

Lund University  
Department of Sociology

# **What is the Role and Significance of Occupational Clothing for the Wearers?**

**Thoughts and Ideas of Nine White Coat  
Wearers in a Pharmacy**

Author: Corina Filipescu  
Master's Thesis SOC 464, 61-80 p  
Autumn Term, October 2003  
Supervisor: Katarina Sjöberg

# Abstract

**Author:** Corina Filipescu

**Title:** What is the Role and Significance of Occupational Clothing for the Wearers? Thoughts and Ideas of Nine White Coat Wearers in a Pharmacy.

**Thesis:** Master's Thesis, SOC 464, 61-80 p

**Supervisor:** Katarina Sjöberg

**Department of Sociology,** Autumn Term, October 2003

This thesis aims to reveal the role and significance of occupational clothing for the wearers, exposing some of the thoughts, ideas and opinions that pharmacy workers have about their work uniform, the white coat. My own experiences from working in an environment (a pharmacy) where occupational uniforms were used was one of the reasons for selecting this thesis topic. My interest was also consolidated by the fact that in recent years the significance and essentiality of work uniforms have been emphasised to a greater extent. All these led to the question of how pharmacy employees (as well as other professionals) experience their "uniformed" role. After a short introductory chapter, the first two parts review the methodological challenges dealt with and the theoretical aspects used in analysing the data collected. The next section analyses the interview information, looking at the role and significance of the white coat from four different perspectives: the symbolism of the coat, the coat's power over the wearers' freedom, its significance for the wearers' acting and the coat's role against the burnout phenomenon. The thesis ends by concluding that indeed occupational clothing plays a vital role and is of great significance for the wearers in different circumstances. In our case, we will see that the white coat incorporates various symbols, has the power of limiting the pharmacists' freedom, has a significance for the wearers' acting in their interaction with the "outsider" world and helps the wearers to escape from the risk of getting burnout.

**Key words:** occupational clothing, qualitative methods, symbol, freedom, peoples' acting, the burnout phenomenon.

# Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	4
Technical Note	5
<b><u>1. Introduction</u></b>	<b>6</b>
1.1. Main purpose	6
1.2. Methods	6
1.3. Literature	7
1.4. Disposition	8
<b><u>2. Methods</u></b>	<b>9</b>
2.1. Portrait of the Interviewees	9
2.1.1. Anonymity	10
2.2. Modes of procedures	10
2.2.1. Open-Ended Questions	10
2.2.2. Selecting the Informants	11
2.2.3. The Sponsor	12
2.2.4. Access	12
2.2.5. Reversed Roles	13
2.2.6. Attitude of the Researcher	14
2.2.7. Asking Questions	14
2.2.8. Own Opinions	15
<b><u>3. Theoretical Framework</u></b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. Symbol	16
3.2. Freedom	17
3.3. The Mask	18
3.4. The Burnout Phenomenon	20
<b><u>4. Frame of Analysis</u></b>	<b>22</b>
4.1. Symbols	22
4.1.1 The Coat as a Symbol	22
4.1.2. Colour and Association	24
4.1.3. Respect and Authority	25

4.1.4. The Concept "Uniform"	27
4.2. Freedom	28
4.2.1. Limited Freedom	28
4.2.2. Creation of Boundaries	31
4.3. The Mask	32
4.3.1. The Front	32
4.3.2. Always Being the Same	34
4.3.3. Delimitation between Front - Back	34
4.3.4. Work Norms	35
4.4. The Burnout-phenomenon	36
4.4.1. Positive Feedback	36
4.4.2. Social Interaction	37
4.4.3. Accessories	37
4.4.4. Depersonifying and Reduced Capacity	39
<b><u>5. Conclusions</u></b>	<b>41</b>
Bibliography	45
Appendix 1	47

# **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank the nine interviewees for their patience and valuable help.

Second, thank you to my supervisor, Katarina Sjöberg, who succeeded to guide me with attention and support.

# Technical Note

When mentioning the researcher or the interviewer, both words refer to the author of this thesis.

Respondent, participant, informant and subject are used as synonyms to the word interviewee.

Client and customer have the same meaning in the thesis context.

When referring to the white coat, synonyms such as work uniform, white uniform/dress, white overall, coat occupational clothing/dress, working dress, dress uniform will be used.

Words such as pharmacy staff or pharmacist/s refer to the nine interviewees (unless specified differently), not taking into consideration any professional differences between them.

The burnout phenomenon will also be referred to as phenomenon.

# **1. Introduction**

The aim of this introductory chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the contents of the thesis. First, the reader will be introduced to the main purpose of the thesis. Second, the introduction turns to the choice of methods and theoretical perspectives (literature) used in the analysis. Finally a disposition has been arranged at the end of the introduction chapter in order to shortly explain and give an insight of the contents of this piece of work.

## **1.1. Main Purpose**

By revealing some of the opinions, thoughts and interpretations of nine female pharmacy workers about their work uniform, the white coat, the main purpose of this thesis argues that occupational clothing plays an essential role and is of vital significance for its wearers. This argument has its origins in the long history of occupational clothing, as well as the author's personal experiences. For thousand of years human beings have communicated with one another first in the language of dress. For example sociologists have uplifted in their research that clothes are a language of signs. The French structuralist Roland Barthes spoke in his book "The Disease of Costumes" of the theatrical dress as a kind of writing of which the basic element is the sign. Barthes also involved hair styles, accessories, jewellery, make-up and body decoration as part of the theatrical occupational clothing (Lurie, 1992:3-4). The author's own experiences of wearing occupational clothing, proved that occupational dress plays an important role for its wearer. From the personal experiences of the author, it has been noticed that long before you talk to a person wearing occupational clothing, the wearer gives important information (or misinformation) of his/her occupation, origin, personality, opinions, etc. The uniform becomes therefore what sociologists have defined as dress language or non-verbal system of communication (Lurie, *ibid*:3).

The focus of the thesis will be on nine female pharmacy workers, who are using occupational clothing, the white coat, in their professional life. The interviewees rank between 26-62 years, have between 2 and 44 years of work experience, perform different professional tasks and have different skills in their work place. In order to thoroughly explore the main purpose, the analysis chapter was divided into four parts, enumerated as symbol, freedom, the mask and the burnout phenomenon. The central concern of each of these parts is to point out different situations in which the role and significance of the white coat are uplifted.

## **1.2. Methods**

The thesis is based on collected interviews and studies of literature. Qualitative methods were used in order to collect the information needed for the analysis. This meant to interview each one of the participants separately, while the interviews were based on unstructured questions,

so called open-ended questions. The selection of the interviewees was not made personally by the interviewer (the author), but the pharmacy employees volunteered after the research topic was presented to them. Afterwards it was decided when to meet at the pharmacy in order to conduct the interviews. A gatekeeper<sup>1</sup> (a member of the staff) also helped in selecting a part of the informants.

In the second chapter of this work (the methodological chapter), some of the challenges, which arose when working with qualitative methods, are explained. The author will resort to four aspects that will explain some of the advantages and disadvantages, which appeared when collecting and analysing the data. First, one of the chapters in Martyn Hammersley's and Paul Atkinson's "Ethnography" (1995) brings to the qualitative methods tradition a deeper understanding over how the selection of the interviewees was made, as well as how asking the interviews questions has been made. Their view will be used when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of these situations. Second, in "Experiencing Fieldwork" (1991), William B Shaffir and Robert A Stebbins are discussing different aspects of the selection made by a gatekeeper and the access to the interviewees. Third, Lawrence W Neuman's discussion on open-ended questions in "Social Research Methods" (1994) gives a detailed aspect of the use of this method, uplifting both positive and negative aspects. Fourth, despite the fact that the use of Robert K Merton's "The Focused Interview" (1990) might be questioned, some of his views were appropriate in explaining the challenges dealt with in certain situations. Merton will be used when discussing challenges that occurred when the reversed role situation between the interviewer and the interviewees took place, as well as when the interviewer interfered during the interviews with own opinions.

### **1.3. Literature**

We have to consider the fact that the row of published theories and aspects referring to the subject studied here, cannot be reviewed in this thesis. The four chosen main aspects will supply with extracts, appropriate for analysing the interview material and to achieve the thesis purpose. Alongside these four aspects, other arguments and perspectives will be added, placing the interview material in a broader theoretical framework. We will return to these latter aspects in the theoretical chapter.

First, since the respondents regarded their work uniform as a symbol, this view will be supported by Billy Ehn's and Orvar Löfgren's symbol-perspective, described in their book "Kulturanalys" (1982). The two authors have examined situations in which different items become symbols in the social world, a perspective which will be incorporated when dealing with the white coat as a symbol. Second, in "Att tänka sociologiskt" (1990) Zygmunt Bauman

---

<sup>1</sup> Also called a sponsor throughout the thesis.

argued that an individual's freedom is limited, which in turn creates limitations for what an individual can do. His argument will be connected to the interviewees' feeling that when wearing the uniform, the coat put boundaries to their freedom. Third, Irving Goffman's "Jaget och maskerna" (1995) focuses on the idea of actors and performance in everyday life, which will help us understand the interviewees' creation of a "mask". The informants emphasised that when wearing the coat, they not only behaved differently, but also became different. Fourth, among the row of published theories concerning the burnout phenomenon, the interviewees' thoughts connecting the white coat and the burnout phenomenon will be supplemented by Christina Maslach's book "Utbränd" (1986). Maslach's arguments will be compared to, but also strengthened by Johan Asplund and his "Det sociala livets elementära former" (1992), which also deals with the burnout phenomenon.

#### **1.4. Disposition**

The next chapter contains a presentation of the methods used in the process of collecting the information, where relevant challenges of the qualitative method will also be analysed. Some brief information about the nine interviewees will be incorporated in this part as well. The purpose of the third chapter, the theoretical chapter, is to give further details about the aspects used to explain and interpret the information gathered. This chapter is divided into four major sections (titled as symbol, freedom, the mask and the burnout phenomenon). The fourth chapter, the analysis, attempts to place the testimony of the subjects into a broader theoretical framework. The interview material is strengthened with different appropriate aspects and arguments described in the previous chapter. The nine interviews were done in Swedish, but were later translated into English. This was due to two reasons. First an English version of the interviews content would be better incorporated in the international debate of this thesis topic. Second, an English translation would also incorporate better into the English text of the thesis. The last chapter includes the conclusions. The thesis concludes that the white coat plays an important role for the pharmacists, sometimes without them being aware of this fact. At the same time, the coat is of significance for the pharmacists in the sense that it is a necessary tool in their work and during the interaction with the clients. A final remark points to the fact that further research about the thesis topic would reveal further interesting facts about the role and significance of occupational clothing.

