Humans are social beings, and engage in social interactions from early in life. Yet, grasping early social-cognitive development is incredibly complex: besides a child’s genetic predisposition, there are a wide variety of environmental experiences, across nested time scales, which are shaping a child’s social-cognitive development (e.g., Junge et al., 2022; Masten & Cicchetti, 2010; Tamis-LeMonda, 2023). To further capture the broad range of social experiences, this special issue aimed to bring together research that addressed how infants’ and young children’s social environments shape their early and later social and cognitive development from a variety of perspectives, including both empirical and theoretical papers, spanning typical and atypical populations.

This special issue showcases the complexity of social-cognitive development in a variety of ways. For example, it spans a wide range of social experiences: it includes empirical papers ranging from micro-level factors such as parenting styles (He et al., this issue; Iwasaki et al., this issue; Kim, this issue; Krijnen et al., this issue; Ramos et al., this issue) and other daily life experiences (Guellai et al., this issue; McCall et al., this issue) to macro-level experiences such as COVID-19 (Lopes Ameida et al., this issue; Wermelinger et al., this issue). In addition, it encompasses empirical research on a variety of neurotypical and neurodivergent populations (ASD: He et al., this issue; Adoptees: Ramos et al, this issue; Preterm infants: Krijnen et al., this issue). There is further a great variety in empirical methods employed to capture this development: spanning behavioral observations, eye-tracking (He et al., this issue), and network analyses (Burke et al., this issue). Finally, this special issue covers not only empirical research but also provides a case report (McCall et al., this issue), a theoretical paper (Belteki et al., this issue), and a review (Guellai et al., this issue). All in all, this special issue fully embraces the complexity of social experiences, as it considers a variety of experiences, outcomes, populations, methods, and approaches, all of which contribute in shaping early development.
As we framed this special issue in terms of outcomes on social-cognitive development, authors defined this in various, compelling manners. They examined the influence of early experience upon self-esteem (Kim, this issue), emotion labeling (Wermelinger et al., this issue), language development (Bazhydai et al., this issue; Belteki et al., this issue; He et al., this issue), curiosity (Iwasaki et al., this issue), social competence and psychosocial behavior (Krijnen et al., this issue; Ramos et al., this issue Zhu et al., this issue), and attention and cognitive development more broadly defined (Almeida et al., this issue).

In addition to the scientific impact, these outcomes are also relevant because of the potential interest beyond academia in terms of implications for society. For example, the interest in children's screentime and media exposure (Almeida et al., this issue; Guellai et al., this issue) is a pressing issue for caregivers, policy-makers, and educators alike. Moreover, the consequences of various parenting styles and the development of social networks (Burke et al., this issue; He et al., this issue; Iwasaki et al., this issue; Kim, this issue; Krijnen et al., this issue; Ramos et al., this issue) may help inform caregivers and educators. The potential impact of foster care, adoption, and government policies relating to children in care (McCall et al., this issue) is relevant for practitioners and policy-makers. The effects of COVID-19 (Almeida et al.; Wermelinger et al., this issue) are important to consider both for facilitating recovery and future-proofing against potential issues for children and families when global crises may arise.

The impact for both academia and society is even stronger given the striking diversity of researchers who contributed to this special issue. The articles come from authors across five continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America) and 14 countries. Including a diversity of both researchers and participants is critical for moving global developmental science forward (Apicella et al., 2020; Moriguchi, 2022; Singh et al., 2023). As such, we hope that this special issue models the move toward embracing not only a complexity of methodologies but also the benefits of taking an international view of development and including both researchers and children and families from diverse regions across the globe.
References


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