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Ghanaian Academics' Views about Research Misconduct in a Public University in Ghana

8th World Conference on Research Integrity

Oral Presentation 16.1 Tuesday, Jun 4, 2024
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM. MC3 Hall. Athens, Greece.
Presenter: Dr. Fred Yao Gbagbo

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

I — **INTRODUCTION**

What is, Research Misconduct and Research Integrity?

Background/ Why we chose this study?

Study Aim

M — **METHODS**

Study design

Study site

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria & IRB

R — **RESULTS**

Participant characteristics

Key findings by themes

Schematic linkages

I — **IMPLICATIONS**

For research agenda
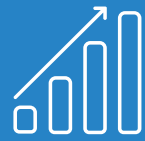
Suggested approaches to improve RI

C — **CONCLUSION**

Summary and the future directions

BACKGROUND - WHY WAS STUDY THIS NECESSARY?

The scientific community increasingly demands high quality research conducted with the greatest research integrity possible [1]

Research misconduct is on the rise in recent time [2]

Yet, the available evidence is unfortunately skewed in favor of developed countries compared to Sub Saharan Africa [3] The reasons are varied [2,3,4]

In Ghana, preliminary papers (mostly anecdotal evidence) suggest that the practice may be prevalent among both students and faculty of universities [4, 5] Yet this is unconfirmed

The pervasiveness of RM (among university researchers & authors) has the potential to hurt not just researchers and scientists, but also society at large [4, 5]

STUDY AIM

To **provide empirical evidence** that may lead to a bigger research project to inform policy and programme interventions, that may chart an ethical research path within the academia in Ghana.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

A. Research Misconduct: means fabrication, falsification, Manipulation or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results *(Gopalakrishna, 2022)*

- ➢ *Fabrication* - making up data, results, recordings and reporting them.
- ➢ *Falsification* - manipulating research materials, equipment, processes, changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
- ➢ *Manipulation* - adjusting data to make it organized (i.e adjusting, inserting, modifying)
- ➢ *Plagiarism* - the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.

B. Research Integrity: means conducting research in such a way that allows others to have confidence and trust in the methods and the findings of the research (*https://ori.hhs.gov/definition-research-misconduct*)

[NB: Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion].

METHODS

Study design

Rapid Exploratory-descriptive case study design with a qualitative approach (Pilot)

Study Setting/ Population

* A purposefully selected public university in Ghana

* Academics (faculty members and research fellows)

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

*Completed probation (+/-)
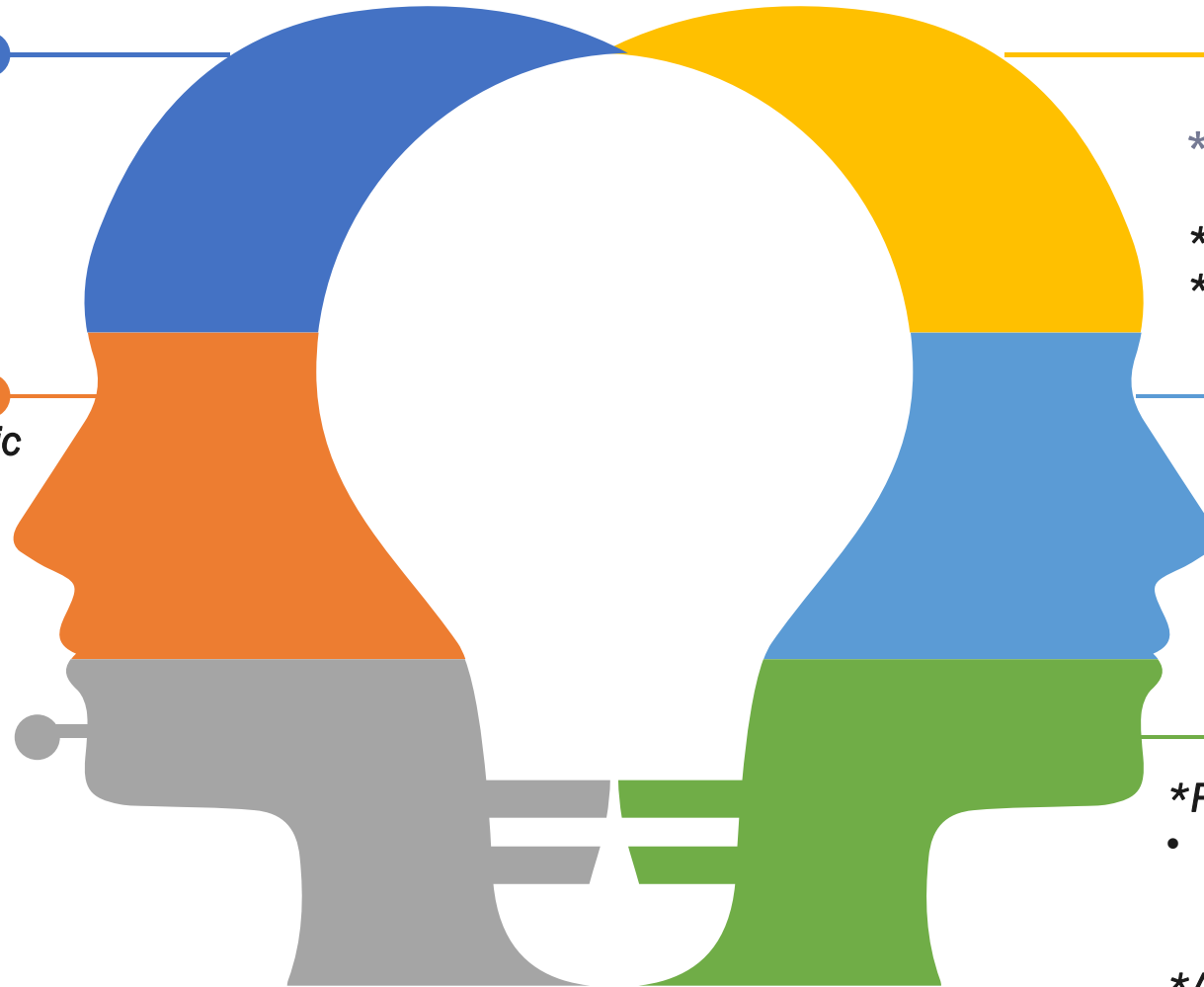
*Full time employee (+/-)

