Preface

This is the first book about the Mmogo-method\(^{1}\), a visual data-collection method used in exploring personal and group experiences. *Mmogo* is a word borrowed from Setswana, one of the indigenous languages of South Africa, and it refers to relatedness, co-ownership, togetherness, co-construction and interpersonal threads. These meanings capture the essence of the Mmogo-method: participants, who are viewed as relational beings, are invited to take part in a group to provide data in response to a research question. They are provided with unstructured materials (malleable clay, beads of different colours and sizes, and dried grass stalks or an appropriate substitute material) and are asked to construct visual representations of the social phenomena under investigation. The participants explain these to the group and its members, thereby complementing the discussion by giving their views. This involves participants actively and enables researchers to obtain rich and textured visual, interactional, observation and textual data. The visual representations participants create capture personal perspectives on social reality that have developed in the contexts in which people function and are embedded in broader environments. The group members’ views provide additional perspectives so that detailed nuanced data are obtained.

This book is a culmination of my personal journey and academic insights as a psychologist. I have had the opportunity to develop a qualitative data-collection method that enables people to express themselves visually, and in which both researchers and participants are able to participate jointly – irrespective of their age, cognitive abilities or culture, and irrespective of my age, ethnicity or position as a psychologist and researcher.

I learned about the world as the oldest child in an Afrikaans (one of the indigenous languages of South Africa) family. In addition to the social and emotional skills I acquired in my family, I was able to develop my critical thinking abilities thanks to my father’s constructive and active involvement in the

\(^{1}\)Even though the Mmogo-method is trade marked, it will not be indicated in all cases used in the book, to ensure easier readability of the text.
disadvantaged communities at the time – in spite of the oppressive Apartheid system operating then. I became acutely aware of the inequality and exclusion of my fellow countrymen and women on the basis of race, and of the cruel disregard for humanity and the disrespectful treatment of people. However, I also learned to appreciate the remarkable expression of cultural diversity through my involvement in various community projects and I observed the resilience of individuals and their communities, and how they confronted and dealt with adversities and challenges. All this led me to question unhealthy systems, discern inconsistencies in human interactions and actively oppose segregation.

I was trained in Clinical Psychology, with a focus on individuals, intrapersonal processes and research conducted mainly quantitatively, which I found very limiting in the multicultural and multilingual context of South Africa. I was often challenged to find appropriate data-collection methods to address research topics on people as relational beings and which recognize the impact of broader socio-cultural, economic, cultural and political environments. I found my exposure to community processes to be incompatible with the tendency to seek largely causal explanations for individuals’ behaviour, while failing to make clear how the broader environment informs the dynamic processes and interactions in human relations. Early in my academic career, I became attracted by the recognition Community Psychology accords to the reciprocal relationship that exists between people and different environments, its focus on diversity and the marginalized, and its preventative orientation. The awareness that relational interactions between people are grounded in particular interpersonal contexts, are continuously in the making and are informed by place, time and activity opened up the possibility for the development of the Mmogo-method.

Some encounters with visual methods stimulated my awareness of the wide range of application possibilities. This first occurred when one of the clinical psychology students I was supervising was asked to assist a child of six from a different cultural background who had presented with selective mutism. We decided to use the Scenotest developed by Gerhild von Staabs, which is based on play and various visual elements as a projection of lived experiences. Although the use of visual materials had been widely researched in therapeutic contexts, I was intrigued to know how an explicitly therapeutic intervention could be used to collect visual data. Even more significant was my participation in a workshop by Violet Oaklander, author of *Windows to Our Children* (1988). We were presented with an assortment of unstructured materials to express our experiences visually. In addition to the personal insights I gained from this, I was again struck by the way in which representations could be used as a reflection of their creators’ perspective on reality.

These fresh insights made me aware of the potential of visual data in the researcher-participant relationship to extract detailed data. The Mmogo-method as visual data-collection method was originally developed to assist me in answering research questions for which I could not find appropriate tools. In my initial experimental use of the method, I followed the procedure described in this book, adopting an intuitive approach and enjoying how participants mostly reported that they had benefited from their active involvement in research projects (some volunteered to be included in future research). Many postgraduate students joined
me in various research projects, and we were constantly surprised by interesting discoveries. I became increasingly aware of the usefulness of combining knowledge of relational psychology with research elements and of the position of participants in the research context as co-researchers.

