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Toothpaste: Not Your Typical Hollywood Ending

by Kate Pavao, 07.15.05

Picture this: A Hollywood director shows up in your hometown. He's there to make a movie from a script you wrote with your friends for English class.

Sound like a dream come true? That's exactly what happened to Laura Coria, Amanda Ramirez, Gladys Sanchez, and Kristal Villarreal after they penned a story about two girls in very different relationships, each considering whether she is ready to have sex with her boyfriend.

Their script was one of three to win a writing contest sponsored by [Scenarios USA](#) — a

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nonprofit organization that invites young people from Florida's Miami-Dade County, New York City, and Texas' Rio Grande Valley to write about sexual health. So Laura, Amanda, Gladys, and Kristal spent part of their senior year at Mission High School in Texas working with Hollywood director Ben Younger (who directed the movie *Boiler Room*) to take their script from paper to screen.

"There were students asking us, can I get pregnant my first time? They don't know facts like that."

A Brush with Reality



In *Toothpaste* (named after the main characters' code word for condoms), Jennifer and her boyfriend Carlos have known each other "forever" and communicate well, while Cristina and Bobby have only been dating three and a half weeks. In the end, it's left open whether Jennifer and Carlos have sex, but Jennifer says she knows Carlos respects her and says, "Whatever I want, it's OK."

Cristina, on the other hand, does have sex — but doesn't use the condoms the girls purchased. Ultimately, Jennifer has to buy another drugstore product: a pregnancy test for Cristina to use in the school bathroom. Viewers are left wondering: Is she or isn't she?

This 16-minute film reflects real issues the writers face in their own community. Texas has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the United States — according to the Texas Department of Health, one in 34 girls under age 17 becomes pregnant. In Hildago County, where the screenwriters went to high school, the rate is even higher — more than one out of 26 girls under age 17 becomes pregnant. Laura, age 19, says all of the writers have teenage friends who experienced unplanned pregnancies.

Why the high teen pregnancy rates? For one thing, Texas teens who get sex education in school only learn about abstinence — not about birth control or safer sex. And Amanda, age 19, says she got no sex education at all at Mission High School. In fact, when the writers screened their movie at their high school, they asked students to submit sex questions — and were shocked by what their peers didn't know. "There were students asking us, can I get pregnant my first time? They don't know facts like that," remembers Amanda.



Kristal, age 20, hopes that *Toothpaste* will make a big impact on the teens who see it. "I just hope that they get informed, make better decisions," she says. For teens who want comprehensive sex education in schools, she advises, "Ask for it — because if you don't ask for something, they're not going to give it to you."

Starring Roles



It was hard work getting the movie made. The girls had to rewrite the script, cast the film, make directing decisions, and each worked with a different department — like the art department or makeup — before *Toothpaste* was finally finished. But Kristal says it's been worth it. Three of the girls have become closer friends (Gladys has since moved to Mexico), and they've gotten a lot more comfortable talking about sex and sexual health



And there have been some glamorous moments, too. In May, the girls appeared together on the *Today Show*, and *Toothpaste* will be shown in schools across the nation, at film festivals, and on the television network Showtime. The highlight of their experience? This past December, the writers traveled to New York City to see the premiere of their film. "I think that was the best part, seeing our movie on screen, and the people's reaction to it," says Laura.

Check out [Toothpaste](#) on the [Scenarios USA](#) Web site. For more info about Scenarios USA, you can also e-mail info@scenarioussa.org.

Photo 1: From top right, clockwise: Amanda Ramirez, Laura Coria, Gladys Sanchez, Kristal Villarreal. Photo by Joel Martinez.

Photo 2: Kristal Villarreal on set. Photo by Joel Martinez.

Photo 3: Amanda Ramirez, Laura Coria, director Ben Younger, Gladys Sanchez, Kristal Villarreal. Photo by Meg Handler.

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