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A Conceptual Model of Bleed:

Introducing The Bleed Perception Threshold, the Relational Matrix
of Bleed, and Identity Bleed.

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- The new concepts presented in this talk are from a thesis I finished in May 2022.
- The thesis is an attempt at a “road map” aimed at connecting role-playing and the phenomenon of bleed to established theories on identity creation.



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Bleed and Identity

**A conceptual model of bleed
and how bleed-out from role-playing games
can affect a player's sense of self**

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Sense of Self and Identity Creation

- Central to many modern theories of identity is the concept of a multiplicity of identities or aspects thereof combining into an individual's sense of self (James 1890).
- A person's sense of self is deeply connected to the enactment of their identities within social settings and frames (Freud 1922, Erikson 1950, Goffman 1959, 1986, Jung 1976, Burke and Stets 2009, Stets and Serpe 2013, Jhangiani, Tarry, and Stangor 2022)
- Psychology
 - Erikson's *theory on stages of social development* (Erikson 1950).
 - Marcia's *theory of identity achievement* (Marcia 1966).
 - Jung's theory of self and the process of *individuation* (Jung 1976).
 - Self-concept and self-schemas following Piaget's *theory of cognitive development* (Piaget 1972).
- Social Psychology
 - Stryker's *identity theory* (Stryker 1968).
 - *Self presentation theory* (Goffman 1959).
- Neuroscience
 - Memory construction, processing, and recollection (Klein and Nichols 2012, Brown et. al 2019, Broom et.al.2021).





Sense of Self and Role-Playing Games

- Role-playing games are more often than not designed to deliberately play around and experiment with numerous aspects of identity creation, whether intended to or not.
- The understanding that role-playing games have the potential to change our sense of self seems to be gaining ground in contemporary research (Bowman 2010, Beltrán 2013, Back, Segura and Waern 2017, Boccamazzo et. al 2018, Leonard and Thurman 2018, Lasley 2020, Kemper 2020, Baird 2021, Sidhu and Carter 2021, Loh 2021, Heinrich and Worthington 2021, Bowman and Hugaas 2021, Hugaas 2022).
- Several theorists point to the role-playing phenomenon of bleed (Boss 2007) as one of the central ways in which players are affected by the experiences of their characters (Montola 2010, Beltrán 2013, Bowman 2013,2015,2022, Kemper 2017,2020, Leonard and Thurman 2018, Hugaas 2019).





Bleed

Bleed is when aspects of the player spill over to the character and vice versa.

- Emotional bleed (Montola 2010; Bowman 2015)- emotional states and feelings
- Ego bleed (Beltrán 2012, 2013) - archetypal qualities and identity patterns bleed across the ego boundary that exists between player and character.
- Procedural bleed (Hugaas 2019) - physical abilities, perceptual experience, motor skills, traits, habits, and other bodily states.
- Memetic bleed (Hugaas 2019) - ideas, thoughts, opinions, convictions, ideologies and similar cognitive constructs.
- Relationship bleed - aspects of social and romantic relationships. Romantic bleed (Harder 2018, Bowman and Hugaas 2021) is the most frequently discussed subtype.
- Emancipatory bleed (Kemper 2017, 2020), where players from marginalized backgrounds experience liberation from that marginalization through their characters.





The Case for a Conceptual Model of Bleed

- The term bleed and its numerous iterations, while still remaining somewhat nebulous itself, does still seem to have provided theorists with helpful scaffolding when trying to explain related phenomena
- Yet, at the moment both the everyday and the academic use of the term suffers from a lack of a shared general understanding and agreement, both on what bleed is and on what it is not.
- In particular, the colloquial understanding and use of the term has generally not deepened into the nuances added over the years, leading to it mostly being used interchangeably to refer to the sub-category of emotional bleed.
- This lack of specificity might have led to it being perceived as less useful and as a result sometimes avoided in academic discourse.
- A term is only as valuable as it is useful, and as long as bleed remains nebulous, it will be less useful both as a colloquial term and in the academic discourse.

