

# VOICE Initiative: Biomedical Research

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# Introduction

**Project Description:** Today, non-verbal children are believed to have minimal intelligence and cognitive abilities. We are aiming to prove this to be false. The Voice Project initiative aims to reverse biases in academia and show that communication is still possible without words or signs. Our current work consists of integrating computer software with biomedical engineering and neurology to explore non-verbal and non-symbolic communication through brain monitoring applications.

## Research

Foundational Emotions: Fear, Sadness, Joy/Happiness

### 1. Heart Rate (HR)

**Fear:** Heart rate tends to increase with fear due to the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (the fight-or-flight response). The increase in heart rate is part of the body's preparation to face a perceived threat.

- **Range:** 90-120 bpm (can possibly be higher in intense fear situations)

**Sadness:** Heart rate may decrease in response to sadness. The parasympathetic nervous system (which calms the body) might be more active during this emotional state, leading to slower heart rate and reduced arousal.

- **Range:** 60-80 bpm

**Joy:** Joy or happiness often leads to an increase in heart rate, though the increase might be less intense than with fear. Positive emotions tend to activate the sympathetic nervous system, but in a more moderate way than fear.

- **Range:** 80-100 bpm

### 2. Blood Pressure

**Fear:** Blood pressure typically rises with fear due to the body's stress response. This happens as the body prepares for action—either fight or flight—by sending more blood to muscles and vital organs.

**Range:** Systolic 120-140 mmHg, Diastolic 80-90 mmHg

**Sadness:** Blood pressure might either remain steady or slightly decrease with sadness. A prolonged emotional state of sadness can lead to lower overall arousal, including a reduction in blood pressure.

**Range:** Systolic 100-120 mmHg, Diastolic 60-80 mmHg

**Joy:** Blood pressure can increase with joy, particularly if the emotional

state is intense or accompanied by physical activity (e.g., laughing or jumping around). However, the increase is typically less pronounced than with fear.

**Range:** Systolic 110-130 mmHg, Diastolic 70-85 mmHg

### **3. Skin Conductance (Galvanic Skin Response or GSR)**

**Fear:** Skin conductance (which measures sweating) increases during fear. Fearful emotions trigger the release of adrenaline, which activates sweat glands, leading to higher skin conductance.

**Sadness:** Skin conductance can decrease during sadness. When experiencing sadness, there's often less physiological arousal and lower sweating.

**Joy:** Joy may also increase skin conductance, but generally not as much as fear. Positive emotions can lead to mild increases in sweat production, but the response is less intense compared to fear.

### **4. Respiration Rate**

**Fear:** Breathing rate typically increases with fear. Rapid, shallow breathing is a common response as the body prepares for quick action.

**Range:** 18-30 breaths per minute

**Sadness:** Sadness can be associated with slower and deeper breathing, as it is often linked to a more subdued and low-energy state.

**Range:** 12-18 breaths per minute

**Joy:** Joy is often marked by faster, shallow breaths, especially if the person is laughing or excited. However, in a calmer state of joy, breathing might be normal or even deeper than usual.

**Range:** 15-22 breaths per minute

### **5. Pupil Dilation**

**Fear:** Fear triggers dilation of the pupils (mydriasis). This response is part of the fight-or-flight mechanism, increasing visual sensitivity to detect threats in the environment.

**Sadness:** Pupil dilation is generally less pronounced with sadness, although there might be some dilation due to emotional distress or fatigue.

**Joy:** Pupil dilation can occur with joy or excitement, though it is often less noticeable than with fear. Positive emotions can lead to increased alertness, which can cause minor dilation.

### **6. Facial Expressions**

While not strictly physiological markers, facial expressions are closely tied

to emotion and can give additional context to the physiological signals. For example:

**Fear:** Widened eyes, raised eyebrows, and a mouth that might be open.

**Sadness:** Downturned lips, furrowed brows, and eyes that might be teary or appear "droopy."

**Joy:** Smiling, with the mouth forming a wide grin and the eyes potentially squinting or showing "crow's feet."

## 7. Body Temperature

**Fear:** Often, body temperature might decrease in response to fear (cold hands or feet), due to the redirection of blood flow to essential organs and muscles.

**Sadness:** Sadness may lead to a slight decrease in body temperature, especially if it leads to lethargy or feelings of coldness.

**Joy:** Positive emotions like joy can sometimes cause a slight increase in body temperature, particularly if the joy is linked to physical activity or excitement (e.g., laughing, running around).

