



DANCING WITH MYSELF

By Evelina Teddy Karlsson

On an ordinary day, an ordinary person walks by a party and they feel welcome, called even, to join. They don't know what this party is, and they don't know anyone else there. That is, until they see someone they have never met, but know better than they know anyone else.

In *Dancing with Myself* one gets to play a person who meets themselves at a party. The game explores who we really are, who we want to be, and what one would say if one met oneself. It is a grounded and surrealistic scenario where introspection and conversation becomes the same thing.

In pairs, the players will create characters with dilemmas and hardships, and in doing so choose the themes of their own game. Through dance, mirroring, and most of all conversation, the players will explore this character and their relationship to themselves. At the same time, they will be a part of a crowd of people around their co-players. The game centres around co-creation, being in tune with another person and dancing like nobody's watching.

Number of players: Always equal numbers, around 10 players are recommended. If you have less than 4 or more than 14 players you may need to change some things, for example splitting the group in two for certain parts of the game if you have a larger group.

Time: approx. 2.5 hours, approx. 40 mins ingame.

Gamemaster: One facilitator who leads the workshop and debrief, narrates part of the game and controls the music.

Materials: 1-2 rolls of painters tape, something to play loud music with, some kind of disco lights and this document printed out.

Location: A room that can be made dark. The size needed varies depending on the amount of participants, see below how the play space is used to consider how big of a room you need.

Preparation: Read the entire manuscript at least once! Have everything ready including having the tape readily available, the “truths” papers cut apart, the disco lights in a good spot and your own notes in order. Make sure you have both playlists available and ready to play.

Music: Two playlists will be used to make sure there is flexibility of when to move to the next part of the game. Here you can find the [playlist for the workshop and the meta parts of the game](#) and the [playlist for the conversational parts of the game](#).

Thank you: To all of my playtesters for their lovely stories and their input, to Simon Rosén for letting me think out loud and helping me not overthink and lastly to all scenario writers who has inspired me, for this game in particular Karolina Soltys with her game The Glimpse.

If you run this game: I’d love it if you email me at evelina.emma.karlsson@gmail.com and tell me about how it went! This document only explains how I run this game, feel free to make any changes needed to make it work for you!

The ingame location

This game has a clear but mystical location; a large room fit for a party, basically just one big dancefloor, with a door on each side that leads right out into the street. The room has loud music, moving coloured lights and a crowd of strangers. Loud music and lights is quite easy to accomplish, but being crammed amongst a crowd of strangers and especially having two doors leading to two versions of the same street is harder to create for a game. These things will be accomplished with the same method. This method is a ring of imaginary doors marked on the floor, each one belonging to a player, with their partner's door right across from them. The players will start off the game walking around the ring and then enter the party through their door, and stay within the circle during the game. This will make sure that they can all enter the room at the same time and that they have their partner right in front of them as they do so. This will also make sure that the players feel a bit crammed like in a crowd. This game might seem like one where you don't really need to imagine your surroundings, but I think the game gains something from the players imagining the street that their character passes every day on their way home, and the strange party room that seems a bit out of place. This will be helped by the initial narration. As you narrate, it's important to be specific enough to trigger the players imagination but not so specific that you hinder it, and especially not specific enough to speak against what the players have already decided about their character. There is a blurry picture in my mind of the room where the party takes place, and I hope there may be a picture in your mind, and in the players minds as well.

“Lore”

The explanation for how the characters are able to meet themselves is not important to the story, and is therefore not established. That they meet themselves is surprising and is perceived as something they will never experience again. The focus of the game is instead the character and their life. There is an explanation for how they experience the situation; they enter the party from streets that look the same and walk through doors on each side of the room. No further explanation is given, but if any differences arise between the two versions of the character, or if the players choose to have differences between them, this can be explained by the two versions of the characters coming from different realities/dimensions/universes/whatever you want to call it. Since the players will only talk to their partner during the game, the different pairs do not need to have a common understanding of anything, and there really aren't any wrong answers.