## **2. Methods**

This chapter examines the way in which the methodological research was done, covering the data about the interviewees, the method used for extracting information and the challenges met while approaching the purpose.

### **2.1. Portrait of the Interviewees**

The nine interviewees were all working in the same pharmacy, but had different tasks and skills. By choosing respondents with various tasks and skills, the interview material might reveal significant differences between the interviewees' ideas and thoughts, influenced by their professional differences. However, whether this is happening or not remains to be seen in the analysis part.

There existed three staff categories in the pharmacy, placing the employees in a hierarchy of three levels. Some of them were working as pharmacists, while others were dispensing chemist's assistants. The latter ones were divided into two almost similar groups and the only factor, which divided these workers was the number of years spent on their pharmaceutical education. Since there is no equivalent for one of these groups in the English language (receptarie) and since the pharmacy staff did not distinguish the two groups, it was decided to put the interviewees belonging to these latter two groups under the same name: the dispensing chemist's assistant. The interviewees stated that this particular "receptarie" group is specific for Scandinavia and does not exist elsewhere. The assignment of an dispensing chemist's assistant was to receive prescriptions and hand out medicine. The pharmacists took care of similar tasks, but also had the responsibility to sign for prescriptions and similar documents. The pharmacists also handled tasks such as presenting information about new products or health problems to their colleagues, pharmacy students and medical centres. Next follows nine short statements about the interviewees:

- *Ingrid* is 54 years of age and has worked in the pharmacy since 1967. Her present job is as a dispensing chemist's assistant.
- *Anette*, age 48, is one of the few workers who has multiple tasks in the pharmacy, such as taking care of the information needed to be distributed to the current employees. Although her most important task is her job as deputy manager of the pharmacy, she is also trained to work as a dispensing chemist's assistant.
- *Danja* is 37 years and has worked in the pharmacy since 1996. She works as a charwoman, meaning that she is cleaning the pharmacy, having access both in the premises and the back of the pharmacy.
- *Milica*, 33 years, has worked for ten years as a dispensing chemist's assistant.

- *Britta* is in her fifties and has worked since 1969. She is the manager of the pharmacy. She is also working as a dispensing chemist's assistant.
- *Eva* is 57 years of age and has been working since 1961. She is also a dispensing chemist's assistant.
- *Susanne* is 47 years and has worked as a dispensing chemist's assistant for 31 years.
- *Maria*, 26, has been working as a pharmacist for 3 years. She is doing the same job as a dispensing chemist's assistant, but is also conducting information sessions with staff working in the care and health district.
- *Sonja* is the one who has been working the most of all the nine interviewees, since 1954. Sonja is 62 years and works as a dispensing chemist's assistant.

### **2.1.1. Anonymity**

Before starting the interviews, it was emphasised to the interviewees that, if they wanted, they could remain anonymous. The informants themselves stated that people working in pharmacies have the possibility to stay anonymous by not wearing their name tags. However, the manager of the pharmacy *is* expected to be public and not hide his or her identity. It was expected that the interviewees would insist on anonymity when conducting the interviews. Contrary, the interviewees expressed a desire to use their own names. Nevertheless, there were a couple who wanted to remain anonymous and used a false name, which they chose themselves.

## **2.2. Modes of Procedures**

It should be emphasised that the interviews were done on two different occasions. During the first time, six interviews were conducted in one day and a week later, the remaining three. The experiences encountered when doing six interviews in one day, showed several disadvantages. For example the concentration of the interviewer declined, especially during the last three interviews. This does not mean that the information received was ineffective. On the contrary, having six interviews following each others stimulated the questions that came to be asked in the remaining three interviews, giving rise to further questions. For example, there was much more detailed information in the last interview than in the first one. As the author of "Social Research Methods" commented, "*interviewing is an art, so hard-and-fast rules do not always apply*" (Neuman, 1994:246). Taking this quotation into consideration, interviewing six people in one day can be a stimulating interview method. Nevertheless, this is not the best way of gathering information, especially when the risk of misjudgement or other negative aspects can emerge.

### **2.2.1. Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions were used in order to collect the information needed for the analysis, finding them more appropriate than closed questions. Neuman (1994) is commenting on the

advantages and disadvantages with open-ended questions. According to him and taking the interviewer's own experiences into consideration, open-ended questions yield a greater number of answers, often followed by details. The interviewees have a better chance of expressing their thoughts, explaining their feelings and giving a fuller picture of the topic in question. Using this discussion-resembling method gave the interviewer a chance to come in touch with a wide range of responses, therefore not limiting the possible range of answers.

Neuman also enumerates some of the disadvantages when using open-ended questions. The interviewees might easily get intimidated by the questions, not knowing how to answer. The nine interviewees *were* in fact intimidated by the questions, admitting that before they had not thought a lot about these questions. For some of them it took longer to come up with an answer. Neuman argues that the researcher needs a lot of time interviewing when using open-ended questions, something that the interviewer absolutely needed in order to fully cover the interviewees' opinions.

Another reason for not being able to reply might have depended on the fact that there were clear differences between the informants when it came to articulation. For a couple of the respondents, the interviewer had to thoroughly explain the thesis purpose and what the interviewer was interested in, whereas others revealed that they had been asked similar questions before and did not need a long introduction. The ones who felt more confident in answering the questions, could easily express their thoughts.

### **2.2.2. Selecting the Informants**

The selection of the interviewees was done by using two methods: self-selection (when the interviewees themselves volunteered) and selection by others (through the help of the gatekeeper). The self-selection process seemed to be a good idea, since the staff was not forced to participate. If the interviewer would have personally asked the pharmacy employees, this could have made some of them feel forced to participate, much due to the fact that they did not want to refuse the researcher they knew from before. It was therefore more appropriate to mention to all pharmacy workers what the interviewer intended to investigate about and the ones who wanted to participate were welcome to talk to the researcher.

The interviewer also had the help of a member of the staff, who selected a number of the interviewees, deciding who would be appropriate for the research theme. This particular situation, which will be dealt with further on, gave rise to one issue worth mentioning. Hammersley & Atkinson have the following comment on the situation when a gatekeeper is selecting the informants: *gatekeepers or other powerful figures in the field sometimes attempt to select interviewees for the ethnographer. This may be done in good faith to facilitate the*

*research or it may be designed to control the findings (1995: 133-134).*

It was mentioned to the gatekeeper that the interviewer needed a varied group of individuals for the interviews, when it came to age and professional background. Since the gatekeeper, knew very well his/her colleagues, it seemed to be useful to let the gatekeeper choose some of the respondents. At the same time, it was emphasised that the interviewees should be able to share their experiences and feelings about the coat's significance for them. These demands could have been misunderstood by the gatekeeper, since the interviewer expected the sponsor to know exactly what the researcher had in mind. However, the interviewer did not complain or correct the choice of respondents, being content with the final choices.

### **2.2.3. The Sponsor**

Having the informants selected by others, questions about the link between the sponsor and the interview material arose. The sponsor, as Shaffir and Stebbins are calling a gatekeeper, does influence the research access and the field relations when choosing the interviewees. The two authors are arguing that *"at the start of any project it is essential to be critical of the research sponsorship. For just as my sponsors may open some doors, their support of a project may close others and make participants suspicious of their motives. Certainly the relationship in which sponsors are located will influence the kind of access provided for the researcher"* (1991: 46).

The sponsor is said to often hold an important and central position *"in the hierarchy of the institution"* (*ibid*: 47), which is studied. The sponsor has the power to open the access-door to the interviewees, but he/she can also close other doors, for example by not procuring informants that are more suitable for the research. Indirectly, they influence the data collected. This could have happened with the sponsor and the selection made for the interviews.

### **2.2.4. Access**

Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) question the situation where there exist differences between the researcher and the interviewees. While taking into consideration their own experiences, the authors argue that for a researcher it is for example easier to associate with those closer to one's own age group. This situation occurred when collecting data. The differences existing between people of different age groups became a methodological challenge. One particular situation made the interviewer wonder about the challenges that exist when age differences appear. While interviewing the younger informants, it was noticed that this group and the researcher shared similar views on the importance of occupational clothing. The younger interviewee group had been wondered about the role and significance of the white coat. On the other hand, the older interviewee generation took the coat for granted, without questioning

its role or significance. Therefore, this latter group had difficulties when putting forward views about the coat. This became one of the reasons why it was easier to communicate with the younger interviewees.

Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) comment that it is much easier to communicate and also access data when a friendship is established between the researcher and the interviewee. Since the researcher had been working at this pharmacy and knew the employees, it became easier for the interviewees to open their minds and express their feelings, something that might have been a closed area for other researchers. The interviewer might not have been considered a stranger or an outsider and the access to the field could therefore have been granted in a more expanded way for the interviewees than perhaps for a stranger.

One of the negative aspects of a close relationship to the area approached is the so called "*attitude of strangeness*" (Neuman, 1994: 342). It means that if the investigation is made in strange and new surroundings, it becomes easier for the researcher to notice details, overcoming "*the boredom of observing ordinary details*" (*ibid*: 342). Since the interviewer was not a stranger to neither the place nor the respondents, details might have been taken for granted (such as certain comments during the interviews that could have been expanded), not finding them interesting, something that a stranger might have done. This could have limited the findings and the final results.

### **2.2.5. Reversed Roles**

The particular with one of the interviews was the fact that the interviewee attempted to reverse roles. Instead of the interviewer asking the questions, it almost ended up with the interviewee asking questions on what the researcher's own opinions were. It should be mentioned that this reversed roles situation did not happen all the time. However there were some occasions when the interviewer became an interviewee, without even realising. Merton explains this by arguing that "*the questions often reflect his (the interviewee's) emotional blockage. He may be reluctant to explore his own feelings because they are painful or embarrassing or because they are so diffuse that he cannot easily put them into words. By directing attention to the interviewer, he diverts attention from himself. He hopes, at times, that the answer will provide the "correct" formulation of his own vague feelings*" (1990:184).

