Anxiety can impact people's walking direction

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

People experiencing anxiety and inhibition have more activity in the right side of the brain, causing them to walk in a leftward trajectory.

New research led by Dr Mario Weick of the School of Psychology at the University of Kent has for the first time linked the activation of the brain's two hemispheres with lateral shifts in people's walking

trajectories.

In a study aimed at establishing why individuals display a tendency to allocate attention unequally across space, people were blindfolded and asked to walk in a straight line across a room towards a previously seen target.

The researchers found evidence that blindfolded individuals who displayed inhibition or anxiety were prone to walk to the left, indicating greater activation in the right hemisphere of the brain.

The research indicates that the brain's two hemispheres are associated with different motivational systems. These relate on the right side to inhibition and on the left to approach.

This is the first time researchers have established a clear link between inhibition and activation in the right side of the brain.

The findings may have implications for the treatment of unilateral neglect, which is a condition caused by a lack of awareness of one side of space. In particular, individuals suffering from right-sided neglect may benefit from interventions to reduce anxiety.

Walking blindfolded unveils unique contributions of behavioural approach and inhibition to lateral spatial bias is published in the journal *Cognition*.

More information: *Cognition*, www.sciencedirect.com/science/ … ii/S0010027715301050

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