## 8. Cortisol Levels

**Fear:** Cortisol, the stress hormone, increases during fear as part of the body's preparation for danger.

**Range:** Approximately 15-25 mcg/dL (can vary widely, depending on the intensity and duration of fear)

**Sadness:** Cortisol levels may also rise during sadness, particularly if the sadness is prolonged or linked to stress.

**Range:** Approximately 10-15 mcg/dL (slightly elevated from baseline in some cases)

**Joy:** Cortisol tends to be lower during positive emotions like joy. Joy and laughter can reduce stress and lower cortisol levels.

**Range:** Approximately 5-10 mcg/dL (slightly lower than baseline)

## 9. Muscle Tension

**Fear:** Increased muscle tension is common with fear, especially in the face, neck, shoulders, and hands. This is related to the fight-or-flight response.

**Sadness:** Muscle tension tends to decrease with sadness, as the body may feel fatigued or weakened.

**Joy:** Joy can lead to muscle relaxation and less tension. Laughter and other joyful expressions often involve a relaxation of facial and body muscles.

### **Ethical Concerns in Data Collection (from those who are unable to give consent)**

For individuals who can't provide direct consent, there are a few methods that might help make sure the process is ethical, respectful, all while obtaining effective data collection:

**-Proxy Consent:** In cases where individuals cannot consent themselves, a legal guardian or family member can provide proxy consent on their behalf. This is often used for vulnerable populations and requires that proxies act in the best interests of the individual.

**-Assent Process:** Though they may not provide formal consent, nonverbal individuals can sometimes show signs of assent or dissent through nonverbal cues. This might include gestures, eye movements, or physiological signs (e.g., relaxation versus signs of distress). Observing these cues can help determine if they are comfortable participating.

**-Institutional Oversight:** Working under the guidance of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or an ethics committee can help ensure that the methods used respect the individual's autonomy and minimize risks. These boards are experienced in overseeing studies involving vulnerable populations.

**-Anonymized and Minimal Data:** Collecting only essential data and anonymizing it as much as possible can help minimize privacy concerns. Ensuring data security, especially with physiological data, is crucial.

**-Continuous Monitoring and Withdrawal:** If possible, monitor for signs of distress during the data collection process. This allows the study to be adjusted or paused if signs indicate the participant is uncomfortable.

“ The ethical mandates underlying the conduct of research using human subjects are derived from several sources, including:

- the ancient and traditional duty of physicians to benefit their patients, or at least do them no harm;<sup>1</sup>
  - the Kantian philosophical view of human beings as “ends in themselves,” never to be used merely as means to ends, or for the advantage of others;<sup>2</sup>
  - the political and legal concept of autonomy or self-determination that requires consent to any bodily intrusion;<sup>3</sup> and
  - the requirements of good scientific method in designing and conducting experiments, including: minimization of risk.<sup>4</sup> These ethical concepts are often translated into three basic principles that provide a framework for the moral conduct of human subjects research:
- The principle of “autonomy,” or personal self-governance, “by adequate un-

derstanding while remaining free from controlling interference by others and from personal limitations that prevent choice” (Faden et al., 1986, p. 8). In order for a research subject to make an autonomous choice, the autonomy of the subject must be respected which includes providing sufficient information for the subject to make an autonomous and informed decision.

- The principle of ”beneficence,” which is concerned with the intent and capacity of science and medicine to avoid harm and provide benefit; in the case of research, this requires careful weighing of potential harms against potential benefits.
- The principle of ”justice,” or treatment according to what is fair, due, or owed, which includes avoiding unfairly burdening subjects or communities of subjects in relation to benefits. ”

Source: National Research Council (US) Committee on Evaluation of 1950s Air Force Human Health Testing in Alaska Using Radioactive Iodine-131. The Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory’s Thyroid Function Study: A Radiological Risk and Ethical Analysis. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 1996. 3, The Ethics of Human Subjects Research. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK232523/>

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### **Codes of ethics and regulations for ethical clinical research include:**

- **Nuremberg Code (1947):** It is a set of 10 principles that govern human experimentation:
- Voluntary Consent: the participants in this research have to be voluntary; participants must be fully informed about the nature, duration, and purpose of the experiment.
- Benefit to Society: the experiment’s goal needs to be to produce results that benefit society that cannot be done through other means. Based on Prior Knowledge: the experiment should be grounded in prior animal experimentation and existing scientific knowledge to justify its validity.
- Avoidance of Unnecessary Harm: all unnecessary physical and mental suffering and injury must be avoided.
- No Risk of Death or Disabling Injury: no experiment should be conducted if there is a reason to believe it can cause death or disabling injury, except possibly where the researchers also serve as subjects.
- Risk-Benefit Balance: the risk must not exceed the potential humanitarian importance of the problem the experiment seeks to solve.

