**Meta-Learning Bidirectional Wavelet Neural Operators for Personalized Generative Anxiety Therapy via Affective Computing Electronic Skin**

Samuel Solomon1, Yadong Xu1, Ruixiao Liu1, Jadelynn Dao, José Lasalde Ramírez, Jihong Min, Dickson Yao, Sarah Solomon, Canran Wang, Daniel Mukasa, Wei Gao

**Abstract.**

**Introduction.**

Physiological responses form the foundation of our emotional experiences, yet the exact mechanism by which vital signs map to human emotions has not been concretely established. Nevertheless, reproducible physiological reactions and facial expressions in humans and animals are strongly linked to emotional states, as examined by Darwin in his 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. This connection across species suggests that emotions are intrinsically linked to physical states, though it remains unclear how emotions arise from physiology.

The two-factor model, one of the prevailing emotion theories, posits that physiological changes precede any emotional response, with the mind interpreting this information as a feeling. For instance, an increased heart rate or rapid breathing might be processed by the brain as anxiety or excitement, depending on contextual cues. Paul Ekman’s pioneering work focused on linking facial expressions to specific emotions, demonstrating that certain physiological cues are universally associated with emotions across cultures. Further analysis by Matsumoto and Willingham in 2009 confirmed that these physical responses are not socially learned, as even blind and deaf athletes exhibit predictable physiological reactions to emotional stimuli. This is partly due to an evolutionary adaptation where physiological responses compensate for potential threats—such as squinting out of disgust to block harmful stimuli from entering the body. While rapid processing and reaction to physiological cues are a core function of the human body, the intricacies of how this occurs are not fully understood. Modern approaches using machine learning and wearable devices are now exploring how everyday biomarkers contribute to one’s inner psychological state.

Despite the theoretical and empirical evidence linking the mind and body, the complexities of emotional responses often elude simple classification systems such as decision trees and fully connected networks. The main obstruction for using more complex predictors, is the lack of standardization across the literature for which physiological stimuli (sweat-metabolites, facial expressions, vital signs) as well as emotional responses (positive and negative affective states) should be recorded for a complete and universal physio-emotional dataset. As each researcher probes a different set of signals for a unique set of emotions, each emotion model is only trained on a selective and highly specialized dataset, where it is impossible to generalize across publications. This problem is exacerbated by black-box machine learning techniques, which hinders how relevant any emotion study is to one another. Further issues include resampling features to match a neural architecture, random information loss during data transmission, sampling bias from emotion questionnaires, as well as data sparsity compared to the number of learnable parameters. Modern advancements in machine learning techniques including text-based sentiment analysis as well as neural operators offer a new way for overcoming these issues within the broader context of universal affective computing.

In this work, we present the first bidirectional wavelet neural operator (BWNO) trained through observational learning (OL). We define observational learning as a machine learning framework that mimics the scientific method by probing a system and observing the resulting perturbations. In this context, each physiological signal (an observable event) is treated as a response that is Granger-caused by a hidden biological perturbation, which we refer to as the physiological profile (PP). The physiological profile represents a signal-agnostic manifold, a latent construct capable of explaining each biological reaction independently. This allows us to capture all relevant physiological information within a common structure while maintaining the flexibility to add or remove biomarkers as needed.

Within this framework, each biomarker serves as evidence for the underlying perturbation rather than as a mandatory input for prediction, where the model is trained from the hidden variable to the observed signals. Unlike fixed models, each new observation acts as a weak classifier, increasing the confidence that the manifold represents the body’s current state. We claim that missing or unaligned data points, which typically degrade model performance, have a limited impact on this flexible architecture.

One key innovation that allows observational learning the flexibility to generalize across input domains is bidirectional training. Through diffeomorphic transformations, OL models independently map the common ancestor to each observable output using a set of invertible weights, allowing for both inference and interpretation depending on the direction. During training, the model learns how to remove information from the manifold to validate each observation. While projecting different spaces into a common latent space is extremely difficult, by inverting the weights in observational learning during inference, the model can transform each individual signal into the manifold’s space. Each projection inherently contains noise that is smoothed out when considering all observations together. This approach mirrors scientific experiments, where multiple correlated observations are used to reconstruct the underlying properties of a system. Consequently, this architecture provides an interpretable framework for machine learning researchers, emphasizing not only the final predictions but also the mappings across each space, offering deeper insights into physiological events and their associated emotional responses.

