

UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC THESIS

MEDIA TEXT: PRACTICES AND AUDIENCES

ASSIGNMENT: ESSAY

Question:

Use FIVE examples of media texts for analysis.

*How do you explain the ways in which media texts
create particular occasions of reading?*

Name: Edmond Ng

Date: 6 October 2004

According to constructionist theory, the way people in a society live their lives are shaped by a “system of acquired schema functioning in the practical state as categories of perception and appreciation” (Mercer 1992:26-27). This in essence means the action and behaviour of people in a society are shaped by how they as audiences subject themselves to governance and meanings constructed within discourses created through particular occasions of reading in media texts (Hall 1997:56; Mercer 1992:26-27). To explain the ways in which media texts create particular occasions of reading, this paper will look into how media texts on *crime* construct the policing of ‘punishment’ and control and illustrate how discourses of texts from the newspaper produce objects of knowledge in the way of seeing people with deviant tendencies and how audiences are formed as subjects.

According to Foucault, a discourse is ‘a group of statements’ representing the knowledge about a particular topic and has the power to influence “how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall 1997:44). For example, in a discourse on ‘crime’, statements such as ‘punishment’, ‘theft’, ‘rape’ or ‘penalty’ produce a knowledge of criminals as subjects of deviancy and the audiences reading the texts as citizens behaving ‘normally’ or ‘naturally’ in differing from them (Hall 1997:45). This personification of criminals within discourses produces objects of knowledge in which the ‘normal’ is a constructed regime of truth that has been naturalised into habituation where codes are transparently assimilated into social norms (Hall 1993:95; Muecke 1982:100). This means “not

everything that a text says is in the text. The missing moments or the areas that lack being mentioned are the constructed normalities which has been presupposed but not represented” (Smith 1988:139).

For example, media texts on crime in newspapers contain expected court pronouncement of punishment (Chong 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; *The Straits Times* 2004a, 2004b) but does not mention the connotations of subjectification of audiences to the same law and regulations of the governing authorities, which has been presupposed as normalities (Hall 1993:96-97, 101). The newspaper in this case inaugurates the regularisation of social norms and becomes a moral and manning technology which “would shift the imperatives of conduct formation, advice on exemplary modes of governance, civility and ‘manners’ from the private, individualised genres of conduct manuals” (Mercer 1992:27, 37). To illustrate how normalities are formed in media texts in shaping the ways of behaviour, this paper will now look into analysing texts from newspapers on the subject of crime.

In a case of a man molesting a girl, the offender was jailed twenty months and ordered to be given twelve strokes of the cane (*The Straits Times* 2004a) while a factory worker “was put behind bars for twenty-seven years and ordered to receive the maximum twenty-four strokes of the cane” for raping (Chong 2004). The punishment exacted on the molester and rapist in these cases connotes not only a fear of punishment if similar offences are committed, but also instills fear on the feminine gender by positioning them

as possible targets to sexual assaults. Through this connotation, the people's dependency on governance is ensured and the formation of audiences as subjects are realised (Mercer 1992:27; Hall 1997:54-56).

As seen from the example above, a discourse can influence "how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall 1997:44). Just as a discourse can influence the ways of talking about a topic meaningfully, it can also define limits and restrictions on the ways texts are interpreted through inferred *dominant meanings* coded to provide 'preferred readings' in making sense of "the everyday knowledge of social structures of how things work for all practical purposes" (Hall 1993:98-99). To illustrate this influence of dominant meanings in policing punishment and control, this paper will now look into discourses on topic of punishment by caning and death sentence (*Channel News Asia* 2004a, 2004b).

As seen in the media texts mentioned above on the cases of molesting and raping, the punishment imposed by the court includes caning in addition to imprisonment (*The Straits Times* 2004a; Chong 2004). In a separate case relating to drug trafficking, the convict is sentenced to death by hanging (*The Straits Times* 2004b). Punishment as exacted on these criminals received a high poll of approval from audiences in a news forum (*Channel News Asia* 2004a, 2004b). In the case of death sentence and caning, the poll received a high eighty-eight per cent agreeing to punishment by death sentence and caning or death sentence only or caning without death sentence (*Channel News Asia* 2004a). In the poll for rapists to be caned, a

high ninety-four per cent was scored (*Channel News Asia* 2004b). This example shows how a discourse produces the objects of knowledge in policing for power and authority to regulate social practices that are deemed essential by the citizens (Hall 1997:43-57).

