



I was watching my little boy playing the other day when I noticed a young girl approach him. My first instinct was to encourage them to play together as she looked quite sweet and seemed to be introducing herself. It was clear that he didn't want to play. He pulled back, shy and bashful. I then left it but the whole situation got me thinking – as children most of us behaved like this, boys preferring the company of boys and girls inclining towards girls for friendship. It's almost as if this inherent shyness of the opposite sex is forcibly extracted out of us as we get older – we're encouraged through nursery, school and work to mix freely and I'm not sure it's done us much good at all.

I realised that, growing up in the UK, I too was subject to this. It's all around us and perhaps features most prominently in the workplace. When it comes to starting a career, the issue of free mixing is thrust upon us and suddenly we find ourselves having to deal with a few sticky situations. To aid in the latter, here's my 3 point plan for females on how to avoid intermingling with males at the workplace and why it is so important to uphold Islamic tradition in this respect:

- Don't extend your hand at interview if you are put on the spot – females can shake the other females' hands but if it is a man then start off as you mean to continue – either be bold and explain the issue (it demonstrates strength of character) or find some way to have your hands engaged (in your pockets, carrying a bag in one hand and a hot drink in the other). The reason for this is that it is haram for women to touch the skin of marriageable men and *vice versa*

, and there are a great many benefits in adhering to this both for the individual and wider community as attraction is often consolidated by touching, however brief.

- Avoid all non-essential one-on-one discussions especially those that involve needless chit-chat. Relationships often begin this way and it is best to be wise enough to step back and signal with your body language or awkwardness that you are not comfortable talking in this way.

Khalwah (a sinful situation that arises when a marriageable male and female are alone without a suitable chaperone) is a serious issue; often leading to problems arising when people are too relaxed and do not adhere to Islamic guidance on this issue. The Prophet Mu

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ammad, peace be upon him, said in meaning that 'If a man and woman are alone together, the third among them is Shay
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- When possible avoid eye-contact as people will soon come to understand that you are reserved in this issue and as such will go to other people if they need to talk to you. Furthermore, if you need to communicate with males for whatever reason in your day-to-day life try to include either your husband or *mahram* in that communication, whether that be face-to-face, 'cc-ing' in an email, or sitting with you while you make a phone call.

I recently read an article about personality types and it struck me how much pressure society applies to be extroverted. A few years ago I made the choice to stamp out the extrovert in me as I honoured the traits of the 'Muslim introvert'. To me the latter are people who are shy, quiet and who spend more time focusing on their own faults rather than those of others. They are people who don't joke around too much for fear that it might offend, who find free mixing highly uncomfortable, preferring instead to strengthen bonds within the sisterhood/brotherhood and then later between them and their spouse. The people that I respect the most are like this and *i nsh*

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with fine-tuning and careful upbringing I hope we can raise the next generation with these traits.