

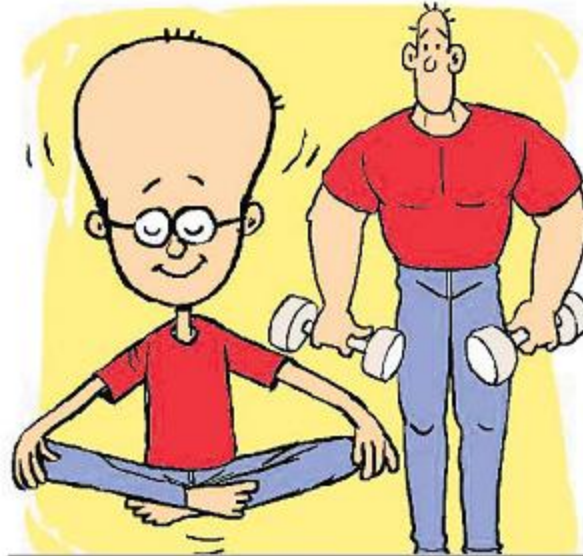
Masculinity redefined: Social skills, not six-pack body, are macho

Niyati Rana AHMEDABAD

What defines masculinity? Traditionally, the word 'masculine' has conjured up the image of a man with a six-pack, gym-perfect body, an aggressive temperament and a bevy of girlfriends. No more! Going by the response of students who participated in a survey conducted at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Gandhinagar, the idea of masculinity among youths has changed.

A survey conducted by mechanical engineering students of IIT-Gandhinagar has revealed that for youths today handsome looks or girlfriends don't make a man masculine! Incidentally, the respondents in the survey were all students of IIT-Gandhinagar. For 77 percent of the respondents, good participation in extra-curricular activities is the most important aspect of 'hegemonic' (dominating) masculinity.

Interestingly, 74% of those surveyed felt that the second-most important criterion for deciding what is genuinely masculine is socio-cultural capital. A socially well-networked person or someone with a dynamic circle of friends is doing well for him-



self in the matter of masculinity.

Handsome looks have slipped to the third position in the list of criteria for determining masculinity. Good looks got only 51% votes but this was more than the votes bagged by academic distinction. Only 44% students found those with high cumulative performance index (CPI) masculine. Similarly, only 44% of the respondents thought those active in sports were masculine.

Wealth, girlfriend and high paying jobs were the least important criteria for masculinity. While 34% respondents said wealth defines masculin-

Dr Prashant Bhimani
city-based consulting psychologist

“The finding of the study mirrors the change in perception of youths. Giving maximum importance to extra-curricular activities indicates that girls rate a man who is good at everything as most masculine. It is like having a smart phone – sleek, handy, good in looks, and with maximum applications!”

Prof Tannistha Samanta
Prof, IIT-Gandhinagar

“It is interesting that masculinity was conceptualized in terms of academic and financial success instead of physical prowess, though I suspect this shift in attitude was greater because the respondents were college students. A survey of general population would probably yield different results.”

ty, girlfriends and high paying jobs got the approval of just 22% respondents. The mechanical engineering students conducted the survey as part of their exam-cum-assignment on masculinity. Yash Shah, a student who was part of survey team, said that they had received good response from 50 students.

“We had given the respondents eight options to define masculinity. They were allowed to choose multiple options. On an average, the participating students chose three of the eight options to define masculinity,” Shah said.

He further said that the idea behind the survey was to understand how students on the campus looked at masculinity.

“We were surprised to discover that physical appearance, in particular good looks, which have traditionally decided what is masculine, were no more in vogue. Students surveyed considered participation in extra-curricular activity and social-cultural networking as much more important. It is interesting to know that perception of masculinity has changed among youths,” Shah said.