

Foundational Principles

These are some foundational principles to bear in mind on this subject:

Quran 9:71 "The believing men and believe in women **are allies** of one another."

As a rule, in social transactional matters, everything is allowed unless it is forbidden. Therefore, the onus of proof lies on the shoulders of those who say something is forbidden, to prove their case.

If evidence is not found in the Quran, the Sunnah, by qiyas/analogy etc.. against a matter then, as a general rule, the matter is acceptable.

Shifting towards the 'too liberal' or the 'too strict' can **both** constitute 'vain desires.'
We may decide to do or not to do something due to our context, wisdom, preferences etc....

Gender Interaction is a fiqhi issue and not an aqeeda issue, so differences of opinion are acceptable.

The Shari'ah sets some guidelines on this issue and is silent regarding the rest; leaving it to culture.

Gender Interactions: What Is Forbidden?

1.Zina (Sex outside of marriage) is a major sin.

2.Khalwa A man and woman who are not mahram, being alone in a private setting). The Prophet AS said "... Satan is the third person in an isolated area (khalwa) where there is only a man with a (non-mahram) woman...." 'Being alone' would be a physical space that is locked or isolated. We also should be mindful that online communication, such as messaging, is respectful, in groups where possible and such that we would not feel ashamed if our messages were read by others.

3.Flirtation and Seduction

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet (saw) said:

7 are (the persons) Allah will give protection with His shade on the Day when there will be no shade but His:

- A just ruler
- A youth who grew up with the worship of Allah
- A person whose heart is attached to the mosque
- Two brothers in Islam who love and meet each other and depart from each other for the sake of Allah
- A man whom a beautiful woman of high rank seduces but he says: "I fear Allah"
- A person who gives charity and conceals it, so the right hand does not know what the left has given
- And a person who remembered Allah in privacy and shed tears. (Muslim)

Point 5 applies vice versa; equally to women.

4.To uncover the 'awrah/nakedness: Men and women must cover certain parts of their body out of public decency and modesty. The level of cover varies as to whether one is in public or only amongst those whom they cannot marry (a mahram). This level of cover serves as a reminder of our subservience to Allah and our seeking of His approval alone. We should also respect the personal journey everyone is on and try to refrain from harsh judgments based on the dress and external appearances of others.

5.The lustful look, speech, touch etc... Lowering the gaze means that we should avoid the lustful gaze or gazing at the 'awrah of another person. What about eye contact? Eye contact is considered the normative way to communicate in our context and an acceptable way to have polite conversation so long as we are not attracted to that person.

Muslims generally disapprove of physical touch between the non mahram male and female eg hugs. According to Sh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Arabic word 'al-mass' (touching) in the Quran refers to sexual intercourse or touching with sexual desire. The ahadith do not prohibit the mere touching of hands (eg shaking hands) between a man and woman without sexual desire, though Muslims may discourage this from becoming the norm.

<https://maktabahalbakri.com/394-shaking-hands-with-a-person-of-opposite-gender/>

Evidence Against Mixed Gatherings from The Quran

By googling this topic, you may find many Muslims who say that it is haram for a non mahram man and woman to be in the same setting. These Quranic evidences are sometimes cited:

33:32-33 "O you wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women.....And stay in your homes...."

33:53.... "And when you ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask of them from behind a curtain.....nor that you should ever marry his wives after him...."

Although, these verses are specifically related to the wives of the Prophet (saw), many mufasireen extend these to **ALL** women.

However the arguments against this being a general command for all women are:

-There are no statements from the Prophet's wives that this verse applied to other women

-There are no statements from female companions that this applied to them also

-Quran 33:32 "*You are not like other women*" is clearly about the wives of the Prophet (saw)

-Allah did not say 'O Believing women.... stay in your houses" but "O you wives of the Prophet"

Evidence Against Mixed Gatherings from Hadith

A'isha RA said: "The riders would pass us while we were with the Messenger of Allah. When they got close to us, we would draw our outer cloak from from our heads over our faces. When they passed by, we would uncover our faces." (Musnad Ahmed)

However, the wives of the Prophet (saw) are special (as stated above). This is a weak hadith and Aisha RA also narrated that the Messenger of Allah said that women must not cover their faces whilst performing pilgrimage

Umm Salamah RA narrated "Once Maimuna RA and I were in the presence of the Prophet AS when Abdullah Ibn Umm Makhtum RA arrived. As he was blind, it never occurred to us that it was necessary to observe hijab, therefore we remained seated. The Prophet ordered us to observe hijab. I replied "Oh Prophet of Allah. He is unable to see us!" Upon hearing that the Prophet said "Are you also blind and unable to see him?" (Tirmidhi & Abu Daud)

This hadith is very weak

However another hadith relating to Fatima Bint Qais RA is authentic:

Fatima bint Qais RA reported that after her divorce, the Prophet AS advised her to spend her 'Idda period in the house of her cousin, the same Abdullah Ibn Umm Makhtum. He advised, "He is blind and you can put off your garment in his presence...." (Muslim)

Another narration, where Fatima RA replied to a question from Ali RA to define a worthy act of a woman, she replied " A woman should not see any man nor should a man see her." (Musnad-e-Bazaar) **This is a very weak hadith.** Fatima RA was reported to be seen out in public.