In the first article on the Mmogo-method (Roos, 2008), it was proposed as a culture-sensitive data-collection method that “appreciates the symbolic, contextual groundedness of lived meanings” (p. 659). The Mmogo-method was positioned as a qualitative data-collection method to conduct exploratory, descriptive research. The theories informing it were social constructionism, symbolic interactionism and community psychology. A second article (Roos, 2012) describes the Mmogo-method as a visual projective data-collection method. Visual representations were viewed as reflections of the conventions, interests and cultural meanings of the community and how they were formed within the contexts in which people developed these meanings. Visual representations were not, as with object representations, linked to desire and fantasy governed by distortion.

Springer’s invitation to publish a book about the Mmogo-method prompted me to systematically record the processes I had applied in developing this new research method and to question the underlying assumptions. Proper reflection and rigorous discussions with Professors Norah Keating, Cecilia Bouwer, Andries Baart and Jaco Hoffman have helped me to present an explicit account of the route I had followed intuitively in applying the Mmogo-method.

**Book Outline**

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 consisting of four chapters, discusses the Mmogo-method in terms of its foundations; how it developed, what it involves in practice, the theoretical frameworks underpinning it and issues of integrity, including ethical considerations before, during and after data collection and analysis. Part 2, in three chapters, presents practical examples of the application of the Mmogo-method and methods of analysis of textual and visual data. Part 3 provides examples of different applications in three chapters. Part 4 consists of two chapters and presents participants’ and researcher’s reflections, a postscript on future developments and applications of the Mmogo-method and concluding thoughts.

In Chap. 1, *Introducing the Mmogo-method as a Visual Data-Collection Method*, the method is positioned as a visual data-collection tool which developed from the Indingilize Structured Observation Technique (*Indingilize* means ‘circle’ or ‘round’). The Mmogo-method proposes that we all have unique and different perspectives that develop in relation to a reality that is not mind-dependent. Researchers using this method do not impose predetermined categories which are subjected to testing hypotheses, but rather adopt an empathic position to probe and interpret the meanings participants attribute to their visual representations. The visual representations are regarded as reflections of their subjective meanings that develop in relation to a social reality. Therefore, from an onto-epistemological stance, both the subjective social constructions of participants and the social reality
that is not mind-dependent are used as a philosophical frame for the Mmogo-method. The importance of context is recognized in terms of situatedness, of how people develop meanings in particular social contexts and to acknowledge that these social contexts are always embedded in broader environments. Researchers also create an optimal context for participation in the research process by drawing a clear frame within which the interpersonal interactions take place. The chapter concludes by contextualizing the Mmogo-method in relation to other visual data-collection methods.

Chapter 2, Conducting the Mmogo-method, describes the method of application. It includes examples of the application of the method in different cultural settings, across age groups and by different subject disciplines. Before the method is applied, preparation takes place: researchers prepare materials and identify the venue and the appropriate use of equipment. Researchers should also prepare themselves for applying the method by ensuring that they have adequate skills to deal with emotional content that might be elicited in the course of a session, deal with group dynamics and ensure that support is available for participants, if required, when the research process has been completed. The method is applied in four distinct phases. Phase 1 demonstrates how to create a context for optimal participation by informing participants before data collection what will be expected from them and to request the group to deal confidentially with the information that is being shared in the group – thereby introducing group norms of respect. Participants are also assured that whatever they construct will not be subject to evaluation. Phase 2 deals with preparing participants for their involvement, by requesting them to form a group and by introducing an open-ended prompt to stimulate their constructions of visual representations from a standard set of materials. In Phase 3, the discussions of individual visual representations and group discussions are explained. Phase 4 details how participants and researchers are debriefed, which is also discussed more fully in Chap. 11. Chapter 2 highlights the different sets of data obtained from the four phases as well as the boundaries around the method in terms of the inclusion or exclusion of participants.

In Chap. 3, Theories and Heuristic Constructs Informing the Mmogo-method, Andries Baart and I discuss relevant heuristic constructs of theories underlying the Mmogo-method. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive discussion of the theories but to demonstrate how some constructs and principles informed the development and application of the Mmogo-method. This is approached from a hermeneutical viewpoint according to which researchers assume an onto-epistemological stance. From a meta-reflective position, researchers move to the position of participants, adopting a relativist position which is described from three perspectives. Participants visually and verbally express (social representations theory) their unique and subjective social constructions (constructivism), and the meaning these have for them (symbolic interactionism). The subjective meanings that are expressed through the visual representations are informed by the social and historical environments (social constructionism) that have developed in relation to a social reality (realism) that is not mind-dependent. From the position of researchers, three perspectives are described: (1) probe the subjective social constructions
expressed in three-dimensional visual representations to obtain the subjective meanings; (2) describe some of the broken patterns of the social reality after analysis of the multilayered data; and (3) interpret data to extend beyond the descriptive level to demonstrate the transferability of knowledge obtained from applying researchers’ skills as methodologists and as experts in the subject field.

