Title
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Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/46n365f3

Journal
Investigative Ophthalmology and Visual Science, 55(1)

ISSN
0146-0404

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Publication Date
2014-01-02

DOI
10.1167/iovs.13-12724

Peer reviewed
Eye-Specific IOP-Induced Displacements and Deformations of Human Lamina Cribrosa

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Submitted: July 2, 2013
Accepted: November 22, 2013

PURPOSE. To measure high-resolution eye-specific displacements and deformations induced within the human LC microstructure by an acute increase in IOP.

METHODS. Six eyes from donors aged 23 to 82 were scanned using second harmonic-generated (SHG) imaging at various levels of IOP from 10 to 50 mm Hg. An image registration technique was developed, tested, and used to find the deformation mapping between maximum intensity projection images acquired at low and elevated IOP. The mappings were analyzed to determine the magnitude and distribution of the IOP-induced displacements and deformations and contralateral similarity.

RESULTS. Images of the LC were obtained and the registration technique was successful. IOP increases produced substantial, and potentially biologically significant, levels of in-plane LC stretch and compression (reaching 10%–25% medians and 20%–30% 75th percentiles). Deformations were sometimes highly focal and concentrated in regions as small as a few pores. Regions of largest displacement, stretch, compression, and shear did not colocalize. Displacements and strains were not normally distributed. Contralateral eyes did not always have more similar responses to IOP than unrelated eyes. Under elevated IOP, some LC regions were under bi-axial stretch, others under bi-axial compression.

CONCLUSIONS. We obtained eye-specific measurements of the complex effects of IOP on the LC with unprecedented resolution in uncut and unfixed human eyes. Our technique was robust to electronic and speckle noise. Elevated IOP produced substantial in-plane LC stretch and compression. Further research will explore the effects of IOP on the LC in a three-dimensional framework.

Keywords: lamina cribrosa, optic nerve head, biomechanics, glaucoma, strain, second harmonic imaging

Glaucoma is a leading cause of blindness worldwide.1 Loss of vision in glaucoma is due to the degeneration of the retinal ganglion cell axons,2 believed to initiate within the lamina cribrosa (LC).3,4 Elevated IOP has been identified as a primary risk factor for the development and progression of glaucoma,2,3 and lowering IOP remains the only proven treatment to reduce the risk of neural tissue injury.2,5 Although much has been learned about the clinical risk factors,2 the mechanisms by which neural tissue degenerates and the roles of IOP remain controversial.2,7 The biomechanical paradigm of glaucoma postulates that an elevated IOP induces deformations of the LC, namely stretch, compression, and shear, which trigger a cascade of events that eventually lead to neural tissue damage.7,8 Despite the importance of characterizing the effects of IOP on the lamina to understand glaucomatous neuropathy, it has not been possible to measure directly the effects of IOP on the LC with sufficient resolution to clarify the role of IOP on the laminar pores and trabeculae. Instead, research on the effects of IOP on the LC has relied on averaged9–11 or indirect12,13 measures, simulation,14–16 or animal models.11,17

Our goal was to obtain high-resolution eye-specific measurements of the trabecular scale displacements and deformations induced in the human LC by an acute increase in IOP. We hypothesized that under these conditions, the tissues of the LC are subjected to substantial levels of stretch, compression, and shear, which could contribute to the biological vulnerability to elevated IOP. Further, we hypothesized that the differences in the effects of IOP between eyes of an individual are smaller than the differences between individuals.

METHODS

General Strategy

Our general strategy was the following: the LCs of human donors were imaged using second harmonic-generated (SHG) imaging at various levels of IOP. An image registration technique was then used to find the transformation that brings an image acquired at low IOP into coincidence with one acquired at elevated IOP. From this transformation, we
computed the in-plane displacements and deformations produced by the increase in IOP, which we then analyzed to determine distribution and contralateral similarity.

