

Notes on the play

'Like. Subscribe. Follow' is an educational play allowing students to devise, perform and discuss themes around body image, online presence and understanding where these insecurities may stem from. This play aims to highlight issues around body image and confidence with the aim to promote body positivity in children and teenagers.

Research shows most insecurities come from social media and online initially, leading conversations at school, distorting reality, idealising body types, contributing to unrealistic beauty stands and unhealthy comparisons. Social pressures, influencers and marketers use this platform to their advantage as some children as young as six are scrolling through images online.

We wanted to make this relevant to the younger generation and present the idea that social media is one of biggest factors in why young people feel insecure using physical theatre and use of multi-media, direct address and satirical comedy. We wanted an indirect method in allowing teenagers to question *why* they may feel this way about themselves.

The brief was initially to educate and promote the idea of healthy body image and body confidence. However, throughout the devising process we discovered the *task* of the students helping to create themselves gave far more valuable insight. The devising process allowed students to discuss openly about body image and specifically the pressures from online. As their confidence grew more within this subject, students started to question deeper about why these corporate companies push specific 'looks and trends' and how they make money from their insecurities. Topics normally left in a PSHE classroom were now able to be explored practically, giving educate and creative freedom to students.

Fundamentally, the opportunities the students were given helped shift their attitudes and mindset around body image. I believe this play to be an insightful read and helpful devising tool as an educator facilitator. It is an incredibly important message giving opportunity for young people to question the wider problems within society.

The play includes specific scenes, dialogue and stage directions with director's notes and tasks for both teachers, educators, and students to start conversations and ample of opportunities to devise.

*This play is suitable for children and teenagers aged 12-18.
Cast size can vary – minimum of 6 up to 30*

Trigger Warnings: *Themes of body image and body dysmorphia.
Advise any students undertaking current treatments for an eating disorder should avoid.*

Characters

- CEO One (M/F)** - the top dog (One with most authority)
- CEO Two (M/F)** - next in line (Second in charge and knows it)
- CEO Three (M/F)** - Debbie/Darren. The people pleaser
- CEO Four (M/F)** - Karen/Carl. An entitled, excessively demanding person
- Ensemble (M/F)** - CEO's Assistants/Voice of reason

CEO's:

The CEO's need to show stereotypical larger than life characteristics of those running terrible big advertising companies, lacking morals. They need to be played viciously with satirical comedy rather than the audience aspiring to be like these people.

They need to portray everything wrong about the fashion industry, social media / size expectations / perfect body idealisation – fake / horrible laughs. It will be a comedic scene but we want the audience to question why they are laughing rather than relating to them.

Where the character is 'Ensemble', these lines can be assigned to any of those chosen to play ensemble. For example, if you have five actors playing ensemble, all 'ensemble' lines should be divided up between them as appropriate.

Note:

All cast members should be wearing oversized clothing & no make-up.

Projection or placards can be used, otherwise bare staging.

Scene 1

(SFX. TikTok video sound effect. One actor centre stage is hunched over on the floor rocking. As their face slowly starts to appear we can see they have cosmetic surgery lines drawn all over their face, they start pulling at their clothes, showing signs of distress in their own skin as they start to stand. The Ensemble join in prodding, poking, micro-managing and adding to the stress and discomfort. The stage starts to become covered with ensemble and we can hardly see the actor anymore. Building to a crucifix lift as it looks like the actor is drowning in people. Voices & music getting louder and overlapping with each other until the actor screams and music stops abruptly- everyone drops to the floor. Blackout.)

(Director's notes: This is a physical theatre sequence where the ensemble almost try to fix the actors hair, posture, arms, legs, mannerisms, smile and so forth, moving them around like a puppet. Opportunities to use masks and draw on these rather than faces. Or even use of puppetry rather than actor.)

