

Ben Schidla, Actor, 23

What was your initial thought when you heard of the casting call?

I am an actor, so from an actor's perspective my initial thought was: Great, an opportunity – I say yes to that. Even though the way I stumbled across the casting call, hung up on the street, surprised me.

Why did apply to be part of the movie, what intrigued you about it?

Because I value Ruth Beckermann and her movies and always thought very highly of her and her work – therefore I really wanted to work on a project with her. As an actor and cineaste, it was an exciting experience.

Which expectations did you have before shooting began?

None whatsoever. I did not know which genre it was going to be, which role is being cast, etc. I had no idea what to expect. What I did know was that – since it was a project by Ruth Beckermann – the film was going to be a very intellectual, clever, and not at all obnoxious or purely vulgar production. Otherwise, I would not have been part of it.

How was it on set?

Not very different. We were confronted with text passages from the book, discussed it – but how exactly the project was going to turn out I didn't know. It was a big "Ok, I get it" moment when I first saw the finished film as a whole at the Berlin Film Festival for its world premiere. You really just knew your own scenes, not the ones of other protagonists, hence only a part of the film.

How easy/difficult was it for you to relax into this very uncommon situation? How do you think about it now looking back?

I am the kind of person that loves new experiences and unknown situations. This is how you grow personally and professionally. Keeping this in mind it was quite easy for me to relax into this environment, it was exciting. I have read the book "Josephine Mutzenbacher or The Story of a Viennese Whore" beforehand and was already aware of the language and text passages. The discussions, in groups and in pairs, were very comfortable. Especially with my partner in the dual discussion – Alexander Horwath – the talk was very interesting and fluent. Ruth Beckermann created a fantastic atmosphere while shooting. Looking back, I actually appreciate this oblivion, which direction the project will take, a lot. I was quite positively surprised by the finished project.

The story of Josephine Mutzenbacher: When was the first time that you have heard of it or read it?

Actually, just before the casting. I have bought the book before that and have read it.

How was it for you to be reading those very explicit passages from the book?

All by myself at home it was really strange because you hardly ever find such explicit texts about certain topics in other media or books, at least I can't think of any. I am not a prude at all, but a few of the text passages were very extreme, vulgar, and disconcerting, especially because they are all about a little child. Some passages depicting incest and rape I just found

appalling. Reading the scenes while shooting was quite different – I knew them already and the artistic work with the text and the discussion about it was predominant.

Talking about sex and sexuality – how easy/difficult is this for you?

Easy, it is absolutely natural, nothing to be ashamed of. In general, I strongly believe that the topic of sex should not be tabooed – another reason why I think “Mutzenbacher” is such an exciting project. However, I would not disclose very private and intimate moments here or in the film for example, being respectful towards my partners and because some privacy is always necessary.

What do you think is good sex?

I would not say “What is”, because there again we circle back to a sort of sexual “bucket list” what to do and what not to do, which obviously doesn’t exist. I think as long as all parties are having fun and are able to relax and are being spontaneous and enjoying the sex, then it’s great sex. Sex is never the same. When everyone involved communicates what they like and don’t like, it’s going to be good. Communication is key. And having lots of fun.

Which sexual fantasies do you have? Do you like trying out new things? And what have you not tried so far?

Of course, I like trying out new things. I don’t need to try everything, but changing things up is important.

How open are you at communicating your wishes and fantasies?

Communicating openly what one likes and doesn’t like is crucial. As I said, sex is different for every single one of us. When partners take each other into consideration, it is going to be good, regardless of what exactly one is doing.

How open are you when talking about sex with others? And what is something that you’d rather not talk about?

Honest – neither I nor others gain any advantage by twisting the truth or telling something different than it actually is. With friends I highly value it talking openly about sex and discussing how we see certain things, but as I said I would not share everything with anyone. After all, this is something really private between my partners and myself. I think locker room talk is just really outdated and disrespectful.

How do you define masculinity?

I think you cannot give an overall definition of masculinity, since we are fortunately living at a time when men – sadly, not everywhere, but in Austria you mostly can – can define themselves as men in whatever way they want, that’s very subjective, I think. I for example feel very masculine when I stand up for what I believe in and for things and people that are important to me. However, that is not really linked to the gender but rather to one’s character. I feel very manly when I work out, when I go to my limits and feel confident in my body. Honestly, also when I see positive exterior training progress and when I define my body, sports in general are a crucial part of my life. However, I feel the manliest, when I am just absolutely self-confident in my own skin, even if in a certain situation I do not fit into a stereotypical masculine box or don’t feed a certain cliché. Therefore I would say being a man for me personally means being true to myself and being the person that I want to be – having a clear and strong opinion and standing behind it and doing my own thing, regardless of societal ideas, how this is

supposed to look like. I am not a fan of traditional gender roles at all. I don't feel more or less manly when I go for a beer after playing a game of soccer or when I repair my car.

Are men nowadays in a crisis – in a time of toxic masculinity, questionable role models, old, white men...?

No, I do not believe that men nowadays are stuck in a crisis. I rather believe that we as modern men get the opportunity to step by step redefine masculinity in our society and break free from patriarchal structures and stereotypical gender roles shaped by clichés. For me personally, masculinity goes hand in hand with feminism as well. Men that try at all costs to keep those patriarchal structure and gender roles up, they most definitely are in a crisis, since there is no room for something like that in our society nowadays. I strongly believe that this holding on to traditional structures is linked to insecurity in one's own masculinity – you can maybe see that with some men in the film "Mutzenbacher". I am very secure in my masculinity and oftentimes feel most manly when I break free from stereotypical ideas and gender roles and just do my thing, and from what I can sense around me, a lot of young and especially modern men feel the same way.

Has the importance of sex changed for you over the years?

The importance has not changed, but the way how you go about it definitely has. The more experience you get, the more you know how versatile sex is.

How often do you like having sex?

I think my sex drive is quite healthy.

What is a taboo for you?

As soon as one person does not feel comfortable doing something, it is an immediate taboo. Then it's not a mutual experience anymore but just egoism.

How important is it for you that you come when having sex? How important is it for you that your partner comes during sex?

For me it's important that both parties have fun and enjoy it. As men we have it easier in general, but the essence of sex is that you satisfy each other, otherwise it would be a one-man-show, in which case you can stay by yourself under the blanket as well.

Are there things that turn you off?

Yes, there are.

Have you ever faked an orgasm?

No, I have not.

When was the last time that you have felt uncomfortable during sex?

I cannot think of any sexual experience where I have felt uncomfortable. I am very grateful for that. Those are only good memories.

Are you worried about erectile dysfunction?

No, I am not worried about erectile dysfunction.

Would you ever pay for sex?

No, I have never and will never pay for sex.

What's your biggest issue with yourself?

Sex is definitely best when you leave all your issues with yourself outside of the bedroom (or wherever) – then you are relaxed and in the right place to enjoy it, that's what it is all about. So better try not to take any issues into the bedroom.

What would you wish from your sex partner?

I think self-confidence and feeling comfortable in her own body is very sexy, then you enjoy sex on a whole new level. Being spontaneous and enjoying it. I also think it's important that my partner tells me what she likes.