

1 Full title: Effect of iris pigmentation of blue and brown eyed individuals with European ancestry on
2 ability to see in low light conditions after a short-term dark adaption period.

3 Short title: Iris pigmentation and visual acuity in low light conditions.

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5 Faith Erin Cain¹

6 Kyoko Yamaguchi^{1*}

7 ¹School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science, Liverpool John Moores

8 University, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom

9

10 *Corresponding author. Email: K.Yamaguchi@ljmu.ac.uk

11

12 Abstract

13 The effect of iris depigmentation on ability to see in low light conditions has not been
14 thoroughly investigated as an adaptive advantage that could have contributed to the
15 evolution and persistence of blue eyes in Europe. In this study 40 participants took part in a
16 simple eye test in increasing luminance to examine if there was a difference in capacity to
17 see in low light conditions between blue and brown-eyed individuals after a brief adaptation
18 period. Blue eyed individuals were identified to have significantly better ability to see in
19 lower lighting after a short adaption period than brown eyed individuals making it likely
20 depigmented irises provide an adaptive advantage ($p=0.046$). Superior ability to see in low
21 light conditions could be the result of increased straylight in depigmented irises, which in
22 light luminance is disadvantageous but in low light conditions may provide an advantage.
23 More research is needed to determine the specific association between melanin content
24 and low-light visual acuity. Furthermore, more research is needed to establish that the
25 improved capacity of blue-eyed individuals to see in low light settings seen in this study is
26 attributable to iris pigmentation rather than corresponding pigmentation elsewhere.

27 Introduction

28 The human iris or 'rainbow membrane' is considered the most complex tissue visible on the
29 exterior of the human body with its variation in pattern and colour enabling real time
30 identification [1, 2]. Eye colours include brown, intermediate and blue, however, eye colour
31 variation is almost exclusively found in individuals of European descent [3]. The iris is made
32 up of five cell layers. Melanin, an inert light-absorbing biopolymer pigment associated with
33 human eye colour variation [4], is stored and synthesised by melanosomes within the
34 melanocytes of the iris. Iris colour is determined by the quantity of melanin pigment
35 granules in the anterior border layer and stroma [2, 5-8]. Pigmented irises appear brown due

36 to their abundance of both forms of melanin; eumelanin (brown pigment) and pheomelanin
37 (red-yellow pigment). Whereas blue (depigmented) irises contain very little melanin [4, 7].
38 Melanocyte number and melanosome size are not factors contributing to eye colour as they
39 are constant across eye colours [7, 9].

40 The blue colour of depigmented irises is due to Tyndall Scattering in the relatively melanin
41 free collagen fibrils of the stroma, that scatter the short blue wavelengths of light hitting the
42 iris, demonstrating blue iris colour as a result of structural difference and not chemical
43 composition, such as blue pigment [10]. There has been found to be no significant benefit to
44 having a physician measure eye colour [11]. As such, iris colours can be classified according
45 to systems such as Mackey, Wilkinson, Kearns and Hewitt (2011) nine-category grading
46 system [12]. This system takes into consideration the pattern of pigmentation to assign
47 irises into specific intermediate categories within three broader classification categories.

48 Role of the iris

49 The iris plays a key role in human vision as it dictates the pupil size according to the light in
50 an environment, governing the amount of light let into the eye [13]. Light let through the
51 pupil is focused on the retina to provide vision. Barlow (1972) hypothesised that varying
52 pupil size may facilitate rapid adaption to darkness by reducing rhodopsin bleaching at the
53 retina [14, 15]. Alternatively, Campbell and Gregory (1960) suggest varying pupil size
54 optimizes visual acuity by maximising light entering the pupil in low luminance and reducing
55 loss of contrast by optical aberrations, straylight and diffraction in increased illumination
56 [16]. As the iris is acutely adapted to control light entering the eye to provide visual acuity in
57 a variation of illuminance levels, it would be logical that iris pigmentation has adapted to
58 facilitate this function. However, iris pigmentation has been found to be independent to

59 pupil size. Iris pigmentation was investigated as a factor affecting pupil size in a sample of 91
60 white subjects and it was concluded that iris pigmentation does not affect pupil size [13].

61 Iris depigmentation is only significantly observed in European populations with the highest
62 frequency in the most northerly latitudes of Europe, which would have been part of the
63 Eurasian tundra belt 10,000 years ago [3, 17]. Depigmentation of the iris to give rise to blue
64 eye colouring has first appeared in the human population in Europe by point mutation in
65 *HERC2* which reduced the activity of the *OCA2* promoter [18]. This A to G mutation at
66 rs12913832 in *HERC2* is the main determinant of blue-eye colour [19] signature of selection
67 has been found for the derived G allele that is associated with blue eye colour [20]. Despite
68 the evidence for positive selection on blue iris colour in Europe, it is still unclear why blue
69 iris colour emerged and persisted within the European population as there are contrasting
70 arguments suggesting adaptive advantages of both pigmented and depigmented irises.

