

Perception of Male Criminology Students on Female Internship Haircut

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceptions of male criminology students regarding the “boy cut” hairstyle required of female interns during criminology training. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, twelve male students from in a university in Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines were interviewed to understand their experiences and interpretations of female grooming standards. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi’s phenomenological method to identify themes reflecting participants’ initial reactions, perceived professional impact, and treatment of female interns. The findings revealed three major themes: (1) Initial Reactions toward Female Interns with a “Boy Cut” Hairstyle, which described participants’ initial surprise and curiosity that gradually shifted to acceptance as they became familiar with grooming standards in criminology training; (2) Perceived Impact on Professional Image, which highlighted how the hairstyle was associated with discipline, confidence, and professionalism, contributing positively to the interns’ professional identity; and (3) Treatment of Female Interns with “Boy Cut” during Internships, which showed that female interns were generally treated equally, with performance and competence valued more than physical appearance. The findings indicate an evolving understanding of professionalism and femininity within a traditionally male-dominated training environment, where competence, discipline, and conduct are valued more than conventional expectations related to appearance. The study therefore recommends that criminology institutions implement orientation programs, awareness initiatives, and gender-sensitive professional development activities that promote inclusivity while reinforcing grooming standards associated with discipline and professional identity.

Keywords: criminology students, female internship, professional image, grooming standards, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

Professional appearance often functions as a symbolic indicator of discipline, credibility, and institutional identity, particularly within professions associated with authority and public service. In criminal justice education, grooming standards are commonly implemented to cultivate professionalism and organizational uniformity among trainees preparing for law enforcement careers. These standards frequently regulate hairstyles, uniforms, and overall physical presentation as part of a broader training culture that emphasizes discipline and conformity. Research suggests that such appearance policies can influence how individuals evaluate competence, authority, and professional readiness within policing environments (Simpson & Croft, 2020).

Within criminology programs, grooming requirements may become more complex when they intersect with gender expectations. Some training institutions require female interns to adopt short hairstyles similar to those worn by male cadets, a policy intended to promote uniformity during field training. While these rules are often justified in terms of discipline and operational practicality, they may also reflect longstanding masculine norms embedded in policing culture. Scholars note that policing has historically been shaped by a hypermasculine institutional structure in which traditional notions of strength, discipline, and authority influence organizational expectations and professional identity (Brown & Todak, 2022).

Studies on police culture further highlight how gender norms may shape attitudes within training environments and professional organizations. Policing remains widely characterized as a male-dominated occupation in which masculine ideals often influence perceptions of competence, leadership, and appropriate behavior. Organizational cultures that emphasize masculine ideals can affect how both male and female participants interpret professional standards and evaluate their peers (Salem, 2024). In such contexts, grooming regulations may be interpreted not only as disciplinary measures but also as symbolic representations of institutional expectations regarding gender roles and conformity.

Despite increasing attention to gender dynamics in policing and criminal justice education, limited research has examined how male criminology students perceive grooming requirements imposed on their female counterparts during internship training. Understanding these perceptions is important because peer attitudes can shape the educational climate, influence professional socialization, and affect interpersonal relationships within training institutions. This study therefore explores the perceptions of male criminology students regarding the female internship haircut requirement in one of the universities in Oroquieta City. By examining these viewpoints, the research seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about gender sensitivity, professional identity formation, and institutional policy development within criminology education.

Statement of The Problem

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of male criminology students regarding the "boy cut" hairstyle requirement for female interns. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the initial reactions of male criminology students toward female interns with a "boy cut" hairstyle?
2. How do male criminology students perceive the impact of a "boy cut" hairstyle on the professional image of female interns?
3. Do male criminology students believe that female interns with a "boy cut" are treated differently by instructors or peers during their internships?

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the perceptions of male criminology students regarding the haircut requirement imposed on female interns. Phenomenology was appropriate because the inquiry aimed to capture participants' lived experiences and interpretations of institutional grooming standards within the criminology training environment.

