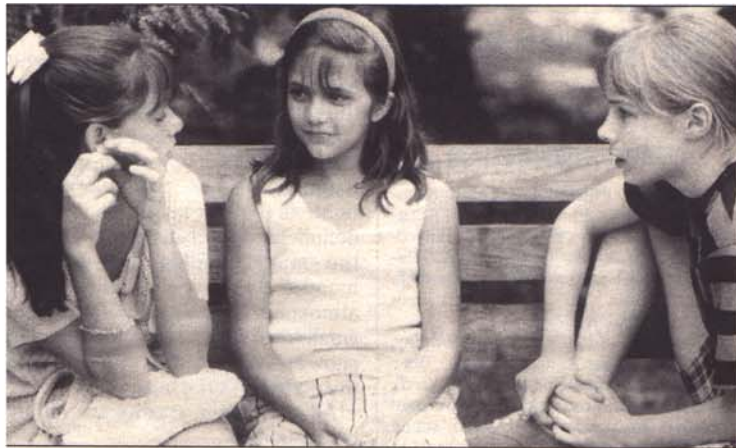


VARIETY

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GIRLFRIENDS: Alicia Manta, left, Ariel Mara and Chels Holland come of age in "Hide and Seek," from helmer Su Friedrich.

HIDE AND SEEK

(DOCU — B&W)

An ITVS (Independent Television Service) production. Produced by Katie Roumel, Eva Kolodner. Executive producer, Su Friedrich.

Directed, edited by Su Friedrich. Screenplay, Friedrich, Cathy Nan Quinlan. Camera (B&W), Jim Denault. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (competing), Jan. 19, 1996. Running time: 64 MIN.

Challenging the notion that there is such a thing as a "typical" or "normal" childhood, "Hide and Seek" is a provocative, often entertaining documentary about lesbian childhood that weaves archival scientific footage and sex-education films with real growing-up tales. Helmer Su Friedrich's film breaks new ground thematically, but its rather short running time and specialized goal make it a likely candidate for PBS and other venues for non-fiction fare, after traveling the gay and lesbian festivals.

Skillfully melding fictional and non-fictional sources, pic observes the emerging sexuality of Lou, a 12-year-old girl growing up in the 1960s, and her close-knit group of friends, as they

experience societal gender roles and expectations. Particularly traumatic is the sudden realization that beyond a certain age it's not acceptable anymore to be a "tomboy," and that there is a distinction between being "girlfriends" and having "friends who are girls."

"Hide and Seek" explores its subjects' sexual awakening, specifically their early feelings of desire, as they are repressed and molded by society's mass media, educational institutions and the family according to permissible and desirable values. Imposing these strict definitions almost forces adolescents who are different to label themselves — and be labeled by others — as deviants.

Drawing on numerous coming-of-age stories, Friedrich and co-scripter Cathy Nan Quinlan create an intriguing narrative about the conflicting, often contradictory, signals of pre-adolescence in American society. The film punctuates the fictional narrative with clips of the era's "scientific" and "educational" films, which advised viewers — and their parents — about the stages of "proper" development of childhood sexuality.

These scenes are interwoven with subjective memories and narratives from a host of lesbians, whose girlhood recollections and testimonies prove the era's scientific theories

false, or at least superficial and distorted, when measured against the complexity of their individual lives and real experiences.

A highly personal and candid film, "Hide and Seek" inevitably encourages viewers of various sexual orientations to reflect upon the idiosyncrasies of their own childhood and coming-of-age.

— Emanuel Levy