Let’s Talk About Sex

Miss America Kate Shindle dares to

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Puh-lease! It’s not like she rolled a condom onto a banana with her tongue or anything. Miss America Kate Shindle, whose HIV-prevention platform has given her access to curious students across the nation, said that more than half of the schools she’s visited put “laughable” restrictions on what she could say. One stuffy South Carolina board completely tied her tongue, forbidding Shindle to mention the words condoms, needles, heterosexual, homosexual, gay and straight. “Other than that, I could say anything I wanted about HIV prevention,” she said. In North Carolina, schools refused to let Shindle in the door—crown or no crown. While the spunky 20-year-old has encountered the most heat from rich, suburban schools, repression has been nearly nationwide. Moreover, Shindle said, many school sex-ed programs are “grossly inadequate” in their ability to teach HIV prevention. What’s an in-your-face beauty queen to do?

“Sometimes I feel like I’m banging my head against a wall. But we have an open Q-and-A period, where I address student inquiries.” And what’s on the minds of American youth? Enough to put adults to shame. Examples: Are drug companies suppressing a cure for AIDS? Can you get HIV from oral sex? Should young PWAs expect to live past 25? Despite the hassles, criticism from family-values groups and a put-down from a former Miss America, Shindle draws power from the students she can reach. “One girl said she was thinking about having sex with her boyfriend but after hearing me, she decided to wait until she could make a responsible decision.” The bottom line, Miss America said: No one should die from a preventable disease. Shindle also toppled some tiaras last spring when she publicly urged the president to lift the federal funding ban on needle exchanges.

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