71 Selection for iris depigmentation

72 In the Eurasian tundra belt, depigmented irises could have been selected for through rare-
73 colour advantage among females from increased pressure of sexual selection due to a
74 skewed operational sex ratio (OSR) caused by high mortality in males [17]. Additionally,
75 individuals with depigmented irises could have been selected for through reduced
76 susceptibility to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a recurring mood fluctuation with a
77 seasonal pattern. The higher rates of SAD in brown-eyed individuals can result in suicidal
78 levels of depression and reduced offspring production by social withdrawal, providing blue-
79 eyed individuals with an advantage [21]. Selection for individuals with depigmented irises
80 through rare colour advantage and reduced susceptibility to SAD could have contributed to
81 the emergence and persistence of blue eye colour in Europe.

82 Selection against iris depigmentation

83 Allowing more amount of light to enter the eye could act as a disadvantage by increasing
84 susceptibility to disability glare. Blue/green-eyed individuals were found to have an
85 increased straylight measure value compared to brown eyed individuals, increasing their
86 disability glare [22]. Vos (2003) defined it as the “the masking effect caused by light
87 scattered in the ocular media which produces a veiling luminance over the field of view”
88 [23]. Disability glare could provide a selective disadvantage by impeding hunting abilities,
89 particularly with light reflecting off snow in the Eurasian tundra. Furthermore, iris
90 depigmentation could be disadvantageous through slower reaction times of motor response,
91 to both auditory and visual stimuli, than individuals with pigmented irises. Landers *et al.*
92 (1976) found mean reaction time to be 23 milliseconds faster in individuals with dark brown
93 irises compared to those with blue irises in a sample of 48 Caucasian men and women [10].
94 Iris pigmentation is believed to indicate melanin in other parts of the body, for example
95 Neuromelanin, which has a function in the speed of nerve impulses [10, 24]. This is thought
96 to be the mechanism behind people with pigmented irises having faster reaction times than
97 those with depigmented irises. Slower reaction times and increased disability glare are
98 disadvantages of iris depigmentation which could contribute to selection against iris
99 depigmentation.

100 The study by Bartholomew *et al.* (2016) found no significant difference in scotopic (night)
101 visual acuity between individuals with blue-grey, green-hazel or brown-black after full dark
102 adaption [25]. However, 52.7% of participants in the study were not of European ancestry
103 but they did not statistically control for ancestry when testing the effect of iris colour on
104 visually acuity or contrast sensitivity. It would be worth focusing on participants with
105 European ancestry only to minimise the influence of genetic background. Also, their study

106 examined visual acuity after complete adaption to low light conditions. Therefore, effect of
107 iris pigmentation on visual acuity after a short adaption period warrants further
108 investigation [26].

109 The aim of our study is to test a hypothesis that the ability to see in low light conditions was
110 a selective pressure for depigmentation of irises in Europe by examining if pigmented and
111 depigmented irises of living human differ in their capability to see in low light conditions
112 after a short adaption period. This will be accomplished by measuring the capacity to read
113 printed codes in steadily increasing light after a short adaption period. Improved visual
114 acuity in low light settings after a short adaption period could provide a selective advantage
115 when foraging between dark caves and daylight. The results of this study could help us to
116 better understand the selective pressures acting upon the population of the Eurasian tundra
117 belt during the emergence of depigmented irises.

118 **Methods**

119 **Study Design**

120 In this study, the ability of brown and blue eyes individuals to see in low light after a short
121 dark adaptation period was compared by analysing participants' ability to read codes in
122 increasing light . The light level at which the participant could read the code was recorded
123 and compared between blue and brown eyed individuals. Data was collected at the John
124 Moore's University Student Life Building between January and August 2022.

125 **Participants**

126 Participants were recruited in line with the LJMU REC guidance following ethical approval by
127 BESREC (approval reference number: 2021/BES/023) between January 2022 and July 2022.
128 The study was concluded to be minimal risk as there was no threat to the psychological or
129 physical wellbeing, values or dignity of the participant. Periods of time spent in darkness

130 were kept minimal and intermittent to reduce potential distress to the participants. To
131 maintain the investigation as minimal risk participants were not asked medical history, age,
132 sex or other personal questions. Each participant was assigned a participant ID composed as
133 a P and a number (P01 for example) to anonymise the data. Personally identifiable
134 information was obtained in order to contact potential participants but no identifiable
135 information was collected beyond this point and it is not possible to link any study data to
136 participants. In advertisements and information sheets potential participants were asked
137 only to apply if they meet the following criteria:

- 138 • Between 18-30 years old
- 139 • Of European descent
- 140 • Have blue or brown eye colour
- 141 • No history of laser eye surgery

142 Informed consent was attained from each participant by written consent form on the day of
143 the test. A total of 40 individuals participated in this study. A larger sample size would have
144 strengthened the results however there was not sufficient participant interest for this.

