





Beauty is in the iris: Study finds bigger irises make people more attractive

June 13 2024, by Erin Johnson

	Pupil Size	
List	Constricted	Dilated
A		
B		

Examples of stimuli (attractive female) used in Experiment 1. Credit: *Cognition* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.cognition.2024.105842

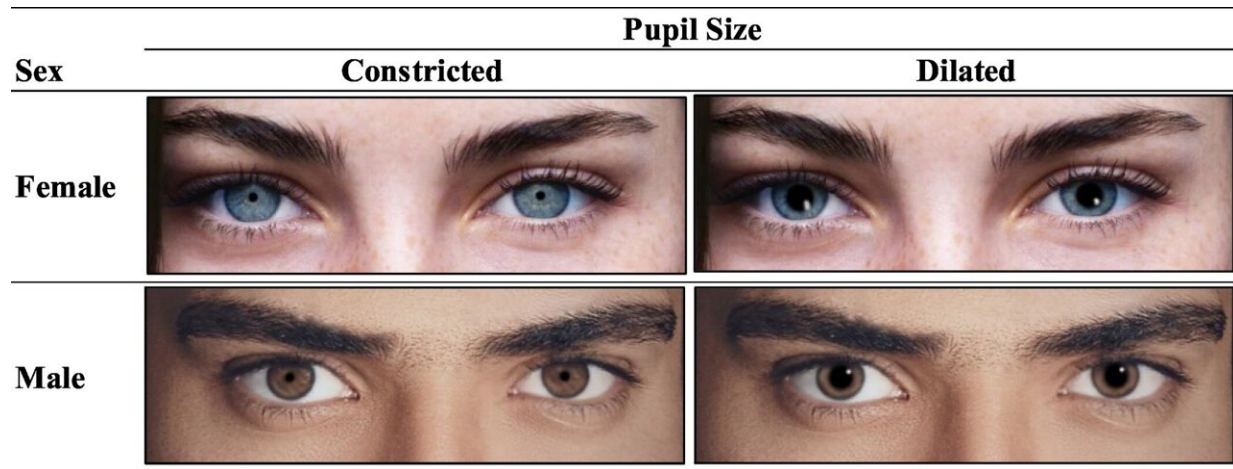
New research by Zachary Estes, Professor of Marketing at Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), as well as academics from the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, and the University of California at Los Angeles, explored how people's eyes affect their perceived attractiveness.

The paper, "[Beauty is in the iris: Constricted pupils \(enlarged irises\) enhance attractiveness](#)," is published online in *Cognition*.

The researchers conducted six experiments testing the effects of [pupil](#) size on attractiveness. The pupil is the dark circle in the center of the eye, and the iris is the colored ring around it. The researchers showed nearly 3,000 participants headshots and images of blue or brown eyes from males and females. These images were edited so that one version showed the eyes with constricted pupils and in another version, dilated pupils.

The participants were then asked to evaluate how attractive the faces were. The study found that the faces were judged more attractive with smaller pupils, which show larger irises.

The experiments also tested whether participants found the faces with larger irises more attractive because they were more colorful, or because they made the eyes appear brighter. Results were the same when participants judged black and white images of people with dilated and constricted pupils, proving that the effect is not due to the color of the iris.



Examples of stimuli used in Experiment 2. Credit: *Cognition* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.cognition.2024.105842

Professor Zachary Estes, of Bayes Business School (formerly Cass) at City, University of London, said, "For more than 50 years, research has failed to identify whether people appear more attractive with dilated (enlarged) pupils or constricted (smaller) pupils. Our research reveals that constricted pupils enhance [physical attractiveness](#) by making the eyes appear brighter.

"Appearance isn't everything, of course, but sometimes we do want to look our best. Our research reveals that people appear more attractive when their irises are bigger, showing more brightness in their eyes."

Dr. Maria Trupia, a postdoctoral scholar from the UCLA Anderson School of Management, added, "Previous research has shown that physical attractiveness influences a wide range of life outcomes, and scholars have spent decades identifying the characteristics that affect perceived attractiveness. Our research uncovers a novel attribute: pupil size."

Dr. Martina Cossu from the University of Amsterdam concluded, "During the Renaissance period, women used to apply drops of "belladonna" herb to increase pupil dilation and appear more attractive. Almost 400 years later, our study shows that they overlooked the fact that bright eyes with constricted pupils appear more attractive than dilated pupils."

More information: Martina Cossu et al, Beauty is in the iris: Constricted pupils (enlarged irises) enhance attractiveness, *Cognition* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cognition.2024.105842](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2024.105842)

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