Another area in which media texts create particular occasions of reading is in constructing the ways of seeing people or things (Mercer 1986: 184; Hall 1993:96-103). For the purpose of this paper, discourses of functional anthropology will be adapted to analyse how people of deviant tendencies are constructed as criminals (Muecke 1982:99-111). The study will highlight three aspects of articulated perceptions of differences between 'us' as the 'civilised', and 'them' as the 'criminals' (Muecke 1982:103). These three aspects of differences are: class stratification, behavioural tendencies, and nationality.

In analysing class stratification between the deviant and the 'normal' person, it is the aim of this paper to put in perspective connotations that are implied in 'civilising techniques' used in state formation of mannerism and control between a code of good manners and a code of morals (Mercer 1992: 27). To illustrate the repetitive ritual of media texts in constructing people of lower class status as deviants, five different news stories on crime will be used in this paper. The first text will relate a case of drug trafficking states that the convict is 'unemployed' (*The Straits Times* 2004b), while the second text of a man molesting a girl states the molester as a 'cleaner' (*The Straits Times* 2004a). The three other media texts include a crime of rape

where the rapist is a 'factory worker' (Chong 2004a), a man killing a prostitute in a homicide as 'unemployed' (Chong 2004b) and a case of murder where the murderer is a 'domestic maid' (Chong 2004c). These five texts connote criminals as people who are unemployed or employed in domestic work or blue-collar occupations in cases of drug trafficking, rape, molesting, and murder. The media texts in this case effectively implies that all criminals are of a lower class status, associated with deviant 'barbaric' tendencies of behavioural differences opposed to the 'civilised' or a class of "inferior species of human beings" (Muecke 1982:103, 105).

The 'civilised' in this case takes on the 'romantic' position as audiences formed in the discourse as people who differ from the criminals (Muecke 1982:104-106). In so doing, the media texts creates a metaphoric displacement of 'racist' discourse through the designating of people other than 'normal' (Muecke 1982:106). For example, in the five media texts mentioned above, two cases of crime are committed by people of foreign nationalities (*The Straits Times* 2004a; Chong 2004c). In the case of the murder committed by an Indonesian maid (Chong 2004c), portraits of the murderer and the victim are juxtapose in difference sizes to position how audiences should view the 'criminal' in the media texts, even though the murdered 'victim' indirectly causes her own death as a result of her ill treatment of the maid. The way the photo of the murderer is positioned and captured from the front view puts into perspective how the murderer is to be represented (Crimp 1992:117-131). In this case, the representation of the 'criminal' constructs and conditions the preferred occasion of viewing the

media texts, even when it is placed in context with the story narrative (Mercer 1986:184) which states “the accused was indeed abused in general” (*The Straits Times* 2004a).

As can be seen from the discourse in this paper, the ‘romantic’ and ‘racist’ positioning in the study of anthropological discourses between ‘criminals’ and the ‘civilised’ are separated only by a thin line of differences (Muecke 1982:105). Both audiences and criminals are subjects of discourses constructed in the regime of truth, naturalised through ritual repetition of texts in the media. The ways in which media texts create particular occasions of reading explain how audiences are formed within discourses and how discourses regulate social practices. The news media as a moral and mannering technology inaugurates and regularise social norms and creates conduct formation and modes of governance.

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APPENDIX 1

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The Straits Times INTERACTIVE

SEPT 18, 2004

Uncle molested, raped girl for years

Factory worker gets 27 years' jail and 24 strokes of the cane

By [Elena Chong](#)

FOR nine years, a 36-year-old man molested and raped his niece.

When she was in school, he would wait outside for her, and then take her to a staircase landing of a block of flats and molest her. She was then about 13.