145 Glasses/contact lens wearers

146 The effect of wearing glasses/contact lenses on ability to see in low light conditions was
147 explored as an independent variable because there was an unequal distribution of
148 glasses/contact lens wearers between the eye colours. It was noted if the participant wore
149 glasses or made the investigator aware they wore contact lenses. During the test, these
150 individuals were required to wear their glasses or contact lenses. The procedure for
151 glasses/contact lens wearers was the same as the test for participants who did not wear
152 contact lenses or glasses.

153 Light Levels

154 The light levels were adjusted using the light box. The light box is a 29.5×25.0×18.0 cm
155 cardboard box with 25 holes in the lid and contained 120 Lezonic string LED lights (Aaronic
156 Tech Co., Ltd; Xiamen City, China). Each bulb was 3.6 watts . The light level was increased
157 between each level by pulling another bulb up through the top of the box. The first light
158 level was complete darkness with no lights exposed from the box in the light proof test
159 room (40.55cm³).Light was prevented from leaving through the unoccupied holes in the box
160 lid.

161 Lux was measured using the HoldPeak HP-881D Digital LUX Meter (HoldPeak instruments).
162 The lux at the code at each light level was measured with the sensor of the luxmeter
163 132.5cm from the ground under the same conditions as the participant set up shown in Fig
164 1.

165 **Fig 1. Participant set up for code reading test. A) birds eye view, B) side view: LB= light box**

166 Table 1 displays the average lux after 3 repetitions at the code based on the number of
167 lights exposed from the box. A regular increase in lux was observed as more bulbs are
168 added, each contributing an average of 0.068 lx ($R^2=0.9983$, Fig 2).

169

170 **Table 1. Average Lux output of the light box measured on a vertical plane at the code after**
171 **3 repeats with an increasing number of bulbs.**

172

No. of Bulbs	Average Lux (lx)	Standard deviation	Lux per bulb (lx)
0	0.01	0.00	0
1	0.05	0.01	0.04

2	0.13	0.00	0.08
3	0.19	0.00	0.06
4	0.28	0.01	0.09
5	0.32	0.00	0.04
6	0.43	0.01	0.11
7	0.48	0.01	0.05
8	0.50	0.00	0.03
9	0.56	0.01	0.06
10	0.68	0.01	0.12
11	0.75	0.01	0.06
12	0.79	0.01	0.04
13	0.84	0.01	0.05
14	0.94	0.00	0.10
15	0.99	0.02	0.05
16	1.12	0.01	0.13
17	1.17	0.00	0.05
18	1.22	0.01	0.05
19	1.30	0.01	0.07
20	1.38	0.01	0.09
21	1.42	0.03	0.04
22	1.50	0.01	0.07
23	1.56	0.01	0.06
24	1.61	0.01	0.06
25	1.67	0.01	0.06

Weighted average lux per bulb:	0.07
SD lux per bulb:	0.03

173

174 **Fig 2. Average lux according to the number of lights exposed from the light box after 3**

175 **repetitions.** The graph shows an increase in the average lux at the code with the number of

176 lights exposed from the light box ($y=0.0684x - 0.0809$, $R^2=0.9983$).

177 Procedure

178 The process of the test is illustrated in Fig 3. Each test took approximately 30 minutes.

179 During this time the participants had the test explained to them, signed consent forms, had

180 their iris photographed and undertook the test.

181 During the test, participants were asked to read a code on the adjacent wall 3 meters from

182 them with the light box on the floor 120cm from the wall with the code, as illustrated by Fig

183 1. The distance from the code was chosen to be 3 meters following the Pelli-Robson
184 contrast sensitivity chart test that uses the identification of letters to test visual acuity [27].
185 The test was comprised of 30 seconds of full light (with the main ceiling lights of the room
186 on) followed by 30 seconds of the next light level (with the main ceiling lights of the room
187 off) controlled by the light box. As complete rod and cone adaption to darkness after bright
188 lights can take between 20 to 40 minutes, this study does not compare complete dark
189 adaption between blue and brown eye colours [28-31].