Truths

This game is played in pairs where the two players have a shared character that they make up together, and both play. This game does not have any prewritten characters, instead each pair has a few statements that will be an inspiration for them as they make their characters, I call these Truths. Truths are trios of statements and each pair will have one Truth each. There are 10 of them in this document and if you have more than 20 players you will have to print extras and use doubles, or feel free to write your own. The idea is that the Truths should contain one thing the character likes, one thing they do and one thing they are, or believe they are. I have chosen things that feel quite permanent and things that are current in the character's life. The truths are written to invite the players to quite different processes and to work a bit differently to hopefully cater to different kinds of players. Since the players get to choose their own Truth (with the caveat that some compromises will be needed) they hopefully get what they need, and get a partner with a similar need.

Accessibility

This is a game that can make some players uncomfortable due to being crammed with others, hearing loud music and being among bright lights. All of these things are design choices bringing something to the game, but the game should never be more important than the players. For example moving outside of the circle slightly will of course be okay. Have an open communication with your players as you decide things like the size of the circle or the placement of the lights. Don't assume anything, and be prepared to accommodate for example wheelchair users. If any of the players are worried about the volume during the game, you can tell them about the levels of noise that will happen;

1. Gamemaster talks, other listens
2. All participants talk at the same time
3. All participants talk at the same time and music is played at a lower volume that everyone agrees on during the workshop.
4. Limited talking, louder music at a volume that everyone agrees on during the workshop.

Below is a description of every part of running this game. The song Dancing with Myself, in all of its versions, will be referred to as DWM. When you are instructed to play the song the version will be specified.

How to run the game

1. Introduction

Start off with an introduction of yourself and the game. If you want to, you can read out the text at the very start of this document.

Tell the players

- About yourself if relevant.
- About practical details if relevant.
- The game is about a person meeting themselves at a party and working through something with themselves.
- The game is played in pairs with the other characters simply being strangers in the crowd. In these pairs you will make characters with quirks and hardships.
- About the structure of the game, all in all it should take no more than 2,5 hours depending on your pace. You will start with a workshop to prepare the players for the game and make their characters, then you will play the game for about 40 minutes and then you will debrief together. Just before the game starts there will be a break.
- They may be confused during the workshop but all should be clear by the end, they should stick to clarifying questions during the workshop and save any other questions for the end of the workshop.
- They will all be playing normal people in an unusual situation, this is a once in a lifetime thing that will be surprising to the character, but the game is about the characters life and not how they got to meet themselves. There will be a simple explanation of the way they experience meeting themselves but the focus of the game is the character and the story.
- The game takes place in our time, where the game takes place doesn't matter but the pairs can decide that for themselves if they want to.
- Their partner should be their focus but they are allowed to ask someone else a question, scream something for all to hear or react to someone being loud. As a rule interactions between pairs should be kept to a short moment. How their character perceives the other people in the room is up to them, whether they're seen as other people meeting themselves, just a part of this weird place or something else.
- Since they will mostly or only talk to their partner the different pairs won't need to have a shared understanding of anything within the game, just the meta stuff like the structure of the game.
- If they ever need to communicate with their partner out of game, they may simply say offgame and what they want to say. If they need the whole game to pause or stop they may yell offgame or speak to you. The players and their feelings are always more important than the game! Do not disturb other players' experience without a reason though.

2. Practice dancing

Go right into the first exercise of the workshop, which is free dancing for the duration of one song. Explain the things below and then play the original Billy Idol version of Dancing with Myself from the meta playlist. As you start playing the song, check with your players that you all agree on a good level for louder dance music.

Tell the players

- This exercise is about practising dancing, not like getting good at dancing but practising daring to dance.
- This exercise is also a way to let loose and to warm up both their physical and creative muscles.
- Different sentiments work for different people but things like “Dance as badly as possible”, “Dance like nobody’s watching” or “Do what you feel like your body needs” might apply!
- If they want to feel creative in their dance and try new things, it might help to think of different levels, dancing high, dancing low or keeping in the middle.
- Another point of this exercise is to show the original version of DWM to the players, during the game this song in different versions will signify a more surrealistic phase of the game with a focus on movement.

