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Sommario	<p>Theoretical and empirical literature extensively underline that both the quantity and the quality of peer social interactions and relationships are important components of human life and fundamental contributors to positive children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Gazelle, & Ladd, 2003; Ladd, & Burgess, 1999). From early in childhood, establishing and being involved in positive social relationships influence long-term trajectories of well-being, health, and positive adjustment (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Umberson & Montez, 2015). A lack in the quantity or in the quality of social interactions may negatively alter or impair children's socio-emotional development (Edwards, & Hans, 2015; Ladd, & Burgess, 1999). Accordingly, children who engage in comparatively infrequent social interactions may 'miss out' on these benefits, with potential implications for their long-term socio-emotional adjustment (Caspi, Harrington, Moffitt, Milne, & Poulton, 2006; Kopala-Sibley, & Klein, 2017; Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009). Nevertheless, some children tend to withdraw from the opportunity to play or socialize with others. The term used to define the process of removing oneself from opportunities for social interactions is social withdrawal (Coplan, & Rubin, 2010; Rubin, et al., 2009).</p>

In recent years, researchers have proposed increasingly complex models to describe social withdrawal, shifting from a unidimensional to a multidimensional approach that reflects a range of underlying emotional and motivational substrates (Coplan, Ooi, Xiao, & Rose-Krasnor, 2018). As a result, contemporary researchers now conceptualize subtypes of social withdrawal that can be detected during childhood, that may have different psychological meanings, and appear to be related to different outcomes (e.g., Asendorpf, 1990; Coplan, Ooi & Nocita, 2015; Li et al., 2016). Despite growing interest in the study of social withdrawal in recent years (see Coplan, Ooi, & Baldwin, 2019; Coplan et al., 2018; Sette, Baldwin, Zava, Baumgartner, & Coplan, 2019; Sette, Hipson, Zava, Baumgartner, & Coplan, 2018), to date it remains an underexplored aspect of children's development that still merits further empirical investigation. In this regard, the present dissertation aimed to investigate still unexplored facets of social withdrawal in preschool-aged children. In the first section of this dissertation, the theoretical aspects of social withdrawal will be discussed, with a main focus on definitions, functions, and implications for young children's emotional development and social adjustment. In the second section, three studies will be presented: Study 1. Shyness, Unsociability and Social Avoidance. Social withdrawal from young children's perspective: preschool children's understanding and beliefs about hypothetical socially withdrawn peers. Study 2. Shyness and Unsociability. Social withdrawal and protective factors: the positive role of peer acceptance for shy and unsociable preschool children. Study 3. Shyness. Social withdrawal moral emotion: Shyness and Empathy in Early Childhood: Examining Links between Feelings of Empathy and Empathetic Behaviors

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