**Eye Preparation and Imaging**

Six ostensibly healthy eyes from four human donors aged 23 to 82 years were scanned using SHG imaging. The details of the eye preparation and imaging have been described elsewhere. Briefly, the eyes were obtained from the San Diego Eye Bank within 36 hours of death, and managed in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human tissue. The eyes were cannulated with a 25-gauge sutureless trocar and cannula system attached to a reservoir of buffered saline solution. The protruding optic nerve was removed at the level of the sclera in a single pass by using a disposable cryostat blade, to allow imaging of the LC region without blockage from retrolaminar tissues. The entire eye was placed onto the microscope and held in place with moistened cotton gauze so that the posterior aspect of the eye was placed onto the microscope and held in place with the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human tissue.

Images up to a depth of 600 μm were acquired at IOPs ranging from 10 to 50 mm Hg (Zeiss 510 Meta LSM [Zeiss, Oberkochen, Germany] equipped with a titanium-sapphire femtosecond laser mode-locked at 820 nm, and backscattered SHG signals were collected using the Meta detector set to collect 400–420-nm emissions). Line averaging during acquisition was set between 2 and 4. At each pressure, the eyes were allowed to equilibrate for 30 minutes before imaging. Mosaic lateral resolution varied from 1.76 to 4.97 μm/pixel. Resolution only varied between eye pairs, so that images from the same eye or contralateral eyes were always with the same resolution. We analyzed the effects of an IOP increase of 35 mm Hg (either 10–45 mm Hg or 15–50 mm Hg). The globes were allowed to rotate and translate during inflation so as not to introduce artificial constraints. The image mosaics covered areas at least 20% wider than the scleral canal to avoid introducing artifacts during image registration, such as those that could arise due to changing field of view or moving boundaries. In this work we analyzed maximum intensity anterior-posterior projections of the LC.

**Image Registration to Determine Displacements**

To identify the transformation bringing the image acquired at low IOP into coincidence with the image acquired at elevated IOP, we used a multilevel finite element-based digital image correlation technique in which the task of registration is formulated as a variational problem. This is a well-established and powerful technique within the general family of deformable registration algorithms. Using the shape functions of the highest resolution finite element mesh, we computed the in-plane shear deformation matrix at each pixel, from which we computed the maximum (first) and minimum (second) principal strains. The maximum in-plane shear strain was computed as the maximum difference between the principal strain magnitudes.

**Verification and Performance Evaluation**

We set a series of test tasks to verify the image registration technique and evaluate its performance. First we used a set of synthetic deformations applied to an image acquired at low IOP (OD donor 2) to produce test-elevated IOP images. Our technique was then used to find the deformation by registering the original and test images, and its performance evaluated by comparing the known (imposed) displacement and deformation fields with those obtained using our technique. We considered the following synthetic deformations of progressively increasing difficulty:
1. rigid body translations of various magnitudes and directions;
2. linear tissue stretch (first principal strain of 5%);
3. radial stretch (first principal strain of 10%) from the geometric center of the LC; and
4. a deformation pattern obtained from our own technique matching low to elevated IOP images, intended to test our technique using a realistic complex deformation.

We further evaluated whether the algorithm had converged to a good solution using the following three tests:

1. Using landmarks manually placed on the low and elevated IOP images: A coauthor familiar with LC imaging, morphometry, and delineation (JLG) manually placed 35 landmarks in corresponding locations of both the low and elevated IOP images. Landmark placing on the elevated IOP image was repeated three times. Using the deformations obtained by our registration technique, the landmarks placed on the low IOP image were virtually deformed (transformed) to their corresponding locations at elevated IOP. We then evaluated the distance between the low IOP landmarks transformed to elevated IOP and the manually placed elevated IOP landmarks. This distance was then compared with the repeatability of identifying the landmark locations at elevated IOP. The distance between elevated IOP landmarks is a measure of landmark placement repeatability. A good transformation would result in transformed low IOP landmarks within the region defined by the elevated IOP landmarks.

