Communicating Death to Potential Military Recruits:

A Terror Management Theory Approach

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Abstract

Efforts to encourage more citizens to join the military is a prominent duty within a military organization. In order to maintain force strength, military recruiters and marketing teams need to persuade the population to join. This study used Terror Management Theory (TMT) and the relationship between the fear of mortality and its effect on motivation toward volunteering for military service in the United States. TMT is a theory that explains how the human psyche combats the fear of mortality, and this study sought to answer how mortality salience affects an individual's motivation to join the military. TMT's explanation of defense mechanisms can be partnered with components of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in order to refine marketing strategies and increase predictability in the effects of communicating death to potential recruits.

Replicating Orit Taubman–Ben-Ari and Liora Findler's experiment conducted in Israel (2006), this study used an updated motivation scale and a different sample group: American university students instead of Israeli high school males. Although there are differing demographic and cultural variables, it was expected that results would have underlying similarities and contribute to our body of knowledge about the theory.

Although the original hypotheses that were tested did not produce significant findings, the general trend revealed that participants who were made aware of their mortality had lower motivation to join the military, enlist as a noncommissioned officer, or pursue a commission as an officer than participants who were not made aware of their mortality. With additional testing, there were two significant findings within the female participant sample. First, females who were not made aware of their mortality were more motivated to enlist in the military than those who were made aware of their mortality. Second, non-service member female participants not made

aware of their mortality were more motivated to enlist in the military than non-service member

female participants who were made aware of their mortality.

Table of Contents

1   Introduction

The United States military is an all-volunteer force and in order to remain voluntary, the organization has to allocate resources to market to the population and encourage recruitment. As the largest employer within the nation, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) needs to maintain its force as there has been a decline of interest in military service over more than 15 years (National Research Council). With advertising campaigns that try to speak to the individual to rise to the challenge offered by joining the U.S. military, today's marketing campaigns focus on the strength that already resides within the potential recruit (Air Force: "Aim High," Navy: "Forged by the Sea," Army: "Army Strong," Marines: "The Few, The Proud," Coast Guard: "Born Ready"). The military uses many resources to analyze incoming recruits on their capabilities, personality, and potential in order to match the individual with the proper job and proper training. This rigorous system of training and coordination of occupation is designed to allow optimal job satisfaction. Not only is the DOD focused on occupational success, but it also strives to create a community that establishes a sense of belonging within each member. If the service member feels included, individuals will align themselves with the values, converging with the legacy of the organization and achieving a sense of immortality.

Achieving a sense of immortality is a psychological need through self-actualization, but what if that sense of immortality is threatened by risky behaviors accompanying your occupation that could result in your death? Early humans were explicably killed by their predators, but once humanity began outliving noticeable threats (i.e. death by predator) and began to die by unforeseeable forces (i.e. old age, disease) the need for explanation grew. Belief systems were constructed in an attempt at explanation (i.e. sacrificial rituals to bargain life with gods). Sciences were developed to experiment and prolong life in visible ways (i.e. vaccinations created

and distributed to fight against disease). With cultural worldviews and belief systems in place, the world splinters into various ideologies. Psychological defenses are constructed, organizations are formed to govern communities of shared ideals, and military forces are formed to defend those shared values.

When individuals are confronted with ideology that contradicts their own, they dehumanize the outgroup or those who stray from the cultural norm in order to protect their self-esteem. We need tangible things to put our worries on and those who have different cultural worldviews serve as psychological lightning rods for our anxiety connected to our mortality (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016). In order to combat those who do not fall in line with our cultural worldview, we begin to categorize and dehumanize in order to fortify our self-esteem. Historically, in order to control their sense of immortality, males have had a tendency to create social structures that constrict women's capabilities, dehumanizing women (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016). For this study, women were considered the outgroup within the military because it has been a predominately male industry. Although women have found ways to join the ranks through unconventional ways in the past, the first women were placed in a stereotypical gender-role of a nurse, the care provider. With the further expansion of egalitarian efforts, the once only male field is beginning to expand opportunities for women to join.

This study examines previous research in the areas of motivation towards military service, effects mortality salience has on receiver behavior, and self-esteem defense capabilities of each gender. It will examine effects of existential threats that are developed by environmental factors, cultural worldviews that shape the perceptions of these threats, the implications of mortality salience's effect on motivation to partake in risky behavior, and possible biological factors that reveal contrasting coping mechanisms to manage death-thought awareness. This

study may help expand upon necessary sustainment operations to build up a defense force for a foreign nation as well as recruitment for U.S. military services. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and other tests are already given to gauge potential soldiers' skills before enlisting. Introducing a test or survey like the one in this experiment could reveal the subconscious level of motivation for participation in military services.

