

# A year in the life of 5 teen girls

By Carrie Rickey  
INQUIRER MOVIE CRITIC

**F**ew spectacles are more extraordinary than those captured by a documentary camera purporting to chronicle ordinary life. We know this, even while we also know the certainty of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle — the act of observing a phenomenon alters the outcome of that phenom.

*Talk 16*, a profound piece of *cinema verite* following five Toronto teenagers from New Year's Eve 1990 to Christmas of the following year, is a heady brew that carries its own sobering antidote. While the filmmakers have rare access to the lives and hearts of these ethnically and economically diverse young women, they are aware that shining a light on an "average" girl can't help but make her unique. Moreover, they're aware that training their cameras on a young woman at the most acutely self-conscious time of her adolescence might in fact impel her to act in ways she perceives will make her more appealing or sympathetic to her audience.

Reminiscent of Michael Apter's epic survey, *7 Up/28 Up*, which visited English kids at seven-year intervals, *Talk 16* is itself unique in that its focus is exclusively on females, girls who strike the external poses of adulthood while cloistering treasured totems of childhood.

Erin is upper-middle-class, white, a prospective deb who goes to private school, enjoys proms and mother/daughter teas and can't contemplate her future. Maybe she'll be a model.

Buoyant Rhonda knows exactly where she's going: this middle-class daughter of Guyanese immigrants is a public school student who aspires to be "Canada's first great black actress."

Robust Lina is the working-class daughter of Russian immigrants, an engaging girl whose intellect is well in advance of her below-average grades at a technical school, and whose only ambition is to get a boyfriend.

Boys are no sweat for Astra, a middle-class punkette and frequent runaway who attracts no shortage of dates but who can't stay in school or keep a job.

Her opposite is Helen, the daughter of working-class Korean immigrants who deftly juggles an A average, two part-time jobs, religious school and a rich extracurricular life that includes training in classical piano.

Artless and potent, this smorgasbord of teenage exuberance and angst manages to illuminate five distinctively different experiences of adolescence while implicitly showing that the passage from girlhood into womanhood is marked with universal conflicts.

Each young woman finds herself pulled in certain predictably opposite directions. They yo-yo between the need for rebellion and for parental approval. With the exception of Helen, who knows how smart she is, all the girls worry about their intelligence, which ranges from simply being bad at



They're "average," but they're in a movie. The stories of (from left) Helen, Lina, Astra, Rhonda and Erin illuminates some truths about growing up.

## Review: Film

TALK 16

★★★½

Produced by Back Alley Productions, directed by Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell, photography by Deborah Parks, music by Aaron Davis, distributed by Alliance Releasing.

**Running time:** 1 hour, 50 mins.  
With Astra, Erin, Helen, Lina and Rhonda

**Parent's guide:** No MPAA rating (drugs, sexual candor, profanity)

**Showing at:** Neighborhood Film/Video Project, tonight at 7, Saturday at 5 and 9:15 p.m., Sunday at 2 and 7 p.m., Monday and Tuesday at 7 p.m.

math to dyslexia. With the exception of Astra, who is secure about her looks but insecure about everything else, each worries that she is overweight. Each struggles between wanting a boyfriend to confirm her social standing and at-

tractiveness and wanting to assert her independence.

It's hard to know whether this is a lack in the movie or something that adults project onto teenage experience, but it's interesting that none of the girls talks about the conflict between their desire for sex and their desire for love. Each does, however, talk about her marital ideal, which ranges from the sweetly callow to the deeply disturbing.

Without being matronizing, the filmmakers ask the girls about their views on feminism. To a teen, each rejects "feminism" although each is quick to voice her support for women's rights and equal pay for equal work, which the filmmakers clearly see as synonymous with feminism.

Perhaps the most moving aspect of this first feature by Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell is that while these teens are swift to classify their peers into groups — among them Chelseas, freaks, preps, casuals, mods and headbangers — none can categorize herself.

Like its unique subjects, *Talk 16* resists easy categorization.