

# Mechanisms, Metaphors, and Meaning in Energy Psychology Journal

*Melisa Naranjo Vanegas*

When a field matures, its language matures with it. The early literature of energy psychology was rich with metaphors borrowed from traditional Chinese medicine meridians flowing with *qi*, subtle energies coursing through invisible channels, the body as a landscape of ancient maps. These were not lies—they were the best available approximations of phenomena that practitioners could observe but not yet explain. And they served a purpose: they gave clinicians a coherent framework within which to act, and act effectively.

But metaphors have costs. When a metaphor outruns the science, it invites dismissal. For more than two decades, the evocative language of energy and meridians handed skeptics an easy target. The approach was labeled a pseudoscience not primarily because its outcomes were weak—they were not—but because its proposed mechanisms were unverifiable by conventional scientific means. The clinical results accumulated; the theoretical scaffolding creaked. This issue of *Energy Psychology: Theory, Research, and Treatment* mark a significant moment in that long transition from metaphor to mechanism. David Feinstein's article, "Physiological Mechanisms of Energy Psychology Treatments: An Updated Synthesis," represents the most comprehensive and rigorously grounded account yet published of how acupoint tapping protocols produce their documented clinical effects. It is, in a meaningful sense, the paper that earlier skeptics challenged the field to produce.

Feinstein's synthesis draws on more than 400 peer-reviewed sources to identify seven empirically supported premises linking the physical act of tapping to the neurological changes that explain durable psychological improvement. The sequence he describes is

elegant in its coherence: pressure applied to an acupoint generates electromagnetic signals through mechanosensory transduction; those signals travel via afferent nerves and connective tissue to the brain; they reach precisely the regions activated by the clinically relevant memories, emotions, and cognitions the client holds in mind; and they upregulate or downregulate activity in those regions in ways that consistently correspond with therapeutic benefit. The process interfaces with memory reconsolidation—one of the most robust constructs in contemporary neuroscience—to explain why the results are not merely temporary but transformative.

What is notable about this framework is not only its explanatory power but its scientific address. Every step in the proposed chain of events is grounded in established biology. Mechanosensory transduction is not a construct invented to explain tapping; it is the same mechanism by which the body processes hearing, touch, and balance. Connective tissue signaling was not proposed by energy psychology researchers; it was postulated at Harvard Medical School in the context of acupuncture research. Memory reconsolidation is a widely accepted framework in cognitive neuroscience. Energy psychology, as Feinstein demonstrates, fits within these well-mapped territories—it did not require its own private science.

This matters for several reasons. It matters for practitioners who have long worked with methods they knew to be effective but struggled to explain in terms their colleagues would credit. It matters for researchers designing the next generation of studies, who now have a more precise roadmap for the mechanisms that most warrant direct investigation. It matters for the patients and clients whose access to effective treatment has sometimes been limited by the controversy surrounding the approach. And it matters for the field itself, which has earned a more confident posture in its dialogue with mainstream psychology and medicine.

None of this means the work is done. Feinstein is admirably candid about the limitations of the current synthesis: imaging studies with small samples, a literature weighted toward efficacy rather than mechanism, the perennial challenge of distinguishing specific effects from placebo and nonspecific factors. These are not embarrassments—they are the honest conditions of a science still in productive development. The mechanisms proposed here are plausible and evidentially supported; they are not yet definitive. Future studies measuring electromagnetic signal propagation in real time, tracking neuroplastic changes longitudinally, or isolating the differential effects of specific acupoints will be built on the foundation this synthesis provides. There is also a broader meaning in this moment for the journal itself. *Energy Psychology: Theory, Research, and Treatment* was founded on the conviction that an unconventional approach deserves rigorous examination—those extraordinary clinical results, however initially puzzling, warrant serious scientific investigation rather than reflexive dismissal. Volume 17 arrives with that conviction vindicated. The field has

produced its efficacy evidence. It has now produced its mechanistic account. The conversation with mainstream science can proceed on different terms than it could a decade ago.

*The metaphors served their purpose. The mechanisms are taking their place.*

## References

- Church, D. (2022). Clinical EFT as an evidence-based practice for the treatment of psychological and physiological conditions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 951451. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.951451>
- Feinstein, D. (2023). Integrating the manual stimulation of acupuncture points into psychotherapy: A systematic review with clinical recommendations. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 33(1), 47–67. <https://doi.org/10.1037/int0000283>
- Feinstein, D. (2021). Six empirically supported premises about energy psychology: Mounting evidence for a controversial therapy. *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*, 35(2), 17–32.
- Stapleton, P., Kip, K., Church, D., Toussaint, L., Footman, J., Ballantyne, P., & O’Keefe, T. (2023). Emotional freedom techniques for treating post-traumatic stress disorder: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1195286.