2   Previous Research

2.1   Terror Management Theory

To help understand how to improve messaging to obtain and retain recruits, this study expands upon Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's previous research that found that mortality salience affects an individual's self-esteem if the results of the mortality salience enhances their self-esteem. Using the Terror Management Theory framework, the authors investigated effects of the motivation for military services when individuals are made aware of their mortality (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler, 2006). The peripheral and central routes of communication described within ELM can be partnered with TMT's psychological defense mechanisms to protect an individual's self-esteem.

TMT is a social and evolutionary psychology theory that posits that basic psychological conflict arises from our natural instinct for self-preservation and knowledge of our ultimate fate, death. This conflict generates terror, but the anxiety of this terror can be managed by relying on cultural beliefs and symbolic systems that offer stability and significance. Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, and Tom Pyszczynski introduced the theory in 1984 and continue to expand upon its capabilities for mental health. Their research is built on Ernest Becker's claims that "people strive for meaningful and significant lives largely to manage the fear of death" (Solomon, Greenberg, &Pyszczynski, 2016, p. ix).

TMT stems from Maslow's existential approach that discusses the basic hierarchy of needs (Becker, 1973). Once the physiological and safety needs are taken care of, an individual becomes aware of their psychological needs (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). One of these needs is self-esteem, which is based on self-awareness and at some

point, we become "aware of ourselves not just as individuals but as part of a broader social

context" (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016).

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This chart explains the different levels an individual needs to achieve self-actualization and a sense of immortality.

In order to appease their need for connecting with members of the group, early humans

groomed each other as a social bonding activity that promoted cohesion and coordination

(Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016). Those with low self-esteem are searching for a

collective to join; whereas those with high self-esteem do not feel the need to join a larger

organization. Individuals with high self-esteem already have a sense of self-value with their

group affiliations already in place. This social inclusion of the individual within a collective can

satisfy the need for love and belonging. Once the individual is accepted within their social

groups, they begin to adopt their cultural values.

Once individuals are self-aware and are able to reflect on how they feel, they now can

imagine how others might feel and begin to predict potential effects of a particular action

(Solomon et al., 2016). For example, we cannot fathom the fact that we are not able to defend

against natural death; therefore, early societies began developing belief systems and innovative technology in attempts to avert the inevitable and achieve immortality (Solomon et al., 2016).

The need for immortality stems from self-esteem, the feeling that one is a valuable part in a meaningful universe (Solomon et al., 1989). Solomon et al. state that "self-esteem enables each of us to believe we are enduring, significant beings rather than material creatures destined to be obliterated;" therefore, self-esteem is a viable gauge for defense against death thought effects (2016, p. 9). The foundation of self-esteem is grounded in the individual's cultural worldview, the accumulated system of ideology that we rely on when our beliefs are brought into question. The surrounding beliefs and perceptions are what shape our purpose within our community. An individual's self-esteem is fragile and can be affected when confronted with death awareness through images or words and that the fear of death affects our behavior (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986).

Original research on TMT has posited two distinct hypotheses – the *anxiety-buffer hypothesis* and the *mortality salience hypothesis*. The *anxiety-buffer hypothesis* states "that if a psychological structure (worldview faith or self-esteem) provides protection against anxiety, then strengthening that structure should make one less prone to exhibit anxiety or anxiety-related behavior in response to threats, and weakening that structure should make one more prone to exhibit anxiety or anxiety-related behavior in response to threats" (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997, p. 24). The *mortality salience hypothesis* states "that to the extent that a psychological structure (worldview faith or self-esteem) provides protection against death concerns, reminding individuals of death should increase their need for that structure" (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997, p. 25). These hypotheses form the foundation of TMT research.

2.2   Defense Against Death Thoughts

In order to fend off the inevitable, belief systems and sciences are developed in attempts to understand and fend off mortality salience (Solomon, et al., 2016). The defenses are dependent on the individual, the situation, and the path of immortality they are attempting to achieve. There are two paths of immortality, literal and symbolic, that often times overlap.
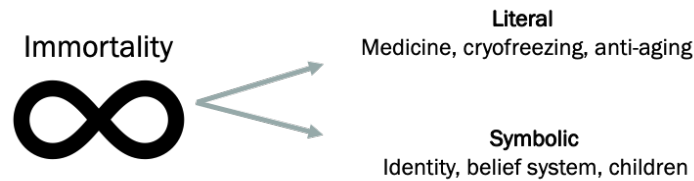

Figure 2. Types of immortality. This image depicts the two types of immortality individuals strive to achieve, literal immortality or symbolic immortality.