190 Before the first light level each participant went through a preliminary 30 seconds of
191 complete darkness followed by 30 seconds of full light. During the 30 seconds of full light
192 the investigator would prepare the light box for the next light level by exposing another
193 bulb from the top of the light box. Across the lux measurements the lights were exposed
194 from the centre outward in the regular pattern shown in Fig 4. During the following 30
195 seconds of the next light level the investigator secured the code 122cm off the ground and
196 the participant was asked to look ahead at the code and particularly avoid looking at the
197 light box to avoid disability glare. When prompted by the investigator at the end of the 30
198 seconds the participant would be asked to read what they could see of the code which was
199 noted by the investigator. The code was then removed from the wall before starting the
200 next 30 seconds of full light to prepare for the next light level. Also, during the 30 seconds of
201 full light, note was taken if the participant had been able to correctly read the code in the
202 pervious light level. Once the participant had correctly read the code the test was continued
203 for three more light levels before the participant was informed the test was complete. The
204 variable used in this study is the light level score which corresponds to the number of
205 exposed lights at the light level they were first able to read the code.

206 **Fig 3. Diagram of the process during the participant test (s=seconds).**

207 **Fig 4. Diagram showing the pattern of bulb exposure from the top of the light box.**

208 Codes

209 Each light level had a specific code for the participants to read. Each code was composed of
210 five randomly generated capital letters in Calibri font size 190 in black (RGB: 0,0,0). The
211 letters were horizontal on A4 dark grey paper (RGB: 51,51,51). In order to get the code
212 correct the participant had to read all five letters in order.

213 Iris Classification

214 Irises were photographed with the participant stood against a white wall. Photographs were
215 taken on an iPhone XR (Apple Inc.) back camera using flash from approximately 6 cm away
216 from the eye. To remove subjectivity from determining iris colour, six colour samples were
217 taken from the iris photos and their RGB values were analysed using the eyedropper tool of
218 Photoshop, version 3.0 (Adobe Systems, 2021). Average RGB values for the peripupillary ring
219 area and periphery iris area (overall eye colour) were generated from three colour samples
220 from each area in a triangle shape (Fig 5). The RGB value (Red, Green or Blue) present in the
221 highest quantity reflected the unobjective colour of that part of the iris. Brown eye colour
222 was represented by red, blue eye colour by blue, and green intermediate colours by green.
223 Irises were categorised by the colours of these areas according to Mackey *et al.*'s (2011) Iris
224 colour classification grading system [12].

225 **Fig 5. The six colour sampling points on the iris. The RGB values of the six colour samples**
226 **from the iris photos were analysed with the eyedropper tool of Photoshop, version 3.0**
227 **(Adobe Systems).**

228 Statistical analysis

229 Descriptive statistics of the participants score were calculated using Microsoft Excel version
230 2108 .

231 Outliers were identified within each eye colour group using the outlier labelling rule with
232 the standard 1.5 multiplier suggest by Tukey (1977) [32]. The outlier labelling rule was also
233 used with a 2.2 multiplier as recommended by Hoaglin and Iglewicz (1987) for more
234 accurate outlier labelling in smaller sample sizes [33].

235 Due to small sample size nonparametric tests were employed. SPSS Statistics version 27
236 (SPSS, IBM) was first used to conduct a test of homogeneity to ensure the data fits the
237 assumptions of Mann–Whitney U; same distribution of data across blue and brown eye
238 colour. A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to compare differences in light level scores
239 between blue and brown eye colours, again using SPSS. A second Mann–Whitney U test was
240 conducted to compare differences in light level scores between glasses and contact lens
241 wearers and non- wearers.

242 Results

243 Iris colour analysis

244 The iris of one participant did not fit into blue or brown eye colour groups by Mackey *et al.*'s
245 (2011) Iris colour classification grading system [11]. This participant was excluded from
246 further analysis. Therefore, self-reported eye colour was 97.5% (39/40) consistent with
247 colour analysis. The results of colour analysis are displayed in Table 2 . The original data are
248 available in S1. Within the sample used in this study, 36% (14/39) of participants had brown
249 eyes and 64% (25/39) had blue eyes. The colour category with lowest and highest mean
250 light level score was light blue and brown with peripheral green respectively.

251 **Table 2. Eye colour classification category according to Mackey et al.'s (2011) and mean**
 252 **light level score (number of bulbs) of participants.**

	Eye colour classification category	Quantity	Mean Light level score
Blue (25)	Light Blue	12	10.08
	Dark Blue	8	10.5
	Blue with peripuillary brown	5	10.2
Brown (14)	Brown with peripheral green	2	13
	Light Brown	5	12
	Dark Brown	7	11.71

253 Light level score according to eye colour

254 Descriptive statistics of the light level score according to eye colour are found in Table 3. The
 255 mean light level score of brown eyed individuals was 1.76 light levels (0.12lx) greater than
 256 blue eyed individuals and 1.13 (0.08lx) greater than the combined mean. Blue eyed light
 257 level scores ranged from 7 to 17, which is corresponding to an average lux of 0.43lx to 1.12
 258 lx at the code. Brown eyed light level scores ranged from 8 to 19, which is corresponding to
 259 an average lux of 0.48 lx to 1.22 lx at the code.