2. Comparing pixel by pixel the differences in image intensity between the unregistered (initialized) and registered images.

3. Inspecting the images to use our experience to judge whether the technique had successfully registered the images. This qualitative approach, while not definitive, is important for verifying new algorithms.

Robustness to Image Noise
The magnitude and type of noise in our SHG images of the LC is unknown. To estimate these we measured the signal intensity in image regions with and without tissue (comparing two images of the same region at the same IOP registered manually). In both cases, the noises were well described by a normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov P < 0.02). Means (SD) were 0.7% (3.1%) and 1.6% (0.48%) of the image dynamic range for regions with and without tissue, respectively. Our goal was to evaluate the robustness of our image registration technique to noise. Specifically, we added various levels of noise to the images to be registered (donor 2 OD) and registered again. Two types of noise were considered: Gaussian and Exponential. Gaussian noise, also known as shot or electronic, is additive and can be well approximated by a Gaussian function. We added Gaussian noise with SDs of 4.0%, 8.0%, 12%, and 16%, and a mean of zero. Our algorithm normalizes by mean signal intensity, and is therefore insensitive to mean differences. Exponential noise, also known as speckle noise, is multiplicative with Inoise = nIbase, where n is randomly generated from a population that follows the negative exponential function $P(n) = (1/\beta) e^{-n/\beta}$. We added Exponential noise with $\beta$ of 1 and 2. For each case with the added noise we compared the size of the differences in displacement magnitude with the baseline (no extra noise) as well as the distributions and contour maps of principal strains.

Analysis
For each eye, we analyzed the maps of displacements and deformations, as well as the distributions of each of these measures. Herein our focus was the effects of IOP on the LC, and therefore we excluded from analysis the central retinal vessels and tissues exterior to the scleral canal. We excluded regions of low contrast or low signal-to-noise ratio by manually identifying and marking them in each image. We also excluded from analysis any regions that showed any suspicious noise or variations in contrast or intensity that could indicate problems with the stitching. No filtering or averaging was applied. For visualization, but not for analysis, the images were processed to improve brightness and contrast using previously reported algorithms. Image processing, visualization, and analysis were done using open source software (ITK, Fiji, ParaView, and R).
RESULTS

Images of the LC region at different IOPs were obtained (Fig. 1). The images show the pore and trabeculae structure traditionally defined as the LC,9,11,17,29–33 with well-defined trabeculae and canal edges, with pixel intensities spread over the range of the imaging device (the dynamic range).

The image registration technique performed very well to match low and high IOP images (Figs. 2, 3). For the synthetic evaluation cases with no deformation, our technique found the known displacement precisely (to machine zero). This demonstrated that the meshing and boundary conditions do not preclude simple translations. In the rest of the synthetic cases, all results from our technique were very close to the known displacements and deformations, with differences in magnitude of displacement and deformations (for all strain measures) at every point always smaller than 1% (relative). In every case, the technique converged to the correct solution.

Using manual landmark delineations, we found that the mean distance between the landmarks placed at low IOP transformed to the elevated IOP and the landmarks actually placed at elevated IOP were 3.4 pixels, which was smaller than the 4.2 pixels repeatability (mean distance between landmarks as placed in the elevated IOP images). The pixel-by-pixel comparison of image intensities established that the image differences remaining after the registration were much smaller than before registration, accounting for noise and illumination variability (Supplementary Fig. S1).

Applying the registration technique to the experimental data revealed that increases in IOP produced substantial in-plane tissue displacements and deformations (Fig. 4). LC close-ups illustrate various effects of IOP, and demonstrate the complexity of displacements and deformations produced by the increase in IOP. This complexity is also evidenced quantitatively in maps of IOP-induced tissue displacement, and deformation magnitude (Fig. 5). The regions of largest
displacements did not colocalize with the regions of largest deformation. Similarly, the regions of large stretch did not colocalize with large compression or large shear. Interestingly, the deformations were sometimes highly focal and concentrated in regions as small as a few pores (Fig. 6). Maps of image differences before and after registration demonstrate that this was not an artifact of the registration (Fig. 7).