Unfortunately, within physiological datasets, there inherently exist motion artifacts and noise that can bias data interpretations, which is only exacerbated by the relatively small size of physio-emotion datasets compared to traditional large language models. To learn how to deal with these events, we employ meta-learning techniques to share weights and integrate multiple datasets together. Each path to the physiological profile can be broken up into 3 main sections: a signal-specific layer, shared meta-learning layer, and another signal-specific layer. Most of the model weights lie within the meta layer, removing the burden of small datasets, while the signal specific layers provide dataset-specific expressibility. Each single-specific layer address subproblems within the broader task of physiological-emotion mapping, enabling few-shot learning on previously unseen datasets. Our core model has demonstrated strong performance after training on five physiological meta-datasets from the literature (WESAD, EMOGNITION, DAPPER, AMIGOS, and CASE) and has shown few-shot learning capabilities on two out-of-domain datasets that we compiled (EMPATCH). We aim to further enhance our model's generalizability and utility for the broader research community by establishing the first domain-agnostic physio-emotion model.

By understanding the complex relationship between physiology and emotions, we gain deeper insights into the intricacies of human emotional responses, creating opportunities for more personalized mental health interventions. Our approach was validated through generative virtual reality, music, heat, and voice therapy sessions, all of which were personalized to the subject’s real-time emotion and biological profile. In early tests, we demonstrated the ability to modulate and reduce negative affective emotions and anxiety. We further validated our model’s predictions against the gold standard State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) Y2 questionnaire as well as the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), showing strong alignment between our automated therapy outcomes and patient-reported results. This validation not only supports Ekman’s theoretical framework linking physiological and psychological domains but also establishes a new benchmark for closed-loop personalized therapeutic interventions, paving the way for automated, in-home, tailored mental health therapies.

**Discussion.**

Here we present our analysis from capturing real-time physiological signals in response to four unique experimental stressors, including music, cold pressure, exercise (biking), and virtual reality, to investigate the relationship between physiology and emotional responses. The custom-designed patch integrated four key sensors—electrooculography (EOG), electroencephalography (EEG), electrodermal activity (EDA), and temperature—enabling the continuous recording of both electrical and thermal signals (Fig 3a). These sensors provided rich, multidimensional data that form the foundation of the analysis.

**Device Design and Signal Processing**

Our device is composed of EOG, EEG, EDA, and temperature sensors that conformally adhere to the surface of the skin. Signals are collected and processed through a series of filters, amplifiers, voltage regulators, and a microcontroller unit (Fig 3bc). This robust design ensured that signals were processed in real-time and transmitted for further analysis.

Signal preprocessing, illustrated on the top right, involved filtering the raw physiological data to remove noise and artifacts while preserving essential features related to emotional states. The filtering and amplification stages were particularly important in handling high-frequency noise in EEG and EOG recordings, while EDA and temperature data required low-pass filtering to stabilize readings. These preprocessing steps ensured the data was clean and interpretable for the subsequent analyses of emotional responses.

**Real-Time Data Collection from Stressors**

The figure presents representative datasets from four different stressors—cold pressure, exercise, music, and virtual reality—demonstrating the robustness of the device in capturing physiological signals across various conditions. The datasets are displayed in the middle portion of the figure, showing the raw signal patterns for each stressor.

In the cold pressure and exercise experiments, we observed clear variations in physiological responses. For example, alpha power from the EEG readings, which are known to decrease during times of anxiety, distinctly dropped during the cold pressure test, indicating increased sympathetic nervous system activity. Similarly, temperature fluctuations were evident during the cold pressure experiment, correlating with participant discomfort. In contrast, music and virtual reality experiments yielded more moderate physiological changes, suggesting these stressors were less intense.

**Positive and Negative Affectivity Scores**

We also analyzed affective responses through positive and negative affectivity scores, focusing on how these scores varied across the cold pressure and exercise experiments. As shown in figure 3e, affectivity scores derived from physiological data showed distinct patterns. Cold pressure led to an overall increase in both positive and negative affectivity, while exercise was able to boost positive affectivity and decrease negative affectivity. The graphs show overlapping yet distinguishable distributions of affective states, with cold pressure eliciting a strong negative response and exercise producing mixed emotional states.

**Emotional Distributions and Correlations**

The violin plots (3g) represent the distribution of emotional states as measured by the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). These distributions capture the range of emotional intensities experienced by participants, highlighting the variability across different stressors. Cold pressure induced a broader distribution of negative emotions compared to exercise, which showed a wider spread across both positive and negative affective states.

Lastly, the correlation analysis from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) revealed significant relationships between emotional states (3h). The correlations confirm the model’s ability meta-learn a core set of transformations, while leaving only a small set of weights to differentiate each emotion.

**Implications for Personalized Interventions**

The data gathered from this study not only validate our device’s capacity to measure physiological responses but also demonstrate its potential in developing automated, personalized mental health interventions. By accurately mapping physiological signals to emotional profiles in real time, our approach could be used to tailor interventions such as music or virtual reality therapy to a patient's emotional state, offering a novel method for treating anxiety and mood disorders.

The results also set a strong foundation for future work, where further validation across larger and more diverse datasets will be critical. The combination of wearable sensors and machine learning can provide increasingly precise mappings between physiology and emotional states, ultimately leading to more robust, domain-agnostic models for therapeutic applications.