The reversed roles situation can be interpreted as due to the diffuseness that existed in the questions asked. Many of the respondents explained that the subject researched about was an area that they had never thought about and it was hard to come up with an answer. Therefore, many of the interviewees intended to ask back what the interviewer's opinion was, as a result of their diffuseness. Sometimes it was hard to keep the researcher's own opinions back. The

reversed roles situation influenced the researcher's attitude towards the interviewees, making the interviewer not as careful with the use of leading questions. The reversed roles situation might be seen as a disadvantage, influencing the informants' responses. Yet, the interviewer's own opinions involved can also be seen as a starting line for developing the interviewees' answers.

### **2.2.6. Attitude of the Researcher**

One of the negative aspects sensed while interviewing, was the fact that a couple of the older informants were reacting to the use of the word "uniform", which referred to the white coat. This occurred especially during the first interviews, but the interviewer did not try to find a synonym or a substitute for the word. Maybe the word was used in an incorrect context, but the interviewer never asked why the informants had reacted. When the interviewees reacted, the researcher interfered, expressing what it was understood through the word "uniform", perhaps unawarely influencing the participants' own definitions. It was thought that by explaining, it was going to make the informants aware of what the concept meant and in this way was helping the respondents to answer the questions. However, Merton is not encouraging the interviewer to engage him/herself in "*what the interviewee says or does*" (1990: 178).

During several other interview occasions the interviewer was tempted to express own opinions and this happened a few times. The interviewer felt that the questions asked were misunderstood by the respondents. By expressing own opinions, the interviewees were expected to form an understanding of the questions. However, the researcher remained an interested listener and kept a low profile most of the time. Yet, after the interviews, the researcher explained to the informants why the word "uniform" was used in the context. It was then suggested by the interviewees that perhaps it was the age difference between the interviewer and the participants that made the concept have different meanings.

### **2.2.7. Asking Questions**

*"Researchers are often warned to avoid the use of leading questions"* (1995:155), Hammersley and Atkinson argue. Especially when noticing that the interviewees did not know how to answer some questions, claiming that they had not thought about these before, the interviewer was tempted to express own opinions. Merton also discusses this kind of situation by arguing that *"the interviewer will sometimes deliver himself of a sentiment or opinion without being aware that he is doing so. He may think that he is engaged only in helping to draw out to the full what the speaker is trying to say"* (1990:180).

Involuntary and perhaps unaware, the researcher "helped" the interviewees many times, using

leading questions. Expressions like *"I do not know if I give you the information you need"* gave the impression that the interviewee was insecure of her answers and needed a slight push into the "right" direction. It was during these occasions that leading questions were used. During these particular interview moments, the interviewer did not question the fact that leading questions could influence the responses of the interviewees. Instead the interviewer was more concerned to describe his/her own point of view, in order to help the informants express *their* thoughts.

### **2.2.8. Own Opinions**

Before starting the interviews, it was stated to all the nine informants that it was *their* own opinions, which should be expressed and not the general one or what their colleagues thought and said. Merton is encouraging this act and claims that *"from the beginning the emphasis is put upon the actual experience of the interviewees- their reactions to the situations. They are being asked not to sit as judges, but to report the experiences, which can accumulatively help provide a basis for judgement"* (1990:172). However, this was something hard to hold on to for a few of the participants. It was something almost impossible, especially during one particular interview, which was done during the first interview occasion. The participant could not focus on her own experiences and opinions, but had to talk in general or about someone else. Every time it happened, the interviewer encouraged her to describe her own opinion too. It seems to now that this interview contains two answers to the questions asked: the participant's and her colleagues', viewed through the interviewee's eyes.

While searching for reasons of why this situation happened, two factors can explain it. One of them is that perhaps the interviewer was not clear about the research purpose. This could in turn have depended on the fact that too many interviews were done that day and the researcher was not as precise with the last informants, as with the first ones. The second factor might have been that when asking the interviewee to provide with information, the respondent might not have understood that the information should have been based on individual opinions. The interviewee could have seen the significance of the white coat as something contingent with all pharmacy employees, not being able to separate them.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

According to Neuman a theory is *"as a system of interconnected abstractions or ideas that condenses and organises knowledge about the social worlds ... People are always creating new theories and ideas about how the world works (1994: 35)"*. In this chapter the chosen theoretical aspects, concepts and assumptions will explain the interview material connected to the role and significance of the white coat.

#### **3.1. Symbol**

Ehn and Löfgren (1982) claim that a symbol dominates the surroundings where the symbol is to be found. This is explained in their book "Kulturanalys" where Ehn and Löfgren are discussing the example of the elk hunt. The authors argue that one does not have to stay long in a Norrland village to notice how dominant the elk hunt is in this area. The writers suggest that the importance of the elk hunt in Norrland is conspicuous, dominating and colourful and that the elk hunt has therefore become a symbol in Norrland. Is the white coat also seen as a conspicuous, dominating and colourful symbol by its wearers?

The interviewees explained that customers showed more respect and gratitude to the employees when they wore the white coat. The importance of the coat made the interviewees view their work uniform as a symbol of authority. The interviewees experienced that their predominant character was to be found in their coat. Ehn and Löfgren (1982) strengthen the interviewees' reports, when explaining how the world of symbols is created around an authority, for example the preacher. The preacher's predominant character is not only to be found in his office and person, but also in his cassock.

Joel M Charon also deals with symbols in his book "Symbolic Interaction" (1985). For him a symbol is something that allows individuals to deal with the social world. When encountering a symbol, individuals are usually categorising the objects they view with the social world. By doing so, people are ordering a world and are in this way reducing the chance of making mistakes. Connecting Charon's view with the data collected, the interview material offered some situations in which the clients of the pharmacy were often not differentiating between the staffs of the pharmacy and the hospital. Because both staffs are using the white coat as their professional uniform, the pharmacists became symbols of both work places. The interviewees expressed the feeling of becoming symbols of medical knowledge (or the knowledge a doctor possesses).

The above can also be connected to the argument of George Herbert Mead, who emphasises the importance of significant symbols (in our case the white coat). In his book "Mind, Self

and Society" (1962), Mead stated that significant symbols call similar responses from the speaking individual and the others who are surrounding the speaker. According to him, a significant symbol is a gesture, which is arising in the individual who is making it, "*the same kind of response ... as they are supposed to elicit from those to whom the gestures are addressed*" (Ritzer, 1996:336). Mead exemplified this through words such as cat or dog, explaining that when people are using these words, they are all thinking of similar things. He explained that for example yelling the word fire in a crowd motivates the crowd *and* the yelling individual to react in a similar way. Mead concluded that these words (such as dog, cat, fire) stimulate the person speaking as they stimulate others and that a significant symbol works better than body language when communicating with people (Ritzer, *ibid*:338).

Mead's view can also be connected to and explain the situation when the interviewer and the younger participants shared the same definition of the word "uniform". In contrast to Mead, Pierre Bourdieu discussed in "The Craft of Sociology" (1991) the different associations people make when using a certain concept, for example the word tree. The association made cannot always be the same for all the actors involved in the social act. As we could see from above, the use of the concept "uniform" did not elicit the same response from all the interviewees as it did from the interviewer. Some of the interviewees stated that the concept might differ from person to person and from generation to generation.

Further, Bourdieu is concerned with the dialectical relationship between habitus and field. He explains that habitus is created by and produces the society, while the field is the relations among objective positions. Habitus is the one through which people are communicating with the social world. "*People are endowed with a series of internalised schemes through which they perceive, understand, appreciate and evaluate the social world*" (Ritzer, 1996:540). Habitus results from a long occupation of a position in and varies depending on the position an individual has in the social world. Therefore habitus is different for each individual, but those occupying the same position in the social world are almost having the same habitus. Taking into consideration that habitus is not a similar phenomenon for all individuals, this can explain why the word "uniform" had different associations for the interviewer and for the interviewees. The reason lays in the different positions the interviewer and the interviewees occupy in the social world.

### **3.2. Freedom**

According to Bauman freedom means to have the ability or the power do decide and to choose for yourself (1990: 29). People in general are not concerned about the choices they make, but from time to time they are reminded of the freedom they possess. An individual might perhaps do something, which may not be tolerated by others and becomes punished for

his/her actions. As Bauman expresses, the punishment acknowledges the fact that the person in question is responsible for what the person has done (ibid: 30), but could have refrained from the action. Freedom is therefore limited and can also raise boundary lines for others' freedom too.

Sometimes people find freedom dependent on what one person is. Bauman expresses this by arguing that freedom today is conditioned by the freedom of yesterday (ibid: 32). Also, the group to which someone belongs to, can construct boundaries for one's freedom, but also expand one's freedom. The group is able to raise boundaries for the area where the person exercises his/her freedom. All the advantages provided through skills are becoming disadvantages when the person gets outside the group's boundaries.

Bauman's aspect can be linked to the interview material when the informants explained that when trying to abandon the use of the coat (since they found the coat unpersonal and uncomfortable, bounding them too tightly to the pharmacy) their effort did not succeed. The coat had become something necessary when working. One of the interviewees stated that the coat was bounding the staff to the pharmacy, something the employees could not be without anymore. Several other informants confirmed the fact that the coat was putting boundaries to their freedom, making them feel more responsible for their actions. Listening to them, it became interesting to see how much freedom the interviewees felt they had when wearing the coat.

Bauman argues that freedom is often depending on what one person is. The interviewees emphasised strongly that their freedom is limited in line with their tasks and profession. The skills they accumulated in the past (such as during their education) and the choice of their profession conditioned their freedom today. As mentioned before, the pharmacy had three categories of workers. The interviewees explained that the ones who have numerous tasks and higher education were the ones who had more responsibility, but also limited freedom. The informants argued that the choice of their profession yesterday, limited their freedom today.

### **3.3. The Mask**

According to Goffman (1995), in their everyday life people are acting like actors on stage, constructing a mask when interacting with other people. When they present themselves, they are trying to control the information they send out, which is the base of others' impressions of them. It is when interacting with others that actors are struck into the real society (Aubert, 1979).

Goffman is using different concepts to delimit the properties used in the process of acting.