***TASK:** Get students to create a range of different gestures/images that show insecurities. Extend this to showing control vs. lacking control. Which part of the body are they leading from? Get them to think about use of power dynamics, different levels and pace. Can they repeat a range of movements as a sequence. How can they build this movement to a potential lift? How can they effectively work as an ensemble?*

***TASK:** Get students to create a mind map on what they personally feel insecure about in person and/or online (for example 'too short' 'big nose'). What other pressures are online? Students could research specific adverts they constantly see online or hear. Opportunities for conversations about different types of advertising companies and how they target people to feel insecure so they buy certain products and so forth. This could create further dialogue for the ensemble such as, lists of emotions or slogans/adverts such as 'Get Beach Body Ready!' 'Spots getting you down? Try this new amazing cream.' This could be live or pre-recorded and overlapped with music to build intensity.*

Scene 2 - CEO'S Advertising/Social Media Corporate Office.

(Four business CEO's around a table centre stage wearing suit jackets. Surrounding the CEO's are rest of the Ensemble as their assistants, typing, running errands. The table includes laptops, mobile phones, iPads, notepads, coffees and so forth.)

(Director's notes: The CEO's need to show stereotypical larger than life characters of terrible big advertising companies, lacking morals. They need to be played viciously with satirical comedy rather than the audience aspiring to be like these people. They need to portray everything wrong about the fashion industry, social media / size expectations / perfect body idealisation - fake/horrible laughs. It will be a comedic scene but we want the audience to question why they are laughing rather than relating to them. Staging wise, have the ensemble where you like (for example a semi-circle behind the CEO's) they need to react, pause when the CEO's pause etc... (to build intensity with dialogue) Ensemble should be terrified of the CEO's.)

CEO One: So, what's the new trend for 2024? What insecurity shall we play on next?

CEO Three: How about... hair?

CEO Two: (annoyed) No, that's so 80's.

CEO Three: True

CEO Four: How about... big bums?

CEO Three: OMG, yes Kardashians!

CEO Two: No, we can't get any bigger!

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CEO Three: Oh yes, I agree. We've had the fitness thing haven't we?

CEO Four: Small bums?

CEO One: Hmm... I like small. It needs to be *unattainable*. If everyone can have it or look a certain way then it loses value.

CEO Three: That's so true!

CEO One: Think more... 90's chic... small –

CEO Two: Low rise jeans

CEO Four: Oh no! I really loved the high waist, tucks everything in...

(They all look at CEO Four in disgust.)

CEO Two: What about... diet pills?

CEO One: That brought in a fair bit of revenue

CEO Three: That's good

CEO Four: But then we did have that legal thing, didn't we? The one we can't name...

(They all look at CEO 4 in disgust again. Pause.)

CEO One: It's [*current year*] for goodness sake! I want something *new*. Not repeating the years!

CEO Two: Something fresh, something teenagers *crave, need*. Something they don't even know they want yet.

CEO Three: Yes

CEO One: Something great, like –

CEO Four: *Thin eyebrows!*

(Pause)

CEO Two: Come again?

CEO Four: *Thin eye –*

CEO Three: **(Interrupting)** You're right! *Fat slug* eyebrows used to be in... I guess it's different?

CEO One: Hmm... **(thinking about it)** It's a bit...1950's. *Yawn*.... It's been done.

CEO Three: **(naively)** Gosh, that's so *true*. We've gone from thin, to fat eyebrows, back to thin, haven't we? **(laughs)**

CEO Two: **(laughing)** Ha, I know! What do you want now? None?

(Pause. All look at each other like a lightbulb has gone off.)

CEO One: **(declaring/standing)** No eyebrows...

CEO Two: I like that

CEO Four: Blonde eyebrows...

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CEO Three: White eyebrows...

CEO Two: Eyebrow extensions...

CEO One: We'd need an influencer!!

CEO Two: A big one

CEO One: Not anyone, the biggest

CEO Two: A celebrity

CEO Three: That's so good

CEO Four: Shall I start making some calls?