When the girl threatened to tell her mother about what he was doing to her, he slapped her.

After that, the student, now 19, did not attempt any more resistance.

But that did not stop him from threatening her.

He demanded that she call him on his mobile phone every day after school so he could tell her if he would be meeting her.

He even caned her when he was unhappy with her or felt that she was not obeying his instructions.

He also threatened to slap her if she cried while being caned, and told her she could not go for her regular swims because he did not want anyone to see the cane marks on her body.

Yesterday, he was put behind bars for 27 years and ordered to receive the maximum 24 strokes of the cane.

The factory worker, who faced 21 charges, was arrested after the girl made a report to the police about being raped at a hotel last December.

She made the report at the urging of her boyfriend on Feb 3 this year.

The bachelor, who was unrepresented, pleaded guilty to six instances of molestation, causing hurt, rape, aggravated rape and oral sex, which took place between 1998 and 2000.

The court heard that the incidents of molestation began between 1995 and 1996, when the girl was just 10.

They escalated and, between 1999 and 2000, he raped her three times, once in a men's toilet at a market, where he also slapped her, said Deputy Public Prosecutor Woo Ka Wai yesterday.

And on one visit to her home in 2000, he made his niece perform oral sex on him.

DPP Woo told Justice Tay Yong Kwang that the teen and her uncle's siblings had written to the Attorney-General's Chambers to say they had forgiven him, but added that this did not detract from the severity of the offences.

In mitigation, the man said he was remorseful and would like to apologise to his niece and her family.

He also asked the court to be lenient, saying that he would turn over a new leaf.

His two sisters and two sisters-in-law were in court and bade him a teary farewell before he was led away to serve his sentence.

APPENDIX 2

Chong, E. (2004b), "Man strangles neighbour over missing cash" in *The Straits Times*, 21 September 2004, *The Straits Times Interactive*.
<http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/storyprintfriendly/0,1887,273710-1095803940,00.html>? (accessed 22nd September 2004). Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings.

The Straits Times INTERACTIVE

SEPT 21, 2004

Man strangles neighbour over missing cash

He ties her neck to armrest of sofa after row over \$820 and leaves flat; he pleads guilty to culpable homicide and is jailed for six years

By [Elena Chong](#)

A MAN used an electrical cable to strangle a neighbour he suspected of stealing his money when he dozed off at her flat after a beer.

Tan Hock Chai, 59, unemployed, found \$820 missing from his trouser and shirt pockets when he woke up and was furious when Madam Teo Eng Moi, 45, denied taking the money.

After threatening her with the cable, he tied it around her neck. She fell back on the sofa. He then tied her neck to the armrest by winding the other end of the cable around the sofa's arm and leg.

He left the one-room flat at Block 26, Sin Ming Industrial Estate, believing she was still alive.

The incident happened between 10pm on Feb 11 and 2am the following day.

Tan was arrested in Jalan Sultan on Feb 20. Police had found her decomposing and maggot-infested body a day earlier.

The former packer, who was initially charged with murder, was jailed for six years yesterday by Justice Tay Yong Kwang, after he admitted to a reduced charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Magdalene Koh said Madam Teo, a store assistant, had invited Tan to her home on the evening of Feb 11. He had visited her once during the Chinese New Year.

He brought some beer to her flat. After she served him the beer, he removed his clothes and fell asleep on a mattress on the floor.

After she denied taking his cash, a search came up with nothing. But on Feb 24, police officers searching Madam Teo's flat found \$784 and an ez-link card under the gas cylinder in the kitchen.

In mitigation, Mr Wong Siew Hong and Mr Patrick Yap, both lawyers assigned to the case by the State, said Tan had felt drowsy, disoriented and confused after drinking the beer.

He suspected Madam Teo, who was a part-time prostitute, of 'spiking' the beer.

All he wanted was his money, said Mr Wong, which was to tide him over while he was out of work. He pleaded with her to return at least half but she ignored him.

Mr Wong said Madam Teo had very likely put a tablet of Dormicum, often used as a 'date rape' drug, into Tan's beer.