One of them is the front (or the facade), which Goffman defines as the expressive standard type equipment, which intentionally or unawaresly is used by the individual during his/her performance (1995: 28). The front includes the personal front, meaning the details associated with the actor itself (like for example clothes, age, facial expressions) (ibid:30; Ritzer, 1996:354). The front region is the place where the performance is occurring. An actor's performance in the front is interpreted as an attempt to show that his/her activity in the region is maintaining and embodying certain standards (Goffman, 1995:97-98). Goffman describes the front as something necessary when acting in front of an audience. A setting, meaning the physical scene, must exist if the actors are to perform (the pharmacy premises is a setting). They also need a personal front (the equipment), which the audience identifies the actors with and expects them to carry out into the setting (for instance the white coat in our case).

There exists a back stage (or back region) as well. It is the place where *facts suppressed in the front ... may appear* (Ritzer 1996:356). Only performers are expected to enter the back. The back region is the place where the impressions given rise to by the performance are to be contested. It is here that the routine is prepared, while in the front region the performance is taking place. The front and back regions are limited and the passage between them is kept closed for the audience (Goffman, 1995).

The interview material pointed at a change of the interviewees when wearing the white coat. When being in the premises (the front), they acted in a certain way, but in the coffee room (the back), they became private people, clearly showing a delimitation between the two regions. One of the interviewees confirmed that for her the coat stood between the private and the job. Another interviewee mentioned that in the back the workers did not have everybody's eyes on them, therefore acting in a more comfortable way. A third interviewee admitted that she felt becoming a civilian when entering the back. She felt that the personality changed not just for her, but for her colleagues as well. When entering the front, the interviewees felt the need of controlling their appearances. As the interviewees explained, when working in the front and wearing the coat, the pharmacy staff was always having a responsibility to take care of.

Goffman argued that when the individual is performing in front of others, sanctionly values are incorporated in the acting. During the performances, many of the actions which are incompatible with the norms are put aside. The motives are often based on ideal norms people are living with. Norms derive from and consist of expectations about what people should do (Aubert, 1979:38). The individual's role is the sum of the norms (ibid: 99) of a certain assignment or position. Norms are the clutch between micro and macro or between the actor and society (ibid:40), delimiting between the forbidden and the admissible.

The pharmacy norms have been emphasised as important by all interviewees. One participant explained that when she was interacting with the customers she was becoming serious and solemn, something that the pharmacy company requires. During breaks the employees could joke with each other, but they were not allowed to do that in front of the customers. Another informant explained that in front of the customers she was more strict than outside the premises. When interacting with the clients and wearing the coat, she considered the pharmacy norms of being serious and concise when working.

### **3.4. The Burnout Phenomenon**

The ones who are struck by the burnout phenomenon are the ones working with human services, such as medical, educational, social and psychological services (Pines and Aronson, 1988:83) The phenomenon is often caused by absence of positive feedback. Maslach argues that the phenomenon is bound up with the social interaction. When social interaction is generating social interaction, the risk for the burnout phenomenon is also there. The expansion of the phenomenon is caused by the explosion of professions based on social interaction (Asplund, 1990:140-141). Both Asplund and Maslach (1986) agree that since social interaction has existed for a long time, the phenomenon must have always existed (Asplund, 1990:142).

As mentioned before, the burnout phenomenon is a process happening in social interaction and is therefore a product of the interaction (ibid:142-143). According to Maslach, the phenomenon share three basic characteristics: emotional exhaustion, depersonifying and reduced capacity. Emotional exhaustion refers to emotionally taxing work (Ayala and Aronson, 1988:83-84). Depersonifying means the tendency of regarding people as things, not as human beings occurs. Reduced capacity happens when the one who is burnout is badly doing his/her job. Lack of care, sympathy or understanding are representative features for this situation. Asplund adds that the one who is burnout does not feel anything, becoming completely indifferent to his/her surrounding. He is emphasising that the phenomenon comes gradually and insidious. Despite of agreeing on certain issues, there are clear differences between Maslach and Asplund and their perspectives of the phenomenon. For example Maslach records that the cause of the phenomenon is the absence of positive feedback, while Asplund is regarding the total absence of feedback as the only cause of the phenomenon (Asplund, 1990).

Looking at Maslach's arguments and taking into consideration the interviewees' narratives shows that the phenomenon did not occur in the work place studied. The statements made by Maslach that people working in the service district are affected by the burnout phenomenon,

did not seem to fit here. This was exemplified by one of the interviewees stating that the relationship between the pharmacist and the client was open and the workers were engaged within their jobs, regarding every client as an individual. She stated that the customers' concerns did not allow the pharmacists to work poorly. Other informants explained that the employees must act attentively and show understanding when interacting with the clients. The interviewees emphasised that they were deeply engaged within their meetings with the customers. Their use of accessories attached to the white coats was seen as an attempt to cheer up the atmosphere for the customers. As the interviewees explained, it was against their profession to do a bad job.

Here we can mention that the white coat can be seen as a tool in protecting the wearers from the burnout phenomenon. As it could be seen in the interview material, the white coat was a significant symbol not just for the wearers, but also for the clients. This can be explained by the fact that the clients had easier to contact and interact with the pharmacy workers when these were wearing the white coats. Also, the interview material showed that the interviewees were receiving plenty of response from the clients when wearing the coat. It was stated that when wearing the coat the informants were not fearing of getting treated as non-existing and the social interaction was not absent either. One of the interviewees exemplified this by explaining that the employees, who were going to rearrange the pharmacy's shop-window, always took the coats off, otherwise they would not be left alone by customers. She even noticed that the clients were asking the charwoman for help, because she was wearing the white coat. This finding can be linked to Mead's significant symbol. According to Mead, a social act is normally involving two or more people. When these people are communicating, language is having a central role. Mead is referring to language as a significant symbol (1962:42), since language stimulates the person speaking as it does others, as well as calling the same response in the individual who is speaking as it does in the others (Ritzer, 1996: 337). The coat is therefore stimulating language, which in turn leads to customers and staff interaction.

Recalling Mead's claim of the self's ability to take itself as an object and a subject (Ritzer, *ibid*: 341), one of the respondents reported that the use of accessories (for examples brooches) was based on her own experiences when going to the doctor. She felt more comfortable when the doctor she consulted was wearing something personal attached to the coat. During the interview, the respondent pointed to a small brooch on her own coat, arguing that the this kind of jewellery showed customers that she was a fellow-being. It can be noticed throughout the interview material that the interviewees often took into consideration their own experiences when interacting with their customers, making the encounters between them and the clients as comfortable as possible. The informants explained that customers were often feeling

uncomfortable to talk about their problems with the staff. The white coat suggested formality for the clients, but by wearing accessories softened up the atmosphere and the interaction.

## **4. Frame of Analysis**

The claims which will be made here are grounded on the main aspects and the additional material listed in the previous chapter. The analysis will be divided into four sections, which correspond to the four themes.

### **4.1. Symbol**

One of the main questions involved in achieving the main purpose was whether the interviewees felt that the white coat did stand as a symbol for something and if it did, for what. The white uniform has through the years been associated with health and care, but has the symbolic of the white coat received a new meaning for the pharmacists?

#### **4.1.1. The Coat as a Symbol**

Unlike most civilian clothing, occupational clothing is often consciously and deliberately symbolic, as in the case of the pharmaceutical white coat. The white coat defines its wearer as a member of a group and often locates him/her within a hierarchy. Sometimes it even gives information about the wearers' achievements, such as expressing what the profession of the wearer is and what the wearer is able to do (Lurie, 1992:20). In other words the coat becomes a symbol. As it will be seen next, the white coat has become a symbol of knowledge and of authority.

Looking at the interviews conducted, the informants regarded themselves as symbols of knowledge. The interviewees emphasised that the importance of the pharmacist's professional knowledge has changed through the years. Today it is more common for people to go to the pharmacy first and ask for help and after go to the doctor. This has led to the fact that customers have become more demanding with the pharmacists, requiring a wider knowledge about health care. The pharmacists were expected to become doctors and know more than they were supposed to when wearing the coat. The below examples can be linked the white coat as a symbol of knowledge with Ehn and Löfgren and their statement that items, which belong to one particular environment, have the tendency of becoming dominating themes and symbols. In our case the dominating item is the white coat. This was exemplified by the following two interviewees, who defined the pharmacists as symbols of knowledge:

*We are symbols of the pharmacy and of knowledge when we have the coats on. It represents the knowledge, it is the knowledge. People who come in here shall know that when they see the coat, it means that competent staff works here ... It dominates our work environment and*

*most of the time we are not even aware of this fact. (Maria)*

*They want to be helped here, we shall be doctors, because we are a part of the medical service ... It has become a symbol of our knowledge. We have to have that knowledge clients require of us ... The clients only see the coat and suddenly we shall have that knowledge, which will give them the requested information, but we do not know everything. (Britta)*

Charon's argument can also be linked to the above two examples. Charon stated that when encountering a symbol, individuals are categorising the objects they view with a certain aspect of the social world (1985). Often this is due to the fact that individuals prefer to avoid doing mistakes when interacting. As it could be seen in the interview material, the coat becomes a symbol of the pharmacy and of the hospital in the eyes of the clients. Clients were not only expecting the pharmacist to sell medicaments, but also to have the ability to inform them about diseases and how these could be treated, just like a doctor would have done. The consequence was that the interviewees viewed themselves as representing the knowledge a doctor possesses. The interviewees remarked several times that the authority of the pharmacist did not only stand in his/her person and profession, but also in the white coat, as it can be seen in the following example:

*The ones who are going to rearrange the pharmacy's shop-window are taking off their coats, otherwise they will not be left alone by the customers. If they see you arranging the window with civil clothes on they do not disturb you. They are always asking us with the uniforms on ... Wherever you are and you wear the coat customers ask you for help, otherwise they would not ... (Sonja)*

The interviewees claimed that clients did probably not reflect over what the white uniform symbolised for them. However, the pharmacists noticed that they were treated differently when wearing the coat than when being without it. As the above example shows, if a pharmacist was rearranging the shop-windows, but did not wear the coat, customers would not ask that person for help. Instead the client was looking for someone wearing a white coat.

