



CHIDERA EGGERUE

A body-positivity blogger propelled into fame, the woman behind *The Slumflower* reflects on the freedom—and scrutiny—that comes with leading a feminist movement

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“There’s so much value in being a troublemaker!” says Chidera Eggerue—though in relative terms, stirring things up is a fairly recent development for the 24-year-old. It started with her fashion blog, *The Slumflower*, a hub for stylish black women who don’t relate to the trend of “mostly white women with the same balayage hairstyle, fedora hat and camel coat.” This led to her creation of the *SaggyBoobsMatter* hashtag in the fall of 2017, which launched her into the body-positivity movement. The irony is that Eggerue, long made to feel self-conscious about her appearance, once saved money for a breast augmentation. Then she had an epiphany: Celebrating her body and defying the culture’s obsession with perky breasts might flip the conversation for women—at the very least, for some women of color.

Calling her work within this 21st century movement a success would be an understatement. Touted as a leading feminist voice of her generation, Eggerue has appeared on national talk shows in the United Kingdom to discuss her social savvy (more than 12,000 Instagram posts bear the *SaggyBoobsMatter* hashtag); published a best-selling book, 2018’s *What a Time to Be Alone*; hosted her first #BlockHimParty (in which she encourages women to leave toxic relationships); and fronted an Adidas campaign that was plastered across London’s Underground.

Eggerue assures me she didn’t come out of the womb like this. Raised by Nigerian parents in Peckham—home to the largest community of Nigerians in the U.K.—she was an inquisitive child who wanted to be “liked and accepted.” She tried to “blend into the background” until the BRIT School put her on a new path. The performing arts institution that has produced such singular talents as Adele, Amy Winehouse and Imogen Heap encouraged individualism, leading Eggerue to develop a mantra: “I can be different, I can stand out, I can be loud, I can be annoying, and I’m not gonna be punished for this,” she tells me.

She brings the same moxie to our discussions about how racism robs black girls of their innocence and why she’s happy Serena Williams finally found the love she deserves. Each point is delivered with blazing conviction. Manicured nails waving, she’s animated

BY GRACE SHUTTI

enough to remind you she’s a young black woman from south London (one energized “*Okkkkk*” here, a “Girl, sometimes it be like that” there) but slick enough to repeat my questions in her answers—a tell indicating someone who has done a lot of interviews.

Her radical outspokenness, mixed with just the right amount of self-awareness, is one reason 220,000 people follow her on Instagram. She throws punches at the patriarchy in her captions, making them accessible to people who may not have read Audre Lorde. She also posts selfies in her underwear, though she jokingly tells me “the tiddies are still exclusive” after deciding to wear lingerie for her *PLAYBOY* shoot. More seriously, she remains conscious of her extended family. “What will my relatives in Nigeria think if they see my naked breast?” she says, breaking into a Nigerian accent. “I’m not ready to start doing that yet.”

Proverbs in Igbo, Eggerue’s first language, are the backbone of *What a Time to Be Alone*. The first adage in the book warns against comparing yourself to others: “He who is asking for the same haircut as John, does he have the same shaped head as John?”

Eggerue credits such wisdom with saving her life. And while many fans would say she’s taught them self-love, just as many cite her “tough truths.” Dating advice is also her purview, and lesson one is on maximizing your standards through strategic courtship. Eggerue tells women to be “as specific as you want to be,” regardless of whether it limits a potential suitor’s height, skin tone or occupation. “If there are women in the world who love dating tall men,” she says, “why can’t there be others who say, ‘I love dating rich men?’”

Some have pushed back at Eggerue for encouraging women to engage in transactional relationships. If you consider how stereotypes like that of the gold digger commonly stigmatize black women, it’s easy to understand the flak. “They have this idea that the exchange reflects your value as a human being,” she says of the critics. “I don’t believe that’s the case. It just means you chose to negotiate that. And that’s fine. Black women, out of everyone, deserve to struggle the least. We deserve a love that allows us to feel free. Love hits differently when you don’t have to worry about paying the rent.”



When I suggest the average woman may not have the same leverage as an author-speaker-influencer, Eggerue concedes the point. “That’s absolutely true,” she says, “but I still believe you can negotiate relatively, even if your negotiation is ‘I want a free meal.’” She adds a disclaimer: “My personal negotiation does not have to reflect femininity as a whole or feminism as a movement.”

Even with all the advice she dispenses, surely dating as the *Slumflower* can’t be easy. “It does interfere heavily,” she admits. “It means I can’t really date across anymore.” She instead dates high-earning men who don’t “feel compelled to want to compete with me, because they have so much going for themselves.” When I ask if she has found men who meet those standards, her answer is unequivocal: “Absolutely, absolutely.”

She says the approach has also changed her sex life. “I used to believe that my value came from being attractive enough for men to want to have sex with me.” Once she became more confident, the landscape changed. “I don’t engage in casual sex, because sex is such an important and powerful tool I can use to get what I want.”

I give her a quizzical look.

“I’m dead serious,” she says. “If a man can fix his mouth to ask me for sex, I can fix my mouth to ask him what I want to ask him for. That’s not to say women who choose to engage in casual sex aren’t lining up the best of their potential. It’s saying there’s power in this, and you can harness it if you want to.”

Redefining the power dynamic between the sexes doesn’t come without a learning curve, however. A few weeks before our interview, Eggerue came under fire for since-deleted tweets that some claim made light of male suicide rates. She posted an essay to clarify her views, stating that though the harm men suffer as a consequence of toxic masculinity is a valid concern, “men often bring up their victimhood to patriarchy as a means to silence women.”

Her comments triggered a debate about her brand of feminism. When I ask if she understands the backlash, Eggerue restates her mission to “highlight female oppression.” She adds

that men have the ability to organize: “If women were able to congregate and create things like feminism, I believe men have even more power to do something for themselves where they can build, create and support initiatives to help themselves.”

Still, many of her critics are put off by the idea that modern feminism means being comfortable with—or even celebrating—men experiencing harm. Some wonder how that benefits feminism, or indeed humanity. Prominent black women have expressed their disagreement with Eggerue but have also called out the impropriety of those who’ve leveled criticism against a black woman who is only 24. Author Reni Eddo-Lodge, for example, remarked that *The Guardian*’s Zoe Williams, who wrote an op-ed piece titled “Feminism Without Human Warmth Leaves Me Cold,” didn’t show “the same energy for her white feminist peers who’ve been challenged on their intersectional failures.”

“These publications exist in a place of comfort where they can afford to chuck a black woman in the firing line and watch people scrap for the bones,” Eggerue says. “Then you have super right-wing white men in your notifications telling you you deserve to die. It’s like, how did we get here?”

Spending time offline is a no-brainer, and it’s telling that Eggerue is building a career beyond the clutches of the internet. Her excitement is palpable when she discusses working with women in Nigeria. She wants to learn from older women who have done similar work but is wary of forcing her British experience on people. “The social landscape is different. I don’t wanna just go there and be like, ‘Hey, everyone, I’m here now.’ I want a calculated approach. But,” she adds, “I also can’t afford to wait for people to like what I’m doing in order for my future to materialize.”

You may not agree with her, but it’s naive to discount the impact Eggerue has had on other women—the ones she has inspired but also the ones who disagree with her. And that is a reality she’s more than fine with: “I will have to live with all of my decisions. Nobody else.” ■