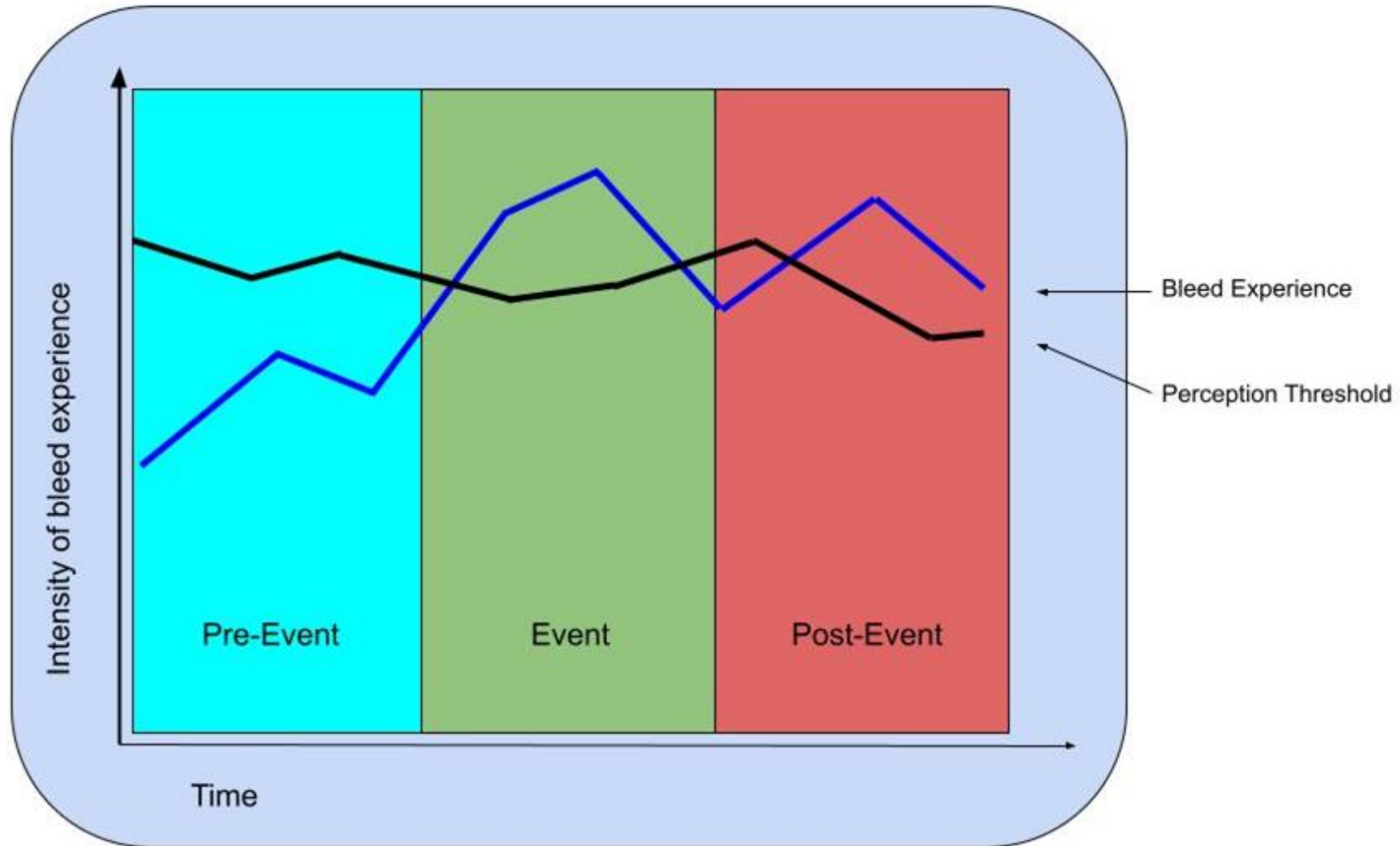


The First Challenge When Studying Bleed

- One of the defining attributes of bleed is that it is a **subjectively experienced and self-reported** phenomenon. This leads to difficulties in data collection, as players' experience and reporting of the phenomena spreads out across a wide spectrum.
- Players even **self-identify across a spectrum** that stretches from on average experiencing significant amounts of bleed at any given role-playing event, to never experiencing bleed at all (Pedersen 2017, Hansen and Hugaas 2017).
- Seeing as how the mechanics of bleed are closely connected to **considered universal processes of human identity creation** that are running continuously, it is hard to believe that any given individual player could be exempt from the effects of bleed.
- Considering the self-reporting aspect of bleed, the reports from players claiming to never having had bleed experiences could possibly rather be explained by **these experiences not reaching an intensity that made it noticeable** to them. To address this challenge and to facilitate a discourse around it, the concept of the *bleed perception threshold* is suggested