(CEO One pauses, thinking, toying with the idea, then bursting in a huff-like tantrum)

CEO One: *But...* ugh, body type always *sells* more!

Ensemble: That's so true! Body type changes across the years constantly!

CEO Four: But, *everyone* has eyebrows!

CEO Two: **(copying CEO 1)** Yes, but, they can be covered, with hats –

CEO Three: OMG, yes, with fringes!

CEO Two: Eyebrows are too small

CEO One: Bodies, You can't hide your body as easily. *Body type* always sells more.
Look at Kenya

(Clicks projector. Image of Kenyan women on projector flashes on the screen. Directors note: Students can hold up placards instead of a projector.)

CEO One: Affluent rich woman are larger. It shows wealth, health... *(Clicks next slide)*
Europeans. *(Image of slim, pale, high cheekbones, blonde women.)* Long, tall,
blonde, *cheekbones*. It just sells.

CEO Four: **(laughs)** They've got blonde eyebrows –

(All disgusted look at CEO 4 again.)

CEO Three: **(coming up with ideas)** Hmm, what about, skinny jeans, back to flares. Or
flares back to skinnies. Oh god, I don't know!

Ensemble: But there's a range of different body types!

Ensemble: True! Depending on the fashion in your culture

(A range of different body types are shown on the projector/placards)

Ensemble: Or even different heritage

(CEO One shoos them away)

CEO One: We've done it again and again...

(Pause.)

CEO Two: **(standing up/outburst)** *clear skin*

(There's a hush around the table as they all think/get excited.)

CEO One: What now?

CEO Two: **(Bursting with excitement)** *Clear. Skin!*

CEO One: Oh my god.... *I love.*

CEO Three: Me too

CEO Two: Clear skin, will always be in!

CEO Four: Say it again

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CEO Two: Clear skin, will always be in

CEO One: **(Stands up)** Write that down

(CEO 3 scribbles it down.)

CEO Four: **(stands up)** Big seller for teens

CEO One: Lots of revenue

CEO Four: **(starts chanting/starting to stand)** Clear skin, will always be in

CEO Three: **(starts to join in)** Clear Skin –

CEO One: Ew, no.

CEO Two: Stop

(CEO 1 & 2 sit down relaxing into their new idea.)

CEO One: Clear skin products –

CEO Two: Lotions –

CEO Three: Creams –

CEO Four: Night and day creams! Lotions!

CEO One: We'll shove it down their *necks!*

CEO Two: Adverts on TikTok , Facebook, Instagram

CEO Three: Influencers

CEO Four: Celebrities

(CEO Three starts scribbling away ideas in notebook.)

CEO One: Are we still listening?

CEO Three: Yes, sorry

CEO One: No, I mean... are we still *listening*?

(Everyone on stage becomes still and looks at the phone on the centre table.)

CEO One: On the gram.

(Pause, as all CEO's lean in closer to the phone.)

CEO One: Are we?

CEO Two: We are. We've been listening since 2016.

CEO 4: And this algorithm –

(Everyone starts moving again.)

CEO One: Is going to make us rich

CEO Four: What's an algorithm?

CEO Two: *So rich!*

CEO One: Make sure they accept cookies on *everything*.... get that –

CEO Two: Data –

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CEO Three: Money!

CEO Two: Perfect skin... *[current year]*!

CEO One: What about clothes? We still need a fashionable body type!

CEO Two: *[current year]*, I'm thinking leathers, cashmere, blazers...

CEO One: *I like.*

CEO Four: Puffa jackets?

(Everyone looks disgustingly at CEO Four.)

CEO Three: **(abruptly)** Shorts!

CEO One: Shorts?

CEO Three: Short shorts

CEO Two: Skimpy shorts

CEO One: Let's bring that thigh gap back

CEO Two: We've done the abs -

CEO Three: We've done the Kardashian bum

CEO One: We haven't done the *thigh* in a while

CEO Three: **(Laughing)** Do you remember hot dogs or legs?

