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The role of language in the expression of shyness

The present study was designed to analyze the relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication and shyness in twenty-four month-old children. Previous research has explored the idea that vocalizations moderate shyness in children (Coplan & Mandana, 2003). The focus of the present study was to determine if shyness is more prevalent in children who do not vocalize than those who do vocalize in a variety of laboratory situations. We collected vocalization data on one sample of toddlers for a sample of 80 children. The main purpose of each child's visit for the original study was to examine emotions displayed by the children in twelve contexts. The present study used the data collected through coding the videotapes of each child's visit to the lab. Three types of vocalization data were collected: 1) the frequency of inhibited behavior displayed in children which was collected for the main study, 2) every episode in the tapes was coded for frequency of utterances made by the child, and 3) a subset of episodes were coded for verbal and non-verbal references to the stimuli. We hypothesize that verbal and non-verbal references made by children about stimuli presented to them would keep the children engaged in the stimuli. Children who did not make verbal or non-verbal references about the stimuli were expected to withdraw from the stimuli. We expected that shy children would vocalize at a lower frequency than those who display uninhibited behaviors. It was also believed that children would vocalize more about stimuli that upset them. The authors expect the results will confirm those found by Coplan and Mandana (2003) who argue that language is a moderator of shyness. We also expect that the behaviors the children display will be the same for verbal and non-verbal references. Implications may suggest that children do not vocalize as a way to remove themselves from the uncomfortable situation they feel they are experiencing.