It seems to that the coat also made the wearer an authority, someone who knew how to deal with and answer the needs of the customers. According to the remarks of the interviewees, the authority of the pharmacist does not only lay in his/her person and profession, but also in the coat. This statement can be supported by Ehn and Löfgren's (1982) example of how a preacher's authority is not only linked to its office and person, but also to the cassock. The informants claimed that the coat lended an aspect of authority and explained that the coat had become a symbol of authority for the clients. Customers seemed to show more respect when

the staff was dressed in the coat than when being in their private clothes. The following statement examples this:

*They (the clients) treat us with more respect when we are wearing the coat. We are becoming an authority for them ... I have noticed that when being without it (the coat), they treat me as an equal with no authority and no knowledge. (Danja)*

What can be deduced from the above is the fact that the authority of the staff lays in their coat. The coat has developed a predominant character in the environment where it is used.

#### **4.1.2. Colour and Association**

Three of the most common and important colours used in uniforms, white, black and gray, are not technically colours at all, but representation of the absence or presence of light. However, the first one (white) is heavily weightend with convetional meanings and symbolism. For example, in the Christian faith, white is the colour of heavenly joy and purity, while we often see God the Father wearing a white robe. White is the colour of innocence, worn by babies and youngsters or people who wish to demonstrate wealth through the conspicuous consumption of laundry soap or freedom from manual labour. The colour is also traditionally worn by participants in the high-status classes or groups (Lurie, 1992:184-185).

Today, certain social roles and professions are using the white colour. It has become a requirement for white garments in professions such as the ones associated with health and medicine (Lurie, *ibid*:185) (for example the uniform of the pharmacists). According to the participants, the white colour of their coat seemed to play an important role for the clients. The customers associated the coat's white appearance with hospitals and doctors' knowledge. One interviewee reported how clients viewed the pharmacists' coats as similar to the doctors' ones, expecting the same treatment as they would have received at the hospital. She exemplified this association by describing a situation from her early childhood, when her young brother was frightened by the sight of white coats. The reason laid in the association that her brother did between the colour white and hospitals:

*You associate the white coat with hospitals. Everything that has to do with medical care, hospitals, pharmacies. When I was young, my mom was working as a laundress, washing hospital coats and was dressed in a white uniform. When me, my father and my little brother used to go and fetch her, my brother would start to cry, because he was afraid of the white coats. He probably associated these with doctors and syringes. ... Of course it does make impressions. The colour means a lot too ... It says that I am working in the care service. It is associated with the white coat of the hospitals and doctors' knowledge. (Milica)*

Another interviewee had a similar memory of her younger brother being frightened of Lucia's white dress, because of the association made between Lucia's dress and doctors. The interviewee also stated that for example today many paediatric dentists do not dress in white while working, due to the simple reason that children get scared:

*People who work with children, for example dentists, wear private clothes, because children can be terrified by seeing the white clothes ... I have an old memory ... We were going to watch Lucia, my little brother was four. He started to cry when he saw the white dress<sup>2</sup>, although he knew what Lucia looked like. (Eva)*

The experiences of the interviewees as seen from the above show that the association between doctors and pharmacists was strengthened by the fact that both groups were wearing white coats. The interviewees stated that doctors are usually associated with knowing everything about a person's health. As long as the pharmacy staff was dressed in white coats, clients expected them to share the same knowledge as the doctors. One of the interviewees described how customers viewed the pharmacy as an extension of the hospital:

*You are sometimes called nurse, because people working in the medical service wear white coats and then we become nurses as well. They know that the person with a white coat is a nurse, so we are nurses as well. (Ingrid)*

The interview material pointed at the fact that the colour white has become a dominant theme in the pharmacy. The interviewees stated that customers expected the white dressed employees to have wider knowledge and skills when wearing the white coat. The informants concluded that people's expectations must be tied to the appearance of the white coat. The whiteness had become a dominating theme in the pharmacy alongside the coat. Linking this conclusion to Ehn and Löfgren (1982), the coat becomes a "colourful" item in the eyes of the clients.

### **4.1.3. Respect and Authority**

The choice of the white uniform for people working with health and care has a long history. It started with the house visits of doctors, who after the consultation were often invited to dine with the family. The white colour of the coat was the perfect colour to create an almost godlike authority figure of the doctor and distinguish himself from the others (Lurie, 1992:186). What we actually see and react on are not the bodies of people, but the clothes of these and it is from the clothes that we form a first impression as we meet people (Flügel, 1930:15).

---

<sup>2</sup> Lucia's white dress.

The association between respect and the white coat became a clear remark in the interview material. The interviewees emphasised in their interviews how clients treated them with more respect when encountering the uniformed staff. It was claimed that when wearing the coat, the clients became more submissive with the pharmacy staff, while the wearers gained an authoritarian status and became more powerful. This can be linked to Ehn and Löfgren (1982) who were pointing out the preacher's cassock as powerful and can be exemplified by one of the interviewees:

*It (the coat) leaves a good impression, it is little authoritarian. You get more respect because the coat suggests respect. (Milica)*

Goffman (1995) also stated that items, which an audience identifies the actors with, are expected to be carried out on stage. Linking Goffman's argument to the interview material, it was deduced that the clients were identifying the pharmacists with the white coat. Wearing the coat while working might explain the respect that the pharmacists received from the customers, something that was clearly noticed in two of the interviews:

*There exists respect and you are getting more appreciation. Even my friends are treating me differently when I am at work than when I am at home. They seemed to respect the person in an uniform much more. (Danja)*

*The customers are viewing us differently and respect us more when we come in our uniforms than in our private clothes ... The coat is a dominating theme. (Susanne)*

For the interviewees it was important to be respected by the clients, since respect meant for them that they had the power to help and represent. The interviewees emphasised the fact that their main role in the pharmacy was to help, but their skills and responsibilities were of great importance as well. This was more noticeable in the case of the pharmacy manager (Britta). She felt being treated equally with her colleagues by the clients, but when one of the employees called her to deal with a client, the situation changed. In front of the customer, she became an authority to which more respect was shown, Britta explained:

*Customers are treating me as an employee ... if they are complaining to an employee and the manager is arriving ... They are not as sharp in their toning, as they were before. They are getting more scared ... but not if I directly come to them, because then I am one of the staff, but when a colleague calls on the manager, the customer changes the attitude, especially when they see the name tag. I am suddenly an authority which they need to respect. (Britta)*

Further, the coat suggested not only authority and respect, but also trust, reminding the informants of the coat's dominance in the pharmacy. To sum up some of the statements made in the interviews, the interviewees reported that the coat had become a symbol for the environment they were working in. One of the respondents explained about the acute cases when the ambulance was called to the pharmacy. The pharmacist was often following the invalid to the hospital and was the client's spokesman. The customer trusted the employee to take care of the bag or making private calls, something they would not have asked anybody else. Two interviewees strengthened the above by explaining how pharmacists are trusted by their clients, often due to the white coat:

*I think that with or without the coat, when serving or helping a customer, I think you are treated in the same way, because they know "she works here" ... As long as I am behind the desk, they know they can trust me. (Ingrid)*

*It means to be reliable with the knowledge I supply to the customer, in a way that makes him/her trust me. Customers are often sick and you shall help them with medicine or anything else they require. They feel safe and know how to identify us when they need help, they look for a white coat ... Of course the coat is a symbol now. It is a part of our professional life. (Milica)*

#### **4.1.4. The Concept "Uniform"**

The word "uniform" often leads to the identification of the concept with the occupational clothing of the military staff (Flügel, 1930:31). However, the official definition of an uniform is a working dress, which anyone wears to work in (Marly, 1986:7). This definition incorporates the pharmaceutical white coat as well.

During the interviews, the word "uniform" was used as a synonym for the white coat. However, it became obvious that word was not regarded as a synonym to the white coat by a couple of the interviewees. One of them explained that she did not view the coat as an uniform, but as a protective coat. She explained that the coat was not something the wearer should be identified by, as in the case of a policeman, who wears a uniform. The pharmacists' coat was something to protect the staff's private clothes with and nothing else. The interviewee had the following comment:

*Honestly, I have never felt that I am working in a uniform. It is not really a uniform, like the ones the police or customs officers have. This is not something to be identified by. It is a coat for protection ... I have never thought of it as a uniform, but more as a coat to protect the*

*clothes you are wearing. I do not think you can even call it a uniform. (Ingrid)*

The above situation where the association of the "uniform" differed between the interviewees and the interviewer can be related to the statements made by Mead and Bourdieu, discussed in the theoretical chapter. Mead emphasised that significant symbols call similar responses from the speaking individual and the others who are surrounding the speaker. Looking at the above example, we can see that the word "uniform" made the interviewees react. However, contrary to what Mead concluded, significant symbols did not stimulate the interviewer and the majority of the interviewees, as it did for a couple of the informants. The white coat may be called a uniform, though not everyone has the same definition of it as an uniform or not.

This latter statement reflects back to Bourdieu, who commented on the different associations people make when using a certain concept. The association made cannot always be the same for all the actors involved in the act. As we could see from above, the use of "uniform" did not elicit the same response from all the interviewees as it did from the interviewer. As Bourdieu is concerned with the fact that habitus is not a similar phenomenon for all individuals, this can explain why the word "uniform" had different associations for the interviewer and for the interviewees. The reason lies in the different positions the interviewer and the interviewee occupy in the social world. Bourdieu's arguments can be linked to the interview material where it was proved that the informants did not view the coat as an uniform. Even for the interviewees who did view the coat as an uniform, it was essential to mention that originally the white coat had been used as protection when preparing the medicine, as we can read in the following quotation:

*Today our coat is seen as an uniform, but before they used to wear it in order to protect the clothes from getting destroyed ... I do see it as an uniform, in contrast to some colleagues of mine, but I think that those belonging to the older generation of pharmacists have difficulties in changing their view about the coat. For many of them the coat is not an uniform. (Maria)*

## **4.2. Freedom**

When working in an institution, employees are subdued to norms and rules, which must be followed. When interacting with employees dressed in occupational clothing, clients are often expecting the employees to act in a certain way. Therefore, from the moment a person has "entered" the uniformed role, he/she has become subordinated to the rules and norms of the institution they work for. Could the nine interviewees feel that they were subordinated certain norms when they were wearing their occupational dress?