Instrument / Data collection

*A pretested researcher-developed interview guide
* Trained RAs collected data
*Audio recordings → transcription

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis approach using the ATLAS.ti 8

Ethics and approvals

*Received ethical approval from IRB
• Obtained formal permission from Office of the Registrar of University (named withheld for anonymity)
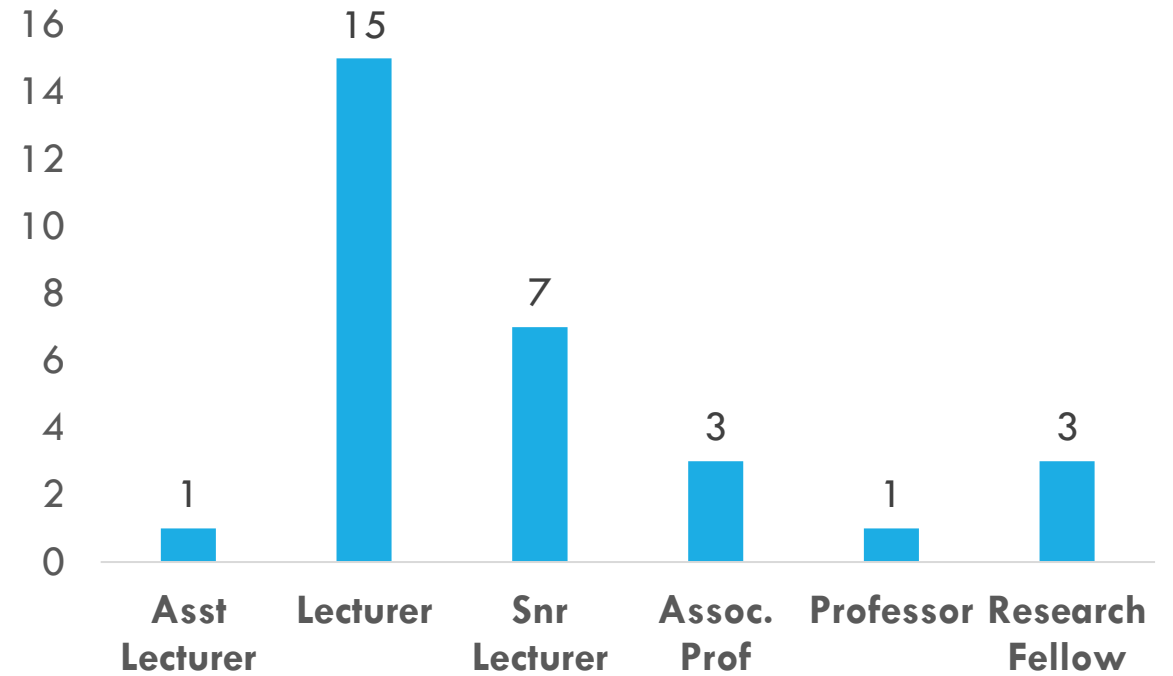*Acquired written informed consent from all participants

RESULTS

Summary of participants' background

30 Number of participants (Saturation)	**97%** Employed for 3 years and more.	**63%** Hold a PhD	**50%** Hold professional fellowship /Post-Doc

Distribution of academic ranks in the samp

RESULTS

Findings 1: RM is more of plagiarism than FFM !