- Adequate Preparations: proper preparations and facilities should be available to protect participants from harm.
- Qualified Researchers: only scientifically qualified individuals should conduct experiments.
- Right to Withdraw: participants must have the freedom to withdraw from the experiment at any time.
- Obligation to Terminate: researchers must terminate the experiment if they observe that it is likely to result in harm or injury to the participant.

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**\* In addition to physiological data, can incorporate other types of inputs to create a more holistic interpretation of an individual's emotional state. (some are the controls of the experiment)**

- Environmental Context: Recording contextual factors like the physical environment, noise level, and who is present can add important context. For instance, loud environments might increase stress responses, while familiar caregivers could have a calming effect. This data could be gathered through passive sensing, such as detecting sound levels or noting the time of day.
- Routine and Activity Patterns: Tracking daily routines, activities, and sleep patterns may reveal emotional cues. For instance, disruptions in sleep or deviations from regular routines might correspond with certain emotional states, like anxiety or discomfort.
- Medical History Data and Trends (sensor aspect @ Jimin): Comparing current physiological and behavioral data with historical data from the same individual can improve accuracy. For example, if the individual shows a particular physiological response consistently during certain activities, it may reveal patterns of enjoyment or distress.
- Sensory Preferences or Sensitivities (sensor aspect @ Jimin): For some individuals, specific sensory inputs—like light, sound, or touch—can affect their emotional state. Tracking the presence of such inputs (e.g., detecting a light level or sound frequency) may help correlate environmental stimuli with emotional responses.

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### **Age, Gender, and Individual Differences in Emotional Physiological Responses**

Understanding how physiological responses to emotions vary based on age, gender, and individual differences is crucial for creating systems that can accurately interpret these signals in diverse populations. These factors influence how emotions manifest in the body, requiring careful consideration

when designing devices or algorithms for emotion detection.

### **Age Differences**

Physiological responses to emotions can change significantly across different age groups due to developmental, hormonal, and neurological factors:

**Children:** Younger individuals often display heightened physiological responses, such as elevated heart rate or respiration rate, to emotional stimuli. This heightened sensitivity is due to the still-developing autonomic nervous system and emotional regulation capabilities. For example, fear may elicit faster heart rate increases and prolonged recovery times in children compared to adults.

**Adolescents:** Puberty introduces hormonal fluctuations that can amplify emotional reactivity. Increased cortisol levels and more pronounced skin conductance responses are common during this developmental stage.

**Adults:** In general, physiological responses stabilize as individuals mature. Adults typically exhibit more regulated emotional reactions, with quicker recovery to baseline levels after an emotional event. **Older Adults:** Aging can attenuate physiological responses to emotions. For instance, heart rate variability (HRV) tends to decrease, and responses to stimuli like fear or joy may be less pronounced compared to younger individuals. However, older adults often show greater emotional resilience and a stronger tendency to focus on positive experiences.

### **Gender Differences**

Gender influences emotional expression and physiological responses due to biological, cultural, and social factors:

**Heart Rate and Blood Pressure:** Studies suggest that men and women may exhibit different heart rate and blood pressure responses to emotional stimuli. For instance, women often show greater increases in heart rate and skin conductance during emotionally charged events, potentially linked to higher sympathetic nervous system activation.

**Cortisol Levels:** Women may experience stronger cortisol responses to stress or fear due to hormonal variations, particularly during certain phases of the menstrual cycle.

**Emotional Processing:** Cultural and societal norms often encourage women to express emotions more openly, which may influence observable physiological responses. Men, on the other hand, might suppress emotional reactions, leading to less overt physiological changes despite internal emotional arousal.



**Individual Differences** Beyond age and gender, individual differences such as personality traits, health conditions, and baseline physiological variability play a significant role in emotional responses:

**Personality Traits:** Individuals high in traits like neuroticism may show heightened physiological responses, such as increased heart rate or cortisol release, to stress or fear. Conversely, those with high levels of emotional stability may exhibit more muted responses.

**Health Conditions:** Factors such as cardiovascular health, respiratory conditions, or neurological disorders can alter physiological responses to emotions. For example, individuals with hypertension may show exaggerated blood pressure responses to stress, while those with anxiety disorders might experience heightened heart rate and skin conductance levels even at rest.

**Baseline Variability:** Some individuals naturally have higher or lower baseline metrics for physiological markers like heart rate or skin conductance. These baselines must be considered to accurately interpret changes due to emotional states.

### **Considerations for Emotion Detection Systems**

-Algorithms and devices must account for these variations to avoid biases or inaccuracies. For instance, age- and gender-specific thresholds can be incorporated when interpreting physiological data.