Literal immortality, "is the promise either that one will never die, or that some vital aspect of the self will survive death" (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 84). Those pursuing literal immortality not only follow spiritual paths, but scientific approaches like alchemy, age reversal, and postmortem resuscitation. Alchemy potions were created to prolong life and are predecessors of today's modern medicine to remedy illness that could lead to our death. Wrinkles and age spots that appear on our skin serve as reminders of our gradual decay; therefore, age reversal techniques like the application of aging cream can smooth the death thoughts away. Scientists continue to experiment with cryogenic freezing of bodies in hopes that one day they would be able to reanimate the bodies (Solomon et al., 2016). In addition to medication to stave off infections, reconstructive surgery and prosthetic fittings are prominent practices of literal immortality that are relevant to military occupations. The second means of obtaining immortality is through one's identity or legacy. This symbolic immortality "promises that we will still be part

of something eternal after our last breath, that some symbolic vestige of the self will persist in perpetuity" (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 84). The creation of the soul stems from symbolic immortality. Humans needed a way to continue living after the end of their physical life, so they created belief systems of life after death (Solomon et al., 2016). A scholar can live on through his books and manuscripts by contributing to the perpetuation of knowledge. Parents can achieve a sense of symbolic immortality by sharing their beliefs and values with their children to ensure their culture continues with each generation. Spiritualists believe in reincarnation or other scenarios that require individuals to be buried with gifts and other material essentials in order to ferry into the next life safely.

This Death Thought Awareness (DTA) is kept at bay with two types of defenses to protect our self-esteem – proximal and distal (Dilliplane, 2010; McCallum & McGlone, 2011). Proximal defenses are conscious efforts to rationalize and get rid of death thoughts by repressing the thoughts, distracting ourselves with other thoughts, or pushing the problem into the future (Solomon et al., 2016). In contrast, our distal defenses have no logical relation to the problem of death, but still attempt to muffle mortal terror (Solomon et al., 2016).

Figure 3. TMT defenses stem from an individual's esteem. This image shows that the defenses against mortality salience originates from the esteem level of individual need.

These defenses originate from our self-esteem and segue into coping mechanisms like reliance on spiritualism and superstition, assuming a rebellious stance, or cultivating diverse self-concepts (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016). These defenses fend off the reality that the value we place on our lives are fabricated by ourselves (Becker, 1973). To further explain, Solomon et al. provide an analogy of a leaky house:

> "Think of psychological security as a way of keeping the inside of a leaky old house dry in a heavy rainstorm. You need to place some buckets around the house to catch whatever raindrops might be coming through the roof. The rain represents death thoughts; the roof represents your distal defenses. If the roof, which serves to keep water from cascading into the house (just as distal defenses function to prevent death thoughts from becoming conscious), has just a few leaks, the buckets (proximal defenses) will suffice to collect the water and keep the house dry. But if the roof leaks profusely, or is blown completely off in the storm, the buckets won't be able to keep up with the influx of water. Your psychological house would then be swamped by a raging river of death fears in exceedingly short order" (2016).

To expand further on this analogy, the buckets (proximal defenses) do well when collecting the rainwater (death thoughts) that has slipped through the faults in the roof (distal defenses); however, wouldn't a smart homeowner want to patch up the leaky roof or reinforce the structure of the house?
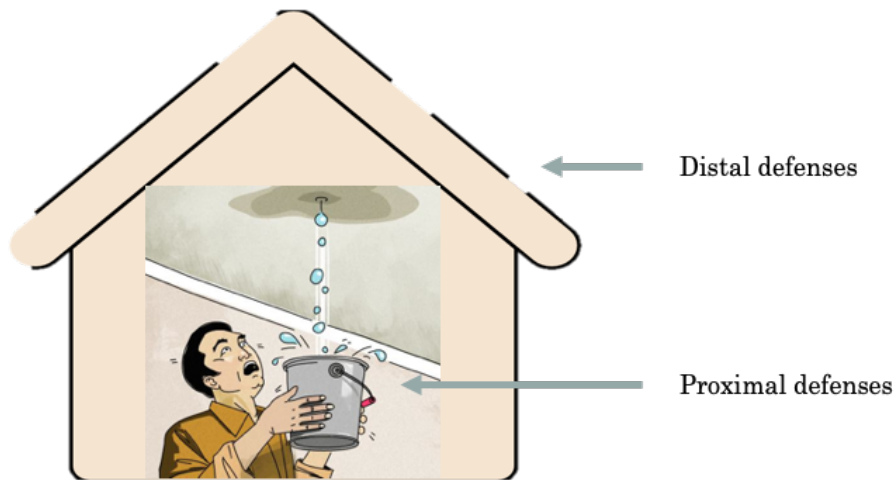
Figure 4. Leaky cabin metaphor. The cabin signifies an individual's subconscious efforts (distal) against death thought awareness, and the bucket signifies the conscious efforts (proximal) to manage the thoughts that leak through the first barrier of defenses.