The intrinsic softness, thickness, and gas permeability of skin-interfaced electronics hold promise for long-term and continuous high-fidelity monitoring of physiological states. Recently, there has been many exciting progresses in the fabrication of ultrathin and soft wearables, as evidenced by elastomeric nanofiber mats1 and elastic conductor with microcracked structures2 and semiconductors3. While these devices exhibited seamless contact with skin, the fabrication typically involves electrospinning, iterative spin coating, and thermal evaporation, which are laborious and time-consuming. Moreover, the manufacture of large patches to cover the head or face presents challenges due to limitations in dimensions imposed by instruments such as spin-coaters and oxygen plasma cleaners. While the float assembly method shows promise4,5, achieving in-situ generation of microscale porosity remains fundamentally challenging.

Here, we present a phase-separated float assembly (PSFA) technique that achieves in situ phase separation of silver nanowires (AgNWs) from thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) matrices at water-air interface. This process enables rapid (in minutes), facile and large-area (>200 cm2) fabrication of ultrathin elastic patches (~1 µm) and phase-separated porous elastic sensors (~6 µm). The resulting ultrathin porous electronic skin exhibits substantial improvement in unobtrusiveness, comfort, and intimate contact with skin. As illustrated in Fig. 2a, the fabrication begins with the preparation of a precursor solution containing polymer solution (TPU in tetrahydrofuran (THF)) and conductive filler solution (AgNWs in ethanol). Upon the injection of the nanocomposite solution into water bath, phase separation initiates due to the evaporation and dissolution of the volatile solvent (THF) and non-solvent (ethanol) into water bath, whereas water-immiscible TPU stays on water surface. This results in macroscopic Marangoni flow and microscale liquid-liquid demixing simultaneously (Fig. 2b). On the one hand, dissolution of THF and ethanol lowers the local surface tension, which results in a circular surface tension gradient near the droplet (Fig. 2b, (i)). This gradient induces Marangoni flow from the center to the boundary, which pushes the boundary expansion and mass flow of the precursor solution. This leads to a partially dried ultrathin nanocomposite film floating at the water-air interface. On the other hand, concurrent liquid-liquid demixing results in phase separation of the TPU-rich and TPU-poor phases (Fig. 2b, (ii)). Ag NWs with amphiphilic ligands (that is, polyvinyl pyrrolidone) reside in the PU-poor phase due to its immiscibility with TPU solution. This process generates co-continuous phases in three dimensions, completed by drying that creates continuous porous structures within the PU matrices.

The resulting porous nanocomposite consists of randomly distributed AgNWs confined within porous polymer matrices (Fig. 2c), forming conductive percolation networks that bridge interconnected pores across multiple scales. Unlike conventional spin-coating processes, the PSFA method enables the fabrication of large, thin, yet adhesive electronic skins suitable for multimodal stress therapy. These devices are stretchable, ultrasoft, and provide conformal contact with the skin for enhanced comfort and unobtrusiveness (Fig. 2d–f). Additionally, the porous conductor demonstrates exceptional durability and reliability, with only a slight resistance change (R/R₀ = 4.8) after 3,000 cycles of 25% stretching, compared to the non-porous control (R/R₀ > 200; Fig. 2h). The multiscale interconnected cellular structure further enhances porosity and breathability, facilitating skin perspiration (Fig. 2i) and improving long-term biocompatibility (Fig. 2j, k).

To evaluate the performance of our porous conductor for electrophysiological signal recording, we first examined the electrode-skin contact impedance. The ultrathin porous electrode showed notably reduced impedance compared to its thicker counterpart, primarily due to its intimate skin contact (Fig. 2l). Furthermore, electrooculogram (EOG) signals recorded before and after sweating using the porous on-skin sensors demonstrated quantitatively comparable patterns to those obtained with Ag/AgCl gel electrodes (Fig. 2m, n). Lastly, we present a comprehensive comparison of our Empatch with state-of-the-art materials fabricated by other methods, such as spin-coating and float assembly4, in terms of processing efficiency, large-area fabrication, breathability, wearability, sweat resistance, and electrical conductivity (Fig. 2o).

To accommodate dynamic skin deformations, we utilize strain-resilient interconnects composed of a porous liquid metal composite6, which enables reliable and robust sensing and therapeutic capabilities. This performance is demonstrated by the proper operation of a light-emitting diode array (Fig. 2p), which can be attributed to the stable electrical resistance of the interconnect under strain (Fig. 2q) and its resilience to various damage scenarios, including scalpel punctures, hammer impacts, and tweezer pricks (Fig. 2r). Furthermore, electrocardiogram signals recorded using the liquid metal composite wiring showed negligible variation before and after stretching (Fig. 2s).

**Methods.**

**Reference**

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