BEING SHY WHEN SKYPING WITH A PEER: THE LINK AMONG THE EXPRESSIONS OF SHYNESS, THEORY OF MIND AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

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Children’s shy reactions have usually been investigated during performance situations in the presence of familiar and non-familiar adults and during peer interactions. Previous studies already reported empirical evidence on the associations between children’s Theory of mind (ToM), social anxiety and their expressions of shyness during performance tasks. Less is known about how children’s shy behavior during social interactions with peers relates to their social understanding and social anxiety. We investigated whether children’s positive and non-positive expressions of shyness and verbal shyness during a simulated peer interaction relate to their level of ToM, and social anxiety.

Eighty-three 7.5-years-old children participated in the study. Each child took part in an online meeting with a (simulated) peer. Children’s positive and non-positive expressions of shyness were coded as the duration of gaze aversions during positive and non-positive facial expressions respectively. Verbal shyness included the latency to respond to questions of the peer and the mean duration of the verbal reactions. Children’s ToM was assessed with the TOM-test-R. Children’s level of social anxiety was measured with the Picture Anxiety Test.

Preliminary multiple regressions show that: a) positive expressions of shyness were predicted by high desire-emotion understanding, $\beta = .27, p = .028$; b) non-positive expressions of shyness were predicted by low desire-emotion understanding, $\beta = -.36, p = .004$; c) children’s duration of verbal reactions was predicted by high false-belief understanding, $\beta = .38, p = .003$, and by low social anxiety, $\beta = .27, p = .020$; and d) latency was predicted by lower levels of social anxiety, $\beta = -.27, p = .031$.

In conclusion, children’s non-verbal and verbal shyness were found to be related to their levels of ToM and social anxiety. During the presentation, we will discuss the relevance of non-verbal and verbal shyness during social interactions with peers.