

Dr. Jackie King's "The Ultimate Other" uses the framework of design thinking – a process typically applied to product or service design – as a method for personal transformation. The book is a deeply personal exploration of the author's journey in integrating her multifaceted identities, particularly as a woman, divorced, and Jewish, grappling with a sense of "otherness". While rooted in the author's specific experiences, this book is more than a self – help guide, focusing on the importance of narrative and sharing stories and aims to progress broader conversations about social cohesion and inclusion through the design process, which begins with empathy for yourself. In this case, the author argues that empathy for yourself is a precondition for being able to have empathy for others, at home, in the workplace and in society.

This guide structures discussion around the design thinking stages as presented in the book, encouraging participants to connect with the author's journey and reflect on their own lives and identities as well as the broader social contexts they find themselves in.

### **Part 1: Laying the Groundwork**

1. The book is described as being "almost twenty years in the making," serving as the author's "therapy, reflection and growth". It also notes that "writing this book very much contributed to and reflects that journey". How does understanding the long, personal nature of the writing process influence your reading of the book? Have you ever found writing or another creative process to be therapeutic or a tool for self-understanding?
2. The author highlights the use of **design thinking** as a framework to understand her "non-linear journey" and reconstruct her life after divorce. She applies it in a "wholistic way," putting herself "at the centre of the design process" to understand her "own pains, gains, needs, and desires with empathy". Were you familiar with design thinking before reading this book? How did you react to the idea of applying a business or design framework to your personal life?
3. The author considers a specifically defined empathy to be the foundation for her-self actualisation. Have you ever had the opportunity to consider yourself with empathy? How did that affect you? What did you learn about yourself? How does this approach differ from other methods of self-help or therapy you may have encountered?
4. The book explicitly states it is "intended to help all women" and that "more unites us than makes us different – the experiences of being burnt out, stretched, alone, undervalued, and looking to make a change". What aspects of the author's initial struggles (lonely in marriage, job below capability, financially dependent, poor relationships, feeling overwhelmed, invisible, unvalued) resonated with you?
5. The author added the lens of identity politics later, particularly her Jewish identity, in the context of rising antisemitism. How did the inclusion of these specific identity layers (Woman. Divorced. Jew. Israeli. Mother. Professional. Other.) impact your reading?

### **Part 2: The Design Thinking Stages for Self-Transformation**

#### **Stage 1: Empathise**

This stage is about deeply understanding yourself, your values, worldview, self-perception, assumptions, and inner critic with compassion. It involves "putting yourself at the centre of decision-making".

6. The author discusses the difficulty of this stage due to a lack of memories, avoidance of digging deep, and a strong inner critic. How challenging do you find it to honestly observe and understand yourself without judgment?
7. The author learned that trauma doesn't have to be a single huge event, but can be the cumulative effect of "lots of little put-downs, criticism, poor treatment, disrespect, loneliness and things going wrong" (microstress). She also reflects on the impact of generational trauma, specifically the Holocaust, on her identity and psyche. How have you come to understand the role of past experiences or potential traumas (big or small, personal or inherited) in shaping your own identity and reactions?
8. The author ignored what her body was telling her for a long time. How connected do you feel to your physical and emotional responses as indicators of your needs and challenges?

### **Stage 2: Define**

This stage involves clearly outlining the challenges by centring yourself. For the author, this meant asking, "how do I reconcile the many versions of 'otherness'?"

9. The author identifies many facets of her "otherness": as a woman navigating gender stereotypes and systemic barriers in relationships, career, and finance, as a divorced woman facing isolation and financial challenges, as a mother managing expectations and worrying alone, and as a Jew/Israeli grappling with identity politics, antisemitism, and feeling like the "ultimate other" in certain institutions. Which of these specific experiences or feelings of "otherness" resonated most strongly with you, even if your identities are different?
10. The author found that many of her activities were "distractions" that "kept me busy... and had positive impacts on others, but at the end of the day, I was still left with me". How do you identify the difference between meaningful engagement and purpose and distraction in your own life?
11. The definition of the problem is crucial. If you were to apply this stage to yourself, how might you define your central challenge or the "otherness" you wish to reconcile?