Whereas both eyes of donor 3 had somewhat similar distributions of IOP-induced strain, the distributions for the eyes of donor 4 were quite different. One eye of donor 4 (OS)

Figure 3. Effect of the registration technique on the distribution of differences in image intensity. We compared image intensities (pixel by pixel) between the SHG images acquired at low and elevated IOP before (left) and after (right) applying our image registration technique. Both comparisons above were done after registering the image centers of mass. The panels are density plots, akin to 2D histograms, where the brightness of a region is proportional to the number of cases. Notice the much wider cloud before registration, indicating large differences between images. Please see Supplementary Figure S1 for a binned Bland-Altman plot further illustrating the effects of registration.

Figure 4. Applying the image registration technique. These animations show IOP-induced displacements and deformations produced by the increase in IOP from 10 to 45 mm Hg that are difficult to distinguish otherwise. Note the variations in beam thickness and pore sizes even within small regions. A small vessel can be distinguished in the LC close-up of donor 2 OD (C), which deforms differently from the surrounding tissues. The animations corresponding to (A), (B), (C), and (D) are 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively.
had distributions similar to those of the eyes of donor 3, whereas the other eye (OD) had distributions similar to the OD of donor 2. Some, but not all, of the IOP-induced displacements and deformations were normally distributed (Fig. 8). The distributions are summarized using box plots (Supplementary Fig. S2). The sensitivity analysis demonstrated that the registration technique was highly robust to image noise (Fig. 9).

The tissues suffer the various deformations simultaneously, and therefore it is useful to visualize the effects of IOP using density plots (Fig. 10). The plots are akin to bidimensional histograms, showing darker clouds in the regions with more measurements. The clouds span three quadrants, indicating a rich response to IOP, with multiple modes of deformation. Again, increases in IOP had similar effects on the eyes of donor 3 but rather different on the eyes of donor 4, who suffered much smaller strains for the same increase in IOP. To illustrate

![Figure 5](image-url)

**Figure 5.** Effects of IOP. Displacement (top row) and deformations (middle and bottom rows) induced within the LC of donor 2 OD by an increase in IOP from 10 to 45 mm Hg. Shown are contour levels of displacement magnitude (top left) and displacement vectors on 5000 randomly selected points on the LC colored by the displacement magnitude (top right). The deformations are shown with contour-level plots of the magnitude of in-plane stretch (left column), compression (middle column), and shear (right column). To better appreciate the relationship between the deformations and the structures of the LC we show the contour levels of deformation (middle row) and the LC structure as imaged by SHG colored by the stretch, compression, and shear (bottom row). In-plane displacements are of the order of the anterior-posterior displacements measured by using OCT, as predicted by modeling. Displacements, and compressive and shear deformations were smaller near the main vessels. The regions of largest displacement, stretch, compression, and shear did not colocalize. Shear strains in this eye did not have as high peaks as the stretch or compression.
how the deformation mode varies over the tissues of the LC, we color-coded three modes of deformations (Fig. 11), each one a quadrant in Figure 10. In this eye, the region near the central vessels was under biaxial stretch and regions in the periphery under biaxial compression.

**DISCUSSION**

We present high-resolution (trabecula-scale) eye-specific measurements of the displacements and deformations induced within the LC by an acute increase in IOP. Three main results arise from this work: first, increases from physiologic to elevated IOP produced substantial, and potentially biologically significant, levels of in-plane LC stretch and compression; second, the regions of largest IOP-induced displacement, stretch, compression, and shear did not colocalize; and third, contralateral eyes did not always have more similar responses to IOP than unrelated eyes. Below we consider each of these in turn.