Studies have shown attempts to find alternative ways to bolster self-esteem or defend against death-related thoughts. Florian, Mikulincer, and Hirschberger conducted a study on personal hardiness and found that hardy people transform their perspective of fearing death into an optimistic opportunity to grow (2001).

Instead of reinforcing self-esteem when confronted with mortality salience, "hardiness affects the generation of death-related thoughts...hardy persons would be less aware of death-related thoughts than nonhardy persons" (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2001). Hardy people may experience a heightened accessibility of death-related thoughts but will not react with an increased reliance on cultural worldview as nonhardy people would (Florian et al., 2001). Relying on an inner strength, hardy people are able to confront implications of death and react to death-related thoughts in an active transformational way (Florian et al., 2001). Finding ways to bolster your collective values develops a stronger foundation for your distal and proximal defenses against death thoughts.

Once an individual has joined a collective, the shared cultural values affect the individual's death thought defenses and level of self-actualization. Self-actualization is the realization or fulfillment of one's talents and potentialities and considered as a drive or need present in everyone (Lexico, n.d.).
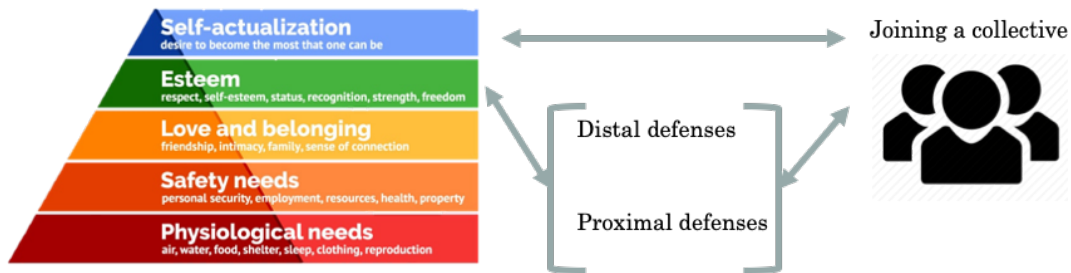
Figure 5. Influence of needs. This image shows the influential relationship between an individual's esteem, death thought awareness defense, joining a collective, and achieving self-actualization.

Research has been conducted on the relationship between hardiness and coping abilities (Florian et al., 2001; Florian et al. 1995) as well as implementation of hardiness training programs for test anxiety (Moazedian, Ahghar, & Aref-Nazari, 2014). Florian et al. found that hardiness may affect the generation of death-related thoughts, the appraisal of threats implied by death, and how individuals cope with their terror of death (Florian et al., 1995). Moazedian, Ahghar and Aref-Nazari's study found that "students who received 10 sessions of hardiness training had lower levels of test anxiety" (2014, p. 50). Although there is scarce research or explanation of hardiness training within the U.S. military, it can be implied that hardiness training within military education curriculum may lower the anxiety toward death-related thoughts (Moazedian et al., 2014).

2.3 Mortality Salience Threatening Self-Esteem Leads to Risky Behavior

One effect mortality salience can have on an individual is to influence them to increase in risk-taking behaviors. Solomon et al. state that "people terrified by the prospect of their own demise would be less likely to take risks in hunting to increase the odds of landing big game, to

compete effectively for mates, or to provide good care for their offspring" (2015); however, it seems that society has altered this norm in order to accommodate for an opportunity for physical or symbolic immortality, thus alleviating some pressure on risky actions. Previous research has assumed "the underlying decision to engage in risky behavior results from the tension between two conflicting motives: a) avoiding or minimizing potential losses and b) maximizing potential gains" (Hirschberger, Florian, & Mikulincer, 2002).

