

Is Serena Williams angry or ecstatic? Context is everything in reading facial emotion, say psychologists

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The Daily Mail:

With her mouth wide open, teeth bared and eyes pressed tensely shut, tennis star Serena Williams looks a picture of pure anger in this close-up photograph.

Has she just lost the final of a Grand Slam? Or perhaps had to withdraw through injury?

Or is she, in fact, ecstatically happy?

When the image is widened out to include her body language the answer is made more clear.

The pumped fist is an indicator of her happiness and, as it happens, this photograph was actually taken at the moment she defeated her sister Venus at the 2008 U.S. Open.

The difficulty of identifying her emotion in the close-up photo occurs because context is vital to interpreting facial emotion, according to a new psychology paper.

‘Humans are exquisitely sensitive to context, and that can very dramatically shape what is seen in a face,’ says psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard School of Medicine.

‘Strip away the context, and it is difficult to accurately perceive emotion in a face.’

Read the whole story: [The Daily Mail](#)