### **Stage 3: Ideate**

This stage is about generating as many possible solutions with a "creative, curious, entrepreneurial and growth mindset".

12. During the ideate stage, the author asked questions like "What would I do in my career, across my relationships, my physicality and my creativity, if time and money were not considerations?". What did you learn about the author's aspirations and desires during this stage? How did they resonate with you as reflections in your own circumstances?

13. The author discovered that her past need "to be right and my ambition were trying to plug holes in myself". She learned the importance of setting her "own values-based parameters of success". How do you differentiate between external measures of success and your own internal, values-based definition of meaning? What does success look like for you?
14. The author's perspective on feminism shifted; she realised the importance of reciprocal relationships and saw men as potential "partners rather than the cause of the world's problems". How did this shift in perspective strike you? Have your own views on such fundamental aspects of your identity evolved over time?

#### **Stage 4: Prototype**

This stage involves creating "basic working model[s]" or possible solutions to test, challenging assumptions, and revealing contradictions.

15. The author found vulnerability "most challenging" in relationships, particularly with men, learning to be "comfortable with [her] own company" and not dependent on a partner for her emotional state. Why do you think vulnerability is often so difficult, especially in relationships or leadership?
16. The author reflects on the importance of women telling their "real, honest and raw stories" to offer a different notion of success and provide relatable examples beyond those who have seemingly "had it all". What value do you see in sharing vulnerable personal stories within communities or society?
17. How does the author's experience resonate with the challenges of being authentic and managing personal needs alongside caring for others?

#### **Stage 5: Test and Launch / The Cycle Repeats**

This stage is about trying out the shortlisted solutions, observing their impact, learning from what works and what doesn't, and integrating new practices, understanding that it's an iterative, lifelong process.

18. The author tested herself in different contexts, including asserting her Jewishness and advocating against antisemitism. How do you decide where and how to "put yourself out there" in relation to your values and identities?
19. The author emphasizes that in this process, there are "no time restrictions" and it's okay "to stop and breathe". She frames setbacks as "learnings not failures". How do you approach setbacks or things not working out as planned?
20. The book concludes by stating the cycle "needs continual testing" and "repeats" How does the idea of personal growth and self-discovery as an ongoing, iterative process resonate with you?

#### **Part 3: Broader Relevance and Takeaways**

The author explicitly hopes the book contributes to conversations about "social cohesion and inclusion" and "designing our own futures where we feel safe, validated and equal".

21. How can the principles of empathy, understanding "otherness," and sharing vulnerable stories discussed in the book be applied to foster better social cohesion or dialogue over difference in teams, organisations, or society more broadly?
22. The author notes the interconnectedness of personal struggles with "structural and cultural inhibitors" in society. How might the design thinking framework be used to address these larger systemic issues that impact individuals and groups?
23. The author lists many societal issues that haven't resolved (gender pay gap, safety, lack of women in leadership, etc.) and suggests that empowerment programs can only go so far "without doing the hard work on ourselves". Do you agree with this perspective on the interplay between individual work and systemic change?
24. The author's journey is deeply tied to finding and expressing her authentic self. What does "bringing your whole self" mean to you in different contexts (work, relationships, community) How do you navigate situations where you feel you cannot be your "full self" or are treated as "less than"? How does the process of understanding your values and triggers with empathy, as described in the book, help in navigating challenging conversations, relationships or professional environments?
25. Having discussed the book, what is one idea or practice from "The Ultimate Other" that you might try to apply in your own life or recommend to someone else?

If you are interested in engaging Jackie to present to a group, or to undertake any of the programs outlined at [www.drjackieking.com.au](http://www.drjackieking.com.au). She is available to attend events in November 2025 face to face, and online anytime!