

Somatic Experiencing™ May Mitigate Retraumatization for Sexual Harassment Victims with PTSD during Litigation

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ At least 40% of all working women will experience some form of sexual harassment, yet only 11% of those harassed will ever file a complaint, and less than 1% will ever sue and reach the courts (Cassino & Bensen-Cassino, 2019; Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; Mani, 2013).
- ❖ Victims who file a sexual harassment legal complaint have a high probability of retraumatization due to a legal system that often provokes symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) through aggressive argument, selective presentation of the facts, and psychological attack (Herman, 2003).
- ❖ According to research, the severity of posttraumatic stress symptoms -- including hyperarousal, avoidance, re-experiencing, and sleep problems -- is linked to sexual harassment (Palmieri & Fitzgerald, 2005), which can be exacerbated during litigation (Adams-Clark et al., 2019; Bond et al., 2010; Herman, 2003; Larsen & Fitzgerald, 2011; Stockdale et al., 2008).
- ❖ Sexual harassment may produce exacerbated posttraumatic stress disorder symptomology, including dissociation, due to correlations to past trauma, betrayal trauma, institutional trauma, as well as fear, self-blame, demoralization, and anxiety (Adams-Clark et al., 2019; Larsen & Fitzgerald, 2011; Stockdale et al., 2009; Wright & Fitzgerald, 2007).

INTRODUCTION (cont.)

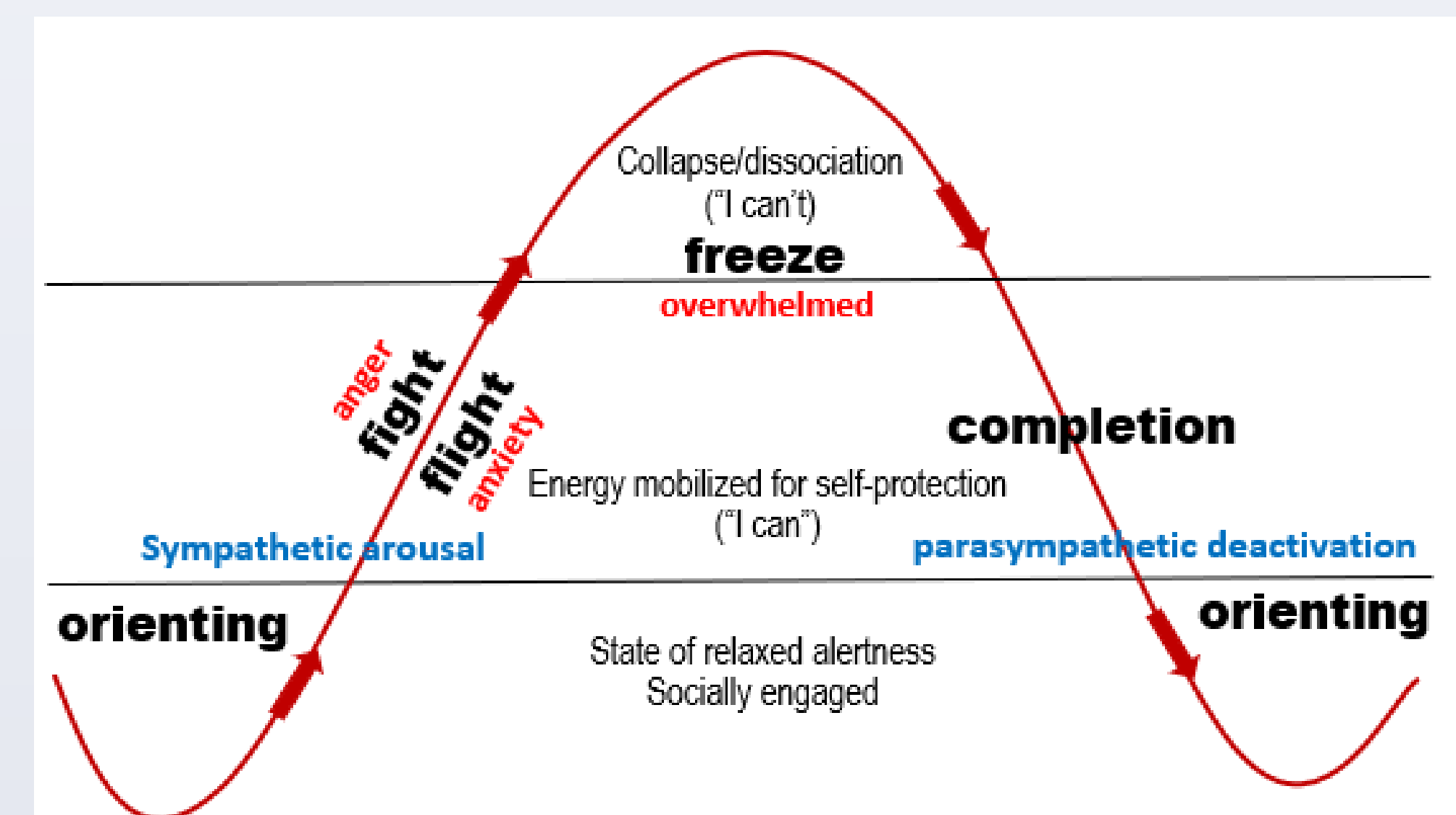
- ❖ The goal, then, for the forensic team is to continuously mitigate the trauma response so that the victim is able to testify, from a grounded state within their window of tolerance, providing the most accurate, complete details to support the litigation.
- ❖ Implications of the research suggest Somatic Experiencing™ (Levine et al., 2018) during the litigation process may mitigate retraumatization of the victim, as well as ensure that the victim may fully participate and respond to questioning in a grounded and regulated state.
- ❖ Further research is needed to analyze the effectiveness of Somatic Experiencing™ in courtroom settings, especially in relation to mitigating PTSD symptomology in sexual harassment cases.

