

Based on a True Story: How Fictionality Affects Spatial Cognition of Events

† Pierre Gander, Anna Jia Gander

INTRO

- Visual perspective has previously been investigated in memory, episodic future thought, and mind wandering.
- Although several factors have been found to influence whether events are experienced from a first- or third-person visual perspective, the effects of the **factual/fictional** dimension have been little addressed.
- In the present study, we investigated **visual perspective** and memory characteristics **clarity**, **colour**, **visual detail**, and **cognitive empathy** of factual and fictional stories (measured between-subjects) as imagined and remembered (measured within-subjects).
- Taking the visual perspective of a protagonist in a story was considered a first-person perspective, while viewing the event from another vantage point was considered a third-person perspective.

METHOD

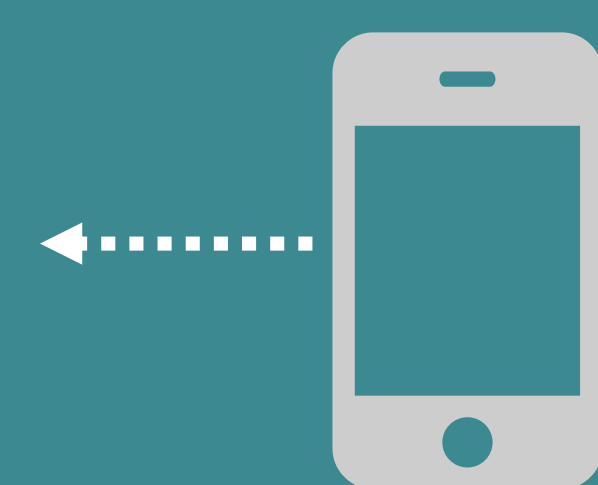
- In an experiment, participants ($N = 153$) read four short stories in English labelled fact or fiction (varied regarding first/third-person narrative perspective and emotional valence).
- Rating of visual perspective and memory qualities.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

- Fact and fiction are similar concerning first/third-person visual perspective and memory characteristics, consistent with earlier research on fiction reading.
- Differences in third-person vantage points between fact and fiction indicate that readers of fact are more visually aligned with the protagonist in the story.
- Trends regarding how fictionality interacts with narrative perspective and emotional valence of the stories to produce differences in clarity and fantasy empathy,



Fact focuses third-person visual perspective of events in memory while fiction distances it.



Take a picture to download the full paper

Gander, P., & Gander, A. (2021). Visual perspective in imagination and memory of factual and fictional stories. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20445911.2021.1928144>