3. Form pairs around Truths

It's time to do two things, forming the pairs and assigning every pair their own Truth. Start with spreading the papers on the floor. As a rule, place out all 10 regardless of the amount of players you have. The players will then get to walk around, choose a Truth that they want to work with and then stand next to it. When everyone is done the idea is that all players are paired up by a paper, but likely there will be a need to compromise.

Tell the players

- That these statements, called a truth will be the starting point as they make their characters, if these things are true what else is true and so forth.
- To read the Truth and then stand by one they want to play on.
- That they may tell the group any preferences they have like speaking a specific language or keeping a specific pace. Then others who feel the same can say so directly and/or move towards that person as they find their partner.
- That any two players can make a pair, looks and the like does not matter at all.
- To be mindful of each other in the process and remember that being chosen and choosing is a vulnerable thing to do.
- That there will probably need to be compromises to pair everyone up.
- The idea is that all three things will be true about the character but if any of them is standing in the way of their experience they may ignore it.

4. Make doors

Now it's time to use the painters tape. Let the players form a circle, without you in it, where they have their partner across from them. Make sure that everyone agrees on the size of the circle, as this will be the space they have to play in. Send the painters tape around the circle and let the players put markings on the floor like this | | on either side of themselves to mark the door.

Tell the players

- That they will get to put their truths away for a moment to do a thing to prepare for the game, and explain how they experience meeting themselves.
- The game takes place in a room made for a party, basically a large dance floor and has parallel doors on each side of the room. These doors lead out into the same streets.
- You will now make marks on the floor that represent the parallel doors on either side of the room. The ring of marks on the floor will be the space where they will play the game. It's supposed to be a bit too small to simulate there being a crowd around the characters. The players are supposed to stay within the circle during the game but of course they can move outside it slightly if they are uncomfortable or leave completely if they need to. There needs to be room to move around outside of the circle.
- They should be able to find their way back to their own door, so they should either make an extra identifying marking with the tape or look around the room to see an identifier like a scratch on the other wall.
- This will be the spot where they stand at the start of the larp.

5. Make the character

Now the players have a partner, a Truth and an explanation of how they will meet themselves. It's time to make the characters! This is a pretty free process but you need to be ready to give players clearer questions if needed. Give the players a specific amount of time to do this, around 15 minutes depending on if you're on schedule or not.

Tell the players

- That as they are making the character they are deciding what their game is about, apart from identity and self reflection.
- The Truth is the starting point of their character; if those things are true, what else is true about the character? What other characteristics does it point to?
- The one thing everyone should decide is what's going on in the character's life, a dilemma or the like, something they'd bring up with themselves, something they might not be able to discuss with anyone else. It's recommended to make up 2-3 things like that or one thing that is multi-faceted. The main part of the game will be to discuss this.
- How much and exactly what the players decide is entirely up to them, they may want to pick a name, occupation, some childhood quirk, a habit etc. They should focus on deeply personal things that only the character knows, things they'd bring up with themselves.
- The players decide what they need to know about their character, and they can and should improvise other things during the game. If their partner says something new, they should agree, or make a thing of there being slight differences between them.
- They can decide that there is some difference between the two versions of the characters if they want to. These should be decisions the character has made, not anything that is different between the realities.
- They can just call you over or raise their hands if they need any help or more clear questions. *Walk around and listen in to see that everyone is getting started with their characters. Dare to give help if some pair seems to need it. Give the players some extra time if they still have things to talk about.*

6. Mirror-exercise becomes character exercise

It's time for another exercise. This is an important part of the workshop and there is no need to rush it, try to feel when it's time to go on to the next step.

Tell the players

- That it's time to do a so-called mirror-exercise, which is a classic drama exercise. This will help them be in tune with their partner and will lead to finding the character's way of movement.
- To stand faced towards each other.
- To decide who should start to lead.
- That if the one who leads raises their right hand, the other person should raise their left hand, and vice versa. *Feel free to demonstrate.*
- The idea is that the other person should match the leader's movement as if they were standing in front of a mirror. The point is to try to do the exact same movement, and to focus on the other person, not necessarily succeed in moving identically.
- That you will tell them when to switch who leads.

Play the lo-fi version of DWM, the second song on the meta playlist, on a loop. Let the first person lead for a few minutes, then lower the music. Take this time to find a good lower volume that will be used for the conversational parts of the game.