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING™ APPROACHES

- ❖ Body-oriented approaches can target PTSD symptomology by modifying the interoceptive and proprioceptive sensations correlated with the sexual harassment experience (KahfuB et al., 2021).
- ❖ Somatic Experiencing™ assists in supporting intrinsic resilience and mitigating stress (Winblad et al., 2018) by defusing the trauma response in the nervous system so that the victim remains within their window of tolerance, mitigating a dorsal or hyperaroused state.

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING™ APPROACHES (cont.)

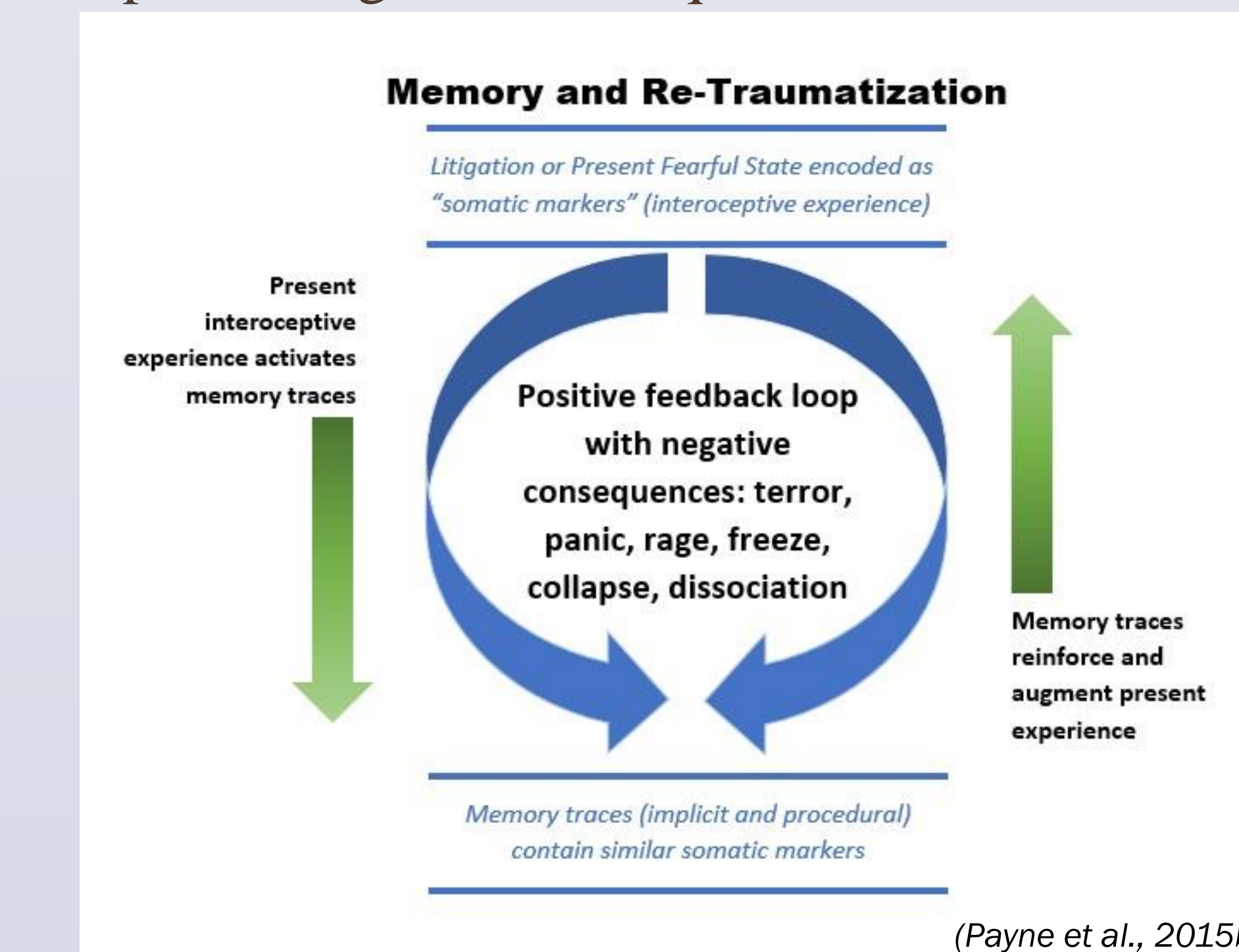
- ❖ **ORIENTING** – Orienting to the space allows for client to remain socially engaged, which helps client testify in a manner where they can think and make decisions.



