**Getting into design thinking… A guided activity**

This activity comes from the Design Interlude of *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. The cross-references refer to book content. Any articles cited can be found in the reference list of the book.

This design interlude has intended to pique your curiosity and signal the domains of thinking and planning for a well-designed, conceptually coherent, ethical TA project. If much of this is new to you, we end with an activity intended to get you into a design-thinking space (the readings below provide additional resources for this, if needed). Imagine you’re designing a small student project to explore *how young people – or a particular group of young people, such as trans-and non-binary or disabled youth – make sense of the role of social media in their lives*. You plan on using reflexive TA to analyse the data. You have a research proposal and ethics application to write, so need to make some fairly concrete decisions about design. To write your proposal, you need to answer the following questions, and provide a rationale for your choices. In working this through, keep the principle of *design coherence* in mind.

* Will your design reflect an interest in gaining an ‘empathetic’ insight into people’s own perspectives, understandings and views about an issue? Or are you more interested in unpacking and questioning the ideas or concepts related to a particular issue. These interests reflect different orientations in qualitative research, respectively referred to as ‘experiential’ and ‘critical’ (discussed more in Chapters Four and Six)? Do you think one of these approaches might be better-suited to this research project, or are both equally appropriate? Why? What might distinguish *your* approach to researching this issue as experiential *or* critical?
* Having decided your broad orientation, what ‘version’ of reflexive TA (see Table 1.2, in Chapter One) might you select for this project, and why? If you already have some understanding of research values or ontology and epistemology (which we discuss in Chapter Six), what ontological and epistemological framework would you select for this project? Why?
* Consider whether the research question (in italics above) fits to the orientation (and ontology and epistemology, if you are familiar with these) you have selected – if not, how would you reframe it to fit better?
* What are potential suitable data collection methods or sources? Which will you choose? How would you justify your choice (or choices) in the proposal? (See the suggested readings below if you are new to qualitative data collection.)
* What’s dataset selection might you use? What type of dataset will you seek (e.g. homogenous or heterogenous), what are your inclusion and exclusion criteria, and what size of dataset do you think would be appropriate for a dissertation project? How would you justify your dataset selection strategy?
* How will you source your dataset? If using human participants, how will you recruit them?
* Within reflexive TA, which particular ‘version’ might – at least initially – seem most suitable (e.g. more inductive, more deductive, etc; see Table 1.2 in Chapter One)?
* What specific ethical issues might there be with this project, research question and dataset/participant group?
* Imagine you have seven months to complete this project, and you will be spending about a third of your time on this. Plan out a timetable for conducting your research, considering you need to allocate *at least* a third of your time to analysis (see *Allowing Time for your Analytic Insights to Fully Develop*, in Chapter Nine). What will you do when? How long will you allocate for each element of the project?
* Finally, reflect on your experience of and expectations of the topic, your role as researcher for this topic, and, in research with participants, your relationship to the participant group (as discussed in the *Reflexivity Pause* in Chapter One). If your proposal had to include a statement of researcher reflexivity, what would you say?

These are some of the questions you typically need to consider when writing any qualitative research proposal. Reflecting on these aspects, how confident do you feel that you have designed a TA study that is conceptually coherent and demonstrates good fit? What *questions* do you still have, that you’d need to think further about, to feel confident about this? (Note that at this stage, if you’re new to qualitative research, we’d expect you to have quite a lot!)