**Main Results**

**Increases From Physiologic to Elevated IOP Produced Substantial, and Potentially Biologically Significant, Levels of In-Plane LC Stretch and Compression.** Although much has been learned about the effects of IOP on the tissues of the ONH, the mechanisms by which the IOP-induced forces and deformations contribute to neural tissue degeneration and loss of vision are still not well understood. These mechanisms have been proposed to involve stretch, shearing, or kinking of the retinal ganglion cell axons, disruption of axoplasmic flow, compromised perfusion, and others. A better characterization of the effects of IOP on the LC using methods such as those presented herein will contribute to evaluation of these hypotheses. Most studies of ONH biomechanics have focused on the IOP-induced anterior-posterior displacements of the LC. We have shown here that the in-plane (lateral) displacements of the LC are also prominent, reaching levels comparable to those that have been shown to be of biological significance to LC astrocytes. Experiments have established that both tissues and individual cells are sensitive to mechanical stimuli, and that their sensitivity varies depending on the mode, magnitude, and temporal profile of the stimulus. Sensitivity includes upregulation and downregulation of hundreds of genes. We have shown that the highly focal effects of IOP observed were not an artifact of the image registration technique.

The complex biomechanical environment within the ONH had been predicted by us and others, and was, therefore, not a surprising finding. It was surprising, however, to find that the shearing strains were sometimes substantially smaller than the tensile or compressive strains. Direct comparison of strain magnitudes may not be appropriate to determine their relative effects, as tissues may be more sensitive to shear than to stretch or compression. Studies of neural tissue damage in the brain and spine have found these tissues particularly sensitive to shearing strains. The potential biological significance of the biomechanical effects of IOP on the tissues of the LC is discussed in more detail elsewhere. Note that in this work we have studied the in-plane deformations, and the three-dimensional (3D) tissue deformations could be different.

**The Regions of Largest IOP-Induced Displacement, Stretch, Compression, and Shear Did Not Colocalize.** Each effect of IOP had a different distribution over the LC, with

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**Figure 6.** Detail of the biomechanical effects of IOP. To better appreciate the local nature of the effects of IOP we show in this figure a detail of the peripheral region of donor 2 OD. The panels show the structure of the LC in the SHG image (top left), as well as the SHG image colored by the magnitudes of displacement (top right), stretch (bottom left), compression (bottom center), or shear (bottom right). Notice the concentration of compressive strains in two pores that appear otherwise unremarkable. These pores are not highlighted by either the displacements or other modes of deformation.
the maximum stretch being the most similar to the displacement magnitude, and the maximum compression the least. Although this seems natural from a theoretical perspective (i.e., there is no reason a priori for the large derivatives of displacement to colocalize with the large values for the displacement), it has been speculated that larger displacements implied larger deformations.9,10,12

Some LC regions were subjected to bi-axial compression. This is interesting because it raises questions on the role of the load-bearing connective tissue fibers within these regions. Collagen-based materials are traditionally conceived as highly efficient in carrying tensile loads, and poor for supporting compression or bending.51 Studies of collagen fibers have shown that lack of tensile loads result in a substantial increase in sensitivity to collagen-digesting enzymes.59 We did not measure the full 3D deformation, and it is possible that the 3D deformation was not only compressive. Nevertheless, the question stands for the horizontal LC trabeculae. We suspect that analysis of other loading conditions, such as intermediate levels of IOP or fluctuations in cerebrospinal fluid pressure,29,31,60–62 will show that these trabeculae are sometimes subjected to in-plane stretch.

Contralateral Eyes Did Not Always Have More Similar Responses to IOP Than Unrelated Eyes. Some eye pairs had similar responses to IOP, whereas others had notably different ones. Thus, it cannot be concluded that the differences in the effects of IOP between eyes of an individual are always smaller than the differences between individuals.

