



**“Life is what happens to you while you're
busy making other plans” –**

**When the story of a research project`s
becoming is inseparable from the subject
you plan to study**

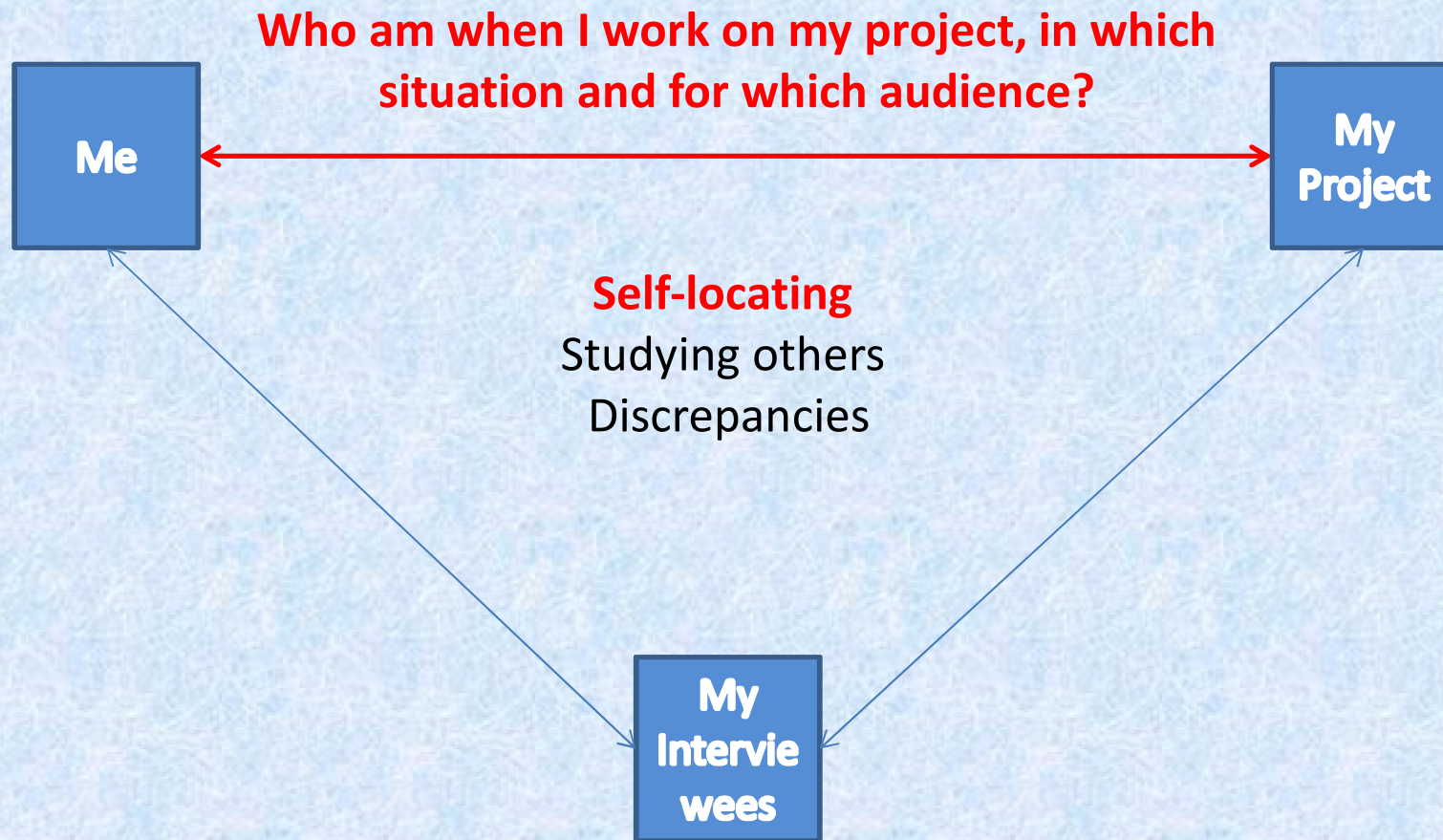
**by Dr. Dipl.-Psych. Sabrina Koepke
Berlin, Germany**