Mortality Salience **+** **Self esteem** **=** **Risky Behavior** *to achieve immortality*
a) Avoiding potential loss (low self-esteem)
b) Maximizing potential gain (high self-esteem)

Literal (physical training)   **Symbolic** (values/ patriotism)
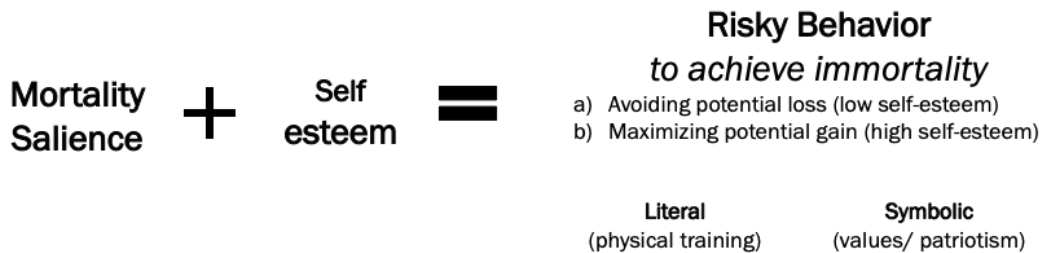
Figure 6. Mortality salience and self-esteem lead to different types of risky behavior. This image depicts how mortality salience and an individual's self-esteem can affect their actions.

While these motives align with the beliefs of Solomon et al., social constructs have draped an elusive veil over the option of meaningful loss by creating or increasing the rewards associated with particular behaviors. For example, most cultures value courage, bravery, and valor; however, additional value is added to risky behavior because it exemplifies these culturally coveted attributes. "Certain individuals in some instances may decide to engage in risky behavior because their hope for gain may outweigh their fear of loss, regardless of the objective probabilities of gaining over losing" (Hirschberger, Florian, & Mikulincer, 2002).

Although men don't necessarily have to put their lives in danger on a hunt for food because physiological hardships have been simplified due to technology, we are still in danger of psychological loss in our symbolic reality. When confronted with our mortality through images and words, we rely on our cultural worldview to defend against death-related thoughts that threaten our self-esteem and psychological wellbeing. Since self-esteem is linked to our need to

belong to something larger, we join others in shared worldviews in order to validate our belief system. For example, people who are having difficulty in finding their value in life search for avenues to symbolic or literal immortality through behaviors that will reward them with psychological satisfaction, resulting in higher self-esteem (Solomon et al., 2015). Through an extensive literature review, Baumeister and Scher (1988) discovered that risk taking behaviors are central characteristics of males across several cultures. Hirschberger et al. proposes "in line with TMT's hypotheses, that death awareness may increase men's need to identify with the predominant male cultural worldview" (Hirschberger, Florian, Mikulincer, Goldenberg & Pyszczynski, 2002).

For this study, the author used the willingness to join the U.S. military services as a risk-taking behavior. Although there are several non-combat duty positions, the American public likely views military service as a path to situations that may result in physical and mental harm. Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's study asked participants how they anticipate handling the mental and physical hardships that correlate with military services (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler, 2006). So why do some volunteer for military services and others do not, when both parties are aware of the potential outcomes? (Hirschberger, Florian, Mikulincer, Goldenberg & Pyszczynski, 2002).

Although it is known for the rigorous training and occupational hazards, the military is an organization that prides itself on comradery. Individuals who have been exposed to mortality salience with lower self-esteem may pursue joining this collective in order to sustain their need for belonging to something larger than themselves. Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler (2006) conducted surveys with their military force; however, serving in the military in Israel is a compulsory action.

2.4   Integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model into TMT

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) views persuasion as a cognitive event, "meaning the targets of persuasive messages use mental processes of motivation and reasoning (or lack thereof) to accept or reject persuasive messages" (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 119). Developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo in the 1980's, ELM considers two routes of influence that can be used to persuade; therefore, it is important the message sender understands the audience members and their capabilities to accept the message being communicated (Dainton & Zelley, 2015). The two routes of influence are centrally routed messages and peripherally routed messages. Petty and Cacioppo's model depicts the central route as the more complex route and is often times referred to as the elaborated route (Dainton & Zelley, 2015). "Centrally routed messages include a wealth of information, rational arguments, and evidence to support a particular conclusion" and are "much more likely to create long-term change for the recipient than are peripheral messages" (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 119). Even though centrally routed messages offer more information, not all individuals are capable of receiving these messages (Dainton & Zelley, 2015). Central routed messages should be used when the audience is motivated to listen and understand the message, whereas peripheral routed messages are used when the audience members are lacking motivation or ability (Dainton & Zelley, 2015). Peripheral messages include emotional involvement and persuade the receiver through more superficial means. Dainton and Zelley provide the example of politicians broadcasting "feel-good images of family values, patriotism, character, and likability" (2015, p. 120). ELM "predicts that when the audience is unmotivated or unable to process an elaborated message, persuaders should focus on quick and easy ways to produce change"; however, this peripheral route "leads only to short-term change, if any change at all (Dainton & Zelely, 2015, p. 120).