Some Muslims prevent women from entering mosques.

They cite this narration: Umm Humaid narrated the the Messenger AS told her, "Your prayer in your house is better for you than your prayer in the congregation." So, Umm Humaid ordered that a prayer place be prepared for her in the furthest and darkest part of her house and she used to pray there until she died.

The context was an argument between Umm Humaid and her husband due to her regular attendance of congregational prayer in the Prophet's mosque, far from where her tribe lived beyond the borders of Medina. They owned farmlands and had their own mosque. The Prophet AS tried to make things easier for her and her family. As for a dark room, this was most likely her own choice.

There are a number of non-authentic narrations preventing women from visiting mosques. They do not counter the numerous authentic hadith supporting women in mosques.(Reclaiming The Mosque, Jasser Auda)

Evidence For Mixed Gatherings

Life in the Prophet's city showed normal everyday interactions. The Sahaba; male and female knew each other by their names and would address one another in public. See Sh Yasir Qadhi's video in References below.

On the authority of Anas ibn Malik, our Messenger (saw) allowed Umm Sulaim and some other women of Ansar to accompany him when he went to war; they would give water (to the soldiers) and would treat the wounded. (Muslim)

Asma bint Abu Bakr said the Prophet offered her a lift in his caravan when she was carrying a load. She declined as she felt shy. (Bukhari)

Abu Usaid al-Sa'idi invited the Messenger to his wedding feast and his wife served them on the day, while yet a bride. (Muslim) On this basis, Ibn Hajar said: It is permissible for a wife to serve her husband and those he invites over to his home. Imam Malik was asked about this and said that men and women can partake of a meal together should it be culturally acceptable.

After migrating, A'isha RA visited Bilal when he had a high fever. (Bukhari)

The bazaars were mixed in Medina as were the battles.

Famous hadith "Do not prevent the maidservants of Allah access to the mosques of Allah" (Bukhari)

What was the mosque of our beloved Messenger AS like? Most of the evidences below are from "Reclaiming The Mosque" by Jasser Auda.

- Every prayer in the Prophet's mosque was for men and women in one hall, with no partition. In fact, the doors to the Prophet's mosque were used by men and women until the time of 'Umar RA when one door was assigned for the women only, whilst they could continue to use all the other doors alongside the men.
- Asma RA asked a man in a prayer row in front to clarify parts of a sermon that she had not heard clearly. Here one can imagine the closeness between the rows of the men and the women.
- Umm Hishaam said that she memorised the whole of Surah Qaf from the mouth of the Prophet AS as he would recite it in the masjid.
- A freed slavewoman lived in a tent in the Prophet's mosque. (Bukhari)
- I'tikaf /spiritual retreat was for men and women.
- The Prophet AS encouraged all women to attend the Eid prayer even if they had to borrow an outer covering. Umm 'Atiyya said: He (saw) commanded us that we should bring out (from the houses) the unmarried women and the self concealed ladies for the Eid prayers, and he commanded the menstruating women to remain away from the (actual) place of prostration of the Muslims (Muslim)
- Ibn Abbas RA said the Prophet (saw) went into the women's prayer area with Bilal RA on Eid to collect sadaqa. (Bukhari)
- Rufaydah RA was a female companion and physician who set up a tent in the Prophet's mosque. When Sa'd ibn Muaz was wounded, the Prophet AS said "Let Sa'd stay in her tent so that I can visit from a close distance."
- A'isha RA narrated in Bukhari and Muslim: "Allah's Apostle invited me on a day of Eid to watch the Abyssinians playing in the mosque, displaying their skill with spears." She leaned her cheek against his and watched.

Sadly, due to cultural practices and chauvinism, women have been at times sequestered inside the home, have had their right to speak out taken away from them, have been prevented from work, prevented from praying in mosques or performing i'tikaf and even had their voices declared as 'awrah.

General Guidance on Gender Interaction

Purify Intention- only Allah knows our intentions. Actions are beautified by good, pure intentions that are for the sake of Allah. The same actions can become problematic when the intention is not for Allah eg to impress someone of the opposite gender.