(Projector image of "hot dogs or legs?")

CEO Three: I mean, are they hot dogs... or are they legs??!

CEO Two: Exactly.

CEO One: Right call YouTubers, influencers, celebrities, make sure to call... **(add some relevant young influencers here)**

(Everyone starts packing up and looking busy with emails, phone calls etc.)

CEO One: And launch it *now*!! See that capital start rolling in!!

(Chatting and frantic busy moments as they leave the stage / phone calls / texting. Phone is left on the table (listening) for a moment of silence. Blackout. The phone lights up receiving a text.)

Scene 3

(The texts continue slowly on the phone and builds into a range of different notification sounds throughout this scene (messages from Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, emails, dings/likes and so forth). This scene will show a physical theatre sequence showing time spent and wasted scrolling online. One mobile phone is passed around the ensemble.)

(Director's note: We want this scene to encompass the idea of time passing from waking up to falling asleep to how much we use our phones and are bombarded with messages of idealisation of beauty/standards/perfection. We want to toy with the idea that everyone else is having more fun and is more beautiful online. Below are a range of different tasks - what is important here is the students have creative freedom to convey this idea of 'doom scrolling'.)

TASK: Get students to discuss how long they spent on their phones, when do they typically go on their phones (for example, waking up/eating breakfast/at the bus stop... and so forth). In groups or individually create 5 tableaux to show this routine. Then allow this tableau to come alive, playing around with pace creating a sequence of images on repeat (for example phone in hand while lying curled up on the floor, bored in class etc.) Get students to have creative freedom with this. You may want one ensemble to have the phone only, or this could be passed around. Potential to add a range of different physical theatre techniques especially transitioning the phone.

TASK: Alongside the social media 'dings' and notification sounds. Can students create their own soundscape here? Get students to research in groups a sound each. Potential ensemble lines here could be added too.

Further ideas to discuss with students:

- *Filming giving money to homeless person and taking it back when the camera is off.*
- *Pretending to have a great time somewhere and then bored when camera stops filming.*
- *Clock /passing of time with people scrolling on phones till morning- pass out and still scrolling in your sleep with eyes closed without holding a phone. Alarm goes off.*
- *TikTok dances/or current trend while ensemble watching on phone on repeat. Dancing becomes more frantic?*
- *Behind the scenes arguing while filming TikTok dance and then all smiles while they press record.*
- *Researching 'Troll' comments add this as dialogue during TikTok video performance.*
- *Physical theatre sequence/dance with magazines -scatter the stage with magazines.*

- *Potential to use the projector with a range of messages and notifications to show overwhelming bombardments.*

Scene 4 - CEO Advertising/social media Corporate Office.

(CEOs around table, all discussing and talking over each other -ensemble looking very busy and overwhelmed. CEO Four is in their own world until they speak.)

CEO One: I want that hashtag trending on the ‘what’s hot page’ by 6pm!!

CEO Three: On it!

CEO One: Our biggest competitors are going to be this “love your body whatever size and shape” **(being sarcastic)**

CEO Two: Ha ha! That doesn’t sell!

CEO One: Right – and if we pay the right price to our top influencers – they’ll do anything for money!

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CEO Two: Obviously.

CEO Three: Wait, do they not use the products?

(Everyone looks at CEO Three.)

CEO One: Are you joking? They use it like once and throw it away.

(CEO One throws a product over their shoulder. An ensemble member catches it.)

CEO Two: Like you said, anything for money!

CEO One: Oh and before I forget, make sure to put in the contract they cannot “disclose” this to followers, or we’ll sue them.

CEO Two: Obviously

CEO One: Mmm, I see the money rolling in

CEO Two: **(relaxing)** Ahh

CEO One: This is what I love about social media, the users do the work for you!

CEO Two: Thank you algorithm!