These two routes are congruent to TMT's death thought defenses, proximal and distal.

Proximal defenses that allow an individual to consciously combat their mortality salience aligns

with the direct messaging of central routed messages that affect a motivated and capable

audience. Peripheral messaging could speak to the audiences' distal defenses that are steadfast in

the background of the individual's mind. Cialdini identified seven common cues of peripheral

messaging: authority, commitment, contrast, liking, reciprocity, scarcity, and social proofing

(Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 120). Although it may generate short-term changes, perhaps the

seven cues of peripheral messaging can affect an individual's distal defenses which can result in

an increased motivation to join the military. Figure 7 displays each cue, a definition in simple

terms, and the author's example of how these cues can be applied to military recruitment

material.

Cue	Simplified definition	Example
Authority	Do it because I said so	✓ Use an authoritative figure when presenting message.
Commitment	Emphasize a person's dedication	✓ Use to persuade individual to dedicate themselves to selfless service
Contrast	Requires communicator to set up uneven points of comparison	✓ Use to compare individual to someone they admire or a rival
Liking	Stress affinity toward person, place, or thing	✓ Use individual's cultural values to achieve aspirations
Reciprocity	Give-and-take relationship	✓ Use to inform individual of benefits
Scarcity	Creates a sense of urgency	✓ Use individual's beliefs of what they may be missing
Social Proof	Peer pressure	✓ Use reward system for joining with a friend.

Figure 7. Seven common cues of a peripheral message. Paraphrased from Applying Communication Theory For Professional Life, by Dainton, M. & Zelley, E., 2015.

For the first cue, authority, Dainton and Zelley use the example of a parent telling a child

to clean their room "because I said so" (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 120). Military marketing

teams can use authority figures like the leader of an organization to appear in an advertisement to offer an authoritative presence to entice the individual to react to the message in a positive way. The second cue, commitment, emphasizes "a person's dedication to a product, social cause, group affiliation, political party, and so on" which can be used to persuade individuals to dedicate themselves to strive for a particular value the organization offers (Daiton & Zelley, 2015, p. 120). The third cue, contrast, "requires the communicator to set up uneven points of comparison" (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 121). When recruiters are discussing opportunities with the potential recruit, they could offer comparisons that encourage the individual to strive to surpass the recruit's rival or someone they admire. For the fourth cue, "liking messages stress affinity toward a person, place, or object" and recruiters often time utilize the common desire to travel and explore as an incentive to join the military; however, depending on the individual, these messages can be formed to specific interest or cultural value of the potential recruit (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p.121). The fifth cue, reciprocity, tries to "influence by emphasizing a give-and-take relationship" and often times recruiters use this by informing the potential recruit of benefits that partner up with the varying occupations to choose from as well as additional monetary advancements if they extend their contractual obligation (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 121). The sixth cue, scarcity, "preys on people's worry of missing out on something" (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 121). Monetary bonuses are budgeted regularly to encourage recruits to join the military faster and to stay in longer; however, the amounts of these bonuses vary and are not offered consistently to every recruit. The final cue, social proof, "relies on the age-old notion of peer pressure" (Dainton & Zelley, 2015, p. 121). Recruiters may take advantage of influencing a pair of friends to join together with the promise of going to the same training sessions together or monetary bonuses for both recruits.

Although these cues can be utilized when planning marketing campaigns, additional training can be conducted to teach recruiters to employ these influencing techniques in order to communicate messages that are unique to the individual which can be more influential. Dainton and Zelley end their explanation of peripheral cues stressing that "these peripheral messages emphasize fleeting emotional responses and are not likely to create long-lasting change" (2015, p. 122). With this warning into consideration, teams creating recruitment material should understand that although peripheral messaging may get the recruits to join, they may not be retainable in the future.