Chapter 4, authored by Jaco Hoffman, Research Integrity and the Mmogo-method: Some Reflections, deals with the issue of integrity and ethical considerations implied in the different phases of the method. Before data collection, ethical considerations in relation to the research topic, gaining access to the community, inviting participants and obtaining informed consent are relevant. Due to the nature of the Mmogo-method, which draws on principles of projection, an ethical attitude of protecting participants from harm is particularly emphasized when questioning participants and in debriefing them when they exit the research context. Ethical considerations that apply to the data are also discussed, particularly in the choice of an appropriate method to analyze data obtained in a different cultural context from the researcher. In reporting findings, an attempt is made to provide a comprehensive description of guidelines to ensure the trustworthiness of data. In this chapter, Hoffman positions the Mmogo-method in terms of its situational and relational relevance. Such an approach acknowledges that every case should be considered on its own merits, which does not ignore considerations of trustworthiness. A position of integrity is taken in terms of flexibility to the specific situation and the relational context, which is more nuanced than a more principlist approach, which is guided by specific pre-determined principles. Two important ethical considerations are raised: first, the introduction of a broad open-ended prompt requires flexible researchers to link it coherently with the often very specific research question, and second, the apparent contradiction in that the method allows (timewise) for minimal verbal explanation, but that the unit of analysis (including the visual) solely depends on the verbal explanations obtained from participants (Chap. 7).

Even though I have attempted to demonstrate the versatility of the potential application of the Mmogo-method by including a wide range of suitable topics, a large part of the book is dedicated to the relational experiences and interactions between older persons and members of younger generations. As a social gerontologist I am especially aware of the implications of the impact of global population ageing. The exponential increase in the numbers of older persons will, as research has indicated, place correspondingly heavier demands on governmental, mental health and psychosocial resources due to loss and diminution of various kinds associated with ageing. In the light of limited resources, particularly in the South African context, and of population ageing, it is certain that relationships are pivotal and will become even more so in facilitating the well-being and addressing the care needs of older persons. From a psychosocial perspective, people of all ages will be spending more time together, sharing their lives in different contexts, interacting with one another. When considering the position of older persons in South Africa, it needs to be borne in mind that the country’s previous political dispensation contributed to creating the current conditions of disparity in which older persons find themselves today. The exclusive privileges Apartheid
accorded white people at all societal and communal levels contributed to the majority of white older persons finding themselves in well-resourced facilitated care settings while the majority of older persons (people of colour, proportionally the biggest group of older persons in South Africa) find themselves in poorly developed facilitated care or multigenerational community settings.

This imbalance prompted the study described in Chap. 5, *Implementing the Mmogo-method: A Group of Setswana-Speaking Older People’s Relational Experiences in a Rural Community Setting*. In this chapter, I describe the implementation of phases of the method as suggested in Chap. 2. The chapter demonstrates how visual representations were used to elicit discussions from individual participants about the visual elements that they had constructed, and how probing questions were formulated to promote deeper understanding. In the verbatim transcription of the translated discussions of the Setswana-speaking older people, I included the rationale behind the questions I asked and reflected critically on specific questions, acknowledging that different questions could have steered the discussion in a different direction. I offer a summary of the verbatim discussion following each participant’s explanation of their visual representations and use it to develop the theory discussed in Chap. 8. In Chap. 5, I also demonstrate how to involve the group in the discussions without losing the specific meanings the individual attached to his or her visual representation. This chapter also illustrates how people’s subjective meanings are embedded in broader environments, and how the diversity of visual representations of this particular group highlighted the different meanings that develop in relation to a specific social reality.