### **4.2.1. Limited Freedom**

According to sociologist Irving Goffman, to wear occupational clothing proper for a certain

profession means that the person in question conforms to the standards imposed by the institute he/she works for. If not, the individual is most likely to be excluded from the participation or punished from referring from the norms (Lurie, 1992:13). The interview material proved at several occasions that this was the case for the interviewees. The informants stated that sometimes they did things they were not supposed to. This could include for example joking with or getting too familiar with the customers. It was when the pharmacists were doing things they were not supposed to that they were reminded of their limited freedom. The respondents argued that it was the white coat, which put a stop to many actions, limiting their behaviour and reactions. As the following example shows, the informants expressed the feeling that clients were aware of the limited freedom the employees had when wearing the coat:

*You put on the professionalism when wearing the coat ... The customers who come in here should know that this is a pharmacy and that is symbolised by this coat ... It is a big responsibility. When you put on the coat, you are at work. It is a part of my job that I should be helpful ... When I put the coat on, everything shall be right ... It means to be reliable with the knowledge I supply to the customer, in a way that makes clients trust me ... With the coat on I need to act professional, there is no doubt about it, so it means I cannot be myself, but be instead very strict and professional. (Maria)*

Alongside other informants, the above interviewee explained that her limited freedom occurred as soon as she put on her coat. She was then wearing her professionalism, making her feel restricted. At the same time, she felt that she put on a big responsibility. She explained this feeling that when wearing the uniform, the norms and rules of the pharmacy had to be followed. At home, the situation changed and the interviewee could relax and not feel responsible for these rules. The coat was off and so was the responsibility and the professionalism. The above informant further explained that a feeling of being free was experienced when the coat was off:

*Working as a pharmacist means that I have greater responsibility than a dispensing chemist's assistant. I have greater power when doing my job and people trust me. I have to act as a true professional ... The coat has a lot to say about how I behave when I am in the premises ... A pharmacist means greater responsibility towards the clients and the colleagues ... (Maria)*

The above can be linked to Bauman's arguments that freedom often depends on what an individual is. As Maria stated above, working as a pharmacist limited her freedom at work. She must act as responsible as possible and could not afford making mistakes or referring from the standards. Since Bauman sees the group to which a person belongs to as constructing

boundaries for and restricting one's freedom, we can view Maria's belongness to the pharmacist group as limiting her area of action. Bauman's statements can also explain Danja's experiences as a white coat-wearer. Danja worked as the charwoman at the pharmacy. She could wear a pin mentioning she was trained to be a charwoman, but explained that she did not like to wear the tag:

*I do not use the name tag. It feels like a mark, showing which level you belong to and customers treat me in a certain way. If I go out and the name tag says "charwoman", nobody asks me anything, otherwise they do ask and are polite. ... It stands as a sign for what I do. It shows who I am ... The tag changes everything, but when just wearing the white coat, nobody notices anything and customers take for granted that I am a professional. (Danja)*

As long as the pharmacy clients did not see the charwoman sign, they asked Danja for help and were polite to her. However, as soon as they saw the tag, things changed. Even when wearing the coat, she stated that clients did not approach her anymore. She felt that she could not participate in the clients' lives in the same way she did when she was seen as a pharmacist. In other words, her freedom "today" was limited in line with the choice of her profession "yesterday", as Bauman argued. As long as clients did not mark her as a charwoman, Danja explained that she could enjoy more freedom when being in the premises and wearing the coat:

*The tag brings out impoliteness of people. Maybe they do not like the fact that the charwoman is in the premises ... When you have the white coat on, you are someone special, you are educated. They are not treating you as nobody. (Danja)*

Bauman also stated that acting in a certain way can not be tolerated by other individuals, can easily result into a punishment by others. This aspect reminds to a certain degree of Danja's situation when she reported that being identified as a charwoman made the clients behave impolitely towards her. Perhaps customers could not tolerate the fact that the charwoman was taking over the job of a pharmacist or even wearing a white coat. Their punishment constituted in avoiding to ask Danja for help and being impolite.

Not only Danja, but also several other interviewees stated that their freedom was limited in line with their tasks and professions. They claimed that the choice of their profession yesterday, limited their freedom today. Those who had numerous tasks or higher education were also the ones who had more responsibility and felt that their freedom was more limited. The interviewees' claims can once again be strengthened by Bauman, who stated that freedom often depends on what a person is. The group which one belongs to can construct boundaries

for one's freedom. The following two quotations explain what the interviewees felt:

*When having more than one task in the pharmacy, like I do, means that I am more restricted. I do not feel as free as some of the others employees. (Anette)*

*Wearing the coat means that I cannot get outside my profession when I want to. I have to act in a certain way until I finished working for the day. (Britta)*

Further, Bauman viewed freedom as something the individual is able to choose and decide about (1990). Linking his view to the interview material, the informants argued that the customers were aware of the limited freedom the employees had, sometimes becoming very demanding. In this case the interviewees viewed their freedom as restricted, pointing at their responsibility and the pharmacy rules as the factors which caused their freedom restriction. As the respondents explained, this happened when they were wearing the coat and were working in the premises, as the following two interviewees expressed:

*I cannot decide what I want to do when being out there in the premises. The coat tells the people that she is supposed to do this and that and they become demanding with my skills. It is not only me, but everyone here feels the same. (Susanne)*

*During coffee breaks we talk and joke, but we cannot do that in front of the customers ... Sometimes I feel that there is no freedom I have control over ... This coat might look like nothing, but it a very powerful factor in the pharmacy. (Sonja)*

#### **4.2.2. Creation of Boundaries**

The use of occupational clothing within a certain profession forces the wearers to remain into certain boundaries. At the same time the occupational dress is supposed to transfer individuals into homogeneous members of a group, where certain norms rule. However, this can never be done completely (Lurie, 1992:19), something which could be identified in the interviews. For example none of the interviewees seemed to be content over the use of the white coat, despite the fact that they received more respect and gained authority, respect, trust, etc. when wearing them. The coat meant limited area of action, according to the informants. The interviewees stated that sometimes they were doing things which did not suit the standards of the pharmaceutical institution. It was when such situations occurred that they were reminded of their limited freedom. They felt that the coat was limiting their freedom, as the following interviewee stated:

*We are not supposed to joke with customers, but jokes make them feel better and encourage them to overcome fear ... Though the pharmacy policy says not to ... I feel that when wearing*

*the coat, I must limit myself to the institution rules, even if these limit my freedom of action. (Sonja)*

*Customers who come in here shall know that this is a pharmacy and that is symbolised by this coat ... This is not Konsum, but a pharmacy ... If you do not have the coat on, they might not know who to approach, but the coat becomes as a sign ... I do not think that the customers would like to see us in causal wear. It is like going to the doctor. You want to see the doctor wearing a white coat and why I cannot really answer, but you want the medical service staff to be dressed in a certain way. (Maria)*

### **4.3. The Mask**

The interviewees stated that when they put on the coat, they felt putting on a mask. They reported that they usually wore the coat when working in the premises and that when doing so, they changed their ways of being.

#### **4.3.1. The Front**

When wearing the white coat in the premises of a work place, the norms which are connected to the work place itself are frozen. Just like the military uniforms were made to impress and terrify the enemy, so was the pharmaceutical/medical white coat made to become a tool, which expressed to people that the wearer not only has a certain status and knowledge, but is also forced to follow the standards of the work place (Lurie, 1992:20). As the interviewees argued, they also felt changing, which was caused on where they were to be found.

It was obvious from the interview material that when the interviewees put on the coat and where working in the premises, they were also putting on a mask. The coat was worn in the premises, which corresponded to what Goffman called the front. According to Goffman, the front is the scene where the individuals perform their plays. In this case, the individuals can be replaced with the pharmacists and the performance with their work. When entering the front (the premises), the interviewees explained that they changed their ways of being. They did not act in the same way as they did when being outside the pharmacy or behind the premises. They acted as it was expected of them. The informants reflected over the fact that they became more serious and felt more faultless when wearing the coats, as it can be seen in the following statements:

*Maybe you do not notice it yourself, but I think other notice that you become a different person ... During breaks we joke with each other, something you cannot do while working ... You feel lighter with no coat on, a little stiffer and faultless when I have the coat on. (Sonja)*  
*At lunch time, you take the coat off and suddenly you feel lighter, I am free, I do not need to*

*think of work, but during the coffee break, I do not take the coat off and I feel like I am at work ... I change my personality. I am becoming a different person. When you are at home you are different then you are at work. It is not a yoke, but it is awfully cosy when the coat falls off at six o'clock in the evening and I can go out, pushing on the OFF-button. (Anette)*

As we can read in the above, the coat was the factor that made the interviewees' personalities, attitudes and ways of being change. For the interviewees, the coat symbolised the premises (the front) where the interaction with the clients occurred. It seemed to that the informants connected this region with the white coat. As long as they had the coat on, they felt putting on a mask, which they took off during breaks or when going home. Putting on a mask meant that the interviewees changed and became different than they were when being outside the premises. One particular interviewee explained how her personality changed, becoming a different person when the coat was on:

*I become a civilian. My personality changes as well. You are more exhilarated, not as reserved in your way of being. I can see this change better when we are going to a party and we all take the coats off. The atmosphere is different, more enjoyable. It is so obvious! With the coat on, you are more serious, I feel like the work is still on. (Britta)*

In the theoretical chapter it was mentioned that Goffman argued that individuals are controlling the information they send out, creating a certain image of themselves. His argument can be connected to the interviewees' changing of attitude, when working in the premises and encountering with the clients. This change was something that did not happen when they were to be found behind the premises, for example at home, as the following two interviewees explained:

*I do not have the same authoritarian way of being. You are one person at work, another at home. I cannot say that I am the same strict person who is at work, instead I am very natural. I do feel that I am changing depending if the uniform is on or not. (Milica)*

*Maria at home is not as "well-behaved" as Maria who is working, since at work I have to show a certain face of the person who wears the white coat. (Maria)*

However, it was not only the pharmacists who changed their attitudes towards the people they encountered, but even their customers changed. The informants described that both them and the clients were acting and exposing a certain facade when entering the premises. In the case of the clients, the respondents noticed that as long as they were to be found in the pharmacy, they did not have control over their appearances, as Ingrid commented:

*Clients are also different when they are here ... I can see that on my friends when they enter the pharmacy, they are simply different than I know them from home and they keep telling me that I act differently when working. (Ingrid)*