100%

Plagiarism is research misconduct

40%

Fabrication, Falsification, Manipulation & Plagiarism .

60%

Fabrication, Falsification, & Plagiarism

RESULTS - **Perception of RM**

RM is more of plagiarism than FFM!

'... they [fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism] are all forms of research misconduct, but plagiarism is more common and damaging. Now there are ways that people can beat the plagiarism checker ..."

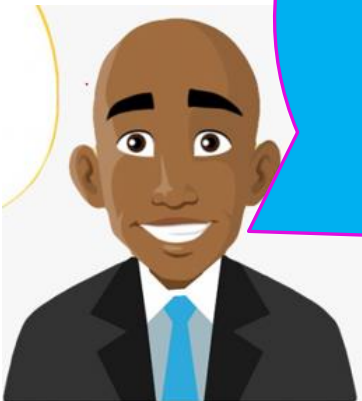"...stealing others ideas without proper reference, and manipulation of results..."

Lecturer, PhD; 11 years in academia]

[Lecturer, PhD; 7 years in academia]

FINDINGS - **Perception of the prevalence of RM**

All respondents believe that RM exists in academic institutions, though it occurs covertly!

".... I have not heard much about research misconduct in [this university] ......, but I am sure there are such things happening..."

"...you can't fault researcher for certain misconducts because this is [a] human institution...but aside that, the contributing factors could be so many.
For example, in this institution, you are required to have a number of publications before you are promoted. So regardless of your field experience you won't be promoted if you don't have the numbers, we usually say you publish or perish...."