(An Ensemble member whispers something to CEO Four. They both look deeply worried.)

CEO Four: So... um... We've got a problem.

CEO One: What?

CEO Four: We've just got undercover knowledge that our biggest competitors are brainstorming ideas for... *the new winter body*.

(Everyone stops what they are doing. There is silence.)

CEO Two: Come again?

CEO Four: *The new winter bod* –

CEO One: Oh for god's sake.

CEO Four: Word on the street, it's going to be big...

CEO Three: **(disgusted)** Big bodies?

CEO Four: No no, big news. **(Pause)** We all know about *'beach body'* and *'bikini ready'* - but we all know we've needed a *winter* one for years!

CEO One: Oh god

CEO Two: Obviously - the beach body term originates back to 1961!

CEO Four: But we all know we've needed one for *winter* for years! Everyone's been struggling... well, up until now.

CEO One: Go on.

CEO Four: Well, the rumours are -

(Ensemble & CEO's lean in.)

CEO Four: Well... I ... You're not going to like it... Basically, they've...

CEO One: **(Bursting)** Oh spit it out for god's sake!

(CEO Four looks around and scribbles something down on a piece of paper. They show everyone secretly and everyone reacts dramatically in their own ways. CEO One- distraught. CEO Two- anger. CEO Three- disbelief. CEO Four- jealousy)

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CEO Two: *What on earth?!*

CEO Three: *It's genius.*

CEO One: *Why didn't we think of this?*

CEO Four: **(devastated)** They'll sell millions.

CEO Two: Hundreds of millions

(Pause.)

CEO One: **(detached)** Karen/Carl - you're fired.

CEO Four: What?

(An Ensemble member picks up CEO Four to take them away as they struggle.)

CEO One: It's been staring us in the face.

CEO Four: You can't fire me. If you're going to fire anyone you should fire Debbie/Darren!

CEO Three: Excuse me?!

CEO One: All this time...

CEO Two: **(clutching at straws)** We'll make a copycat, that's allowed!

CEO One: *This is all your fault!*

Whole scene goes into disarray. CEO One attacks CEO 2. Chaos ensues. An ensemble member stands up on the desk and finally speaks.

Ensemble: (Coughs) If I may say something?

(Everyone goes quiet. All the CEOs look at this person like they have never noticed them before.)

(Directors note: All ensemble lines can be split up and given out individually. Each line can use direct address and travel downstage. Ensemble members can interact with the CEOs, push them down off stage or to sit in a chair and listen.)

Ensemble 1: Um, if I may? What if we sell what we already have?

(CEO's stare at them in disgust.)

Ensemble 1: What if we realised what our bodies *can* do, rather than what it *looks* like?

(Awkward silence among the CEO's.)

Ensemble 1: Focusing on... It *helps* me. *Heals* me. *Adapts* to different environments. It can run, it can stretch, it can solve problems, it can create...

(A variety of different pictures, people, sizes, race on projector are shown.)

CEO Two: I'm sorry, what's your name?

Ensemble: Put your hand up if you are 100% happy with your own body? Go on raise your hand

(CEO's look sheepish and deflated.)

Ensemble: We get paid to make people think they are too fat, too thin, not fit enough, not muscular enough.

Ensemble: Are you wearing the right clothes? Oversized or tight? What's popular? Be hench, but not too hench, be thin but not too lanky, curvy but not too curvy, confident- but not too confident.

Ensemble: What is the ideal body anyway? Why do *we* get to decide that?

Ensemble: What about differences in culture? There can't be a one size that fits all. Can there? That would be a bit boring, wouldn't it?

Ensemble: We need to focus on what our body *can* do - what it *does*.

Ensemble: You will *always* be too much or not enough to different people.

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Ensemble: To some, you will be funny—but not *too* funny because that will be annoying—but a bit funny - otherwise you'll be boring.