CNR Graduate Research Day, “To Think is To Experiment”, UEL, 30th April 2014

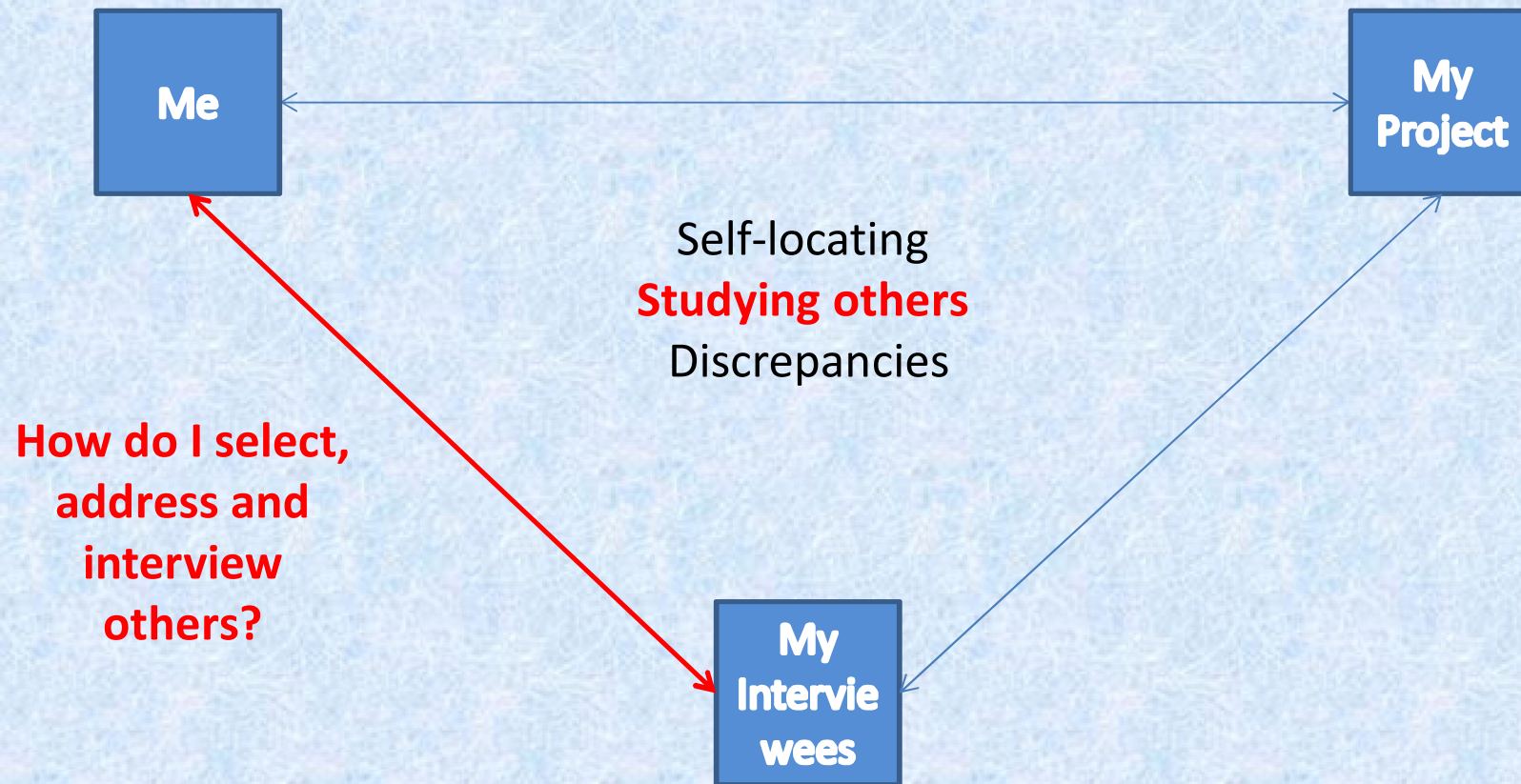
Me/My Project/My Interviewees



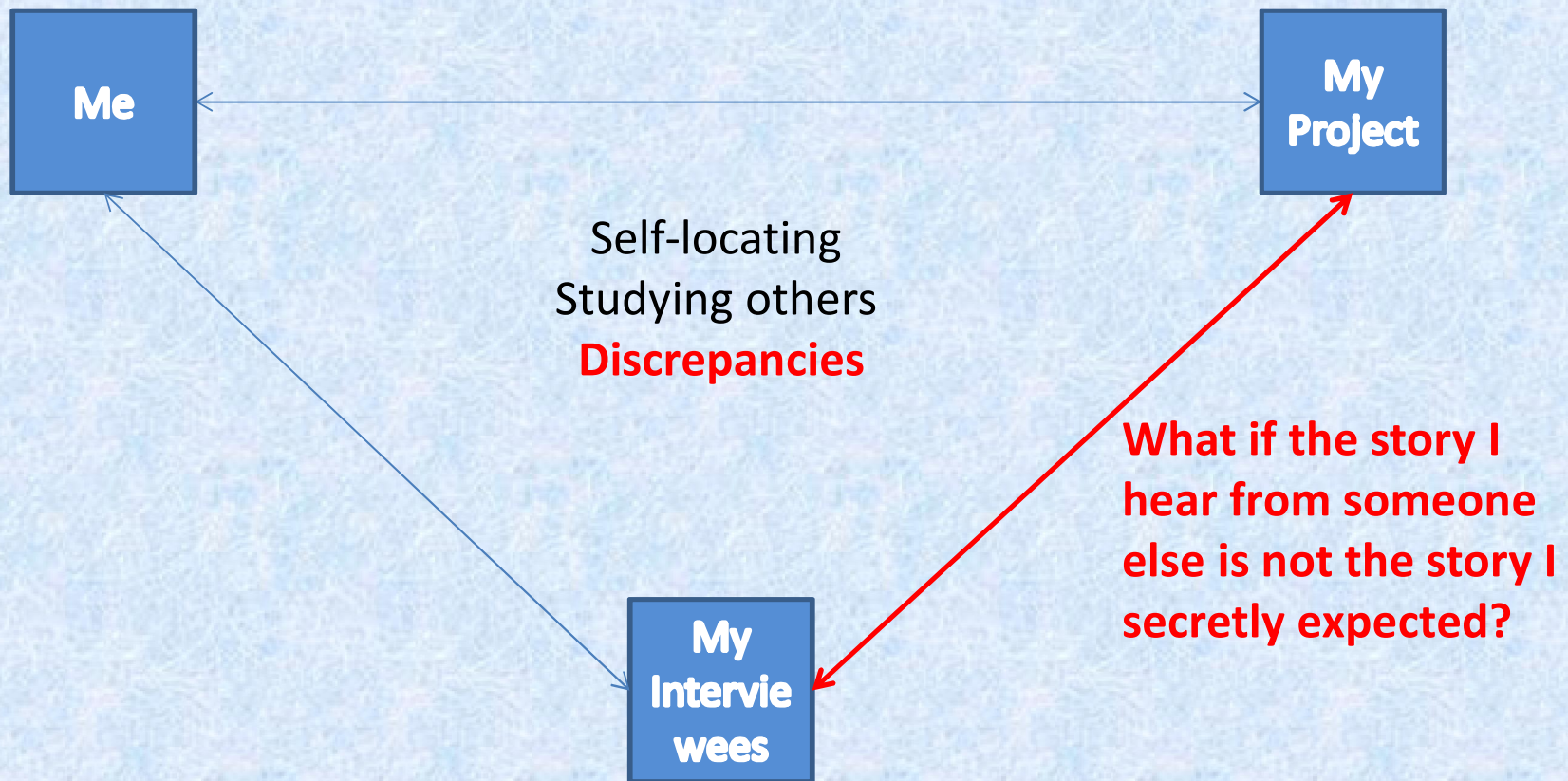
Me/My Project



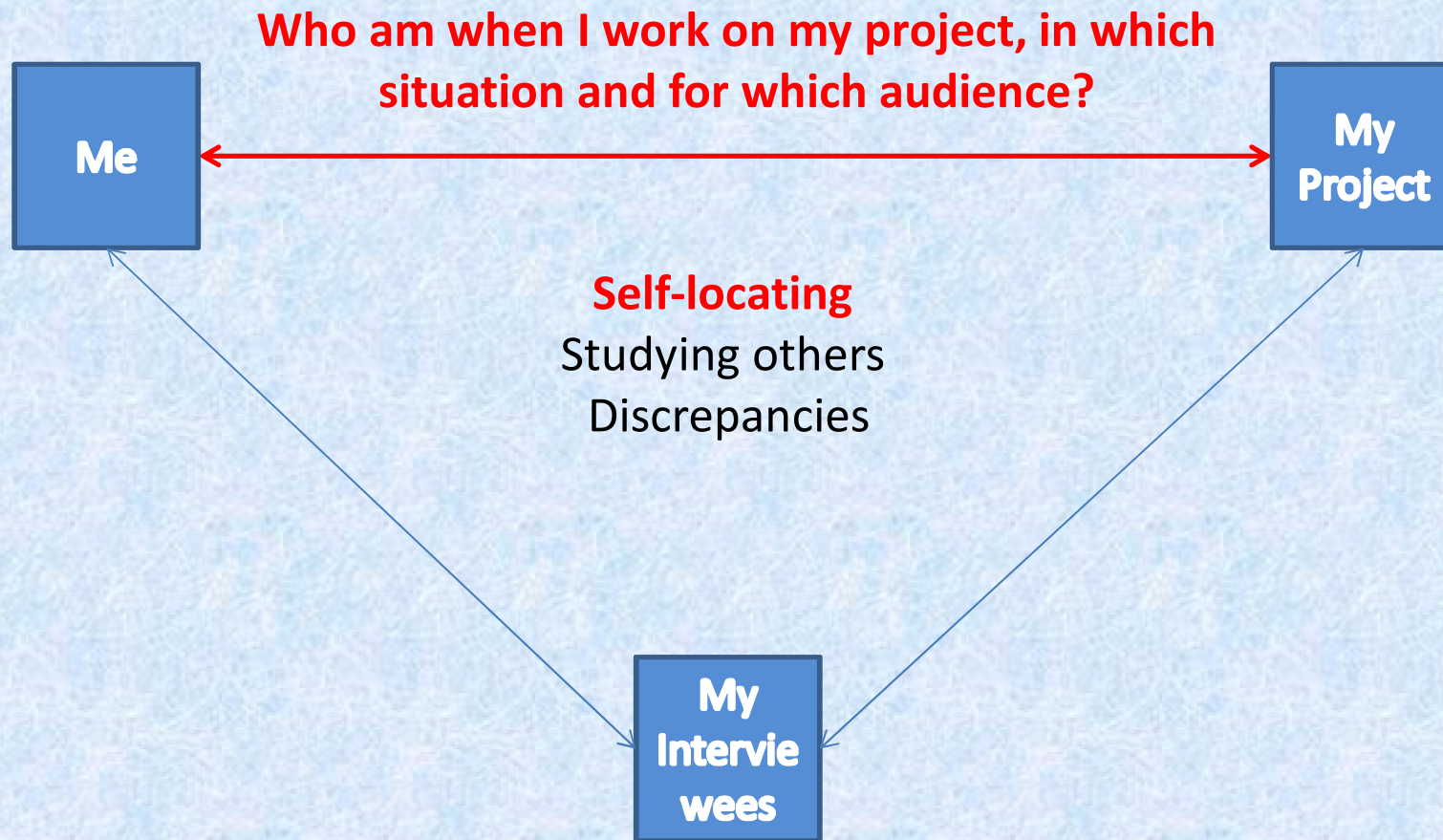
Me/My Interviewees



My Project/My Interviewees



Me/My Project



Period	Events	Dominant identification
2008/09	Scholarship from German National Academic Foundation, read articles on identity conflicts of first generation students	I am a first generation female academic
2011	First contact with CNR, dissatisfaction with quantitative, nomological approach to identity	I am a narrative researcher at heart
Spring 2012	Completion of PhD, work on research proposal	I will be a professional narrative researcher
Summer / Autumn 2012	Unemployment, difficulties in finding financial support for project, giving up on research career	Who am I?
April 2013	Long walk with my boyfriend, reflections on life decisions: Desire vs. Fear	I am a biographical writer but not by profession
Second half of 2013	Writing down my own life story	My restless, searching self is the result of a big gaping hole in my family history
February 2014	Long reflection walk with my boyfriend again, call for papers for To Think is To Experiment 2014	For being a real narrative researcher I have to connect with like-minded others
March/April 2014	First interviews, presentation at CNR today	The process is the answer: Me/My Project/My Interviewees are many things in motion

