We selected participants based on their social anxiety score (LSAS, 17 low, 15 high)

We parametrically varied perspective information in different trials (40 trials/level)

Participants reported percept: facing towards you or facing away

Questions:

Observers have a strong bias towards perceiving a bistable point-light walker as walking towards them. It has been assumed that this is due to the higher social or emotional relevance of this percept. If so, can we find a different bias in people with high social anxiety?

Studies of emotion effects on perception find either a positivity (‘wishful seeing’) or a negativity bias (towards negative stimuli/interpretations). Which is supported when using the more subtle emotional value of our biological motion stimulus?

Conclusions:

Observers with high social anxiety tended to see walkers as facing away more frequently than those with low social anxiety.

This suggests that trait social anxiety can bias perception in a way that counters this anxiety. This self-protective (positivity) bias might be specific to nonclinical anxiety, because it opposes the attentional bias towards threat typically found in clinically anxious groups.