-Baseline measurements should be individualized to each user to account for personal physiological norms and ensure accurate emotion detection.

-Devices must be adaptable and capable of learning from user data over time, refining interpretations based on observed patterns specific to the individual.

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### **Muscle Tension and Emotional States**

Muscle tension is a key physiological indicator of emotional states, reflecting the body's preparation for action or relaxation in response to stimuli. Variations in muscle tension are closely tied to the autonomic nervous system's activity, influenced by emotional arousal and the specific emotion experienced. This connection provides valuable insights for developing systems that interpret physiological data to infer emotions, particularly for individuals unable to communicate verbally.

### **Fear and Muscle Tension**

-Fear is characterized by a significant increase in muscle tension, especially in areas like the face, neck, shoulders, and hands. This heightened tension stems from the activation of the sympathetic nervous system as part of the fight-or-flight response. The body prepares for immediate action, whether to confront a threat or escape from it.

**Observable Effects:** Clenched fists, stiffened posture, and tighten facial muscles (e.g., furrowed brows, wide eyes).

**Significance:** Monitoring muscle tension can help identify fear in non-verbal individuals, enabling caregivers or devices to detect distress.

### **Sadness and Muscle Tension**

-Sadness often leads to a decrease in muscle tension, as this emotion is typically associated with reduced arousal and energy levels. The body may feel weaker or fatigued, reflecting the emotional state.

**Observable Effects:** Slumped posture, relaxed or drooping facial muscles, and less movement overall.

**Significance:** Detecting low muscle tension alongside other markers can indicate sadness or emotional withdrawal, guiding caregivers to provide comfort or support.

### **Joy and Muscle Tension**

Joy or happiness is often accompanied by moderate muscle relaxation, although specific joyful expressions may involve increased activity in certain muscles. For instance, smiling activates facial muscles, while laughter engages the diaphragm and other muscle groups.

**Observable Effects:** Relaxed shoulders, natural smiles, and spontaneous movements such as clapping or jumping.

**Significance:** Increased muscle activity in a relaxed context can signal positive emotions, which is crucial for understanding moments of joy in non-verbal individuals.

### **Applications in Non-Verbal Communication**

-By incorporating sensors capable of detecting muscle tension (e.g., electromyography or wearable sensors) into a broader emotional monitoring system, caregivers and clinicians can: Recognize distress or discomfort (e.g., fear or sadness).

-Identify moments of happiness and relaxation.

-Gain a better understanding of emotional states without requiring verbal feedback.

This data can be integrated with other physiological markers like heart rate, skin conductance, and pupil dilation to create a holistic interpretation of emotions, enabling devices to communicate an individual's needs or feelings effectively.

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## Technical Challenges and Solutions in Emotion Detection Devices

Developing a device to translate physiological data into emotions presents several technical challenges that require innovative solutions. These challenges stem from the complexity of accurately capturing, processing, and interpreting physiological signals, particularly for non-verbal individuals whose emotional states may not align with typical baselines.

### 1. Data Noise and Signal Interference

One of the primary issues in physiological monitoring is the **presence of noise in the data**. For instance, motion artifacts can distort heart rate or skin conductance readings, especially in wearable devices. Environmental factors like temperature, humidity, or electromagnetic interference can further compromise signal quality.

**Solution:** Advanced signal processing techniques, such as adaptive filtering and machine learning-based noise reduction, can help isolate relevant physiological markers. Additionally, multi-sensor arrays that cross-validate data across modalities (e.g., combining heart rate and skin conductance) can enhance reliability.

### 2. Individual Variability

Physiological responses to emotions are highly individualized, **influenced by factors such as age, gender, health conditions, and baseline emotional states**. For example, what indicates stress in one person might signify excitement in another.

**Solution:** Personalized calibration protocols can be implemented during the initial setup of the device. These protocols involve collecting baseline data under various controlled emotional states to establish individualized benchmarks. Machine learning models trained on diverse datasets can also generalize better across populations while adapting to individual nuances.

### 3. Real-Time Data Processing

Emotion detection requires rapid analysis of large volumes of physiological data to provide real-time feedback. However, this poses computational

challenges, particularly in resource-constrained environments like portable or wearable devices.

**Solution:** Edge computing, where data is processed locally on the device instead of being transmitted to a remote server, can reduce latency and improve efficiency. Leveraging optimized algorithms, such as lightweight neural networks, ensures that the device remains responsive without sacrificing accuracy.

#### 4. Sensor Design and Placement

Ensuring accurate data collection often depends on the design and placement of sensors. Poorly placed sensors may fail to capture relevant signals, while uncomfortable designs may discourage consistent usage.