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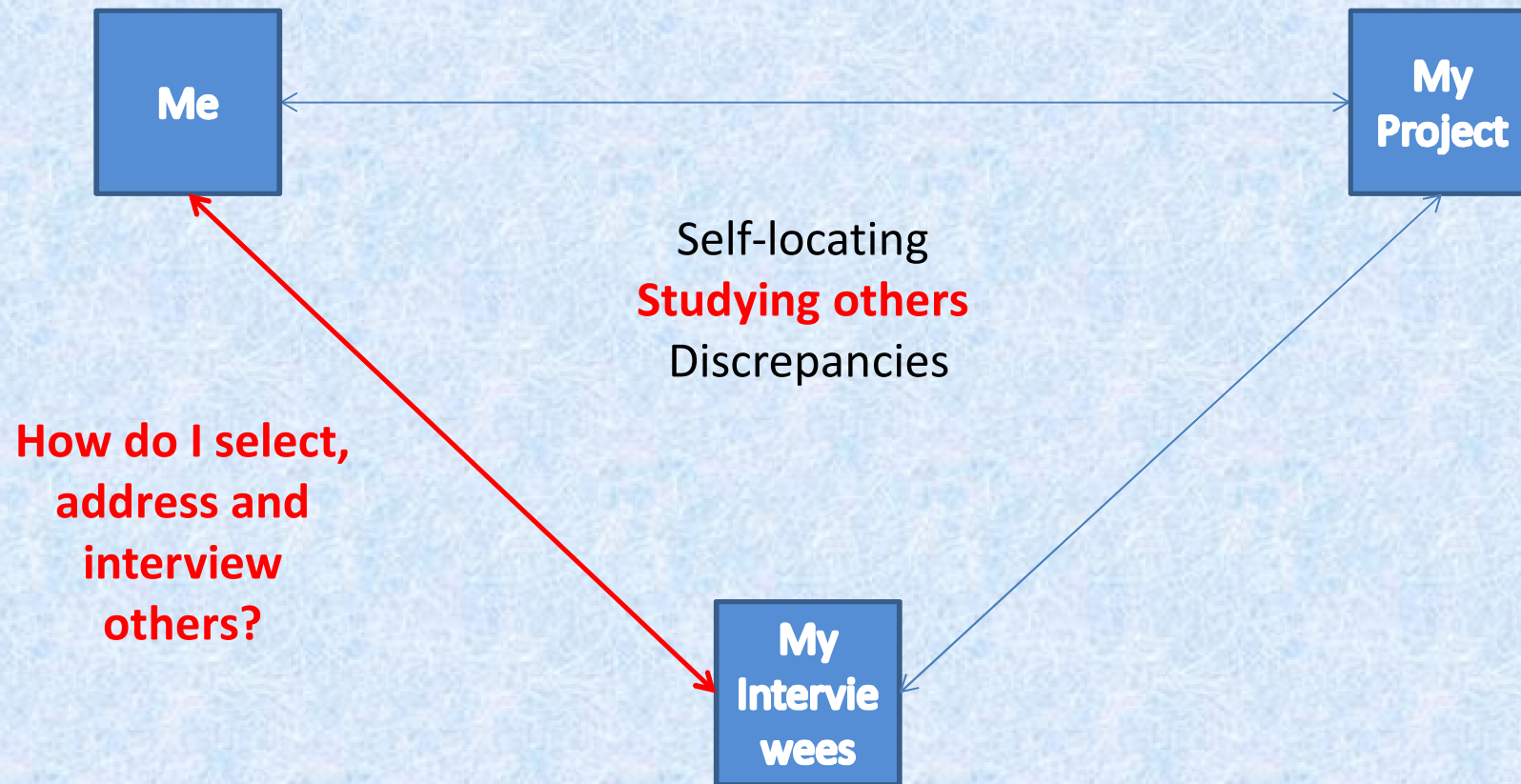
Me/My Project - Who am when I work on my project, in which situation and for which audience?