Our results should be interpreted weighing carefully the virtues and limitations of our methods. We have discussed elsewhere those related to SHG imaging of the LC.58,59 Below we summarize earlier discussions, with a focus on the virtues and limitations most relevant to this work. We begin with the virtues: The measurements presented here were obtained from human eyes, and can therefore be more directly related to patients than those obtained from nonhumans, which are commonly used for research on ONH biomechanics. We have presented eye-specific measurements that did not require
assumptions on contralateral similarity or population generalizations. Our results suggest that the assumption of contralateral similarity may not always apply to human eyes. The resolution and level of detail with which we have been able to measure the in-plane IOP-induced displacements and deformations of the tissues of the LC are unprecedented. Our results do not depend on assumptions on boundary conditions or tissue constitutive properties or symmetry that are necessary for numerical or analytical biomechanical models. We measured the effects of IOP on the internal tissues of the ONH, not on the surface, which have been shown to be poor surrogates for the interior. The tissues were not fixed, labeled, or sectioned. Thus, the results are not affected by artifacts that arise during tissue processing, such as shrinkage, warping, or uneven labeling. Our images were not subject to shadows from vessels, pigment, or the sclera that affect other imaging techniques, such as optical coherence tomography (OCT), and that occlude large regions of the LC. Our technique was robust to image noise, both electronic and speckle, as we obtained effectively identical results even for noise levels substantially larger than expected on SHG images of the LC. We measured various modes of in-plane deformation that have been proposed to be critical contributors to tissue sensitivity to IOP, but that are not well understood and remain to be characterized.

Limitations

The study was conducted on postmortem tissues, and we cannot exclude the possibility of some necrotic changes. The properties of the sclera, in particular, are important because they are a major determinant of ONH biomechanics.
FIGURE 9. Sensitivity to noise. The robustness to image noise was evaluated by adding various levels of noise to the images before registration. Electronic noise was approximated by a Gaussian distribution with mean zero and SD of 4%, 8%, 12% (not shown), and 16%. Speckle noise was approximated as described in the text using a negative exponential function producing noise with SD of 12% and 17%. Data in this figure are for the LC of donor 2 OD. The top row shows details of the LC of donor 2 baseline image (left) and with added noise. The middle row shows box plots of the distributions of first and second principal strains (magnitudes). Adding noise had only small effects on the quartiles of the principal strain, although a few differences were noted on the extremes (5th and 95th percentiles). The bottom row shows contour level plots of the differences in magnitude of displacement (absolute values, left side), compression (middle), and stretch (right). Comparing the plots with those in Figure 5 shows that the displacements and deformations were highly robust to noise. As in Figures 5 and 6, the brightness of the contour levels of displacement and deformation is mapped to the intensity of the SHG images, simplifying seeing the tissue structure.
Experiments have suggested that the mechanical properties of the sclera do not change up to 72 hours postmortem. Similarly, the experiments were carried out without a pressurized vascular system, which could have affected the mechanical behavior of the LC. We cannot dismiss the possibility that sectioning the optic nerve to gain access to the LC may have altered LC biomechanics. The results obtained were derived from a two-dimensional (2D) analysis on projected images. Although we were careful to image the LC always in the same direction, some of the more complex effects of the 3D deformations would not be inferred by our analysis and may even result in inaccurate measurements. However, the focal nature of the deformations is inconsistent with whole ONH tilting or rotation. In-plane stretch, compression, or shearing of the retinal ganglion cell axons or of the capillaries supporting the tissues within the canal in the magnitudes we report may be sufficient insult to trigger a detrimental cascade of events. The data acquired through the SHG imaging is 3D, and our technique can be extended to 3D. Hence, analysis in 3D is possible, and is a logical next step.