Be Purposeful-interactions should have a purpose that is in accordance with cultural norms and do not cause suspicion.

Normalised interaction- the aim should be polite, normalised tone and conversation. This would be a middle path; between harsh, aloof interactions, on the one hand and flirtatious interactions, on the other.

Cultural appropriateness- where the Shari'ah allows differences of opinion in matters that are not forbidden, communities of Muslims can choose options that suit their situation, culture and provide ease for them. These may differ from choices made by communities of Muslims in different geographical locations and at different historical times.

Blind Following

Do we not all want to emulate our Rasool (saw) or the Mothers of Believers eg wearing turban, thawb, avoiding onions.....

We should emulate what our Messenger told us or indicated to us to emulate; not what was for him alone.

Had our Messenger wanted us to emulate something, he would have said so.

We should emulate their piety, their taqwa, their courage, their virtues...

Had the Messenger wanted women to emulate a specific thing from his wives, he would have said so. Therefore it is not a **must** nor a recommendation to blindly follow... but you may do so if you wish.

Blocking the Path- Sadd Ad-Daraiyyah

Some scholars point out the principle that whatever leads to a prohibited act, in and of itself, becomes prohibited- see Quran 17:32 below. This can lead to difficulty and narrowness in religion here in the west. "**Do not go anywhere near adultery: it is an outrage, and evil path**". 17:32

Designating normal interactions as haram eg talking to a taxi driver can engender difficulty for people. Sadd Ad-Daraiyyah is the subjective evidence of scholars and not textual evidence.

In contrast, some theorists of fiqh have proposed "**opening the means**" Fath- al-dara'i' as an alternative methodology to blocking the means, when circumstances differ. Al-Qarafi explained that the means which lead to prohibited ends should be blocked and discouraged, whereas the means that lead to lawful ends should be opened and encouraged. This can be applied, for example, to encourage women to attend mosques to nourish their own faith and that of their families. (Reclaiming The Mosques)

Gender Interactions and Segregation at ISB Campus

ISB Campus is the youth wing of ISB; a family organisation. The culture of ISB is one of noble family interactions. The same is the case for Campus.

We encourage respectful and courteous interaction between genders. This often results from dignified interactions at a formative age. Allah creates His creation in pairs; one exists and is defined by reference to the other. Men and women are socialised by one another.

ISB Campus has a Code of Conduct that requires all attendees to agree that a non mahram male and female will not be in physical khalwa for our activities. The Code also discourages physical touch between non mahrams.

Young people can benefit from interacting with the opposite gender in settings where God is oft-remembered and called upon. These interactions can help develop understanding, sensitivity, empathy, social skills and rahma. In some cases, strict segregation can cause young people to become giddy and excited when spoken to by the opposite gender or to desire to mix secretly; so others cannot find out. We wish to establish a middle ground recognising that many young Muslims in society today are not living in a segregated society nor interacting in segregated educational institutions.

Believing men and women are protecting friends to one another. To this end, understanding one another's perspective and point of view is vital; particularly on gender justice issues.

ISB Campus does not police where young people sit in lecture theatres and encourages attendees to develop an internal locus of control. Workshops and discussion groups are often mixed by age, gender, locality and interests so that young people are enriched by the life experiences and viewpoints of others. ISB Residentials and Masterclasses ensure that older mentors are present and available for mentoring and advice throughout. Campus regional socials ensure that young people connect with one another in order to expand their networks, whilst adhering to Islamic principles. Friendships amongst like-minded Muslims can be a critical step towards developing a strong identity.

ISB Campus respects that some young people may sometimes wish to sit at gender segregated tables at certain points in our residential programmes, whilst others may not. ISB Campus encourages all attendees to be respectful of differences of opinion and practices; recognising that the discussion groups work best when attendees are mixed up.

ISB Campus encourages young men and women to take up positions of responsibility in teams that promote positive social action; making an impact together. ISB Campus encourages young people to make a positive contribution to society by being changemakers in the mainstream; whilst interacting with decorum and dignity.

The Campus Coordinators & The Campus Committee

References

- ISB Masterclass on Gender Segregation by Ustadh Ahtsham Ali <https://youtu.be/ncAmk-ppomQ>
- <https://www.virtualmosque.com/personaldevlp/character/10-guidelines-for-gender-relations-in-islam/>
- Shaking Hands by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi <https://maktabahalbakri.com/394-shaking-hands-with-a-person-of-opposite-gender/>
- "Reclaiming The Mosque" by Jasser Auda
- <https://youtu.be/UL4lvUdCOmA> Sh Yasir Qadhi on Gender Segregation