**Free expression**

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The recent news to catch social media attention has been the Hum Style awards ceremony of 2021 and the way our female celebrities chose to play dress up for the red carpet, and the event as a whole.

Western wear was apparently the ‘need of the hour’ and from gowns to pant suits, to frocks and what not, were seen on the glamorous night. Women wore what they wanted to wear and men wore what they wanted to wear. Some looked stylish, some did not but seemed happy and comfortable in their skin and some did not look comfortable but then who cares? I don’t. End of the story, or one would assume.

Many protested against the choice of clothes worn by the celebrities and called them vulgar and inappropriate for a Muslim country. Some male actors like Bilal Qureshi strongly protested against the revealing clothes and respectfully called out to the women encouraging them to dress up next time without showing skin. Even female model and actor Iffat Omar also said, “Rest in peace, fashion sense!”

[Africa to receive first US-donated COVID-19 vaccines](https://nation.com.pk/17-Jul-2021/africa-to-receive-first-us-donated-covid-19-vaccines)

My challenge isn’t what women wore on the show. Just as an observer and to join the bandwagon of those commenting, I found the dress sense of most celebrities forced and not voguish to say the least. However, I understand that I am not the moral police here and I believe in the notion of ‘to each his own’. Instead, my challenge is that women seem to have some sort of edge to comment and judge other women and men when it comes to everything, these awards for instance in this case. The moment a man speaks about a woman, all hell breaks loose. Everyone jumps at them calling them stereotypical, chauvinistic, radical and narrow minded amongst other things. Why is that?

Like it or not, celebrities will always be objectified and evaluated for whatever life choices they make. Why can women pass remarks on men but men cannot utter a sentence that passes a judgement upon women? They have an equal right to freely express themselves. Furthermore, why is there a greater tolerance for passing a decree on topics like religion, fundamentalisms and extreme thinking? Conservatism is stifling, but when it comes to a subjective verdict on modernism, vulgarity or clothing choices, particularly those of women, the feminists are let loose on these men and more hue and cry follows.

[UK's COVID-19 infections surpass 50,000](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/uk-s-covid-19-infections-surpass-50-000)

I don’t endorse trolling at all, but if you have a public Instagram page and you choose to share certain aspects of your life and celebrate one million followers then these one million followers will say what they want to say. Where female commentary is heard and tolerated, it only is fair for the same courtesy to be extended to men as well.

I strongly feel that in some cases, our men get the raw end of the deal too. Yes, we live in a male dominated society and women suffer a lot but its time that we stop stereotyping men too and not protest to everything they say on autopilot mode and from assuming a feminist perspective on things. Liberalism cannot be rooted in just supporting one side of the coin. Just because modernism feels more liberating, it can be otherwise for some people and their right of expressing should not be curbed.

If Iffat Omar’s statement can be taken with a pinch of salt then Bilal Qureshi’s cannot be trolled by women for how he felt looking at the dress code of many at the awards. These men are also from the same male dominated society and we do have certain norms and traditions that are followed by the majority of our people. If the national dress of Pakistan is a shalwar qameez, and being a Muslim country, revealing clothes do go against the teachings of Islam, then these men have also been conditioned to follow and believe that. It should be okay for them to express a viewpoint based on the values they have grown up with.

[German military on alert after severe floods](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/german-military-on-alert-after-severe-floods)

It is time to cut our men some slack here. Let’s stop discriminating freedom of expression. Tolerance isn’t just accepting what the celebrities wore, which would be the ideal situation, but it also means for us not to judge the critics for their evaluation and to not attack male critics just because of their gender. Freedom of expression is and will remain for all.