Chapter 6, *The Mmogo-method and the Intergenerational Group Reflecting Technique (IGRT) to Explore Intergenerational Interactions and Textual Data Analysis*, provides an example of how the Mmogo-method may be combined with another data-collection method. The IGRT requires members of both generations to be present simultaneously and involved during data collection (Roos, 2011). In applying IGRT, one generational group explains their subjective perspective to another generational group who assumes a listening position. When the first generational group has explained their perspective, the listening generational members are requested to reflect on what they have heard (Roos, 2011). IGRT can be described as an orchestrated intergenerational interaction. In Chap. 6, the Mmogo-method was used to visually represent the younger generational members’ perspective of their current relationship with older people, who were not related to them biologically, but who are part of a social context in which socially related generations are treated as if they are related. In this chapter, older people reacted to the younger generations’ visual representations in a manner that confirmed findings of previous research on reportedly strained interpersonal relationships. By combining IGRT and the Mmogo-method, different dimensions involved in the relational interactions between two generational groups were revealed. The data obtained in this study involved a group of people who did not share the same social-cultural context as the researcher and therefore data were analyzed using Giorgi’s (2012) descriptive phenomenological psychological analysis, which allowed the core message representing participants’ explanations and
the group discussions to be accessed. This approach to data analysis was used to ensure that the translated discussions reflected the meanings participants attached to their visual representations and not on an analysis of the exact words (which could have been changed during the translation process). The findings in Chap. 5 were used together with those in Chap. 6 to develop the Self-Interactional Group Theory presented in Chap. 8.

In Chap. 7, Analyzing Visual Data with Text from the Mmogo-method: Experience of Meaning During the Third Trimester of Pregnancy, Amoné Redelinghuys and I propose a six-step visual analysis with text to analyze data obtained by means of the Mmogo-method. The example of data obtained from first-time mothers’ experience of meaning serves to suggest the following steps in analyzing data.

1. Describe the research production context. The research production context is framed around the researcher’s choices in terms of the setting, the type of participants, the choice of topic and so on. Since the meaning of qualitative data is always contextualized data, a comprehensive description of the research production context is important.

2. Assume an empathic position towards data. In accordance with a relativistic approach, researchers aim to stay close to the meanings participants express in relation to the visual elements in their visual representations. Researchers guard against reading meaning into the visual elements, unless verified by the participants.

3. Describe the observations of visual elements in terms of their obvious or literal presentation. This step allows researchers to focus on positioning visual elements, their size, composition and so on, which become relevant if the symbolic meanings are included in the analysis.

4. Describe symbolic meanings attributed by participants. Participants express the symbolic meanings they have developed in relation to specific objects. As with any other qualitative data-collection method, analysis starts with collection of the data. Therefore researchers should be mindful of the different elements that could be of symbolic value and ask participants about their potential symbolic meaning.

5. Describe participant-introduced contexts. Participants express the meanings of their social constructions in relation to a social reality in terms of contexts that are relevant for them. Therefore any context participants introduce spontaneously is relevant for the interpretation of the data and should be included in the analysis.

6. Conduct an interpretative analysis based on prior steps and identifies transferable knowledge. Roos and Redelinghuys suggest a few questions that might be asked to identify transferable knowledge. Transferable knowledge should not be confused with the principle of generalization in quantitative research, which depends on representativeness.

Part 3 consists of three chapters illustrating some applications of the Mmogo-method. In Chap. 8, Theorizing from the Mmogo-method: Self-Interactional Group Theory (SIGT) to Explain Relational Interactions, data described in Chaps. 5 and 6 are used to illustrate how to start a process of theorizing. SIGT as relational theory was developed. It proposes that from a pragmatic view, relational interactions between people may be described in terms of intra-individual, inter-individual and group units of analysis. The intra-individual unit of analysis encompasses subjective experiences (emotions/feelings) and the problems or meaningfulness
associated with their interactions in a particular interpersonal context. The intra-individual unit of analysis (feelings or emotions) gives an indication of what takes place in the inter-individual and group units of analysis. The inter-individual unit of analysis draws on Vorster’s (2011) Interactional Pattern Analysis, which was refined by Vorster, Roos and Beukes (2013), and involves (1) the interpersonal context in which the interactions take place; (2) the definition of the relationship (either complementary, equal or symmetrical); (3) relational qualities which are observable behaviour of the interacting parties; (4) the motivation (social goals/needs) for interactions between people; and (5) the interactional processes, which are described as an interactional dance. The group unit of analysis describes intra-and intergroup behaviour. These units of analysis, which exist simultaneously and reciprocally, are embedded in the broader social, cultural, political and economic environments which informed them.