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**FIGURE 10.** Two-dimensional distributions of principal strains illustrating modes of deformation and contralateral eye similarity/differences. The panels show density plots, with darker regions representing larger LC areas with the corresponding magnitudes of first and second principal strains. By definition, the principal strains are orthogonal and the first principal strain is greater than the second principal strain. Hence there are no measurements below the identity line. Positive strains correspond to tissue stretch and negative strains to tissue compression. Note that our analyses did not enforce conservation of volume. When both principal strains are positive (top right quadrant), the tissue is stretched in all directions (bi-axial stretch). When both principal strains are negative (bottom left quadrant), the tissue is compressed in all directions (bi-axial compression). When one principal strain is positive and the other negative (top left quadrant), the tissue is stretched in one direction and compressed in the other, in a state of shear. The special cases when both principal strains are equal correspond to equi-biaxial stretch, equi-biaxial compression, or the trivial case with no deformation (the origin). Recall that zero deformation does not have to imply zero displacement. Note the high magnitude of the deformations in most eyes, with strains in some small regions reaching into the 30% and 40%, consistent with the plots of Figure 8. Donor 4 OD suffered no bi-axial compressive strains, and was therefore in tension or shear. Thus, the effects of IOP on donor 4 OD were substantially different from those on donor 4 OS, and did not just differ on magnitude.
Our goal was to image the whole LC, imaging the posterior LC is important because experiments and modeling suggest that the posterior LC is an active region, critical for the sensitivity to IOP, remodeling, aging, and progression of glaucoma. Although our test using manually placed landmarks also supports the results, it is our impression that this was helped by a relatively low repeatability in the placement of landmarks in the images at elevated IOP. Repeatable manual placement of landmarks in a complex 3D structure is not a simple task. The challenge of achieving high repeatability in manual landmark placement emphasizes the need for an automated technique for image registration resilient to image variations. Our goal was the development of a robust technique that could be relied on to identify the transformation between the low and elevated IOP images. Hence, we opted for a registration and search strategy that would be resistant to artifacts from noise or uneven illumination. Computational efficiency was secondary to accuracy for the problem at hand, and it is possible that we will have to implement more advanced search strategies, such as genetic algorithms, when applying our technique to 3D analysis. Further improvements for speed may come from more efficient meshing strategies, such as an adaptive meshing approach in which smaller elements are used in structures requiring a fine mesh and larger elements in regions where the structure and deformations so require. It may also be beneficial to tailor the mesh by assigning different mechanical properties to the various tissues, or perhaps assigning properties from experiments. It also may be helpful to weigh the similarity measure to more strongly drive the convergence in the regions of interest. The trabecular nature of the LC provided an excellent structure for registration, rich in natural landmarks (information) for registration of LC trabeculae. Registration within the pores, where the SHG signal was lowest, was difficult, as the

In the process of obtaining the results shown and discussed above, we introduced a technique for image registration that also merits discussion. We verified the technique and evaluated its performance through several tests. In all the tests, the technique was shown as accurate and appropriate for the task. Use of synthetic deformations is a standard technique for verification and has been applied in ocular biomechanics. The evaluations using differences in image intensity and visual examination demonstrated excellent correspondence between the images after registration, supporting our confidence in the results. Although our test using manually placed landmarks also supports the results, it is our impression that this was helped by a relatively low repeatability in the placement of landmarks in the images at elevated IOP. Repeatable manual placement of landmarks in a complex 3D structure is not a simple task. The challenge of achieving high repeatability in manual landmark placement emphasizes the need for an automated technique for image registration resilient to image variations. Our goal was the development of a robust technique that could be relied on to identify the transformation between the low and elevated IOP images. Hence, we opted for a registration and search strategy that would be resistant to artifacts from noise or uneven illumination. Computational efficiency was secondary to accuracy for the problem at hand, and it is possible that we will have to implement more advanced search strategies, such as genetic algorithms, when applying our technique to 3D analysis. Further improvements for speed may come from more efficient meshing strategies, such as an adaptive meshing approach in which smaller elements are used in structures requiring a fine mesh and larger elements in regions where the structure and deformations so require. It may also be beneficial to tailor the mesh by assigning different mechanical properties to the various tissues, or perhaps assigning properties from experiments. It also may be helpful to weigh the similarity measure to more strongly drive the convergence in the regions of interest. The trabecular nature of the LC provided an excellent structure for registration, rich in natural landmarks (information) for registration of LC trabeculae. Registration within the pores, where the SHG signal was lowest, was difficult, as the