From an Email to Molly (February 2014):

“All the time that I think about and discuss why I turned out the way I am and how my friends or people in general turned out the way they did and what this has to do with family history and academic development and which themes and motifs of this may guide me in exploring the life stories in my project, life goes on, I change, my perspective changes and I constantly reconsider what it actually is that my passion, my longing, my tears are all about...**in which narrative form should I approach myself and my project – do I write and work on this as a scientist? As an artist? As a psychologist? As a psychotherapy patient? As a woman in a career-related identity crisis? As the daughter of my particular parents or as a representative of academic women from non-academic families? As an admirer of Molly Andrews?”**

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Me/My Interviewees



Me/My Interviewees - How do I select, address and interview others?

A cautionary tale... (from an Email to Molly, 25th May 2013):

“A friend of mine had told me that another friend of hers of whom I had heard a lot of impressing things before from her, will possibly have to struggle with the consequences of some kind of cancer diagnosis over the next months and how impressed she was about her friend`s optimistic and analytical way of dealing with the problem and relating it to her overall view on life. When I read her email, all the associations I had about that friend popped up in my head and this is how **I created a personal connection from me to her that led to the spontaneous thought that she might be a great interview partner for my project. I communicated this to my friend and obviously, in doing so, I completely ignored how this cancer diagnosis of her friend might affect her** and in which way she herself is currently most deeply emotionally involved in the relationship to her friend. She was really hurt and bewildered by my mindless thought and I felt really stupid and insensitive for that I had mentioned it.”

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Me/My Interviewees - How do I select, address and interview others?

“So yeah, again, I feel a bit unsure of whether I am steering into the right direction here. But I try to keep up this work I have started by telling myself that **it is all part of the process...**”

→ **Include motifs, relationship, perspectives, surprises as revealing data**

→ **Address actively why I was drawn to these specific women**

→ **Be open to complexity and variety:**

Life history and dialogical approach

1. Broad interview focus in Interview 1 (life chronology, developmental turns, key themes, beliefs, values)
2. Reflection, analysis
3. Interview 2: Meta-perspective, bilateral exchange (roles & relationship in Interview 1, after-thoughts, interpretations)

My Project/My Interviewees - What if the story I hear from someone else is not the story I secretly expected?

Self-evidence of educational decisions / overtaking parents:

“And with the circumstance that I went to the Gymnasium it went along: ‘Okay, she will do her Abitur one day ... and that the highest or best thing you can do with your Abitur is to take up university studies.’ I neither had to break resistance on the side of my parents nor did my parents say: ‘Oh, we have never seen a uni from inside, we do not know it, daughter, you should better let it be’.”

“For me there was only the one option to study. I do not know why, I have not even considered for a second in my life to do an apprenticeship. That was also not a feeling of ambition - ‘I have to study’, for me that was somehow just the most self-evident thing in the world that I will study...Just because I knew that I am able to do it...”

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My Project/My Interviewees - What if the story I hear from someone else is not the story I secretly expected?

Achievements without struggle are none / Failure in interpersonal sphere:

“I do not consider anything as a real achievement. Well, there was nothing that was especially difficult or anything, somehow I just slipped through everything... Achievement is always also associated with work for me.”

“I believe that would be my social failure...I am unable to establish lasting or more intense relationships with other people.”

“On the achievement level I drive a four-wheel drive blindfoldedly by now and somehow drive up and down the Mount Everest and know for sure I will reach my destination...when it comes to the level of emotions, there I am really a 17-year old sitting in the car for the first time ... and when you see all the other cars pass by you easily and you think: ‘God, how are they doing it? I cannot do it.’ ”

My Project/My Interviewees - What if the story I hear from someone else is not the story I secretly expected?

Power relations / Identifications:

Withholding emotions from mother as self-protection:

“I somehow realize bit by bit...that -in which way ever- I am still attached to my mother’s umbilical cord and that for 37 years now in many things that I do, I only try one thing - to get away from her. And by opening up to her emotionally, I would obviously do the exact opposite.”

Adopted self-devaluation:

“I am somehow the double of my mother...I am also so terribly eaten up by inferiority complexes...on the other hand that came from my father’s suicide...I had this info that my father would have kept my brother and me but killed himself nevertheless. And for me it was this causal inference in my head ‘I am not worth living for.’ ”

My Project/My Interviewees - What if the story I hear from someone else is not the story I secretly expected?