260 **Table 3. Descriptive statistic of light level scores (number of bulbs) of blue, brown and**
 261 **combined groupings.**

	Sample		
	Blue	Brown	Combined
Mean	10.24	12	10.87
Standard Error	0.55	0.8	0.47
Median	10	11.5	10
Mode	9	11	9
Standard Deviation	2.76	2.99	2.93
Range	10	11	12
Minimum	7	8	7
Maximum	17	19	19

Count	25	14	39
Percentage	64	36	100

262

263 The light level scores of P26 (Score=17) and P27 (Score=17) were identified as outliers using
 264 the outlier labelling rule with a multiplier of 1.5. However, they were not identified as
 265 outliers using a multiplier of 2.2 that is suitable for a small sample size. Using a 1.5 or 2.2
 266 multiplier, no brown-eyed outliers were found.

267 The test of homogeneity of variance showed equal distribution demonstrating the data fit
 268 the assumptions of the Mann-Whitney U test ($p=0.651$). The Mann-Whitney U test revealed
 269 a significant difference in light level score between brown eyed individuals (Mean=12
 270 bulbs/0.82lx) and blue-eyed individuals (Mean= 10.24 bulbs/ 0.70lx; $U=107.5$, $n_1=14$, $n_2=25$,
 271 $p=0.046$). The results of the Mann-Whitney U test remained significant after the exclusion of
 272 the two outliers ($U=81.5$, $p=0.012$). Distribution of participants light level score according to
 273 eye colour can be seen in Fig 6.

274 **Fig 6. Distribution of participants light level score according to eye colour.**

275 Light level score according to whether glasses/contact lenses are worn
 276 Within this study the percentage of glasses wearers was 1.43% higher in brown eyed
 277 individuals ($3/14 = 21.43\%$) than brown eyed individuals ($5/25 = 20.0\%$) (S1 Table)..

278 **Table 4. Descriptive statistic of light level scores of glasses/contact lens wearers, non-**
 279 **glasses/contact lens wearers and combined.**

	Sample		
	Wearers	Non-wearers	Combined
Mean	11.5	10.7	10.87
Standard Error	1.25	0.5	0.47
Median	10.5	10	10

Mode	9	9	9
Standard Deviation	3.55	2.8	2.93
Range	9	12	12
Minimum	8	7	7
Maximum	17	19	19
Count	8	31	39
Percentage	21	79	100

280

281 Descriptive statistics of the light level scores according to whether glasses/contact lenses
282 are worn are found in Table 4. The mean light level score of wearers was 0.8 (0.05lx) light
283 levels greater than non-wearers and 0.63 (0.04lx) greater than the combined mean. Non-
284 wearers light level scores ranged from 7 to 19, which is corresponding to an average lux of
285 0.43lx to 1.22lx at the code. Wearers light level scores ranged from 8 to 17, which is
286 corresponding to an average lux of 0.48lx to 1.12lx at the code.

287 A Man-Whitney U test revealed insignificant differences in the light level score of
288 glasses/contact wearers (Mean=11.50 bulbs/ 0.79lx) and non-wearers (Mean=10.70 bulbs/
289 0.73lx; U=111.5 p=0.661). This justified the inclusion of glasses and contact lens wearers in
290 the investigation into iris pigmentation. The test of homogeneity of variance showed equal
291 distribution demonstrating the data fit the assumptions of the Mann-Whitney U test
292 (p=0.651).

293 Discussion

294 The results of this study reveal that blue-eyed individuals can read codes in significantly less
295 light than brown-eyed individuals, with blue-eyed individuals reading the code with an
296 average of 10.24 (0.70lx) light exposed from the light box compared to 12 (0.82lx) lights
297 exposed for brown-eyed individuals (p=0.046). This infers blue-eyed individuals have an
298 ability to see in low light conditions that is superior to that of brown eyed individuals.

299 Providing blue eyed individuals with a selective advantage could be the basis of
300 depigmented irises become a prominent trait within the European population.