### **4.3.2. Always Being the Same**

Sometimes wearing the work uniform becomes mechanical, in the sense that wearers are not aware of its presence and do not feel affected by it in any way. A minority of the interviewees emphasised the fact that when the coat was on, they did not feel that their personalities changed. They pointed out that they were not changing *at all* when the white coats were on. The coat did not mean anything to them and they felt totally indifferent to its existence. They remained the same, both outside and inside the pharmacy premises. This particular interviewee group thought that perhaps they had used the coat for such a long time that they did not mark its presence any longer. One of the interviewees commented on the fact that since she had practically grown up with the coat, this could have had an affect on the attitude she had towards the coat:

*I decided when I was small to become a pharmacist, because my father worked at a pharmacy. It is maybe why I do not find it important. It belonged to my childhood and later to my adulthood. Wearing or not wearing the coat does not make a difference for me. I am sure that I am changing when doing my job, but in the long run I am simply not aware of this anymore. (Susanne)*

### **4.3.3. Delimitation between Front and Back**

Often when taking off a uniform becomes like a relief for the wearer. In other circumstances it can make the transition from one role to another easier (Lurie, 1992:20). This was exactly what was experienced by the respondents, as stated in the interviews. For example, one interviewee argued that wearing the coat made a clear delimitation between work and private. We can connect her statement with Goffman's concept of delimiting between the front and the back. Another informant explained that if she was in a bad mood, but had to work, she could not allow herself to show her mood as soon as she put on the coat. When taking the coat off, she reported that she did not have to be as nice as she was while working in the premises. For example in the coffee room (or what Goffman would have called the back), the pharmacists became private persons, delimiting between the two regions (front and back), as the following interviewees clearly stated:

*For me it feels good to have the coat on. It stands between the private and the job, you have the coat in between. It marks that now I am at work. (Anette)*

*Sometimes when I am in bad mood I feel that putting on the coat, I am at work and the customers cannot help that I am in bad mood. Sure, when I take it off I am not as nice anymore, but when putting the coat on, I shall be prepare to serve people ... When I go behind, I can relax and be myself. (Maria)*

One of the interviewees claimed that the coat did not remind her that she was at work or outside the work place. Yet, even if the coat was not delimiting between the regions, she still felt that the norms imposed by the pharmaceutical institution were hunting her outside the pharmacy. Sometimes the coat "followed" into her home, making her still feel at work. She explained that this must be due to habit, being used to wear the coat at work for eight hours wearing, five days a week:

*Sometimes I am still looking for the pockets when I am at home, trying to get a pencil. It is so practical that I forget I do not have it on me ... With or without the coat on, I am at work and (Ingrid)*

#### **4.3.4. Work Norms**

The below interview reports can be strengthen by Goffman, who explained that when an individual performs in front of others, valid values of the society are incorporated in the acting. It is basically only the compatible actions that are allowed to appear during the individual's acting. Central to Goffman's aspect is the division of the front in two parts, which is often done with the help of norms. Norms are often described as the delimitation between the forbidden and the admissible. As we could see in the interview material, the pharmacy norms played an important role for the interviewees and it was of great importance for them to follow these rules. When working and wearing the coat, the pharmacists acted in the way it was required of them. They described that they were more strict and serious when encountering the customers in the premises. The following three examples emphasise the fact that the interviewees were feeling representing an institution and had to keep up good appearances and not to perform absurd when wearing the white coat:

*With the customer I am serious and solemn. During the coffee break we can sit and talk and joke, but we cannot do that in front of the customers. (Sonja)*

*I am not the strict person I am at work when being at home with my family. At work I am supposed to be in a certain way which you might label as professional. (Milica)*

*It stands as a sign for what I do. It shows the place which in turn shows who I am ... In the pharmacist's case it means respect and being helpful. (Danja).*

Another interviewee stated that depending on where she was to be found, decided what her role would be and which character she was going to embody. People who were wearing the white coats were expected to act according to the pharmacy norms. She saw her white uniform as bounded with the norms of her work place, as stated in her interview:

*Sure, you have different roles, depending if you are at home or at work. I am someone else at home, another Anette, because with no coat on I do not feel the need to have a certain facade. Here, everyone who enters my work place expects me to be the working Anette. I simply cannot take my private behaviour out there. (Anette)*

#### **4.4. The Burnout Phenomenon**

The burnout phenomenon is a reaction to a stressful work situation (Cherniss, 1980:13), which pharmacists do experience in their everyday work. According to Maslach (1986) workers whose jobs involve human service are to be found in the risk zone of the burnout phenomenon. How likely is it for the interviewees to be affected by the burnout phenomenon?

##### **4.4.1. Positive Feedback**

Maslach claims that individuals working with people belong to the categories more likely to be affected by the burnout phenomenon. The cause is often due to the absence of positive feedback. The interviewees explained that they did not experience an absence of feedback from their clients, but customers made interaction between them and the staff possible. As two interviewees claimed, it was important for both groups to communicate when interacting:

*It was different before, but you also had a different role in the pharmacy. You were not allowed to question the customer. Now it is the other way around. If a customer is coming , you have to open a conversation and maintain it ... The relationship between the pharmacist and the client is open and the workers are engaged with their jobs. (Eva)*

*There has never happened that I have felt being ignored or neglected by the people coming here. It is impossible, especially when you are having a profession like mine. Communication is the key ... Sure it becomes a big responsibility and the interaction must be present at all the time. (Susanne)*

The following interviewee stated that feedback did not always consist of discussing medicine or diseases, but also in humoristic talk with the customers:

*From time to time I am humoristic with the customers, even if you are not supposed to be. Clients have always responded to this and I know for sure that it makes them feel more*

*comfortable when coming here. You are not talking to a wall, so the response is always there. (Sonja)*

The informants argued that the clients even approached the pharmacy staff who did not appear in the **premises** and helped the customers, like the charwoman. The interviewees explained that the coat was seen as a tool in constructing and maintaining the interaction between the staff and the customer, preventing the burnout phenomenon. The following interviewee referred to the coat as something that gave the wearer a chance not to be forgotten and not to risk to get burn out:

*This coat has become a tool in getting response from the people. They know that when it is on I am doing my job and that my job is to help them no matter how. They often go to the ones in white, even Danja (the charwoman). (Anette)*

#### **4.4.2. Social Interaction**

Maslach (1986) states that lack of interaction is among the main characteristics of the burnout phenomenon. One interviewee incorporated in her interview the fact that when the staff wore the coat, clients had much easier to contact them. The risk of lacking interaction was not existing. She described a situation when the pharmacists were to be found outside the pharmacy, rearranging the shop window. As long as these employees had the coat on, clients approached them and asked for help. To avoid this situation, the employees took off the coats every time they went outside the pharmacy. The interviewee viewed the coat as a protection against the burnout phenomenon, explaining that when wearing the white coat, there was no risk of not getting response:

*Those who are going to rearrange the pharmacy's shop-window are taking off their coats, otherwise they will not be left alone by the customers. People do not ask them then. The coat is dragging people towards you and you are not left alone. Sometimes you really need a break, so the coat must come off. (Sonja)*

Another interviewee stated a similar argument:

*I do get more response when I am wearing the white coat. Absolutely! It has to do with authority. I notice that myself when I wear it outside the pharmacy. Going to the post office or buying food. People seem even then keen to talk to you. (Milica)*

#### **4.4.3. Accessories**

Accessories are often considered essential to an outfit, whether it is a formal dress or an

occupational dress, since they give information about the person wearing them (Lurie, 1992:10). For instance, the use of accessories has contributed to the improvement of the interaction between the pharmacy staff and their clients, it was stated in the interviews. The interviewees argued that the accessories which the pharmacists wore, made customers feel more comfortable, having much easier to contact the staff. As one interviewee expressed, seeing a brooch or a bijouterie attached to the white coat, showed to the clients that they were dealing with a human fellow. The interviewee felt that clients had much easier to interact with the staff, as the next respondent suggested:

*I feel more comfortable when the doctor has something personal attached to the white coat. ... You can have broaches. I have a little sweet doll that is actually worn by many midwives, you can have a broach representing our pharmacy. It shows that you are a fellow-person ... You can always make it look better. For yourself, for your own good. It is not necessary, but I do it because it makes me and the clients feel better. (Milica)*

The informants explained that more than often they apply their own private experiences when dealing with the clients. The above informant stated that when going to a doctor, she felt much better when seeing the physician having something personal attached to the coat. Another interviewee also pointed at the use of accessories as significant for the clients. She was not using accessories too often, but at Christmas she usually put on a holiday-brooch in order to soften the atmosphere. The interviewees' accessories were not something necessary, but they reported that this type of decorations were welcomed by clients, as the next respondent commented in the following interview quotation:

*I do not think that the customers would like to see us in our causal wear. It is like going to the doctor. You want to see the doctor wearing a white coat, why I cannot really answer, but you want the medical service staff to be dressed in a certain way. I have never been without the coat at the pharmacy ... No, I do not have these (accessories), but at Christmas I usually have a small Father Christmas brooch. Just to buck up the atmosphere. It (the coat) is boring, it is white, strict. I know from my own experiences that when going to a doctor and seeing a personal decoration on the coat makes me feel relaxed. I am sure that customers like these, but they are not compulsory. (Maria)*

All work with people involves some degree of stress and certain categories of human services (such as medical, educational and socio-psychological services) share particular kinds of emotional stresses. Professionals that are exposed to their client's psychological, social and physical problems are expected to be both skilled and personally concerned. Often these professionals are using different kinds of instruments in dealing with these situations. For

example accessories are used in order to distance themselves from the stress that might arise when they are encountering the clients (Ayala and Aronson, 1988:84 and 86). One of the interviewees had the following comments when explaining that accessories help her deal with the customers, while distancing herself from the burnout phenomenon:

*You are supposed to look fresh for the customers, they are expecting that of us, not to be dirty, that suggests no confidence. A little detail like this makes a big difference to them ... If I do not wear the jewellery, I feel naked and I feel that something important is missing. Clients like the jewellery and because they find these fun, they have easier to talk to us. (Sonja)*

#### **4.4.4. Depersonifying and Reduced Capacity**

Someone who is burnout primarily feels feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and entrapment. This kind of exhaustion often leads to developments of negative attitudes towards one's self, work and life itself which leads to burnout (Ayala and Aronson, 1988:13). Maslach stated that two of the antecedents of burnout were depersonifying and reduced capacity. Depersonifying occurs when tending to regard people as things, not as humans (1986). This aspect was not experienced by the interviewees, as it could be seen in the interview material. The informants explained that the use of accessories was put into practice because sometimes customers had difficulties encountering the pharmacy staff. Since the pharmacists regarded their clients as equals, not as things, depersonifying was in other words not occurring. This can be explained by a quotation taken from Susanne's interview:

*I always think of how I would like to have it when I am a customer in a shop. A little brooch might make them happy and their concerns go away. We have to look seriously at the fact that our clients need special treatment as humans and fellow-beings. You have to show your human side and I try to understand their problems. Otherwise I would not do my job properly. (Susanne)*

From the above we can therefore see that the interviewees did not experience a loss of humanity in interpersonal interactions. As Susanne explained, she was not less to perceive and respond to the unique personal identities of customers. She argued that she was treating them as if they were humans and fellow-beings (Ayala and Aronson, 1988:14). For example when using accessories to soften up the encounters with the staff, Susanne showed that she took the worries of her clients into consideration.