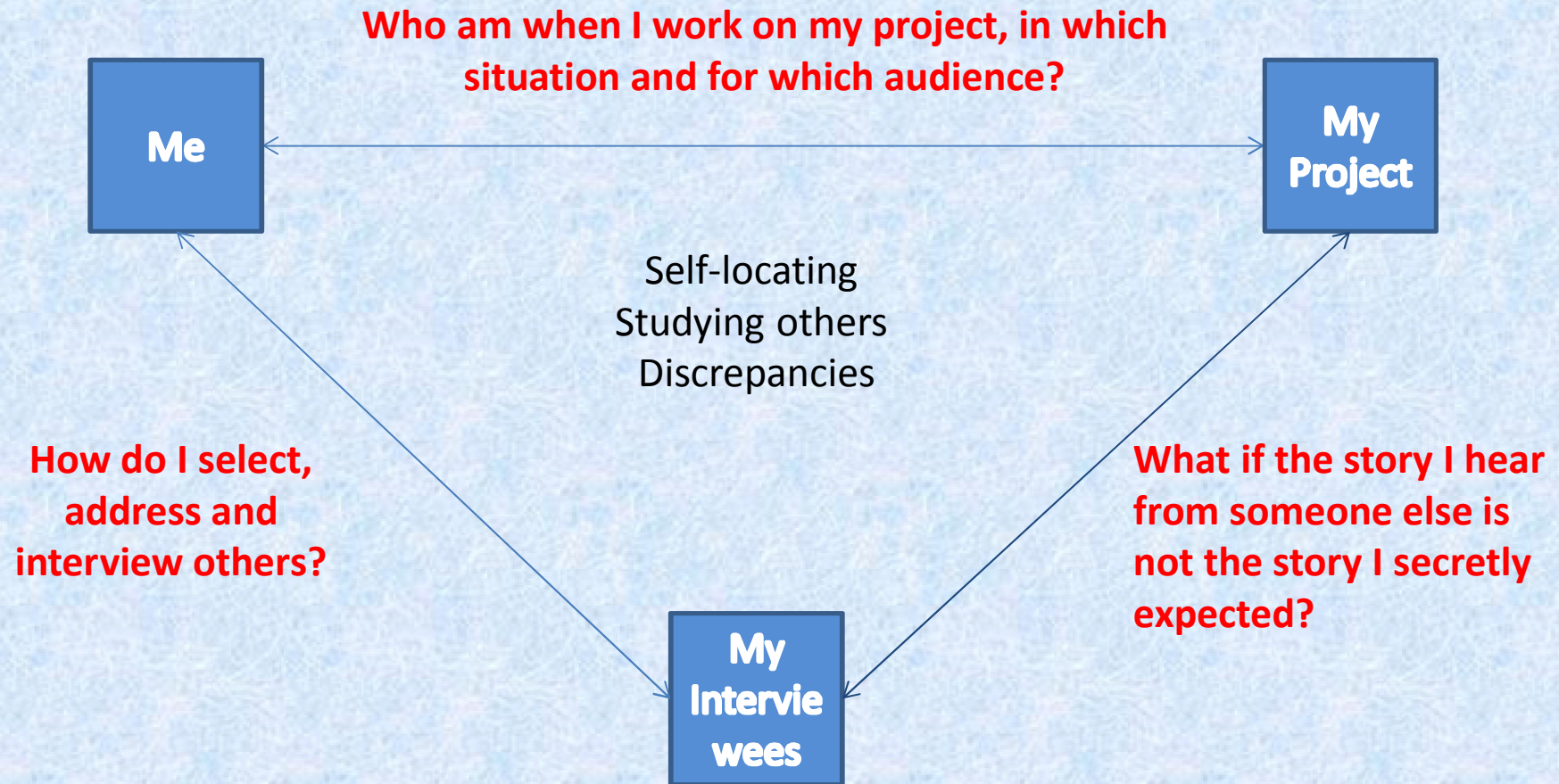
Possible broader direction of exploration:

Roads that can't / couldn't be travelled

Association with emotional-relational barriers

Roads travelled instead

Me/My Project/My Interviewees





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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