**Solution:** Innovative sensor designs, such as flexible and stretchable electronics, can improve comfort and adaptability. Strategic placement of sensors, informed by human anatomy, can enhance signal quality. For instance, wrist-mounted devices for pulse and skin conductance, or headbands for EEG readings, can be effective without being intrusive.

#### 5. Interpreting Complex Emotional States

Physiological markers often overlap for different emotions, making it challenging to distinguish between states like stress and excitement, or sadness and fatigue.

**Solution:** Combining multiple physiological signals—such as heart rate variability, galvanic skin response, and temperature—can help disambiguate overlapping emotions. Additionally, integrating contextual data, such as time of day or user activity, can provide a richer understanding of emotional states.

By addressing these challenges with targeted solutions, emotion detection devices can become more reliable, adaptable, and accessible, bringing us closer to empowering non-verbal individuals and enhancing emotional understanding across various contexts.

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### Harnessing Emotional Monitoring for Mental Health and Well-Being

The integration of physiological data monitoring into emotional well-being management represents a groundbreaking shift in how we approach mental health. Traditional mental health care often relies on subjective reporting

and occasional check-ins, which may fail to capture the complexity of an individual’s emotional landscape. By leveraging real-time data from metrics such as heart rate variability, skin conductance, and blood pressure, this technology offers the potential to provide objective, continuous insights into a person’s emotional state.

For instance, in mental health applications, a device that detects subtle changes in physiological markers could alert both users and their health-care providers to early signs of anxiety, depression, or stress. This could be especially valuable for individuals who struggle to articulate their emotions, such as those with alexithymia or certain developmental disorders. By integrating these insights into therapeutic settings, mental health professionals could tailor interventions based on real-time data, improving outcomes and fostering a more personalized approach to care.

Beyond therapy, this technology could play a crucial role in stress management. Professionals in high-pressure environments, such as surgeons, pilots, or emergency responders, could benefit from systems that monitor stress levels during critical tasks. These devices could provide prompts to engage in stress-reduction techniques, such as controlled breathing or mindfulness exercises, enhancing performance and reducing burnout risks.

Another promising avenue lies in sleep analysis. Emotional states have a profound impact on sleep quality, and vice versa. By combining emotional monitoring with sleep tracking technologies, individuals could gain a deeper understanding of how their emotional patterns affect their rest. This could lead to actionable insights, such as identifying nighttime stress triggers or optimizing sleep hygiene routines.

The broader implications of emotional well-being monitoring extend into preventive care. A proactive approach, where devices monitor emotions continuously, could help identify and mitigate risks before they escalate into chronic conditions. This not only improves quality of life for individuals but also reduces the burden on healthcare systems.

While the technology presents immense potential, it also requires careful consideration of privacy and ethical concerns. Emotional data is deeply personal, and ensuring its secure handling and ethical usage is paramount. With robust safeguards in place, emotional monitoring devices could redefine how

we understand and support mental health, moving us closer to a future where well-being is seamlessly integrated into daily life.

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### **Unlocking Non-Verbal Communication Through Brain Monitoring**

Non-verbal individuals face immense challenges in expressing their thoughts, emotions, and needs. Many rely on limited tools or aids, but these often fail to capture the depth of their cognitive abilities. Brain monitoring technology offers a transformative solution, opening a pathway to better understand and facilitate communication for those unable to use traditional methods.

The concept involves utilizing advanced neuroimaging techniques like functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) or Electroencephalography (EEG) to map brain activity associated with thoughts and emotions. These technologies can detect patterns of neural signals and translate them into actionable outputs. For instance, certain brain regions light up when a person experiences emotions, thinks about specific objects, or forms intentions. By decoding these patterns, it becomes possible to interpret and convey what a non-verbal individual might wish to express.

This innovation holds particular promise for children with conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy, or other developmental disorders. Many such children demonstrate cognitive abilities far beyond what their non-verbal status might suggest, and brain monitoring could provide them with a voice. Imagine a device capable of translating neural signals into digital text or speech, empowering these children to participate in conversations, share their thoughts, and communicate their needs with family, teachers, and caregivers.

Applications extend beyond direct communication. Brain monitoring can also play a critical role in emotional understanding and mental health management. By identifying patterns associated with stress, pain, or joy, caregivers can provide better support tailored to an individual's unspoken experiences. For instance, a parent might learn to recognize signs of discomfort before a child begins to exhibit visible distress, fostering a more empathetic and proactive approach to care.

