

# Coward punch stems from need to display male credentials

January 17 2014, by Niki Widdowson

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The need to prove 'masculine credentials' to other males is at the heart of unprovoked, one-punch street violence, and alcohol is a disinhibitor, not its cause, says a QUT justice researcher.

Professor Kerry Carrington from QUT's School of Justice, whose research on masculinity, [violence](#) and alcohol is recognised and awarded internationally, said a lack of positive male [role models](#) was a key contributor to random violence in [men](#) aged 18 to 25.

"Most young men don't go out and punch someone they don't know, even if they have been drinking, because they are civilized - they have learnt to engage in society civilly," Professor Carrington said.

"They have learnt from men who use their wit, skill, intelligence and reason to articulate their place in the world.

"The [young men](#) who commit these acts of totally irrational, unprovoked violence know no other way to express their masculinity when they feel contested or engaged in rivalry. Men who feel less powerful are more likely to express themselves through aggression.

"They feel all men are rivals. They lack self-control and emotional maturity so they seek to demonstrate their masculine credentials.

"Alcohol disinhibits the restraint they might normally have. That's why a lot of male-on-male violence occurs around pubs and licensed venues,

but alcohol is not the cause.

"The presence of women can be a civilizing influence. When there is a gender balance in a gathering there is less violence, but when there are fewer women rivalry becomes more intense."

Professor Carrington said an underlying factor contributing to random male violence was partly cultural.

"Young men are egged on by violent images that are celebrated. In the games world 'king hits' and 'kills' are endorsed in unreal situations. The link between online and screen violence and actual violence is contentious but it does normalise violence and possibly desensitise us to it.

"Rebranding the single punch a 'coward punch' is a small but significant step in removing the 'gloss' associated with the term."

She said the most important role model for a male was the father figure.

"If the father is violent it can become an intergenerational cycle. It's very hard to break the cycle but it can be broken if a person can come to see that it is not normal," Professor Carrington said.

"They have to learn other ways to demonstrate their credentials and use other resources to express themselves.

"As a society we need to celebrate positive male role models. That's why sporting bodies have been so heavy-handed with transgressors if they muck up in their private life. That shift has been very important because using sporting heroes as role models for males is a good thing."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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