- Tell the players that it's the other person's turn to lead.

After another couple of minutes, lower the music again

- Tell the players that now they can try to both lead at the same time, still trying to be like mirror images of each other.

A point of doing this exercise is that it's a bit impossible, but most of all it creates an intense moment between the players.

When they have both lead for another while, lower the music again.

- Tell the players to start to think of their character, how would they move in this exercise?

Give the players time to move as their characters before giving their next instruction

- How does the character stand? What movement is typical for them? What does their body do when they're talking to someone?

For the next and last instruction, turn off the music, give the next instruction and then turn on the next song in the playlist, by Nouvelle Vague. Let the players dance for the entire song.

- How does the character dance?

7. Explaining the game structure

It's time for the last part of the workshop, where we walk through the game structure.

Tell the players

- That DWM playing means you cannot speak, there will be a focus on movement and mirroring. DWM will play louder than the other music which will be another indication that it's a time to focus on movement.
- That the music being turned off means there will be narrated info.
- That you, the gamemaster, won't be a character in the game but simply a narrator.
- That the game has a set beginning, middle and end, all being surrealistic scenes, and between those there will be time for the character to talk things through with themselves.

- How their characters come to realise that they have met themselves is up to them, but they definitely won't expect to meet themselves and it won't be their first guess on why the person feels so familiar. But maybe deep inside they know all along.

Then explain the phases of the game.

1. Beginning.

They start by moving around the “doors”, as you narrate. When you say they find the door they find the door, they can take their time to walk in. DWM will start to play and they will find their partner without talking. As the song plays they should stay by their doors and mostly share looks with their partner, and take in the party.

2. Between the beginning and middle.

The dance playlist will come on and they can talk and start to discuss their life.

3. Middle.

The music will turn off and they'll get a new narrated instruction. Another version of DWM will come on and they'll do some movement focused play. This will be a break from the talking.

4. Between the middle and end

The dance playlist will come on again and they can talk and start to discuss their life.

5. End.

The first part of the end is that you turn on and off the lights as an ingame signal that the party is about to end. Then they will have time to react to having to say goodbye and move towards their conclusion. A few minutes later you will put on another version of DWM, this means that they should say goodbye, they are allowed to talk during the beginning of the song before moving to silent play. When the characters are ready they can leave through their door, or if they forgot which one it was, use one that's not being used that's across from where their partner is going. Once outside the door the player has some time to do whatever they need, dance or lay on the floor or whatever. Then when the song is over the players can talk with their partner before moving to a circle for a debrief. The players are encouraged to be in character until the last song is playing but if their story is concluded before that they may leave the circle and sit by a wall, making sure to not disturb those who are still playing.

Tell the players

- That when they leave through a door the game is over (if they need to leave the circle momentarily they should make a clear difference between that and leaving through a door).
- That you will go through the structure of the game again after the break, and that there will be clear signals and narrations for each part of the game.

8. Any further questions?

Here's the part where the players can ask questions if anything is still confusing.

9. Break

Take a break of 10-20 minutes depending on how much time you have. Make sure that you get a break as well! Tell the players when you will start again.

10. Regroup and reiterate

Get the group together and repeat the most important info.

Tell the players

- That as long as the two of them are having a good time there is no way to do this wrong. The only exception from this is that interactions with other couples should be kept brief and that they need to somewhat remember the structure of the game and listen to instructions from you during the game.
- The game structure is
 1. A narration where the players will do the things you say they do as you narrate. As they enter the room DWM will play and they should keep a distance from their partner and focus on movement until the dance music comes on.
 2. The game starts for real and they start conversing and dancing together. They should feel free to take breaks from talking to just dance and/or mirror.
 3. The middle meta scene, the music will be turned off and they will get a new narrated instruction. Then DWM will play, the scene ends when the song ends.
 4. The dance music comes on again and they go back to conversation and dancing with their partner.
 5. The end begins with the lights turning on and off to tell the characters that the party is almost over. A few minutes later DWM will play and then it's time to say goodbye, maybe they come to some conclusion and then they leave the room aka the circle. Outside of the circle the players have the rest of the song to do whatever they need. When they leave the circle the game is over.