301 Increased straylight in blue irises as a potential advantage in low light conditions

302 As previously stated, straylight is thought to cause a visual disadvantage since it reduces
303 contrast and commonly manifests itself as disability glare [22, 34, 35]. However, this may
304 not be the case in low light, as demonstrated by our finding that blue-eyed people have a
305 better ability to see in low light after a short adaption period. Straylight is dependent on iris
306 pigmentation as Ijspeert *et al.* (1990) found blue eyes to have a mean straylight measure of
307 0.949 across three glare angles compared to brown eyes with a straylight measure of 0.858
308 [22]. In fact, brown irises transmit approximately 100 times less light than blue irises [35]. It
309 could be hypothesised that, in brown eyed individuals, melanin in the anterior border layer
310 and stroma of the iris absorbs straylight that would otherwise pass through the pupil and
311 cast a veil of light on the retina. For blue eyed individuals, in low light conditions after a
312 short adaption period, this veil of light contributes enough luminance to provide blue-eyed
313 individuals with a visual advantage to make out shapes. This phenomenon is demonstrated
314 by blue-eyed individuals being able to read codes in less light than brown eyed individuals in
315 our study. We demonstrated that illumination is the limiting factor of visual acuity in low
316 light conditions, where blue eyed individuals have the advantage. However, contrast
317 sensitivity, hindered by straylight, is the limiting factor which provides brown eyed
318 individuals with the visual advantage in average to high light conditions [36].

319 Sturm and Larsson (2009) speculated that iris pigmentation influences visual acuity in low
320 light conditions [8]. The findings of our study are contradictory to this as blue and brown-
321 eyed individuals had significantly different light level scores ($p=0.046$). It has been reported
322 that brown irises transmit significantly less straylight than blue irises and are less susceptible

323 to disability glare [22, 26, 35]. Since our study hypothesises that increased light level score
324 (needing more light to read the code) is the product of decreased straylight, the findings of
325 our study are consistent with the findings of the previous studies [22, 26, 35].

326 Influence of glasses and contact lens

327 To justify the inclusion of glasses/contact lens wearers in the sample comparing light level
328 score between brown and blue-eyed individuals, the light level score between
329 glasses/contact lens wearers and non-wearers was investigated. Because the number of
330 individuals who use glasses or contact lenses was not evenly distributed between blue and
331 brown eyed individuals, this investigation was necessary (Blue=25% and Brown=27.27%). If
332 wearing glasses/contact lenses affects light level score, an unequal proportion of
333 glasses/contact lens wearers may cause one eye colour to be influenced more than the
334 other. According to Van Der Meulen *et al.* (2010), rigid contact lenses cause more straylight
335 during and after use. According to the concept that more straylight leads to a lower light
336 level score, wearing glasses or contact lenses could lower the light level score [37]. Also,
337 glasses and contact lenses have blue light filters which could affect light level score, which
338 was not controlled in this study. However, a study by Hammond (2015) suggested no effect
339 of blue light filtering lenses on visual acuity [38]. Also, our study shows no significant
340 difference ($p=0.661$) in light level score between glasses and contact lens wearers and non-
341 wearers. In light of this, the current study warrants the inclusion of glasses/contact lens
342 wearers in the investigation into ability to see in low light conditions between blue and
343 brown eye colour.

344 Other factors

345 As this is a preliminary study with a small sample size, we have only recruited individuals
346 with blue or brown eye colours. In the future, a study with a larger sample including

347 intermediate eye colours and measuring melanin content will be able to provide further
348 insight into the direct relationship between iris pigmentation and ability to see in low light
349 conditions.

350 Apart from iris pigmentation, other factors could have contributed more to visual acuity. For
351 example, diet has been linked to vision in darkness, particularly the effect of malnutrition
352 and vitamin A deficiency [39]. It is not unexpected that vitamin A plays a role in night vision
353 as it is a precursor of rhodopsin; a photopigment found in rods within the retina [40]. A
354 questionnaire on diet could be added to the procedure to control for the effect of dietary
355 factors. Further study is required to isolate pigmentation of the iris as the source of
356 variation in ability to see in low light conditions observed in this study.

357 Conclusion

358 The findings of this study show that after a short adaptation period, blue eyed individuals
359 have greater capacity to see in low light conditions than brown eyed individuals. The
360 advantage of greater visual acuity in low light conditions after a short adaption period could
361 have been the basis of the emergence and persistence of blue eye colour within the
362 European population. Through comparison with other studies comparing blue and brown
363 irises, increased visibility in low light conditions could be the product of increased straylight
364 in blue irises which casts a veil of light over the retina. Further study is need to fully
365 understand the relationship between the iris pigmentation and ability to see in low light
366 conditions.