Of course, the journey to develop such technology is not without challenges. Neural signals are highly complex, and interpreting them accurately requires robust algorithms, extensive datasets, and collaboration across disciplines. Privacy and ethical considerations are paramount, as brain data is deeply

personal and sensitive. Ensuring secure data handling and transparent usage policies is critical to gaining trust and delivering equitable access to these life-changing tools.

Non-verbal communication through brain monitoring represents more than just technological innovation—it is a leap toward inclusivity and understanding. It paves the way for a world where every individual, regardless of their verbal abilities, can share their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives, enriching human connections and ensuring that no voice goes unheard.

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### **Ethical Philosophy and Human-Centric Design in Assistive Technologies**

As we push the boundaries of technology to support non-verbal individuals, it is critical to ground these advancements in ethical principles and human-centric design. Creating a device that translates physiological data into emotional states raises profound questions about autonomy, privacy, and the fundamental nature of human expression.

#### **Philosophical Considerations: Quantifying Emotions**

Emotions are deeply personal, complex, and often context-dependent. Attempting to quantify them through numbers or data patterns poses philosophical questions about what it means to "understand" emotions. Does breaking them down into measurable components reduce their richness? Or does it offer a new lens to perceive and respect emotional depth, especially for those unable to express themselves traditionally? Our approach aims not to define or confine emotions but to empower non-verbal individuals by providing an alternative means of communication. By prioritizing the user's experience and the context in which emotions arise, we ensure the technology respects and reflects the complexity of human emotions.

#### **Empowering Users and Respecting Autonomy**

An essential aspect of ethical design is ensuring that the device serves as a tool of empowerment rather than control. Non-verbal individuals, particularly children, must remain active participants in their interactions with the system. For example:

**-Interpreting vs. Dictating:** The device interprets data but does not make decisions or assumptions on behalf of the user.

**-User-Centric Feedback:** Users or their caregivers can validate or refine

the system’s emotional interpretations, ensuring the device evolves with individual needs. By designing for autonomy, the system avoids pitfalls where technology inadvertently becomes a barrier rather than a bridge for communication.

### **Bias Mitigation in Emotional Algorithms**

Algorithms can carry biases based on the data they are trained on, which can disproportionately affect certain groups. For example, physiological markers of stress may vary across different ethnicities, genders, or age groups. If not addressed, these variations could lead to misinterpretation of emotional states.

**To mitigate such biases:**

**-Diverse Training Data:** Ensure the data used to train algorithms reflects the diversity of the populations the device serves. **Transparent Processes:** Make the system’s interpretative processes explainable to users and caregivers, fostering trust.

**-Continuous Learning:** Incorporate mechanisms for ongoing refinement as new data and feedback are collected.

### **Human-Centric and Inclusive Design**

At the heart of the project lies a commitment to human-centric design—prioritizing the needs, values, and dignity of the user. This includes:

**-Simplicity in Interaction:** Creating an interface that is intuitive and accessible to users of all ages and abilities.

**-Adaptability:** Designing a system that evolves alongside the user, accounting for changes in physiology, emotional expression, and context.

**-Cultural Sensitivity:** Emotions are expressed differently across cultures, and the device must accommodate these variations to remain inclusive.

### **The Broader Impact**

Beyond individual use, this project has the potential to shift societal perceptions of non-verbal individuals. By showcasing their cognitive and emotional depth, the device challenges stereotypes and fosters greater inclusion. Moreover, it invites a broader conversation about how technology can support rather than replace human connections.

In essence, this initiative is not just about building a device; it’s about shaping a future where technology amplifies human dignity, agency, and under-



standing. By prioritizing ethics and inclusivity, we ensure that the innovation remains a force for good, aligning with the values of those it seeks to serve.

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### **Privacy and Data Security in Emotion-Recognition Technology**

The success of any technology that collects and analyzes physiological data hinges on its ability to ensure privacy and security. Our device, designed to empower non-verbal individuals by interpreting physiological signals into emotions, prioritizes ethical and responsible handling of sensitive data.

#### **-Ethical Use of Sensitive Data**

The physiological metrics our device collects, such as heart rate and blood pressure, are deeply personal. Ensuring that this data is used solely to enhance the user's quality of life is paramount. To achieve this, we adopt a privacy-first approach that includes anonymizing data, securing storage, and obtaining informed consent from all users or their legal guardians. This commitment ensures users retain control over how their data is collected, stored, and shared.

#### **-Data Encryption and Security Protocols**

All data collected by the device is encrypted both in transit and at rest, preventing unauthorized access. By implementing advanced security protocols, such as multi-factor authentication and real-time monitoring for breaches, we aim to safeguard against data theft or misuse.

#### **-Compliance with Global Standards**

Our system adheres to internationally recognized standards, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). This alignment guarantees compliance with legal requirements and ethical benchmarks for data security and privacy, instilling trust among users and stakeholders.