Senior Lecturer, PhD/Postdoc; 6 years in academia

Professor, PhD; 9 years in academia

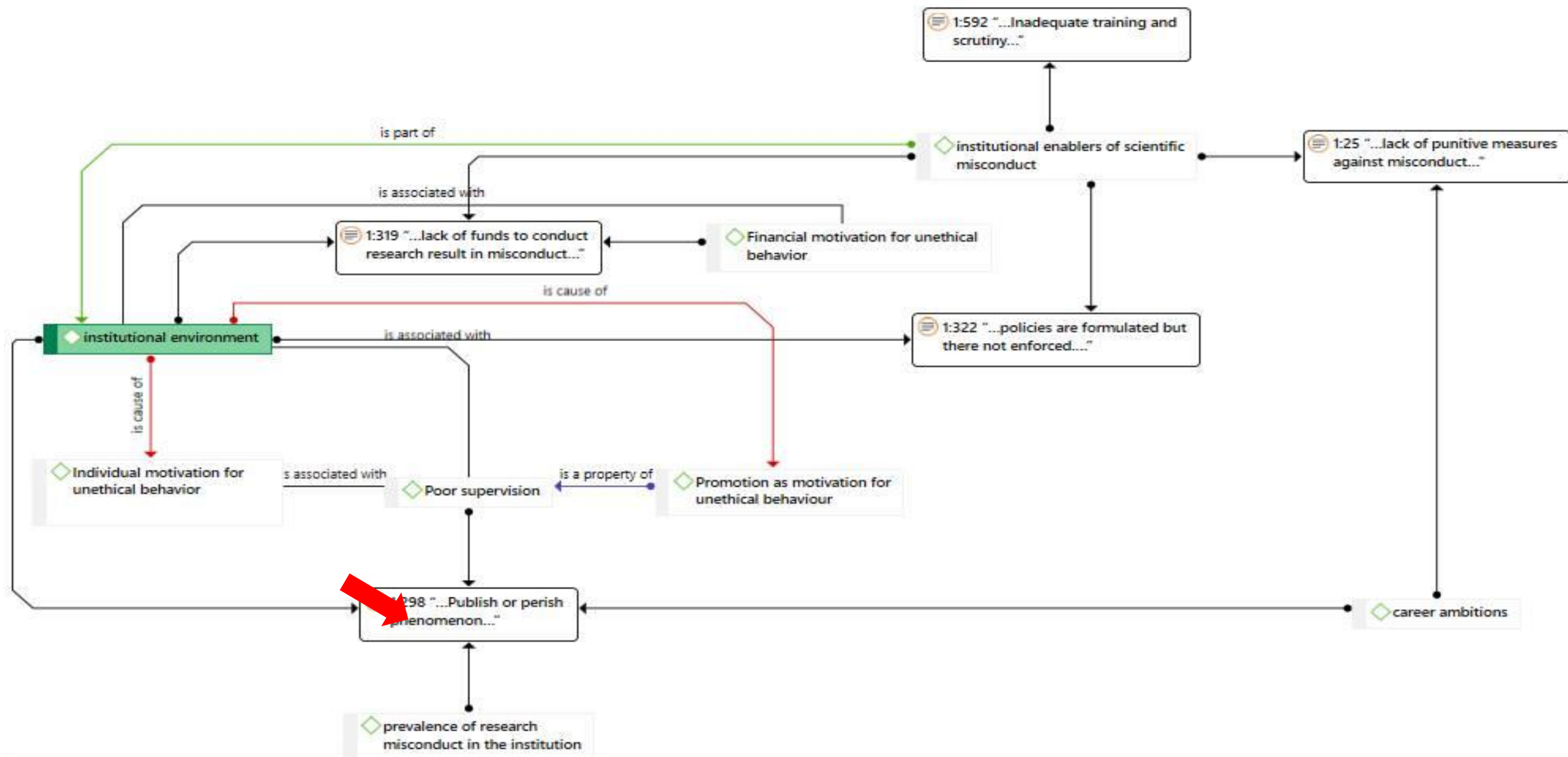# FINDINGS - **Perceived causes of RM**

Figure: A diagram showing the semantic linkages among various elements of academics' perception of the causes of research misconduct in academic institutions

FINDINGS - **Perceived causes of RM**

Publish or perish phenomenon is a major driver of RM!

'...in academia the publish or perish mentality is causing more harm than good and most of the time there is little support, be it funding or personnel ..."

Lecturer, PhD; 4 years in academia]

FINDINGS - **Perceived causes of RM**

Institutional Enablers

- ✓ Lack of punitive measures
- ✓ Inadequate training support and scrutiny
- ✓ Inadequately distributed/ poorly communicated research polices

Institutional Inhibitors

- ✗ (In)ability to detect RM
- ✗ Research funding/ Support
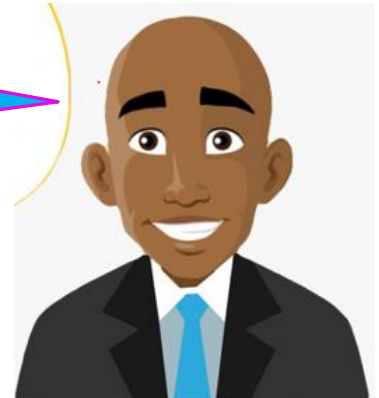- ✗ Ethical climate [The role of the IRBs in RM]

SHOULD IRBs FOR ETHICAL APPROVALS BE EQUALLY HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESEARCH MISCONDUCT?, RETRACTED PUBLICATIONS AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY IN RESEARCH?

FINDINGS - **Perceived causes of RM**

The IRB's perceived role in RM.

'... I have heard complaints about how long it takes for people to get clearance for their research, but that doesn't mean you should do the wrong thing; this **ethics board is to ensure things are done the right way**. So, I don't see the negative influence here...''
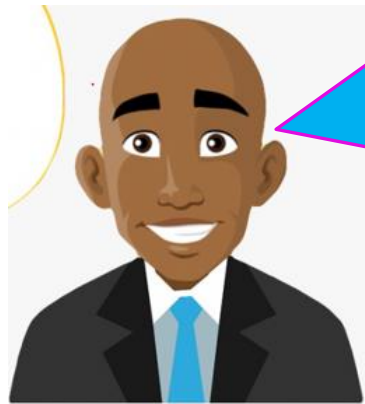[Professor, PhD; 9 years in academia]

Professor, PhD;
9 years in academia]

FINDINGS -**Processes to address identified RM**

All respondents had **no idea** what procedure is used to address identified RM cases in the university.

'... The [*Quality Assurance Unit*] has a special way of dealing with such people, but if you have never been in trouble with rules, you wouldn't know..." ..."

Research Fellow, MSc/MPhil;
20 years in academia]

Suggestions To Prevent RM

Participants offered the following suggestions:

1. Institution should institute capacity building trainings for all persons at all levels

2. Strict and firm enforcement of prevailing institutional RM policies

3. A review of the faculty promotion policy: deemphasize number of publications & the "publish or perish" phenomenon

4. Set up a national research agency to both fund & exercise oversight over all research

IMPLICATIONS

1. Need for a national level research misconduct framework

2. Institutional level to enactment/enforcement of robust RM policy and processes are in place

3. Strengthening Responsible conduct of research training [tailored to the Ghanaian /African context if possible]

4. Strengthening a local research agenda in RM – Funding for further research needed.

CONCLUSIONS

➢We presented one of the earliest evidence that academics in public universities in Ghana hold a perception that research misconduct is widespread in the Ghanaian academic space.

➢Our study highlights significant gaps in the institutional environment that may be hindering institutional measures against research misconduct.

➢More comprehensive research is imperative to explore the drivers and (de)motivations of the role of the institutional environment plays in RM among academics; particularly deconstruct the public-or-perish phenomenon and its effects on RM.

➢Need for funding and collaboration to further explore RM in academia nation wide

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o Authors respective institutions & collaborators

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7. https://ori.hhs.gov/definition-research-misconduct

THANK YOU