2.5   Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's Study

This study replicates Tubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's study conducted in their article "Motivation for Military Service: A Terror Management Perspective," but with a couple of differences. Unlike previous TMT research, they examined "real-life situation with life-threatening implications: motivation for service in the IDF," Israeli Defense Force (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler, 2009, p. 155). In their study they found new empirical evidence of the effects of mortality salience that are consistent with "previous studies indicating terror management may affect behaviors that appear to contradict the biological imperative of self-preservation (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler, 2009, p. 156). Their results revealed that "mortality salience [leads] to higher motivation to serve in the army among young men with high self-esteem" (Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler, 2009, p. 156). Additionally, contrary to TMT's original hypotheses, their findings suggests that "self-esteem provides protection against concerns about death by reducing death-related anxiety and symbolic defensive responses, [their] study indicated that high self-esteem individuals can indeed be affected by death awareness, as long as the reaction to the mortality salience serves to enhance their self-esteem" (Taubman-Ben-Ari &

Findler, 2009, p. 156). This connection solicits for further investigation on the cost and benefit of the risky behavior an individual is confronted with.

Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's study surveyed male Israeli high school students shortly before their conscription into the IDF. This study included a broader range of participants. The only requirement to participate was that the participant was over the age of 18, the minimum age an individual can join the United States military without parental consent. This study's sample was not confined to males only. Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler only surveyed males because they were the only ones who were allowed in combat positions. The United States military has broadened the opportunities for females and allows for them to serve in combat positions if they meet the standard requirements designated for the occupation; therefore, this study included female participants.

2.6   Women Becoming Immortal

Most of the research on mortality salience and women focuses on how women objectify themselves during their pregnancy (Zhou, Lei, Marley & Chen, 2009). Morris, Goldenberg, and Heflick's findings support their hypothesis that "women's self-objectification, defined in a very literal sense, is fueled by, and helps manage, existential concerns engendered by their procreating, lactating, menstruating bodies" (2014, p. 193). To dehumanize women, society enforces standards of appearance and objectification. Objectification involves regarding a person as more of an object than a human. Although Morris, Goldenberg & Heflick conducted several studies that reviewed women objectifying themselves, they found that "transforming women from human beings – plagued by mortality – to immortal objects, existential concerns may be managed" (2014). In order to cope with the mortality salience and our connection to animals, a symbolic immortality suffices. "Babies are potentially a source of symbolic immortality" by

reminding people of new life which counteracts their fear of death (Zhou, Lei, Marley & Chen, 2009). Morris et al. results show that reminders of mortality led women to respond in more object-like views of the self, whereas there was no effect in the male participants. According to previous research, men are more likely to partake in risk-taking behaviors to combat their death thought awareness, whereas women are capable of coping with mortality salience by self-objectification.

Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler excluded women in their surveys because they are not able to operate in combat positions in Israel. Although there has not been any linkage between the quartette of military service, mortality salience, women, and motivation of behavior, there has been research on women and TMT (Fritsche & Jonas, 2005; Hoyt, Simon & Innella, 2011; Morris, Goldenberg & Heflick, 2014; Zhou, Lei, Marley & Chen, 2009). Previous research has found women are able to utilize the concept of babies as a death-anxiety buffer against the mortality salience that may arise during their pregnancy (Zhou et al., 2009). "The concept of babies, regardless of whether they are human or animal, reminds people of the opposite of death: new life" (Zhou et al., 2009, p. 45). Although results of gender difference were inconsistent with previous studies when compatibility of children and career were emphasized, the anxiety of death thought awareness generated by a woman's pregnancy may affect the genders differently due to strong cultural values surrounding motherhood as a role (Zhou et al., 2009). Historically women's bodies and behaviors have been objectified to constrictive cultural roles and are surrounded by taboos in order to demonstrate control. "Evolutionary thinkers attribute this solely to men's need to control access to females in the service of sexual fidelity" (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016). In order to combat their chances of successful offspring,

humans created symbolic claims to a female that can be related to marriage. This allowed males to claim females and the offspring they had, as well as work and live with other males.

Over time, society has increased the taboo and required aversion of natural bodily functions that are common in all animals. For example, we have created restrooms for us to defecate in, we encourage women to use nursing rooms to breast feed their child away from the public, and we deem sexual activity a private practice that is considered poor etiquette if discussed openly. These reservations surrounding the reproduction process are due to males being reminded that they are creatures. Women arouse men, reminding them they are animals with little control over their creaturely behaviors. "Many major religions portray women as dangerous temptresses, worthy of derogation and subjugation [which] can quickly evolve into abuse" (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016).