Proposition 1 - The Bleed Perception Threshold





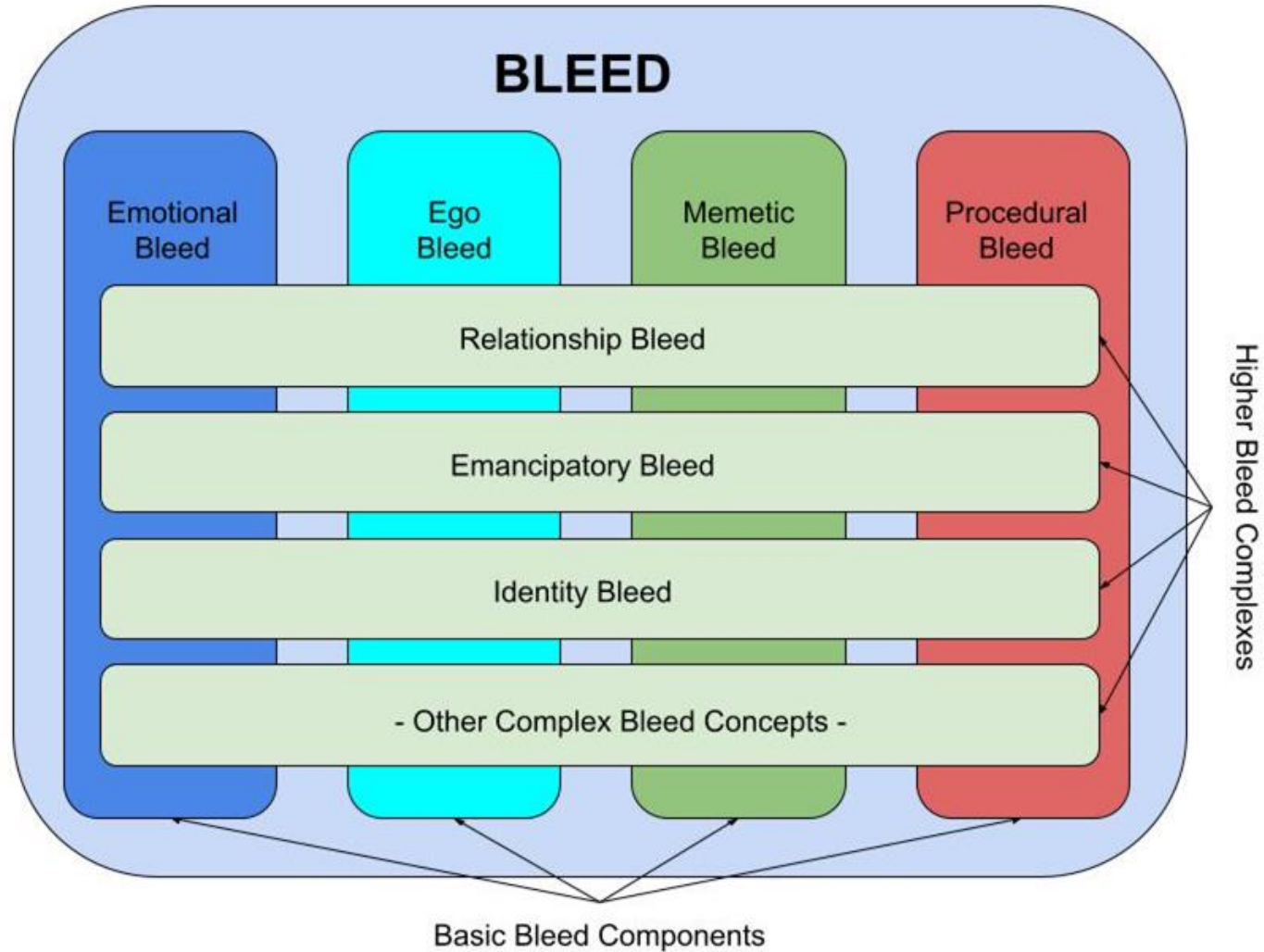
The Next Challenge: How does it all fit together?

- As an answer to how to move forward with the numerous suggested types of bleed, I propose a rudimentary classification into **Basic Bleed Components** and **Higher Bleed Complexes**.
- A basic bleed component is a type of bleed that can be considered as a building block for more complex bleed experiences, while a higher bleed complex combines several basic components and/or goes beyond the phenomenon itself, by for example adding potential uses, tools, and effects beyond the primary experience.

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| • Basic | Bleed | Components: |
| - | Emotional | Bleed |
| - | Ego | Bleed |
| - Memetic Bleed | | |
| - Procedural Bleed | | |
| • Higher | Bleed | Complexes: |
| - | Emancipatory | Bleed |
| - Relationship Bleed | | |
| - Identity Bleed | | |



Proposition 2 - A Relational Matrix of Bleed



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Thank You for Your Attention

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