#### **-Minimizing Data Collection**

To further protect users, our device employs a minimal data collection approach, capturing only the physiological metrics required for accurate emotion recognition. By avoiding unnecessary data collection, we reduce the risks associated with storing and processing large amounts of sensitive information.

**-Transparency and Consent** Transparency is at the core of our device's design. Users and their caregivers are fully informed about what data is

collected, how it is used, and how they can manage or delete it if desired. Consent is obtained explicitly before data collection begins, ensuring ethical practices are upheld at every stage.

### **-Balancing Innovation and Privacy**

While advanced features such as personalized emotion recognition algorithms require data analysis, we are committed to balancing innovation with privacy. Features like offline data processing and user-controlled data sharing provide flexibility, ensuring that privacy concerns do not hinder technological advancements.

By embedding privacy and security into the foundation of our device, we aim to foster trust and ensure that this technology serves its purpose: empowering non-verbal individuals while safeguarding their dignity and autonomy.

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### **Advancements in Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)**

Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) are at the forefront of technological innovation, offering new pathways for understanding and interacting with the human brain. As these systems evolve, they open transformative possibilities for non-verbal individuals to communicate more effectively.

At its core, a BCI establishes a direct link between the brain and external devices, translating neural activity into actionable outputs. In the context of non-verbal communication, this technology holds immense promise. Recent advancements in signal processing, machine learning, and miniaturization have made BCIs more accessible, accurate, and efficient, paving the way for their integration into assistive devices.

Our initiative aims to harness these advancements by incorporating BCIs to interpret neural signals that correlate with emotional states. By analyzing patterns in brain activity, our device seeks to provide real-time feedback on emotions, bridging the communication gap between non-verbal individuals and their caregivers. For instance, a child experiencing frustration may exhibit distinct neural patterns that the device could identify and translate into an output—such as a visual cue, sound, or text—enabling caregivers to respond appropriately.

Key challenges in BCI integration include signal clarity, latency, and accessibility. However, cutting-edge developments in non-invasive methods, such as

advanced EEG systems, are addressing these barriers. These portable and user-friendly solutions align with our vision of creating a practical device suitable for daily use.

Beyond individual applications, BCIs hold the potential to drive broader societal change. They could revolutionize how we perceive cognitive capabilities in non-verbal individuals, fostering greater empathy and inclusion. By integrating BCI technology, we hope to not only enhance communication but also advocate for a paradigm shift in understanding and supporting non-verbal communities.

This fusion of neuroscience and technology represents a step toward a future where communication barriers no longer limit potential, empowering individuals to express themselves in ways previously thought impossible.

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### **Current Limitations of Communication Technologies for Non-Verbal Individuals**

Assistive communication technologies, such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, have made significant strides in helping non-verbal individuals express themselves. However, these tools still have limitations that hinder their effectiveness, particularly for those who cannot easily interact with traditional interfaces. Many AAC devices rely on physical gestures, symbols, or speech-like inputs, which can exclude individuals with severe motor impairments or those unable to grasp symbolic language.

One major limitation is the gap in addressing emotional communication. While current tools focus on facilitating basic needs and simple expressions, they often fall short in capturing and conveying complex emotions or internal states. This oversight can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration for non-verbal individuals who cannot fully articulate their thoughts or feelings.

Additionally, many existing devices lack adaptability to individual needs. They are often designed with a one-size-fits-all approach, which may not align with the diverse cognitive, physical, and emotional capacities of non-verbal users. For example, a child with severe autism may require a completely different interface than an adult with ALS, yet current technologies rarely offer the flexibility to accommodate such distinctions.

Cost and accessibility also remain significant barriers. Many advanced devices are prohibitively expensive, limiting their availability to those in lower-

income or underserved communities. This lack of affordability exacerbates the communication gap for individuals who could benefit most from these tools.

These limitations underscore the need for innovation in assistive technologies. By integrating brain-computer interfaces, physiological data monitoring, and adaptive algorithms, we can create tools that are not only more intuitive but also capable of understanding and responding to the unique communication needs of each individual. Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensuring that non-verbal individuals can express themselves fully and meaningfully, enhancing their quality of life and fostering deeper connections with their caregivers and communities.