The research was conducted in a university in Oroquieta City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Twelve male criminology students enrolled during the 2024–2025 academic year participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had direct exposure to female interns who complied with the prescribed short hairstyle during internship training. Eligibility criteria included male students who were at least eighteen years old and currently enrolled in the criminology program. Those without interaction with female interns who followed the grooming requirement were excluded to ensure that the participants possessed relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews guided by open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' views regarding female grooming standards in the internship program. The interview process began with general questions about grooming regulations in criminology training and gradually moved toward participants' perceptions of female interns who adopted the required short hairstyle. Follow-up prompts were used to clarify responses and obtain deeper explanations of the participants' interpretations. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent and were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in all transcripts and reports. They

were also informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. These procedures were implemented to protect participants' rights and to ensure ethical integrity in the conduct of the study (Resnik, 2020).

Data analysis followed the phenomenological procedure proposed by Colaizzi, which involves identifying significant statements from interview transcripts, formulating meanings, and clustering these meanings into thematic categories. To ensure methodological rigor, the study incorporated the criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through careful transcription and repeated review of interview data to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected participants' narratives. Dependability was supported by maintaining a clear documentation of the research procedures and analytic steps. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding interpretations directly in participants' statements, thereby minimizing researcher bias and ensuring that the findings were derived from the data rather than personal assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Initial Reactions toward Female Interns with a “Boy Cut” Hairstyle

Participants initially reported mixed reactions upon seeing female interns with a “boy cut” hairstyle. Many described feelings of surprise, largely influenced by traditional beliefs that associate femininity with long hair. However, these reactions gradually shifted to acceptance as participants became more familiar with grooming practices within criminology programs. Exposure to the training environment appeared to normalize the hairstyle, reinforcing the idea that professional standards may differ from societal expectations. Similar observations have been documented in studies indicating that grooming policies in law enforcement training environments often reshape perceptions of gender expression by emphasizing uniformity and discipline (Johnson & Lee, 2020).

Participants also expressed admiration for the courage demonstrated by female interns who complied with the grooming requirement. Several respondents interpreted the decision to adopt a short hairstyle as a reflection of confidence and personal strength, particularly because hair is often viewed as a defining aspect of feminine identity. The willingness to alter this aspect of personal appearance was therefore perceived as an act of determination and individuality. Previous research likewise notes that women in male-dominated professions often gain recognition when they challenge traditional gender expectations through visible expressions of professional commitment (Evans & Moore, 2023).

The haircut was also interpreted as a sign of sacrifice and dedication to the criminology profession. Participants recognized that many women value long hair as part of their identity; therefore, choosing to cut it short was seen as prioritizing professional obligations over personal preference. In this context, the hairstyle symbolized discipline and readiness for the demands of training. Studies on professional socialization in law enforcement education similarly highlight that compliance with grooming standards reinforces institutional values such as discipline and commitment (Santos & Villanueva, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings suggest an evolving understanding of femininity among the participants. Rather than defining femininity solely through physical appearance, respondents acknowledged that traits such as discipline, competence, and professionalism can also reflect feminine identity. This shift mirrors broader societal discussions on gender roles, where professional capability increasingly outweighs conventional expectations related to appearance (Lee & Park, 2024).

Theme 2: Perceived Impact on Professional Image

The participants generally agreed that the “boy cut” hairstyle did not negatively affect the professional image of female interns. Instead, many associated the hairstyle with neatness, discipline, and practicality, qualities that align with the expectations of criminology training. The haircut was therefore perceived as a visible indicator of professionalism and preparedness for fieldwork. Research on law enforcement training programs similarly indicates that grooming standards contribute to projecting discipline and organizational identity among trainees (Williams & Carter, 2021).

Participants also observed that female interns with short hair challenge traditional gender norms by demonstrating that professional competence is independent of appearance. Several respondents viewed the hairstyle as a symbol of independence and resilience, qualities that contradict stereotypes about women's roles in physically demanding professions. Previous studies confirm that women entering male-dominated fields often redefine professional identity by emphasizing capability rather than conformity to gendered expectations (Müller & Schmidt, 2024).

