



Is MICRO-CHEATING damaging your marriage?

It's the latest buzzword. Here, we investigate if it's possible to be 'just a little bit' unfaithful

Have you ever sent someone a private message online without telling your partner? What about leaving love-heart emojis on their photos? According to researchers, that counts as 'micro-cheating'.

Defined as any act by someone in a relationship which might suggest that they are emotionally or physically available, thanks to social media, micro-cheating is on the rise. But it's not

just limited to the parameters of the online world. Ever let a stranger buy you a drink? Enjoyed a quick-but-flirty chat over the water cooler at work?

While some researchers warn that this seemingly innocent behaviour could spark infidelity, others disagree, insisting that adults are capable of speaking to exes and enjoying friendships with the opposite sex without there being an ulterior motive. *Woman* investigates...

'IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR CONFIDENCE'

Karin Monster-Peters, 39, works as a psychologist. She is married to Markus Peters, 40.

Catching the eye of a good-looking man in the supermarket, I feel my heart beating a little faster. He's checking me out, so I smile right back. But although I'm encouraging his flirty glances - and even slowing as I pass by - I'm not in the market for a date, and I certainly don't need a husband. I have one at home.

I've micro-cheated on Markus for as long as I can remember, and he's fine

about it. Why? Because he does it, too.

We met through a dating site in February 2008, just before my 29th birthday. He sent me a heart emoji and we met two days later. It sounds cheesy, but it was love at first sight - it was like I'd known him forever.

Even after nine years of being married, that passion hasn't waned. But just because we've made commitments to each other, that doesn't mean we don't



find others attractive and enjoy a bit of flirting from time to time.

Ego boost

Me chatting to a stranger in the supermarket, or cheekily commenting on a male friend's social media photo, doesn't mean I want to sleep with them. It's just good for everyone's ego.

For me, micro-cheating confirms my attractiveness. Markus makes me feel sexy every day, but to

have someone else think I am too - well, it's only natural that it gives me a boost. And if Markus gets that same vote of confidence from other women, then I'm all for it, because it means I have a happier husband at home. Micro-cheating has made our marriage

'THE TRUST WAS GONE'

Kiran Singh, 41, works as a life coach. She lives in Watford with her daughter Khushi, aged 14.

Some people think micro-cheating is innocent, but I know more than most that simply isn't the case.

An ex of mine many years ago had been acting distant for months, and no matter how many times he insisted that everything was fine, I couldn't shake the feeling there was something going on. The turning point came when I realised he was locking himself in the bathroom to take phone calls. When I asked him about it, he insisted that it was nothing - just an innocent chat with an ex. But if it was so innocent, then why was he trying to hide it?

Behind my back

I later found out he had been texting his colleagues, too. While some of the messages could have been seen as just lighthearted banter, they didn't stay that way. Eventually, he confessed to having an affair. I know it's only natural to find other people attractive. But it's acting on those impulses - even in seemingly innocent ways such as sending a text, or liking their photo on Facebook - that crosses the line.

People think micro-cheating is harmless, and that it's innocent flirting and nothing more, but that's what makes it



Kiran's worst fears were confirmed

'HE SAID IT WAS NOTHING'

so wrong. Knowing that my partner had been sending

messages and calling other women hurt just as much as discovering he'd had sex with someone else.

At the point when he sent them, he must have been feeling emotionally disconnected from me and it was at that moment, when the first message was sent, that our relationship was over. The underlying trust was gone.

These days, if I knew that a partner was micro-cheating I would end a relationship straight away - it's just as bad as being sexually unfaithful.

ARE YOU GUILTY?

According to studies, these examples cross the line. How many would you tick yes to?

- * Lying about your relationship status on social media **Y N**
- * Keeping your old online dating profiles, just in case **Y N**
- * Listing someone by a fake name in your phone contacts **Y N**
- * Having an emotional connection with someone else **Y N**
- * Imagining someone else while having sex with your partner **Y N**

THE EXPERT OPINION

Psychologist Sue Firth says:

For some couples micro-cheating won't jeopardise the fidelity of their relationship. The key is to listen to your partner's feelings, and ensure they feel the most highly valued of all your relationships. Minor jealousies are to be expected, but if a partner starts to become irrational and keeps track of your every Facebook like or platonic text message, they could be trying to control you.

* firthconsulting.net

WORDS: EMMIE HARRISON. PHOTO: GETTY