

Film Review: 'Terri' Paints Honest Portrait of Adolescent Alienation

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on July 22, 2011 - 10:22am

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CHICAGO – Nothing says “Official Selection at Sundance” quite like an obese teen grappling with an angst-ridden existence. There have been countless pictures centering on young, plus-size protagonists, though few feel three-dimensional. Tracy Turnblad and Claireece Precious Jones aren't people so much as they are symbols of survival in the face of adversity. It's easy to root for them, but it's more than a little difficult to believe in them.



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

I believed in Terri, the 15-year-old star of Azazel Jacobs's perceptive new film, simply because he's a great deal like a lot of the kids I knew in high school. When asked how he feels, Terri draws a picture of a face with a straight horizontal line for a mouth. The expression is neither happy nor sad. It's simply beaten into submission by the daily hell of adolescence. Terri has no desire to pity himself or put up a false front in order to gain his peers' acceptance. He merely wants to get by...and stay comfortable. That explains his wardrobe comprised entirely of pajamas.



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Though "Terri" is being marketed as a comedy, it's a lot more sensitive and touching than it is laugh-out-loud funny. Jacobs refuses to shy away from moments of painful and relatable awkwardness, and unlike many filmmakers exploring the "coming of age" genre, he doesn't act hipper than the material. Instead, he finds an intriguing middle ground between satire and drama that feels more authentic than an overly indulgent quirk-fest. Relative newcomer Jacob Wysocki is refreshingly unmannered in his titular portrayal, conveying the alienation and apprehension of his character while barely moving his face. The zombified expression he sports in class is as accurate as any I've seen since "Ferris Bueller," and his reaction to vulgar bullies is more bewildered than enraged. Wysocki is so believable in the role that he occasionally causes the dialogue to sound more self-consciously written than it may have been with a more heightened lead actor. The debut screenplay by Patrick Dewitt is mostly successful at humanizing and subverting the clichés it utilizes, but there are a few key moments of contrivance that feel all the more false when placed in the grounded atmosphere created by Jacobs and his uniformly excellent cast. Dewitt's script is a terrific first effort and includes moments of uncommon insight, though its imperfections ultimately cause the film to fall short of its potential.

'Terri' stars Jacob Wysocki, John C. Reilly, Bridger Zadina, Olivia Crocicchia and Creed Bratton. It was written by Patrick Dewitt and directed by Azazel Jacobs. It opens July 22 at the Landmark Century Centre Cinema. It is rated R.



[Continue reading for Matt Fagerholm's full "Terri" review.](#) [12]



Jacob Wysocki and John C. Reilly star in Azazel Jacobs's Terri.

Photo credit: ATO Pictures

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