for years and just realized.

**Tuck:** So, the way we always end this show is by asking, in your ideal world what would the future of gender look like?

**Maddy:** I think the ideal future is one where there is equality and people’s genitals do not determine anything about their lives.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I would love that personally.

**Maddy:** Yeah, I think it would be much sexier (laughs).

**Tuck:** And that’s what we all aspire to is a sexier future.

**Maddy:** Yes, a sexy, peaceful life for everybody.

(theme music plays)

**Tuck**: That’s gonna do it for today’s show. We’ll be back later this week with John Paul Kramer, so make sure you’re subscribed to Gender Reveal, and if this is your first episode of the podcast please go back and listen to some episodes with actual trans people. We actually have a whole section of our website dedicated for people like you, the new listeners. It is genderpodcast.com/starterpacks and we have all of our favorite episodes sorted by interest. You can find Maddy’s book, “The Ex Girlfriend of My Ex Girlfriend is My Girlfriend” wherever books can be found. Please do pick up a copy if you can, it is excellent, the book also includes several guest experts including trans people like Tyler Ford and Mey Rude, so if you’re like, Tuck, don’t sell me cis stuff, joke’s on you there are trans people in there. You can find Maddy at MaddyCourt.com and on Instagram @XenaWorrierPrincess. We are on Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal. I’m on Twitter @tuckwoodstuck and Instagram @tuckwoodstockjr.

We are also at genderpodcast.com where you can find transcripts of every episode and other good, cool resources. Find our merch at bit.ly/gendermerch. Pay us for our work if you want at patreon.com/gender. This episode was produced by me, Tuck Woodstock and edited by Julia Llinas Goodman. Our logo is by the talented Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder, additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. Extra special thanks this week to my girlfriend for giving me two Ex Girlfriend of My Ex Girlfriend zines to read when I was crying on a beach when we were supposed to be having a good time. We’ll be back in a few days with more feelings about gender. Throw a brick at a cop!

(theme music plays and stops)

**Tuck:** It’s just like such a funny, niche, real thing that exists now is like oh this person became well known for making gay memes on the internet and that’s just like part of culture and then you’re trying to talk to a straight person and they’re like, pardon, and you’re like, you know, the famous gay memer.

**Maddy:** Totally, I always, cause I don’t post a lot of pictures of myself or of my life, so I’m always really surprised when people know who I am. Or like know me by name because I’m not somebody who’s gonna be like, gotta a lot of new followers, and then like posts a bunch of selfies. It’s cool if people are like that, I just don’t want to live that way.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I don’t think I knew your name until we started talking about the book, I just thought of you as Xena Worrier Princess, which is probably for the best, right?

**Maddy:** Yeah, absolutely, I want that veil of… yeah

**Tuck:** Yeah, alright, well we’ll not tell anyone