Reduced capacity means that the person who is burnout is badly doing his/her job. Focusing on the interview material, no such thing was occurring, as the interviewees stated. During the interaction with customers, the employees were facilitating the clients' encounters with the

staff. Using accessories on the coats for example cheered up the atmosphere for both clients and staff. By doing so, the interviewees felt that they were showing engagement in their work, not neglecting the service they had to give, as one interviewee explained:

*It is important what I have on. It has to do with how you are as a person and you also keep up the pharmacy's appearances ... Some of us have a brooch and I think that is okay that you have a part of your personality. The clients feel more comfortable and I know that they might be scared when coming here. I do think about their feelings and how to deal with them in a comfortable way. I do not think that you can get burnout when acting like this ... (Anette)*

In the above quotation, Anette explained that the state of burnout is not experienced by the herself. She emphasised that she could distance herself from acting mechanically towards the clients. Instead she was well aware of the worries and feelings of the clients and took these into consideration. The risk of reduced capacity did not seem to occur here either.

## **5. Conclusions**

The conclusions of this thesis are not having the qualities of convincing the reader that this is the case of all uniform dressed people, but this is only to show a picture about how things can behave.

The main purpose of the essay was to find out what the role and the significance of occupational clothing is, by revealing the opinions, thoughts and interpretations of nine pharmacy employees about their coat. The author's own experiences of dealing with the white coat, as well as the long history and debate of occupational clothing constructed a motive for why this topic was chosen. To be able to better analyse the role and significance of the white coat, the thesis was divided into four parts, in which the research material could be analysed. The nine interviewees were individually interviewed. Later, with the help of a number of various theoretical perspectives and aspects, the interviews content was analysed, resulting into the following concluding remarks.

First, occupational clothing can easily become a symbol. In the case of the pharmaceutical work uniform, the white coat has become a symbol of authority and knowledge. Since the pharmacy clients seemed to focus on the colour white of the coat, relating it to hospitals, the pharmacists were often expected to act as doctors. Clients expected from them the same kind of treatment and knowledge as from medical doctors. In this sense the pharmacists became symbols of medical knowledge, much due to the whiteness of the coat. The expectations of customers must be bounded with the appearances of the occupational clothing, such as its colour.

Often authority stands not only in the profession, but also in the occupational clothing individuals are wearing. In the case of the nine interviewees, the wearers were becoming authorities, since the coat suggested respect and trust to the clients. The coat gave an aspect of authority, making the clients show more respect and trust towards the staff. Authority seemed to be mostly attached to individuals' position as occupational clothing wearers.

Second, it should be mentioned that not all occupational clothing can be seen as uniforms. The most important aspect here is the fact that concepts have different definitions embedded for individuals in the society today. We should therefore be careful in order to avoid misunderstandings, since there is a great number of ways of treating identical things differently. In the thesis we could read about the concept "uniform", who did not match as a synonym for the white coat for some of the interviewees. The particular with this situation was the fact that the informants did not view the coat as an uniform. The interviewees

explained that the coat was not something the wearer should be recognised for, as in the case of military uniforms. The white coat can therefore be and not be seen as an uniform, depending on who you are addressing.

Third, from the moment a person has "entered" the uniformed role, he/she has become subordinated to the rules and norms of the institution they work for. In the case of the interviewees, the pharmacy norms played a relevant role for the employees. The respondents reported that when working and wearing the coat, they acted the way it was expected of them. Actions, which did not fit in the premises, were put aside, claiming that the coat was the factor, which determined that certain rules had to be followed.

Nevertheless, when wearing their white uniforms, the coat also limited the wearers' freedom. The interviewees claimed that when wearing the coat their freedom was restricted by norms and responsibility. They concluded that a feeling of being free was attended when the coat was off. It seemed to that occupational clothing seem is endowed with a capacity of putting boundaries for its wearers.

Fourth, when wearing occupational clothing, the wearers build a facade or put on a mask, which is convenient when interacting with customers and when being in the premises. As explained by the interviewees, when their coats were on, they felt behaving differently. The informants argued that the coat was the factor that made their personalities, attitudes and ways of being change, as well as connecting the coat and the premises to each other. The premises (the front) where the informants interacted with the customers seemed to have been the **issue** that changed them. In some occasional cases, this personality change did not occur or was not noticed by the coat wearer.

During breaks when the pharmacists moved behind the premises (the back region), the informants explained that the mask was dropped and they felt becoming private people again. This points to a clear delimitation between the two regions (front and back). In the front, the interviewees were acting in a certain way, living up to the standards that the pharmaceutical institution required. In the back, the coats were off and so was the mask. It might be concluded that occupational clothing in general is more significant in the front than in the back region, imposing certain norms on the wearers.

Fourth, as pointed out earlier, the ones working with human services risk to get burnout. Since pharmacists are also included in this risk zone, it became relevant to examine whether this was the case or whether there was a "remedy" linked to the white coat and which prevented the burnout phenomenon to happen. The nine interviewees explained that it was important for

both them and the clients to be fully engaged when interacting and communicating (receiving feedback). The interviewees concluded that it was the coat that made the feedback possible. Since Maslach stated that the burnout phenomenon has its roots in the absence of feedback, it can be concluded from the interviews that the coat was constructing feedback. One compelling example was concerned with the situation when the pharmacists were to be found outside the pharmacy, for example rearranging the shop window. As long as the employees were wearing the coat, customers approached them. Therefore the employees took off the coats every time they went outside. Such situations made the interviewees see the coat as being a protection against the absence of interaction and of feedback. Occupational clothing can therefore be a tool in preventing the employees of the human services to be struck by the phenomenon.

One notable aspect which was introduced when talking about the risk of the burnout phenomenon, was the role of accessories. Accessories were attached to the white coats to make customers feel more relaxed when approaching the pharmacy staff. Seeing a brooch or any other kind of jewellery attached to the coat, made clients reflect over the fact that the employees were also private people and should approach them as individuals. In this way the interaction between the two groups was lightened up by accessories. This was due to the coat wearers' own experiences through which the interviewees explained that they had developed a better understanding of their customers. For example, when going to a doctor, the informants felt much better seeing the doctor having something personal attached to the coat. It suddenly became easier to communicate with the doctor. It was of great importance for both clients and doctors to understand each others and to communicate properly. As a result, the pharmacists did the same with their clients, resulting into that the social interaction was always present. Accessories can also be used in reducing the uncomfortable feelings or concerns that customers might experience when dealing with the pharmacy staff. By using for example a brooch or a small Christmas decoration, characteristics that cause the burnout phenomenon (such as depersonifying and reduced capacity) are not taking place.

It would be wrong to think that the findings of this thesis are the sole answer to what the role and significance of occupational clothing are for the wearers. Completing the work, only proved that more questions arose: Do all occupational clothing have the same role and significance for the wearers? What differences exist between various occupational clothing? How do people from the outside view the interaction with uniform dressed staff? All these new questions make the conclusions of the thesis difficult to close.

A final remark of this work is what we have learned from the research. Researching about occupational clothing has proved to be a complex topic and that the limitations of the topic

are relative in the sense that where the topic starts and end can rarely be linked to a certain point. Instead the topic is determined by its endless possibilities to research about it.

## **Bibliography**

- Asplund Johan, Det sociala livets elementära former - Bokförlaget Korpen, Göteborg, 1992.
- Aubert Vilhelm, Sociologi: Socialt samspel - Almqvist & Wiksell Förlag AB, Stockholm, 1979.
- Bauman Zygmunt, Att tänka sociologiskt - Bokförlaget Korpen, Göteborg, 1990.
- Bourdieu Pierre, Chamboredon Jean-Claude, Passeron Jean-Claude, The Craft of Sociology - Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin, 1991.
- Charon Joel M, Symbolic Interaction - Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1985.
- Cherniss Cart, Job Stress in the Human Services - Sage Publications, London, 1980.
- Ehn Billy & Löfgren Orvar, Kulturanalys - Liberförlag, Stockholm, 1982.
- Flügel JC, The Psychology of Clothes. Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, London, 1930.
- Goffman Irving, Jaget och maskerna - Rabén Prisma, Kristianstad, 1995.
- Hammersley Martyn & Paul Atkinson, Ethnography - Routledge, London 1995.
- Lurie Allison, The Language of Clothes. Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, London, 1992.
- Marly Diane de, Working Dress. A History of Occupational Clothing - BT Batsford Ltd, London, 1987.
- Maslach Christina, Utbränd - Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur AB Fälths Tryckeri, Värnamo, 1986.
- Mead George Herbert, Mind, Self and Society - The university of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962.
- Merton Robert K, The Focused Interview - The Free Press, New York, 1990.
- Neuman W. Lawrence, Social Research Methods - Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1994.
- Pines Ayala and Aronson Elliot, Career Burn Out. Cause and Cures, The Free Press, New York, 1988.
- Ritzer George, Sociological Theory - The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc, Singapore, 1996.
- Shaffir William B. & Stebbins Robert A., Experiencing Fieldwork - Sage Publications Inc, Newbury Park California, 1991.

## **Appendix 1.**

1. How does it feel working in uniforms?
2. Which function does the uniform supply?
3. What does the white coat mean to you?
4. Does the uniform stand for something?
5. Are you treated differently when working with the coat on?
6. What expectations exist when working and wearing an uniform?
7. Do you change when you have the coat on? Are you becoming a different person?
8. What do you feel when changing from the uniform to casual wear?