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### **Literature Reviews on Correlation Between Biological Vitals and Emotions**

**Title:** The pupil as a measure of emotional arousal and autonomic activation

**Author(s):** Margaret M. Bradley, Laura Miccoli, Miguel A. Escrig, Peter J. Lang

**Summary of Source:** Hess and Polt (1960) observed that pupil dilation and constriction were influenced by emotional stimuli, but their findings lacked replicability due to methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes and absence of statistical analysis. Libby et al. (1973) expanded this research by using more participants and stimuli, finding that "attention-getting" images increased pupil dilation, though results were mixed regarding emotional valence. Recent studies suggest that emotional arousal, not valence, drives pupil dilation, with Steinhauer et al. (1983) and Aboyoun and Dabbs (1998) reporting that arousing stimuli increase pupil size regardless of hedonic content. The current study revisits these findings using a modern eye-tracking system and standardized IAPS images. It also examines the autonomic nervous system's role, distinguishing between sympathetic and parasympathetic influences on pupil changes. Results showed that emotional images, whether pleasant or unpleasant, elicited greater pupil dilation and skin conductance compared to neutral images, while heart rate deceleration was linked to unpleasant stimuli. Luminance effects were controlled to isolate emotional arousal as the primary driver of pupil changes, reinforcing the hypothesis that arousal, rather than valence, modulates these responses. These findings contrast earlier research by Hess and Polt and partially align with Libby

et al.'s work, emphasizing the complexity of emotion-driven physiological changes.

**Significance:** The findings on pupil dilation and its correlation with emotional arousal provide valuable insights for my project, which aims to translate physiological data into emotions to help non-verbal individuals communicate. Knowing that pupil size reflects arousal regardless of whether the emotion is positive or negative simplifies the challenge of emotion detection. Coupled with evidence that heart rate and skin conductance are reliable markers of emotional intensity, I can refine the data streams my device will analyze. Additionally, understanding that arousal often outweighs valence in emotional responses helps me focus on detecting "how much" emotion is present rather than attempting to classify it. This research gives me confidence in designing a system that prioritizes clarity and precision, making meaningful communication possible for those who can't express themselves verbally.

**Title:** The influence of happiness, anger, and anxiety on the blood pressure of borderline intensives

**Authors:** James, G D; Yee, L S; Harshfield, G A; Blank, S G; Pickering, T G

**Summary of Source:** This study investigates how emotions like happiness, anger, and anxiety influence blood pressure in 90 individuals with borderline hypertension during 24-hour monitoring. Participants recorded their emotional states (happiness, anger, or anxiety) alongside 1152 ambulatory blood pressure readings. Data analysis revealed that emotional arousal significantly increased systolic and diastolic blood pressure, independent of position or location. Notably, anger and anxiety were associated with higher blood pressure than happiness. Happiness was inversely correlated with systolic pressure, while anxiety was positively linked to diastolic pressure. The extent of emotional impact varied with individuals' daily blood pressure variability, suggesting that more labile blood pressure amplifies emotional effects.

**Significance:** This study directly supports your project's aim to use physiological signals, such as blood pressure, to infer emotional states for non-verbal communication. It demonstrates that distinct emotions are associated with specific, measurable changes in blood pressure, providing a foundation for developing algorithms to map physiological data to emotional states. Additionally, the findings emphasize the importance of accounting for individual variability, which could guide the personalization of your device for more accu-

rate emotional translation. This research validates the feasibility of leveraging blood pressure as a meaningful biomarker in your communication device.

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**Research Plan (Idea for the Biomedical Team):**

**Objective:** To test whether physiological metrics (e.g., heart rate and blood pressure) can be mapped to emotional states and used as a foundation for creating a device that helps non-verbal individuals communicate emotions.

**Materials:** A heart rate monitor and a blood pressure cuff. A computer with data acquisition software (e.g., Arduino, MATLAB, or Python). Emotionally stimulating materials (e.g., images, videos, or sounds validated to induce specific emotions such as happiness, sadness, or anger). Participants who can provide feedback about their emotional state.

**Procedure:** Baseline Measurement: Have participants sit in a calm environment. Record their resting heart rate and blood pressure for a baseline. Stimuli Presentation: Present participants with stimuli designed to evoke a range of emotions (e.g., a happy video clip, a sad piece of music, etc.). Allow time between stimuli to return to baseline.

**Data Collection:** Measure heart rate and blood pressure continuously during each stimulus presentation. Record the participant's self-reported emotional state after each stimulus for correlation.

**Data Analysis:** Analyze trends in heart rate and blood pressure for each reported emotion. Identify patterns (e.g., increased heart rate for excitement or sadness). Prototype Testing (Optional): Use the identified patterns to design a simple algorithm that assigns a specific emotional "label" based on the physiological data collected. Test if the algorithm's labels match self-reported emotions

**Hypothesis:** There will be measurable, consistent changes in heart rate and blood pressure associated with specific emotional states, forming the basis for translating physiological signals into emotional communication.