Ensemble: Kind but not *too* kind, you don't want to be a pushover - stick up for yourself - but don't be a bully - be generous - but not *too* much or you won't have anything for yourself.

Ensemble: Be imaginative and clever- but not too clever- no one likes a 'know-it-all' –

Ensemble: Don't be uneducated or you'll be deemed thick.

Ensemble: Too big - too thin - too hench - too spotty - not spotty at all so people are jealous - too many moles - too dark - too pale -

Ensemble: it's too much!

(Pause.)

Ensemble: It's impossible to please everyone.

(Directors note: As they start talking about Oscar new ensemble members have taken over the seats at the CEO table to signify a change in society.)

Ensemble: This is Oscar (**shows picture on projector**) This was Oscar when he was 20. He *always* wanted more muscles. Oscar is now retiring from his career as a doctor. In his lifetime he has cured over 15,000 people.

Ensemble: This is Jennie.
Jennie never thought she was thin enough and always strived to have a thigh gap. Jennie became an advocate for the RSPCA, raising thousands and has fostered hundreds of abused cats and abandoned kittens, helping them find loving families.

Ensemble: This is Charlie. Charlie has always longed to have clearer skin. Charlie doesn't know it yet, but will end up running in the Olympics in 2034 and wins a gold medal placing 1st for the United Kingdom.

Ensemble: This is Bella. Bella wanted more than anything to get a 6 pack. She achieved this once. It took months of deprivation and missing social events. Nothing really happened. Last year however, she finished her Masters degree in Politics and has recently implemented an Inclusion & Race Equality plan for businesses in the community. She doesn't have a six pack anymore and she doesn't care.

Ensemble: Mathew always wanted more facial hair as a teenager. He didn't really achieve anything as big, but he has helped many people in his life, just by being kind and he doesn't even know it. He helped his best friend get help when they were depressed, and well, actually, that's pretty big.

Ensemble: None of them are 100% happy with the way they look. I don't think I can actually find anyone who is. But they concentrate on what they can do, rather than on what they can't.

Ensemble: You are not loved any less because of the way you look, you are loved because of how you treat people.

Ensemble: When somebody dies, we don't talk about how they looked, we talk about how they made us feel.

(CEO's are silent and still. Blackout.)

Scene 5

(Same actor from the beginning on the floor hunched over, this time with nothing on their face. Dull lighting. Actor is editing a picture on their phone (use light from phone to light up their face). Students to choose emotive music (for example: 'What Was I Made For?' By Billie Eilish). As crescendo with music builds subtly, ensembles coming on stage one by one randomly sit down, all holding a phone and turning the light on one by one so it lights up their face building to a sea of faces lit up on stage.

Suddenly, the ensemble turns and shines the light now on the actor in the middle as they look mad. Ensemble stand up and get closer to her. We see actor under the lights smiling frantically with a tear-stained face, trying to hold a pose centre stage as we see a totally different and distorted image to what we see on the projector. Music builds, getting louder - potential cyclical ending with lift/actor looks like they are drowning in people - use of light from phones and screens only.)

(Director's note: Practical Lighting movement sequence / dance. Students with dance experience have the opportunity to choreograph. Opportunity to add a pre-recorded video of the actor's face being photoshopped / filters being added, as a time lapse, sped up to music shown on projector behind. Opportunities to use masks/puppets and draw on these rather than faces. If no projector, ensemble can each have a phone backwards that uses the torch to light up their faces while they show a range of different emotions as they try to edit the perfect image.)

TASK: Ensemble members to be in isolation from each other alone on stage with their phones. Start off with a neutral expression then confused, annoyed, frustrated, panicked, until a manic smile consumes their face trying to get their idea of perfection on their phones. Light and ensemble focus can then go back to the actor centre stage where phone light is turned on them. This scene is an extension of the beginning to represent a cyclical structure.

(Actor takes a huge deep breath. SFX. Sound of TikTok Closing sound effect. Voiceover: "Power off". Blackout.)

END.