'To a large extent, the deceased was the author of her misfortune. By spiking the accused's beer, doping him and thereafter relieving him of all his cash... she set in motion the chain of events which led to her death,' he said.

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APPENDIX 3

Chong, C. K. (2004c), "Surprise verdict: Maid who killed boss gets life" in *The Straits Times*, 25 September 2004. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings: Front Page.



JUDGE'S VERDICT:
Maid Sundarti Supriyanto (left) had been abused by her employer, Madam Angie Ng (above).

Surprise verdict: Maid who killed boss gets life

By **CHONG CHEE KIN**

IN A verdict that surprised courtroom and accused alike, Indonesian maid Sundarti Supriyanto, who killed her employer and then razed her Bukit Merah office to cover up the crime, escaped the gallows yesterday.

She was sentenced to life imprisonment after being convicted of a lesser charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Sundarti, 25, one of five maids charged with murder here, stabbed Madam Angie Ng, 34, to death on May 28, 2002, and then set the office alight. The fire also killed Madam Ng's three-year-old daughter, Crystal Poh.

In the High Court yesterday, Madam Ng's family members looked stunned after the verdict was read out by Justice M.P.H. Rubin.

Sundarti initially looked surprised but recovered quickly and bowed to her lawyer, Mr Mohamed Muzammil, then clasped his hands and pressed them to her lips before a courtroom packed with embassy officials and journalists.

In convicting the woman of the lesser charge, Justice Rubin said he was convinced that Sundarti had been abused by Madam Ng, and lost control of herself after being provoked yet again.

He acknowledged that there were many lies in Sundarti's testimony, but said he was convinced that she had been abused "in general".

He added that the maid had to be in a frenzy to inflict the kind of injuries found on Madam Ng, who had several gaping wounds on her arms. Her left hand was nearly severed at the wrist.

"She must have been so blind with rage that she lost control over herself and lashed out repeatedly at the deceased," he said.

In his written grounds of judgment, the judge explained why he rejected the prosecution's attempts to discredit Sundarti's allegations of abuse.

Yes, her claim that Madam Ng forced her to eat faeces was "extravagant".

True, no one saw Madam Ng abusing her maid.

But, the judge said, "I felt it was not necessary to analyse whether each and every incident of abuse actually occurred before I made a finding that the accused was indeed abused in general."

Employees at Madam Ng's office had testified that their boss did not allow her maid to eat or let others feed her, and such incidents supported Sundarti's claims.

Yesterday's events capped a drama that began two years ago when firemen, responding to a call about a fire, found Sundarti clutching Madam Ng's second child, Leon, then 18 months old.

Sundarti initially said the fire broke out after masked men came into the office.

But police later found video footage and a receipt indicating that she had bought

petrol at a nearby station.

After she was arrested for the crime, she admitted starting the fire, but denied that she killed her employer.

During the 27-day trial, the prosecution sought to paint her as a cold-blooded murderer.

The defence's stand was that the maid, who had worked for Madam Ng for three weeks before the killings, was a victim of abuse who had lashed out.

In court yesterday, Sundarti apologised to Madam Ng's husband, Mr Drake Poh, by reading from a note. She urged him to accept her "deepest apology for the events... which had brought tragedy and grief to him".

But Mr Poh, 45, would have none of it. The managing director of a labour supply company seethed outside court. When asked for his reaction, he said: "I'm not accepting the apology at all."

Sundarti's mother, however, was a picture of relief. Madam Binarti, 51, said in Bahasa Indonesia: "I'm happy the court spared her, and I am very grateful to the lawyer and the embassy."

[See also **HOME: H1**]



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The Straits Times interactive:
<http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>
is available from 6 am.

APPENDIX 4

The Straits Times (2004), “Man molested girl who tried to help”, 18 September 2004, *The Straits Times Interactive*.
<http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/storyprintfriendly/0,1887,273203-1095544740,00.html>? (accessed 23rd September 2004). Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings.

