Marital infidelity and professional misconduct linked, study shows

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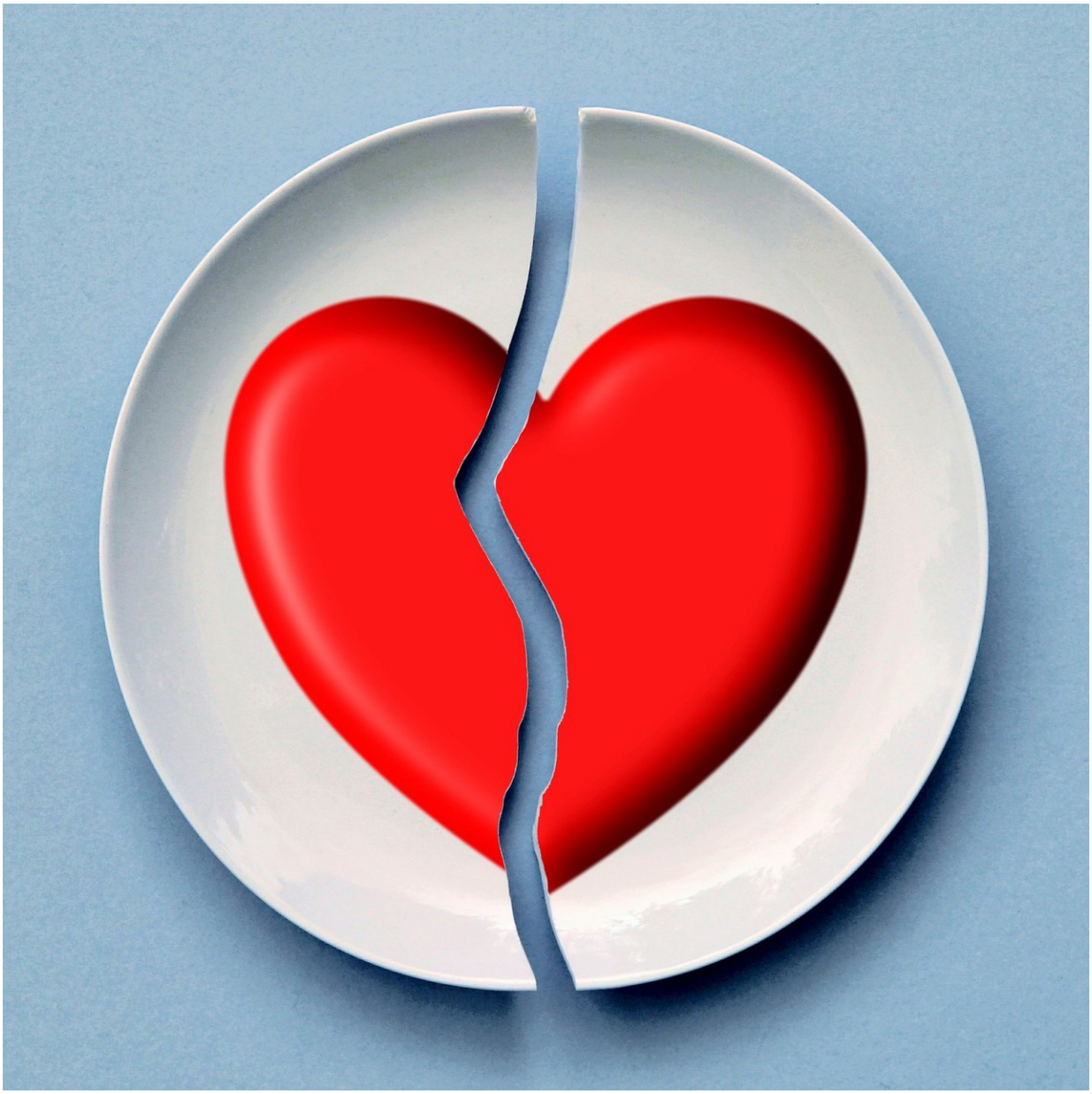

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People who cheat on their spouses are significantly more likely to engage in misconduct in the workplace, according to a study from the McCombs School of Business at The University of Texas at Austin published today in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The researchers looked at the records of police officers, financial advisers, white-collar criminals and senior executives who used the Ashley Madison marital infidelity website. Operating under the slogan "Life is short. Have an affair," Ashley Madison advertises itself as a dating service for married people to have "discreet encounters." Despite promises of discreetness, the data were put in the public domain through a hack in 2015 that included 36 million user accounts, including 1 million paid users in the United States.

The study, "Personal Infidelity and Professional Conduct in 4 Settings," by McCombs finance faculty members John M. Griffin and Samuel Kruger, along with Gonzalo Maturana of Emory University, found that Ashley Madison users in the professional settings they studied were more than twice as likely to engage in corporate misconduct.

"This is the first study that's been able to look at whether there is a correlation between personal infidelity and professional conduct," Kruger said. "We find a strong correlation, which tells us that infidelity is informative about expected professional conduct."

The researchers investigated four study groups totaling 11,235 individuals using data on police officers from the Citizens Police Data Project, data on financial advisers from the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority BrokerCheck database, data on defendants in SEC

cases from the Securities and Exchange Commission's litigation release archives, and data on CEOs and CFOs from Execucomp.

Even after matching misconduct professionals to misconduct-free individuals with similar ages, genders and experiences and controlling for a wide range of executive and cultural variables, the researchers found that people with histories of misconduct were significantly more likely to use the Ashley Madison website.

Their findings suggest a strong connection between people's actions in their personal and professional lives and provide support for the idea that eliminating workplace sexual misconduct may also reduce fraudulent activity.

"Our results show that personal sexual conduct is correlated with professional conduct," Kruger said. "Eliminating sexual misconduct in the workplace could have the extra benefit of contributing to more ethical corporate cultures in general."

More information: Personal infidelity and professional conduct in 4 settings, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019). DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1905329116 , www.pnas.org/content/early/2019/07/29/1905329116

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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