11. The game starts

Let the players stand by their "door", make the room dark and turn on your disco lights (or if it works for you change the lights when the characters "enter the room"). Make sure that you are ready to put on DWM when the players enter the room, and to switch to the other playlist when the song is done.

12. Walking to the party

It's time for the GMs big moment, the narration. Make sure that you say that the characters enter the door when the players are close to their own door. You need to keep track of where at least one character's door is. As you narrate use your own words but include these things in this order:

- Normal day
- Walking your normal way home
- Done with everything you planned
- Felt like there was something else that should happen today
- Hear loud music with a strong beat
- You see a door, has it always been there? Haven't stood open before
- You hear people talking and laughing in there
- You see moving coloured lights
- There is a party in there but no signs of what it could be
- You feel welcome to the party
- You feel like you should enter
- See a door on the other side of the room
- Through the door you see a house that looks like the house behind you

- Someone is standing in the other door
- You finally decide to walk through the door
- The room is full of strangers
- You see someone who you recognise

13. Players find their partner without words

Play DWM by Delaney Cheal, the fourth song on the meta playlist.

14. Talk

When DWM is over, put on the dance playlist. Let the characters talk for about 20 minutes.

15. Meta scene

Turn off the music.

Tell the players.

- Suddenly as you look around there isn't just one other you anymore.
- You can see yourself all around you.

Turn on DWM RAC Remix, the fifth song on the meta playlist.

16. Talk

When DWM is over, let it be quiet for a moment.

Tell the players

- Once again it's just you and your one other self.

Turn on the dance playlist again. Let the players play for about 15 minutes, try to see where the characters seem to be in their story, how intense their conversations are etc. and try to find a good place to move towards the end.

17. Lights blink

When it seems to be time to move towards the end, slowly turn the lights on and off to signal that the party will soon be over.

18. The players say goodbye and leave through their door

Turn off the music.

Tell the players

- It's time to say goodbye, when you feel ready, you say goodbye to your other self and leave the party.

Then play the last song in the meta playlist, DWM by Civil Twilight. When the players have left through their door the game is over and they have a moment to do whatever they need.

19. Debrief in pairs

When the song is over, let the players have a few minutes with their partner to talk. Sit down to be the first part of a circle on the floor or in chairs.

Tell the players

- To talk to their partner and then both join the circle when they are ready,

Feel free to tell people that it's time to join the circle if they are staying too long.

20. Debrief in full group

When everyone has joined the circle, go through these questions

- ★ How do you feel?
- ★ Who was your character? Tell us in your pairs!

21. Thank the players

Thank the players for playing the larp!

And that's it! That's how I run the game! Thank you for reading!

Truths

I really enjoy the process of mending clothes.

I often go out to feed the ducks even though I worry that it may be bad for them.

I long for the day that I find whatever it is I'm missing.

I love the sound of water moving in waves.

I sometimes pretend that I'm an alien who has never seen earth before.

I'm afraid no one really knows me.

When I'm in a crowd I hope they're all noticing me.

I often find the least wanted book in the library and read it in one sitting.

I feel that I have lost my inner child.

I really like antique tables with built-in lamps.

I feel most myself when I take long walks without knowing where I'm going.

I'm quite sure that I'm not enough.

My absolute favorite thing to eat is berries that I've just picked.

I often spend hours under a blanket in complete silence.

What I want most in life is to be understood.

I love the smell of freshly baked bread.

Whenever I find a dead bird I bury it, however busy I am.

I'm sure that all I am is a coward.

I really like drinking tea that has turned really bitter.

I've watched the same movie hundreds of times.

I want to think of something that no one has thought of before.

I enjoy keeping myself away from things, only allowing myself to indulge every so often.

Whenever I see a fire I can't stop looking at it.

I desperately want to believe that humanity is inherently good.

I'm comforted by the sound of thunder.

I keep a list of every time I feel something really strongly.

Most of all I want to help others.

My favourite way to wake up is with the sun shining on my face.

Whenever I see dandelions I pick one up and bring it home to put it in a vase.

I'm way too good at holding a grudge.