In addition, the hairstyle occasionally attracted recognition from outsiders, which reinforced the interns' professional identity. Participants shared instances where community members or instructors interpreted the appearance as resembling that of law enforcement personnel. Such reactions were described as motivating for the interns and contributed to a stronger sense of belonging within the profession. External validation has been shown to strengthen professional identity formation among students undergoing specialized training (Lee & Park, 2024).

Nevertheless, the hairstyle was sometimes perceived in contrasting ways. While many observers associated it with professionalism and confidence, others viewed it as unconventional in relation to traditional feminine appearance. Despite these differing interpretations, participants emphasized that such perceptions rarely affected the interns' credibility within the criminology program. Moreover, the haircut functioned as an identity marker that visually distinguished criminology students and reinforced their affiliation with a disciplined academic field (Reyes & Dela Cruz, 2020).

Theme 3: Treatment of Female Interns with “Boy Cut” during Internships

The findings indicate that female interns with “boy cut” hairstyles were generally treated equally during their internship experiences. Participants consistently reported that instructors and peers focused more on performance, discipline, and responsibility rather than on physical appearance. In most cases, the hairstyle did not influence how interns were evaluated or assigned tasks. This reflects a broader shift within professional training environments where competence and work ethic are prioritized over appearance-based judgments (Cunningham, 2025).

Despite this overall fairness, participants acknowledged that female interns occasionally encountered teasing or questions about their haircut, particularly during the early stages of internship. These reactions were typically temporary and diminished as the interns demonstrated competence and professionalism in their tasks. Research on gender integration in male-dominated occupations similarly notes that women may initially experience scrutiny before gaining full acceptance through performance (Yudiani et al., 2025).

Participants emphasized that resilience and confidence were key factors that helped female interns manage such situations. Interns who displayed self-assurance and professionalism were more likely to earn the respect of peers and instructors. Over time, their performance shifted attention away from appearance toward their professional abilities. This finding aligns with studies showing that confidence and competence are crucial in overcoming gender-based stereotypes in professional training contexts (Hernandez & Ortiz, 2025).

Finally, the hairstyle was widely interpreted as a symbol of readiness and determination. Participants viewed it as an indication that female interns were prepared to meet the rigorous expectations of criminology training. Instructors and peers often associated the neat and practical hairstyle with discipline and commitment to the profession. In this sense, the “boy cut” functioned not merely as a grooming requirement but also as a symbolic representation of professional identity and preparedness within criminology education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the participants' narratives and the thematic analysis, it can be concluded that male criminology students initially responded to female interns with a “boy cut” hairstyle with a mix of surprise, curiosity, and mild hesitation. Over time, these perceptions shifted toward acceptance as the interns demonstrated competence, professionalism, and discipline. The short hairstyle was generally perceived as enhancing the professional image of female interns, symbolizing neatness, confidence, and a commitment to the demands of criminology training.

Moreover, female interns with a “boy cut” were largely treated equitably by instructors and peers, with occasional comments having minimal impact, and in some cases, the hairstyle reinforced perceptions of dedication and readiness. Overall, the findings underscore the evolving understanding of professionalism and femininity within a traditionally male-dominated training environment, highlighting that competence and conduct outweigh conventional expectations related to appearance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational institutions and criminology training programs are encouraged to conduct orientation and awareness initiatives for both male and female students prior to internship deployment, addressing misconceptions and fostering understanding of diverse grooming standards. Integrating seminars and workshops focused on professional image and identity can reinforce that hairstyles, such as the “boy cut,” are symbolic of discipline, confidence, and professional preparedness. Instructors and peer leaders should actively cultivate inclusive practices by emphasizing competence, character, and performance over physical appearance, ensuring fair and supportive treatment for all interns regardless of grooming choices. These measures can strengthen professional development, promote gender sensitivity, and foster an equitable learning environment within criminology education.

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