The Straits Times INTERACTIVE

SEPT 18, 2004

Man molested girl who tried to help

Cleaner jailed for 20 months and given 12 strokes of the cane

AN ACT of kindness by a young girl turned into a nightmare for her when the man she tried to help assaulted her sexually.

The 10-year-old was molested by a Bangladeshi cleaner while she was alone at home.

She had wanted to give the man, who worked in the same estate, a packet of instant noodles to eat after taking pity on him. But when he showed up at her flat, he molested her.

The cleaner, Hanif Sheak Shahed Ali Sheak, 32, was jailed for 20 months on Thursday and ordered to be given 12 strokes of the cane after he admitted sexually assaulting the girl at her home.

He could have been jailed for up to two years and fined.

A district court heard that the incident took place on Aug 20 at about 9.30am.

Hanif knew the girl and both had chatted before. She had seen him only drinking water on Aug 20, so she beckoned him to her flat, intending to give him instant noodles.

But the moment he reached her home, he ordered her to shut the door, gave her \$5 and molested her, telling her to be quiet.

When done, he asked her to open the door and check if the coast was clear before leaving the flat.

Before he fled, he promised her another \$5 if she did not tell on him.

But the frightened girl called her family who alerted the police. Hanif was arrested the same day.

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APPENDIX 5

The Straits Times (2004), “Addict to hang for heroin trafficking”, 18 September 2004, *The Straits Times Interactive*.
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The Straits Times INTERACTIVE

SEPT 18, 2004

Addict to hang for heroin trafficking

A DRUG addict who refused to give evidence in his defence was sentenced to hang yesterday for heroin trafficking.

Chew Seow Leng, 43, was convicted of having 226.57g of heroin on Jan 7 this year, of which more than 15g was for trafficking - an amount that carries the death penalty.

The unemployed Chew was found with four packets containing not less than 149.1g of heroin in a taxi along Puay Hee Avenue in MacPherson.

More were found at a flat he had rented in Topaz Road in Serangoon. Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) officers found 10 packets, two straws and one container with not less than 77.47g of heroin.

They first spotted him in a cab in Yishun Ring Road on the morning of Jan 7. Later, he was seen carrying a red paper bag at Block 115 and making a call on his mobile phone.

He walked to the void deck and emerged with a yellow bag on top of the red. He then went to a provision shop in Block 110 and came out with yet another bag, a white one. He took a cab and the officers on his trail arrested him in Puay Hee Avenue.

Chew admitted that the heroin in the red paper bag was his. He then led another group of CNB officers to his rented flat where more drugs and drug-trafficking paraphernalia were recovered.

Chew, a drug addict since 1977, said in his statements that he consumed a packet of heroin weighing 7.5g every day. But Deputy Public Prosecutor Nor'ashikin Samdin argued his addiction was mild.

Chew's assigned lawyers, Mr R.S. Bajwa and Mr Mahmood Gaznavi, had argued that a mandatory death sentence was unconstitutional.

But Justice Tay Yong Kwang said, after a 2 1/2-day trial, that he was adopting the decision of Justice Kan Ting Chiu, who held that the mandatory death penalty was not unconstitutional when he heard the drug-trafficking case of Australian Nguyen Tuong Van. Nguyen's appeal was heard in July and the Court of Appeal's decision is pending.

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APPENDIX 6

Channel News Asia (2004a), "Are we civilised? Dealing with death sentences and canning", *Chanelnewsasia.com*.
<http://info.channelnewsasia.com/bb/viewtopic.php?t=647&highlight=rape>
(assessed 4th October 2004). Singapore.



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Are we civilised? Dealing with death sentences and canning

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Canning & Death Sentence, In favour or not?

