

This 'good' deal is no deal to some

Oh heck, what's another \$200 a year to University students?

That's the minimum amount we would pay should the recently proposed mandatory health insurance offer go into effect.

The Student Health Insurance Committee is now working on the mandatory plan, which could be implemented within the next three to four years.

In a step toward its possible integration, students may be asked to decide yea or nay on this plan when they enroll next fall.

So, in case anyone out there isn't sure if students here at the University are paying too much for what's turning out to be too little, now he or she can be sure.

Should the plan be implemented, students not having outside insurance would be forced to buy it through the University. Presently, premiums run \$593 per year; this amount would be lowered via the mandatory arrangement since there would be more people under the blanket plan.

The lower cost per subscriber sure sounds spiffy, but must the obvious be stated as to why this is a bad idea? Apparently so.

For one thing, there are many students at this university who cannot afford even the lower-priced version. Illustrating this fact is a recent SHIC survey which showed students not covered by their parents' policy aren't planning on subscribing to the University's either.

There are reasons for this, one of them being that darn near no one, except the lucky few whose parents buy it for them, can afford insurance — University or other.

In order to attend this outlandishly expensive university, one must make several sacrifices, especially if he or she is an average financial Joe, which most of us are. One of these sacrifices is health insurance. Sad, but ever so true. Should it be mandatory, that would be just one more block to those struggling to make it financially.

Students voted down a similar plan several years ago; is the University hoping two no's will make a yes? Let's hope students will again down the plan. The lower-priced version may sound like a deal to some, but to those of us on the monetary edge, it could be the final blow.

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COMMENTARY POLICY

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COMMENTARY

Stop selling Playboy, Penthouse

By David Peterson

There are at least two compelling reasons for the University Bookstore to stop selling *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines. First, a significant proportion of the bookstore's members feel understandably threatened by these "entertainment for men" publications, and second, the images of women in these magazines perpetuates an environment in which rape is both commonplace and unacknowledged.

Many women for many years have told the bookstore's management of their opposition to *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. Some indicate a very personal aversion to the magazines. A bookstore employee recently wrote that she has violated working when men simultaneously peruse photographs of women in sexually submissive poses and her going about her job.

Recently, a student told me how shocked and saddened she was to learn that her university bookstore sold the same sort of magazines that a man had repeatedly used at the very moments he had sexually abused her.

Thousands of University women have been raped or otherwise sexually abused, and all University women live in an environment where sexual assault and harassment are common. Not every woman, therefore, wants the bookstore to stop carrying *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. Yet a significant proportion of campus women have made it abundantly clear that this is precisely what they want, that the presence of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* is deeply offensive.

These sensibilities are based on numberless painful experiences and should not be dismissed as irrational or trivial, or as being akin, as one skeptic suggests, to disliking the presence of video cameras in banks.

The role that *Playboy* and *Penthouse* actually play in sexual assault is, of course, difficult to trace. One side can cite the example of Scandinavia, and tests indicating that rela-

tively mild pornography does not make men more aggressive under laboratory conditions.

On the other hand, the United States has seen a simultaneous rise in reported sexual assaults and the availability of pornography — the two states with the highest reported rape rates have also had the highest proportion of *Playboy* subscribers, and counselors who work with sexual offenders find that such men nearly always consume pornography. To be sure, none of these facts prove much about the complex cause-and-effect relationship between pornography and sexual assault.

But *Playboy* and *Penthouse* clearly contribute to the pervasive rape culture in which we live. These publications are rape handbooks inasmuch as they define women as the pliant objects of male viewers' narrowly defined sexual desires. Their photographs reduce women to breasts, vaginas and buttocks. This tedious litany, imposed on a set of uniformly girlish, thin, and heavily made-up models, objectifies the women, bleeding them of their actuality and humanity.

Those images also share a resolute passivity: legs spread, mouths open, hips tilted. This, then, is the essence of pornography and rape culture: the assertion that a woman happily exists to be penetrated and dominated by a man at his pleasure and on his terms.

Studies show a strong congruence between the attitudes depicted in *Playboy* and *Penthouse* and the attitudes actually held by rapists. A study by Koss of nearly 3,000 college men finds that rapists, much more than non-rapists, believe strongly in sex-role stereotypes, discuss daily how women acquaintances might perform in bed, and base their self-worth on sexual conquests.

Not surprisingly, these men tend to be heavy consumers of magazines like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, and they take the magazines' message to heart: 84 percent of those who admit to behavior that meets the legal definition of rape (penile pene-

tration without consent) strongly disagree they have, in fact, raped. Actual women, like playmates, are perceived as always wanting and needing a man.

I do not believe the personal antipathy so many women have for *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, and the role these magazines play in creating and reinforcing rape culture warrants abrogating their right to be published, distributed or read. But neither do I believe these publications must be sold by every public or private business in which they could turn a profit.

The argument that the bookstore is morally obligated to use no moral criteria in selecting the entertainment products it carries raises a host of logical and ethical problems. Are bookstores required to carry any publication a portion of its clientele desires, regardless of that material's social consequences or its effects on other portions of its clientele?

Is the bookstore's membership in any sense a community of people able to develop a set of ethical concerns other than complete access to published materials? Is the bookstore really willing to follow its present policy? Is it prepared to honor requests for photographs or videotapes which graphically document the actual torture and murder of women? Of men of color? Is it truly obligated to sell anything that exists that sells?

The image of complete freedom which the defenders of the bookstore's policy articulate possesses a compelling simplicity. But our community has other rights and values as well: the rights of survivors to a modicum of respect and privacy, and the value of collective social responsibility to name but two. When these concerns clash, as they sometimes do, no single right or value should enjoy automatic primacy over the others.

Dave Peterson is a doctoral candidate at the University and co-director of Men Against Rape.