In Chap. 9, The Development of a Board Game as Intergenerational Intervention: Secondary Analysis of Data from the Mmogo-method, Maryke Hewett, Werner de Klerk and I describe how rich and detailed data may be obtained from the broad open-ended prompt in combination with using unstructured materials of the Mmogo-method. This combination provides researchers with an opportunity to ask secondary research questions aligned with the original research question. In this chapter, the relational experiences both of older people and young adults, who were not related, were used to identify their social goals or psychosocial needs for intergenerational interactions. Social goals and psychosocial needs are, according to SIGT, part of the need to relate or interact with people. Data obtained from the secondary analysis were used together with a literature review about intergenerational programmes, to develop a board game. The intergenerational programmes included older persons and young adults as well as psychological and sociological theories and heuristic constructs underpinning those programmes. The board game was based on secondary data of older people and young adults’ generational needs, and the theories and heuristic constructs were involved in its content and structure. A detailed outline is provided to create a board game as an intergenerational intervention and a source of fun, and to create awareness between generational members of their similar identities and interests.

In Chap. 10, Using the Mmogo-method to Explore Important Places and Their Meaning in Two Communities: The Importance of Context, Karen Puren and I demonstrate how the Mmogo-method revealed context-specific data and, by using the same open-ended prompt with diverse groups, how the broader environments informed the meanings that had developed between people and places of importance. In this chapter, two distinct groups of people, residing in two different settings but in close proximity, representing two different cultural groups and speaking two different indigenous languages of South Africa, participated in the study. The one group of participants highlighted the importance of preserving places for future generations because of their historical value and the nostalgic memories associated with particular places. The other group took a developmental stance, emphasizing the value of developing or restoring places to cater for the needs of younger generations and of the vulnerable groups in the community. They
also wanted to preserve their cultural heritage for two reasons: to remind the youth of the older people’s rituals, and to perform their cultural rituals in a particular place. The two groups expressed the importance of context, which was referred to in Chap. 1, in applying the Mmogo-method. Meaning for these two groups of participants developed in relation to particular social, economic, cultural and political environments and circumstances and was expressed by using the Mmogo-method. The usefulness of the findings obtained by the method for spatial planners is illustrated, particularly in being able to identify the meaning and importance of places in a group setting, thereby contributing to group consensus.

Part 4, consisting of two chapters, focuses on participants’ reflections and a researcher’s perspective. In Chap. 11, Participants’ Reflections on Participating in the Mmogo-method: The Example of Mental Health Workers’ Coping Strategies, Jenni van der Westhuizen, Anna Keyter and I take the example of mental health workers to illustrate the importance of context, group processes and of debriefing. The importance of creating context of optimal participation was illustrated by participants who compared the research production context to a therapeutic space – a safe space providing clear boundaries, unconditional acceptance and protection against harm. The importance of the group was also illustrated in this chapter. Through the group interactions and dynamics, participants shared their experience; became more aware of their coping strategies, occupational satisfaction and interpersonal relationships; and even remembered the coping strategies that they could be using more effectively. They also gained insight into adjusting their strategies to benefit their relational interactions. The mental health workers identified specific aspects relating to the material used in applying the method as contributing to awareness, maintaining their focus and helping them to exercise control – an aspect which is often lacking in a traumatizing environment. In reflecting on how the participants experienced their participation in the method, a debriefing space was created; this is the last phase of the Mmogo-method.

In Chap. 12, Researcher’s Reflections on Using the Mmogo-method and Other Visual Research Methods, Avivit Cherrington describes how the use of visual data-collection methods, including the Mmogo-method, enabled a shared engagement and understanding of children’s experiences of hope in a poor, rural environment. A participatory research methodology was used and different visual data-generation methods were applied: the Mmogo-method, drawings, collage and photo-voice. The visual data generation methods were supplemented with individual interviews, informal group discussions and the researcher’s journal containing personal reflections (notes and photographs). The author reflects on the value of the Mmogo-method as a visual data-collection method that could be used with young children. She also discovered implicit cultural meanings and through the group dynamics was able to make observations about individuals’ functioning that had not been noticed in other data-generation methods. The Mmogo-method here supplemented data obtained from the methods. This chapter also draws attention to two further contributions, which are often neglected: First, how researchers keep reflective notes and use photographs about the research process which could serve as rich and detailed data; and second, how issues of integrity may be negotiated with
participants, which is used as an example of the situatedness and contextual relevance to which Hoffman refers in Chap. 4.

Lastly, the Postscript presents concluding thoughts and points to potential future developments and applications of the Mmogo-method.

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