In favour of both punishment	<input type="text" value="17"/>	56%	[17]
Agree with the canning, disagree with death sentence	<input type="text" value="5"/>	16%	[5]
Disagree with the canning, agree with death sentence	<input type="text" value="5"/>	16%	[5]
Not in favour, we should look for other alternative	<input type="text" value="2"/>	6%	[2]
Too tough to decide	<input type="text" value="1"/>	3%	[1]

Total Votes : 30

Author

Message

Ruth Napier

Posted: Wed Aug 13, 2003 5:28 am Post subject: Are we civilised? Dealing with death sentences and canning



Joined: 11 Aug 2003
Posts: 4

Do we favour the canning punishment?
Do we favour the death sentence?
Are we morden enough to find alternative to these severe punishments?
Let us know what you think?

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mathew

Posted: Wed Aug 13, 2003 1:50 pm Post subject:



Joined: 15 Jul 2003
Posts: 1601

I am in favour of capital punishment. In view of the inherent evil in man, some evil have to be removed from the face of the earth before they remove others.
I believe in due process , appeals and the whole 9 yards.
I believe very little in changing over a new leaf - it happens sometimes and are few and rare. We might be able to find some modern technology.
I do not believe much in moral justification for killing someone except in self defence - something that must be proved !!!!!

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bleu

Posted: Wed Aug 13, 2003 1:59 pm Post subject:



Joined: 01 Aug 2003
Posts: 273

if you can find a **fair** replacement for death sentence for a first degree murder convict, then we can do away with it. if not, stick to death penalty for the time being.
please don't tell me lock up the prisoner for 20 years should be fair enough.

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Ruth Napier

Posted: Wed Aug 13, 2003 3:25 pm Post subject: My Views are Different



Joined: 11 Aug 2003
Posts: 4

Being civilised is showing compassion, forgiveness, understanding and hope.
Is the current standing acceptable or hoping for some change?
We need to let people know this is a safe heaven. We are concern of all people and there is hope and recovery rather than deterrent.

APPENDIX 7

Channel News Asia (2004b), "Should rapists be caned?",
Chanelnewsasia.com.

<http://info.channelnewsasia.com/bb/viewtopic.php?t=4964&highlight=rape>
(assessed 4th October 2004). Singapore.



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Should rapists be caned?

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Should rapists be canned?

Definitely, 24 strokes are not even enough.	<input type="radio"/>	94% [17]
Definitely, 24 strokes are not even enough.	<input type="radio"/>	0% [0]
Not if they are above 50 years old.	<input type="radio"/>	0% [0]
Not if they are above 50 years old.	<input type="radio"/>	0% [0]
No, the girls must have led them on.	<input type="radio"/>	5% [1]
No, the girls/boys must have led them on.	<input type="radio"/>	0% [0]

Total Votes : 18

Author

Message

Yasmin

Posted: Wed Jun 30, 2004 4:45 pm Post subject: Should rapists be caned?

[quote](#)

Joined: 21 Apr 2004
Posts: 51
Location: Singapore

Having scarred another human being for life, every single rapist should be given a mandatory 24 strokes of the cane.

Last edited by Yasmin on Thu Jul 01, 2004 10:33 am; edited 2 times in total

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okw10

Posted: Wed Jun 30, 2004 5:15 pm Post subject:

[quote](#)

Joined: 20 Apr 2004
Posts: 8

u totally rite about that one. a rapist is no different from a breast. is 24 strokes of cane enough?? should the sentences be longer too? what do u think

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tee o uu

Posted: Wed Jun 30, 2004 5:18 pm Post subject:

[quote](#)

Joined: 21 Jul 2003
Posts: 62

Yasmin,
Perhaps besides canning they should be castrated too.

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menace

Posted: Wed Jun 30, 2004 5:20 pm Post subject:

[quote](#)

Joined: 05 May 2004
Posts: 275
Location: sg

No, they should be let scot-free? What do you think

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Yasmin

Posted: Thu Jul 01, 2004 3:36 pm Post subject:

[quote](#)

Joined: 21 Apr 2004
Posts: 51
Location: Singapore

I agree with tee that rapists should be 'bobbit'/castrated so that they can never commit the offence again.

Some guy I know suggested that rapists be sodomised with blunt objects to make them experience the same pain and humiliation they inflicted on their victims.

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SC

Posted: Thu Jul 01, 2004 4:09 pm Post subject:

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Yasmin wrote: