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Introductory Chapter: Smart Biofeedback – Perspectives and Applications

Edward Da-Yin Liao

1. About this book

This book is about the *perspectives and applications in smart biofeedback*. The chapters of this book provide a glimpse of the research projects and clinical applications that are underway in smart biofeedback as well as the perspectives of smart biofeedback.

Biofeedback is an autonomic feedback mechanism to let people (1) observe their physiologic information such as muscle tension, blood pressure, heartbeat rates, and brain wave signals, (2) develop awareness of their physiological reactions, and (3) learn to change these physiologic responses accordingly. The biofeedback mechanism helps people take responsibility for their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes for better health. A biofeedback process may utilize many and various sensors to measure physiologic functions and parameters. Sensory data are first collected, analyzed, and then fed back to the human sensor nervous system in a simple, direct and immediate way.

Modern biofeedback experiments began in the early 70's of the last century [1–3], with a promising evidence observed on the efficacy of clinical biofeedback applications [4–7]. For past five decades, uses of biofeedback techniques have been widely seen in health, wellness, awareness, and computer interactive entertainment, including therapies of self regulation of psychiatric and physiologic disorders [8–21], rehabilitation [22–28], healthcare [29–31], training activities such as balancing [32, 33], postural [34, 35], relaxation [36] and sports [37, 38], development of socio-emotional interactions [39, 40], assessment of psychophysiological stress [41–44], falling prevention and detection [45], computer game design [46], and more.

Smart biofeedback [47–52] is receiving attentions because of the widespread, available building blocks of advanced technologies and smart devices that are used in effective collection, analysis and feedback of physiologic data. Researchers and practitioners have been working on various aspects of smart biofeedback methodologies and applications by using wireless communications [53, 54], Internet of Things (IoT) [55, 56], wearables [57, 58], biomedical sensors [59–61], artificial intelligence [62], big data analytics [63], clinical virtual reality [64], smartphones [65, 66], APPs [67], and so forth. The current paradigm shift in information and communication technologies (ICT) such as smart and ultra-compressed sensing, generative adversarial network (GAN), analog bio-inspired machine learning, trainable neuromorphic signal converting, and quantum computing, has been propelling the rapid pace of innovation in smart biofeedback. As a new technology regime of research and applications we only scratch the surface of smart biofeedback.

2. Perspectives and applications in smart biofeedback

This book addresses five important topics of the perspectives and applications in smart biofeedback—*Brain Networks*, *Neuromeditation*, *Psychophysiological Psychotherapy*, *Physiotherapy*, and *Privacy, Security, and Integrity of Data*, described as below.

2.1 Brain networks

Human brain is an information-sharing network which is connected by many spatially distributed, but functionally linked regions of the brain. Exploration of dynamic interactions of the large-scale brain network can construct the relationships among brain regions. It helps understand which and how brain regions actually cooperate during creative cognition and artistic performance. In past decades, neuroimaging studies have investigated the functional connectivity by measuring the level of co-activation of resting-state functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) time series between brain regions [68]. Recent advancements in smart biofeedback technology have paved a promising avenue for real-time, *in vivo* analysis and modeling of nerve synapses in the brain. Electrical neuroimaging [69] that uses electroencephalography (EEG) biofeedback [70] as the neuroimaging technique has the advantages of online recording of the neuronal activity in real time. As a window into the brain, EEG has been used to localize the neural activity in the brain non-invasively. Biofeedback, also known as neurobiofeedback or neurofeedback (NFB) [71, 72], is a psychophysiological mechanism for training of self-regulation and has shown compelling findings about brain function and the neural correlates of behavior and cognition.

2.2 Neuromeditation

Over the last years, the soaring public interest in mindfulness meditation has raised scientific attention. For many people, mindfulness meditation brings a lot of benefits and is considered useful for training attention on cognition and emotion simultaneously. However, some of them are either difficult to maintain a disciplined practice regularly, or lack of methodologies or tools to develop their meditation practice more rapidly. Research studies have observed that many similarities of changes in EEG frequency bands trained in cognitive NFB therapeutic protocols are found in the mental activity involved in meditation practices [73]. As both meditation and NFB are techniques to train mental states, systems or applications based on NFB or real-time EEG biofeedback techniques have the potentials to help develop meditation. However, the reliability and accuracy of signal detection remain questionable in current neuromeditation applications. It is challenging to describe the complex brain activity during meditation by basic EEG analyses [74].

2.3 Psychophysiological psychotherapy

While psychophysiological and behavioral interventions manifest equivalent effectiveness for some kinds of psychological problems, most psychotherapeutic practices focus on the cognitive procedures. Even though psychophysiological approaches that use heart rate variability (HRV) biofeedback in muscle relaxation and breathing interventions have shown significant effects in clinical psychotherapies, psychophysiological methods are often downplayed [75, 76]. Psychotherapy is increasingly emphasizing clinical processes and mechanisms in developing smart

biofeedback protocols in psychotherapeutic training programs to mitigate patient's physical and psychological disorders such as headache [77], depression [78], and anxiety [79]. As the engagement of an efficacious patient-therapist relationship is prominent in psychotherapy [80], development of innovative, artificial-intelligence-augmented tools and systems for interpersonal biofeedback [81] is required to optimize therapists' awareness of unconscious interpersonal regulation dynamics on a moment-to-moment basis.

2.4 Physiotherapy

Biofeedback has been an established, non-pharmacologic technique in physiotherapy and rehabilitation to mitigate migraine headache [82], relax pelvic floor muscles [83–86], help stroke patients regain movement in paralyzed muscles [87, 88], relieve chronic pains [89], and reduce Raynaud's phenomenon [90]. Recently, a combined approach, named Imagined Imitation [91], that integrates traditional physiotherapy with NBF appears to establish more therapeutic benefits. In conjunction with electromechanical physiotherapy, participants who receive NFB training sessions get better improved in motor control of their affected arms [92]. The mechanism of the effectiveness by combining NFB with physiotherapy to modulate brain activity is still yet to explore. However, such a combined approach opens a grand door to both researchers and practitioners for design of user interfaces and user experience scenarios which drive sound user engagement with proper match of the level of challenge, according to the participant's ability and conditions.

2.5 Privacy, security, and integrity of data

The prospectives and applications in smart biofeedback have to embrace the advanced ICT integration. In addition to diagnosis information, demographic, medical, and psychological data, as well as historical information such as duration of complaints and treatment history, should be well managed [93]. Simultaneous acquisition of data from multiple physiological sensors introduces new challenges to data management along the path of data life cycle of each data, from sensing, measuring, interpreting, transmitting, storing, analyzing, predicting, learning, to optimizing. Smart biofeedback belongs to highly interconnected systems and applications that demand end-to-end privacy, security, and integrity of data for proper operations [94]. Smart biofeedback systems and applications are all built on the assumption of reliable and secure communication but are vulnerably exposed to various treats and attacks. As more and more smart biofeedback systems and applications with IoT, cloud and edge computing implementation are emerging, new system architectures and approaches such as blockchains are to develop for massively distributed processing, to ensure the privacy, security, and integrity of data.

3. How the book is organized

This book consists of six chapters. The remaining of the book is into five sections to cope with the five specific topics of the perspectives and applications in smart biofeedback described above. All the chapters are from academic researchers and clinical practitioners on various areas of smart biofeedback. This introductory chapter, Chapter 1, describes the nature and purpose of this book and outlines the scope, logic and significance of the contents of this book.

Chapter 2 in the *Brain Networks* section overviews the recent advances in electrical neuroimaging, brain networks and neurofeedback protocols. It starts with a review of live Z-score NBF training which uses an EEG normative reference database to identify the possibly dysregulated brain regions from the probabilities estimated by auto and cross-spectrum of EEG. New advances in electrical neuroimaging provide a 12,700-voxel resolution, three-dimensional EEG source location that uses swLORETA (weighted standardized low resolution electromagnetic tomography) and 19 channels for NBF. Such technologies enable the NFB approach to cerebellar and subcortical brain hubs like the thalamus, amygdala and habenula. Linking symptoms to dysregulated brain hubs and networks is crucial to help patients of NBF training. New development in cerebellar z-score NBF research has shown a bright future in NBF for brain networks. Potential applications of future swLORETA z-score NBF include helping people with cognition problems as well as balance problems, and Parkinsonism.