(Payne et al., 2015b)

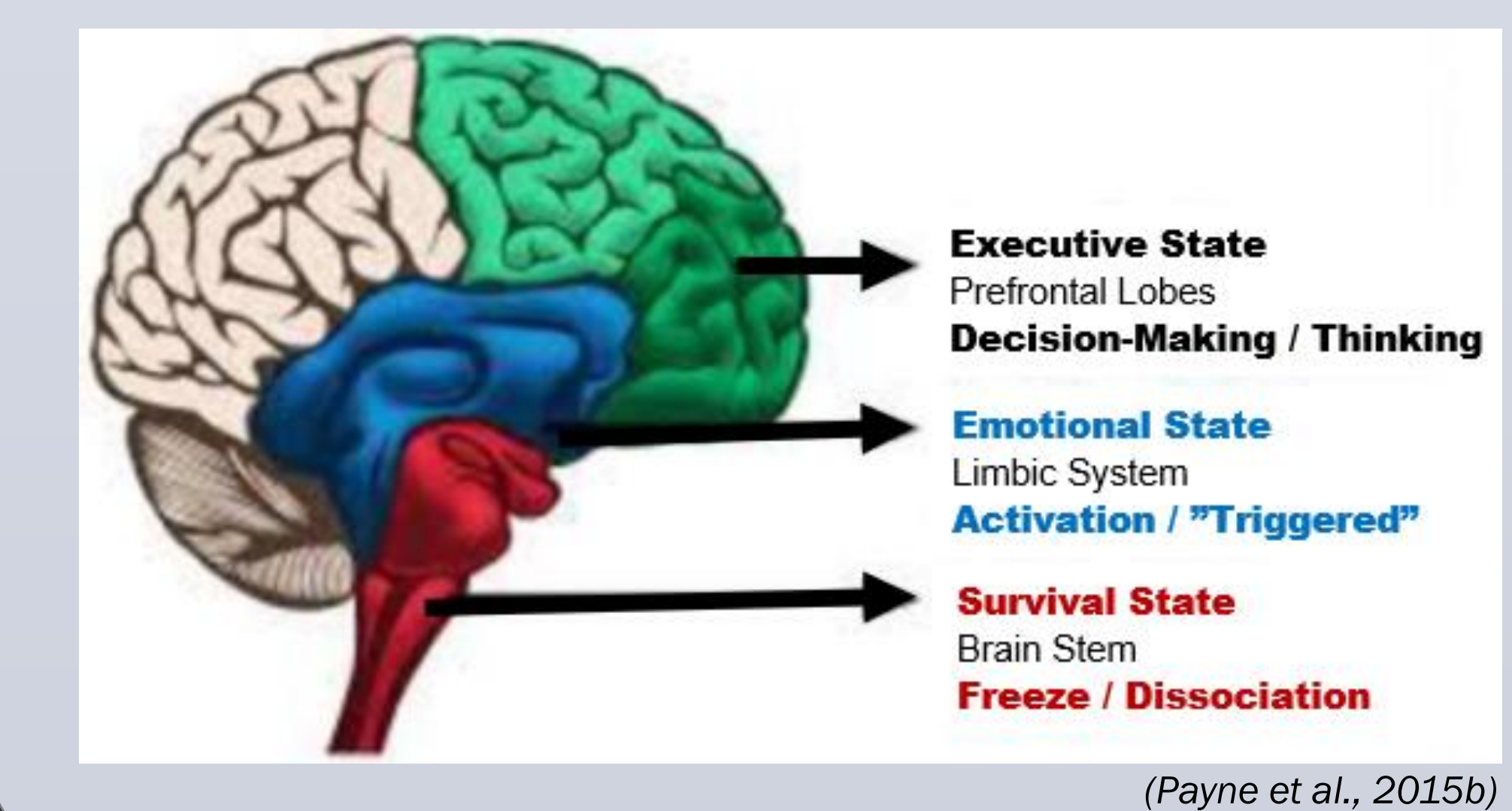
- ❖ **PHYSICAL ENGAGEMENT** –

Proprioception, body-awareness sense, reduces interoceptive experience and activation of memory traces, reducing the positive feedback loop with negative consequences.



(Payne et al., 2015b)

- ❖ **WRITING** – Utilization of neo-cortex/ executive function to prevent sympathetic arousal.



(Payne et al., 2015b)

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