367 Supporting Information

368 **S1 Table. Recorded number of light bulbs required to read a code by participants with**
369 **their eye colours and glasses wearing status.** The 'specific eye colour' was determined

370 using a photograph of each participant's iris by Mackey et al.'s (2011) Iris colour
371 classification grading system [12]

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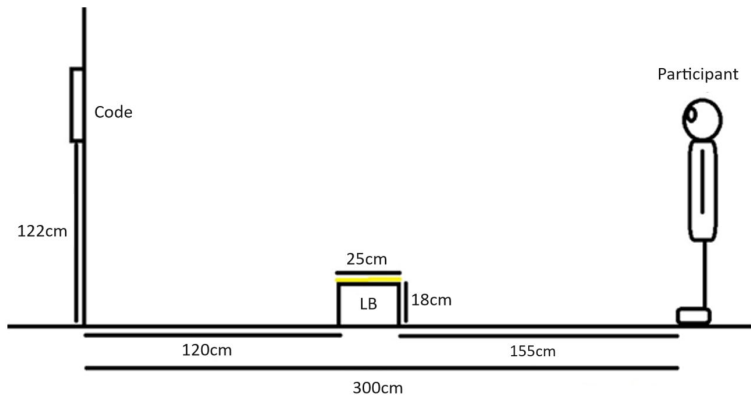
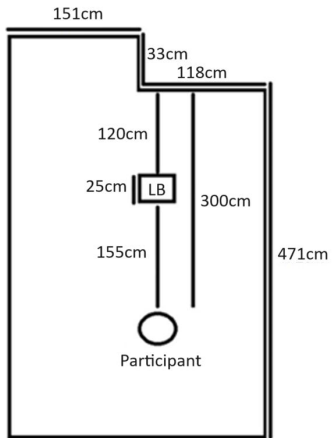
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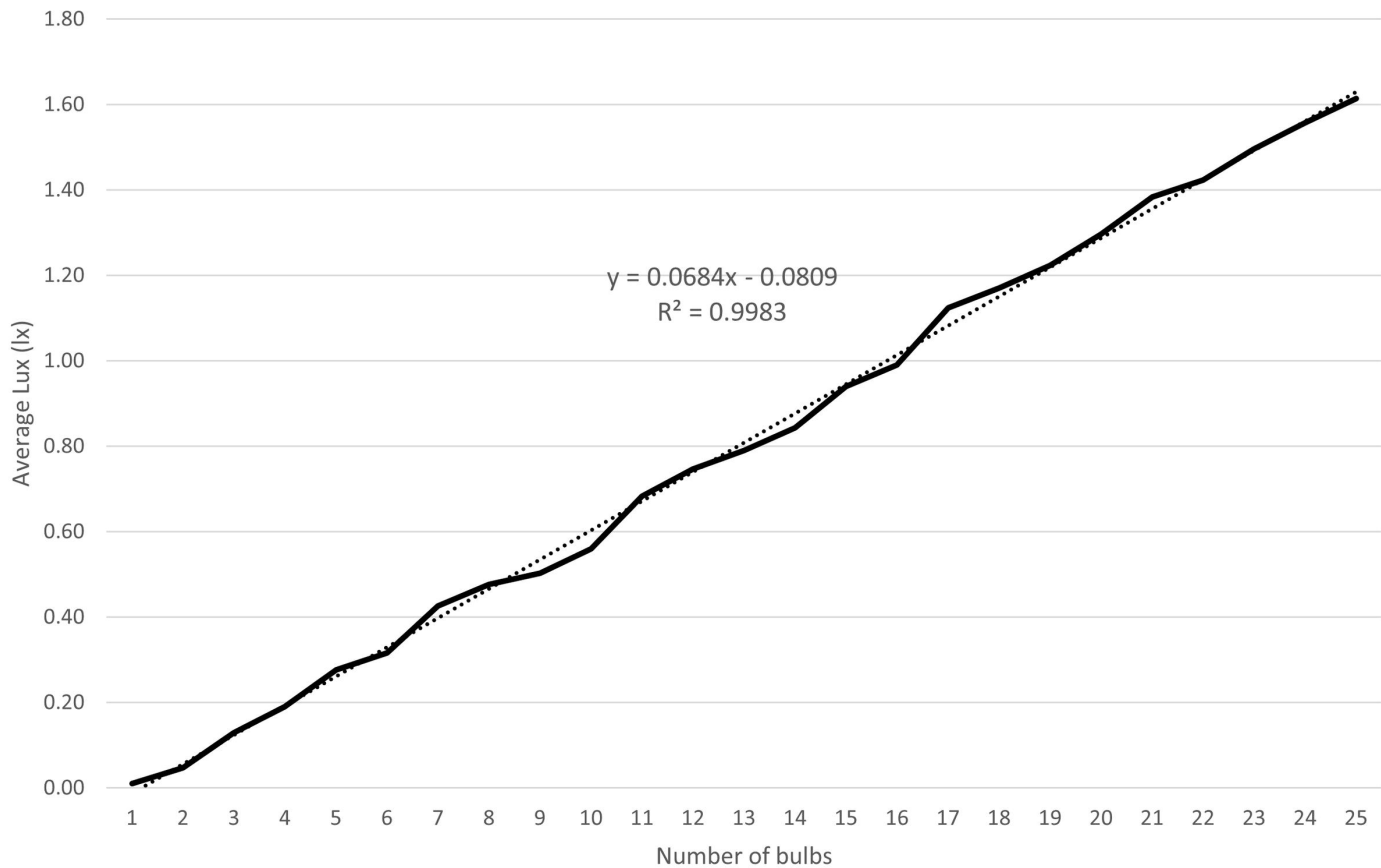
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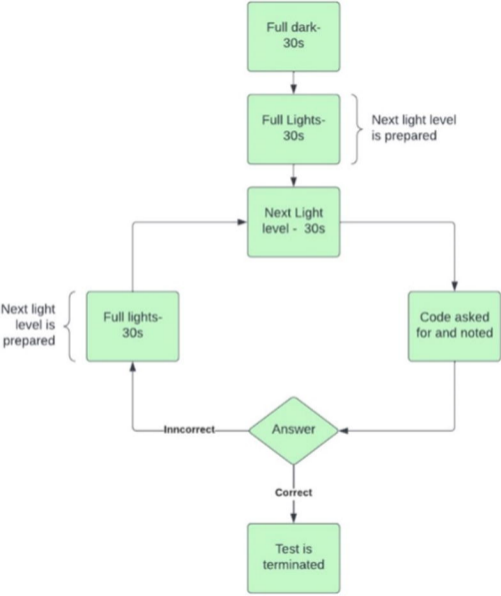
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LB= Light Box