Fictionality manipulation: Instructions to participants

Four news stories

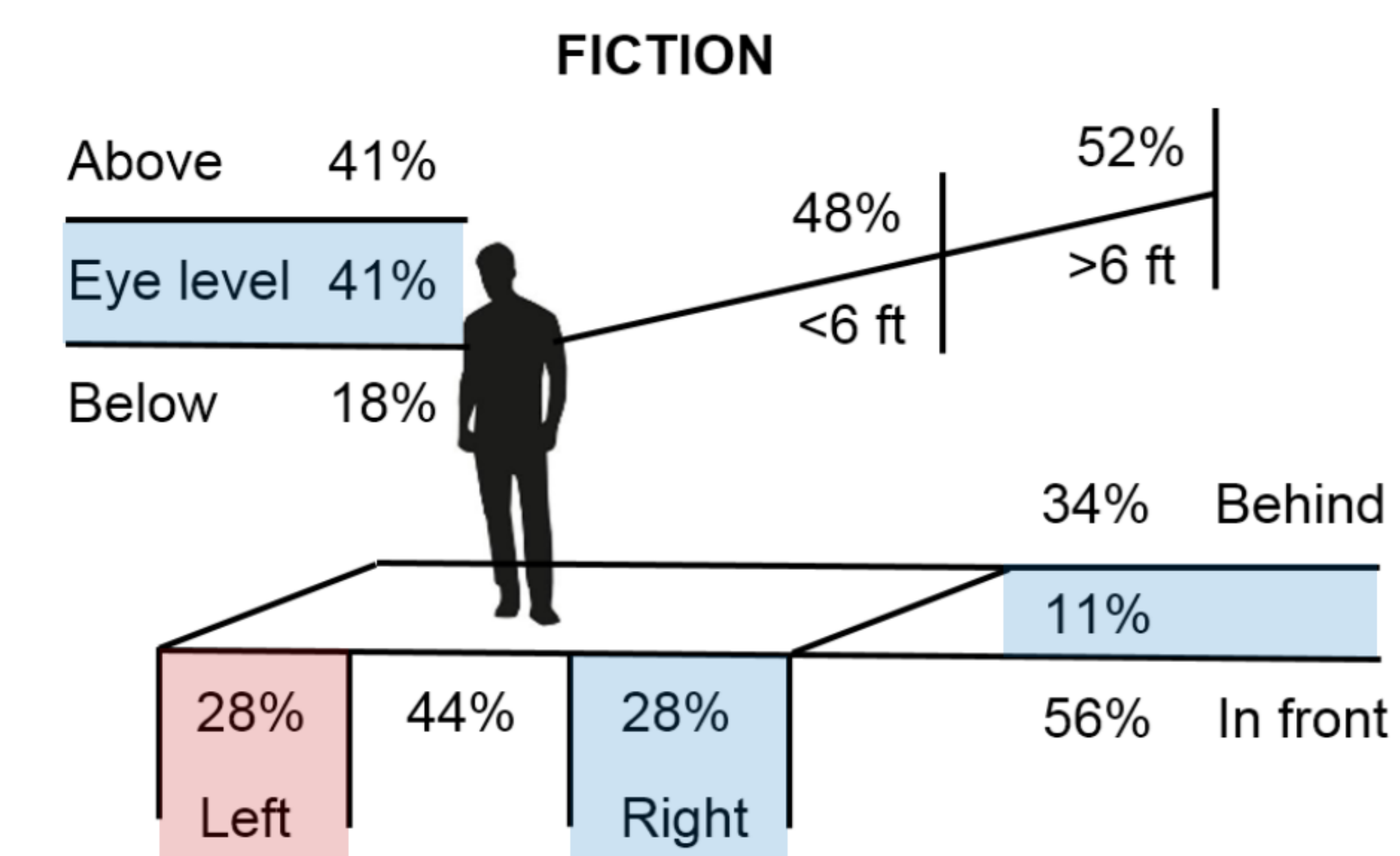
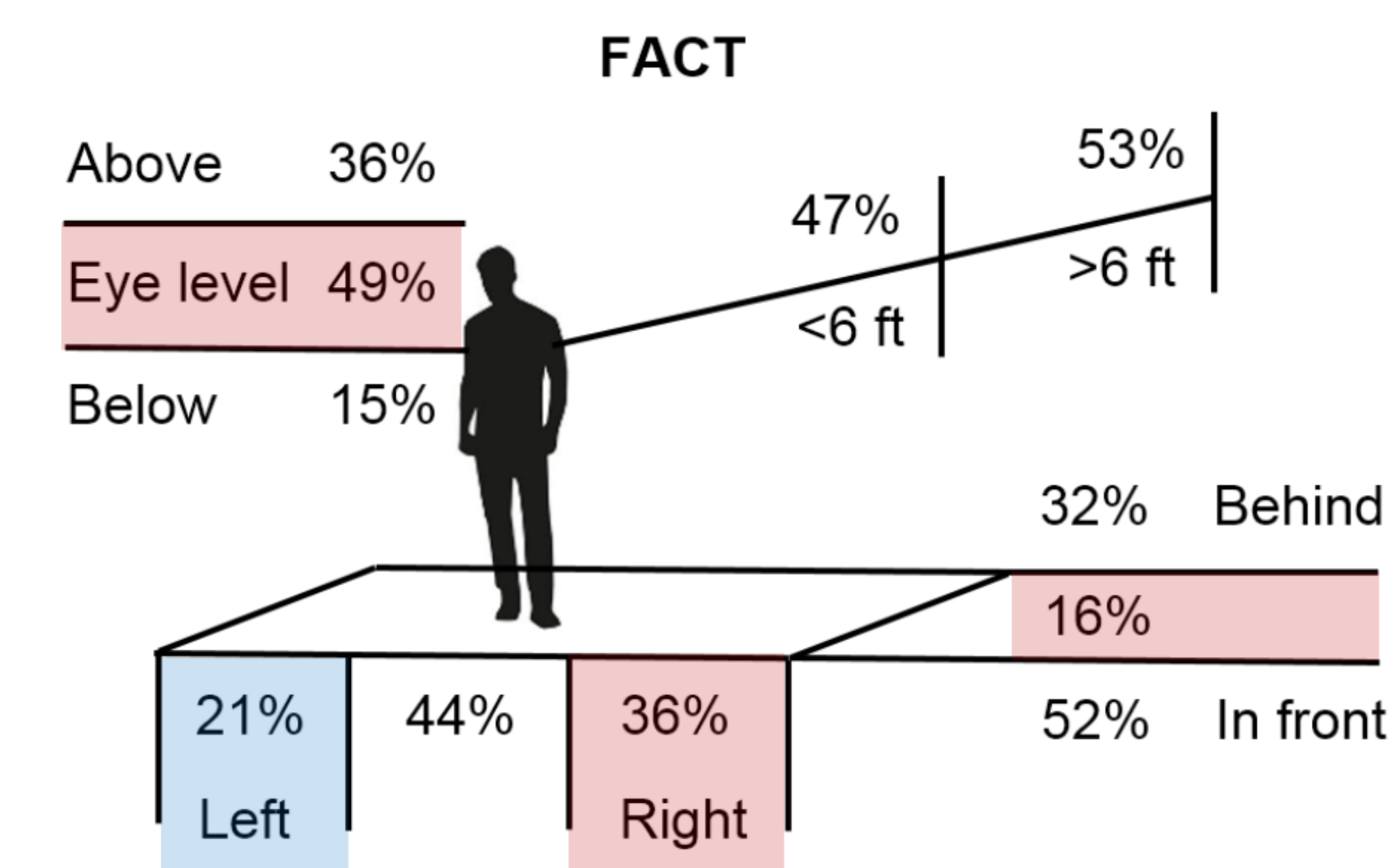
You will now read four short news stories. The events depicted are real and actually happened.

Four fictional stories

You will now read four short fictional stories. The events depicted are imagined and did not actually happen.

Proportions of third-person perspectives

Fact	81 %
Fiction	84 % (n.s. diff.)



Differences in locations of third-person visual perspectives of remembered events

(statistically significant differences between fact and fiction are marked **red for higher** and **blue for lower**)