Chapter 3 in the *Neuromeditation* section introduces the science and practice of neuromeditation. Combining NFB and meditation, neuromeditation monitors brainwave activity to help meditators learn to quickly enter a desired state of consciousness and then maintain the state for a period of time for improvements in mental health. The history, examples, and research evidence on neuromeditation are reviewed. As researches on both NFB and meditation have found effective in the treatment of various mental health concerns, respectively, the efficacy of neuromeditation is reviewed with a case study about a middle-aged, Caucasian female with anxiety, eating disorder, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) mental health history. Assessment results, including a quantitative EEG (qEEG) assessment comparing her baseline EEG activity to a clinical database, indicate that her concerns most closely match the Quiet Mind style of meditation. A mindfulness meditation protocol with eight neuromeditation sessions is identified as the best for her concerns and background. Most of the improvements are found directly related to the goals and concerns identified in the intake process.

Chapter 4 in the *Psychophysiological Psychotherapy* section surveys the most common eight modalities of biofeedback in clinical psychology and provides the perspectives of how biofeedback is applied to manage the psychophysiological conditions. It aims to elucidate the clinical settings in psychotherapy practices and point out the psychophysiological conditions for biofeedback training. It reviews the basic principles of psychophysiology, including the balance mechanism between the fight-or-flight (sympathetic) versus the rest-and-digest (parasympathetic) pathways in the autonomic nervous system (ANS) where biofeedback can regulate and provide balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic responses to mitigate psychopathological symptoms and to improve cognitive performance. It demonstrates several successful biofeedback training protocols in clinical psychology, including managing stress in anxious patients, managing hyperactivity of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), managing depression.

Chapter 5 in the *Physiotherapy* section deals with the problems of chronic pains. It surveys six NBF protocols to evaluate the efficacy of NBF training for treatment to chronic pains. At first, it introduces the mechanisms and neural pathways underlying pain perception, and describes the brain rhythms associated with chronic pains and the identification of neurophysiological correlates of chronic pains. The efficacy of the two key NBF modalities, EEG and fMRI, for chronic pains are discussed. A NBF protocol with EEG target brain rhythms is provided. It surveys the efficacy of various NFB training protocols applied in the management of chronic pains, including fibromyalgia, central neuropathic pains in paraplegic patients, traumatic brain injury, chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy, primary headache, complex region pain syndrome type I, post-herpetic neuralgia,

and chronic lower back pains. The feasibility and availability of home-based NFB therapy for chronic pains are reviewed. Finally, it discusses the adverse effects associated with NFB training and limitations, and provides future recommendations.

Chapter 6 in the *Privacy, Security, and Integrity of Data* section presents the design and applications of the Blockchain-based Medical Data Management System (BMDMS) for management of medical health records and biofeedback data. As an emerging and prospective technology in ICT, blockchain is featured by its privacy, security, and integrity of data so that blockchain-enabled information and data will remain safe and secure. BMDMS adopts the smart contract approach to reduce the need in trusted intermediators, fraud losses, and accidental or malicious exceptions, in order to protect the privacy of patients and medical practitioners. Patients can take biofeedback training at home or in any local clinics, hospitals, or large medical centers and their medical health records and collected biofeedback data can be shared among medical facilities within BMDMS in a secure and safe way. The proposed BMDMS framework utilizes big data, analytics, and edge/cloud computing technologies, to smartly retrieve the exact amount of data to optimize the computing and storage capabilities. BMDMS thus avoids the possible deluge of clinic or laboratory data, such as massive data collected from biofeedback sensors.

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