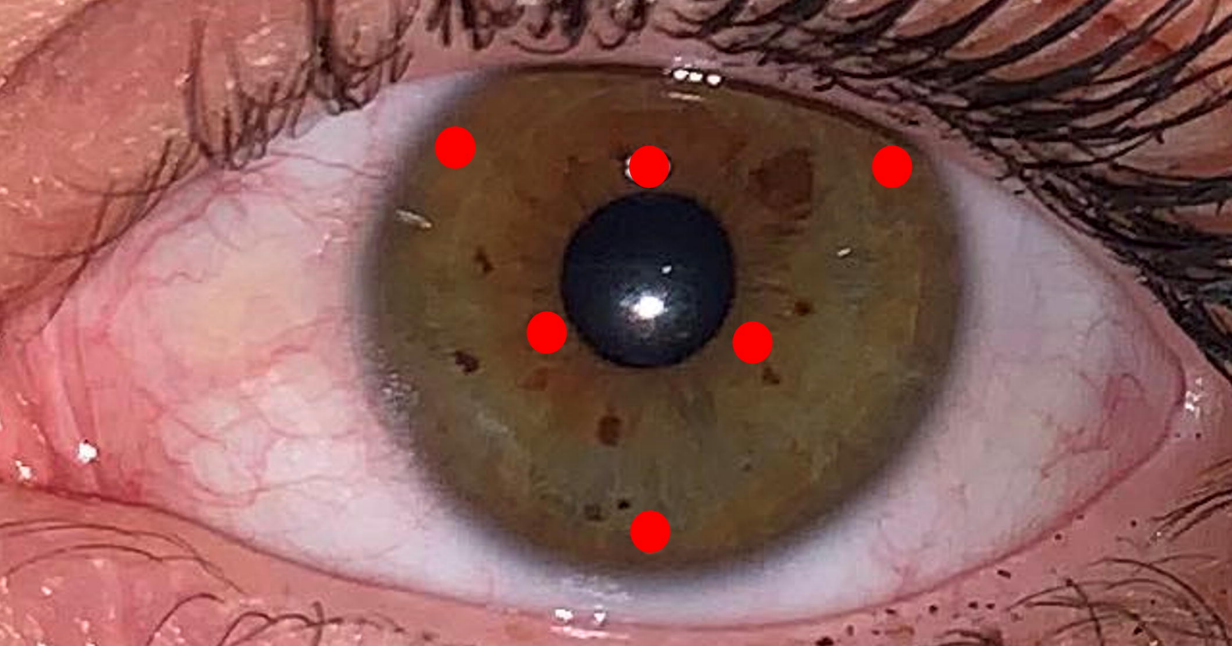
Average lux accordig to the number of lights exposed from the lightbox





A 5x5 grid of 25 numbered circles. Each circle contains a number from 1 to 25. The numbers are arranged in the following order from top-left to bottom-right:

22	18	10	14	24
20	8	2	6	16
13	5	1	4	12
17	7	3	9	19
25	15	11	21	23



No. Participants