Figure 11. Spatial distribution of the modes of deformation of the LC of donor 2. Illustration of the spatial distribution of the three modes of deformation described in Figure 6. The colors represent whether locally the tissue is under bi-axial stretch (red), bi-axial compression (blue), or shear (green). In the plot on the left, the color intensity corresponds to the magnitude of the effect (distance from the origin in Figure 10), such that white represents zero deformation. In the plot on the right we used only red, green, and blue to color the SHG image to illustrate the spatial distribution of the modes, and overlaid the colors on the SHG image to show how the modes of deformation correspond with the LC structure. Note how the region near the vessels is in bi-axial stretch and most of the bi-axial compression occurs in the peripheral LC, often concentrated on specific pores.
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information content and signal to noise were lower than in the beams. Thus, measurements of deformation within the pores should be taken to represent averages from the well-constrained deformations in the neighboring trabeculae. Nevertheless, we should point out that our technique used for registration all the pixels in the LC region of the images. Our technique is not restricted to registering the images at a set of landmarks, or the nodes of a mesh, which may optimize registration at those points, often compromising the registration elsewhere.\textsuperscript{81} Note that the use of a finite element-based technique, with associated mechanical properties and forces producing image deformation, does not mean that we have modeled mechanically the effects of IOP on the tissues. Our method should not be construed as a type of inverse modeling, as the forces deforming the tissues are derived from the similarity neighborhoods and not IOP.

In summary, we presented eye-specific measurements of IOP-induced displacements and deformations of unprecedented resolution obtained from uncut and unfixed human eyes. This is an important step toward understanding the mechanobiological effects of IOP on the tissues of the optic nerve head, and their role in glaucomatous optic neuropathy. We have demonstrated that our technique is robust to electronic and speckle noise. Further work is needed to determine the biological effects of LC tissue stretch and compression of the magnitudes we measured, and if contralateral similarity in sensitivity to IOP is the rule or the exception in humans.

Acknowledgments

We thank Kitware (Clifton Park, NY), the developer of ITK, VTK, and ParaView for making these packages and their source code available.

Supported in part by National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, Maryland) Grants P50-EY008098 and EY019719; Eye and Ear Foundation (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania); and unrestricted grants from Research to Prevent Blindness (New York, New York).

Disclosure: L.A. Sigal, None; J.L. Grimm, None; N.-J. Jan, None; K. Reid, None; D.S. Minckler, None; D.J. Brown, None

References


**APPENDIX**

The similarity measure was the normalized cross-correlation function:

$$
\Pi_\sim = \sum_{X_i \in \Theta(X)} F(X_i) M (X_i + \tilde{u}(X)) 
$$

where $\Theta(X)$ is the neighborhood of a point $X$ at which the similarity is being computed, $F$ and $M$ are the fixed (target) and moving (deforming) images, respectively, and $\tilde{u}$ is the displacement field.

In the image registration process we seek $\tilde{u}$ that minimizes the potential energy $\Pi$ over the domain $\Omega$, as given by:

$$
\Pi = \Pi_R - \Pi_\sim
$$

where $\Pi_\sim$ is defined as above, and

$$
\Pi_R = \int_{\Omega} (\sigma : \varepsilon) d\Omega
$$

The stress ($\sigma$) and strain ($\varepsilon$) are related by $\sigma_{ij} = C_{ijkl} \varepsilon_{kl}$. The tensor $C$ reduces to two coefficients with the simplified materials we assume. The forces guiding the registration (the loads) can be computed with:

$$
\tilde{F}_\sim = \nabla \Pi_\sim
$$

The process of registration proceeds until the potential energy is minimized (at least in a local minimum). In our implementation, the potential energy is minimized with respect to the baseline image (the undeformed configuration), $X$ for each time step.