With women's more prominent role in the reproduction process, they "are perceived to be more associated with biology and nature than are men" (Morris, Goldenberg & Heflick, 2014, p. 182). This stronger perceived connection highlights this human creatureliness and increases negative reactions toward women and reproduction (Goldenberg, Cox, Arndt, & Goplen, 2007). In order to mask this similarity between humans and animals, taboos and regulations begin to surround women and reproduction (Morris, Goldenberg & Heflick, 2014).

When females are aware of their mortality, they are able to cope with their salience by self-objectification; therefore, having no desire to partake in risky behavior. However, mortality salience in men increases risky behavior; therefore, they may be more likely to join the military. Further analysis of the relationship between mortality salience, self-esteem, and gender difference should give insight into the varying motivations individuals take on to defend against their mortality.

2.7   Considering cultural differences

Cultural settings and expectations differ from Israel to America. Geert Hofstede's six dimensions of national culture provides insight on how Israel's way of life differs from America's. Hofstede's comprehensive study of how values are influenced by culture included an analysis of data collected within IBM between 1967 and 1973 (Hofstede, 2010). Although a majority of the data was collected in the late seventies and the most recent 2010 edition is partly based on replications and extensions of the IBM study, Hofstede Insights considers the scores to be up-to-date because culture changes very slowly (Hofstede, 2010). The scores within each dimension of Hofstede's 6D-Model runs from 0 to 100. When compared to American scores, the Israeli information is prefaced with commentary regarding its unique position within the database due to the size of immigrant groups. The groups are larger than average in Israel and may influence dominant values of the whole population of Israel.

Israel scores a lower power distance (13) than the United States (40). The power distance dimension "has to do with the fact that a society's inequality is endorsed by followers as much as by their leaders" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Both are relatively low scores; however, American's higher score is due to its belief system "that everybody is unique implies that we are all unequal" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). The higher the score a country receives represents how accepting the people are of natural order hierarchy, leader leads followers without much input.

The second dimension of individualism is "the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). According to Hofstede Insights, Israel (54) is a blend of individualists and collectivists. Individualist societies only look after themselves and direct family members; whereas, collectivist societies are accustomed to

belonging to "ingroups" that take care of each other in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Israelis have a strong belief in self-actualization with communication that is direct and expressive. Americans (91), on the other hand, are very individualistic and are best at joining groups, but find it difficult to develop deep friendships.

The third dimension is masculinity. Higher scores (masculine) indicate that the country has a value system that is driven by competition, achievement and success, while lower scores (feminine) indicate values that focus on caring for others and quality of life (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). The United States is highly masculine (62) with a population that tends to display and talk freely about their successes. Although Israel is considered to be neither clearly masculine or feminine with a score of 47, some behaviors point to masculine features with personal performance being highly valued and status is shown by material goods (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010).

The fourth dimension, uncertainty avoidance, "is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). According to Hofstede Insights, Israel is one of the stronger uncertainty avoidant countries (81) and has an emotional need for rules. Americans have a below average score (46) because there is a degree of acceptance within the culture for new ideas or willingness to try something different (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). However, the 9/11 attacks have sparked fear within American society, making everyone cautious and monitor behavior more closely (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010).

The final dimension that can be compared is long-term orientation, "how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and

future" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Lower scores represent populations who value traditions and grow suspicious of changes, whereas high scoring populations take more pragmatic approaches that prepare them for the future (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Both receive relatively low scores. Israel (38) seems to be more pragmatic than Americans (26). Hofstede Insights explains that "many Americans have very strong ideas about what is 'good' and 'evil,' ...[and] measure their performance on a short-term basis, with profit and loss statements being issued on a quarterly basis" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). The description for Israel is brief but discusses how the population has "a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth" and have great respect for traditions (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions provides insight into the collective psychological habits of each population and the foundational cultural values that establish an individual's defenses against mortality salience; however, there are more external factors that need to be taken into consideration for further understanding.

2.8   Environmental Differences

In order to gain more insight on Israeli culture through the 6D-Model, a recent article from the Jewish-American magazine, *Forward,* helps refine context regarding today's Israeli culture. This article was selected because all other options of research were not available in English or an advertisement toward tourists. According to Media Bias/Fact Check, *Forward* magazine covers national and international news and although it falls on a left-leaning bias of story selection, the magazine's information comes from credible sources and uses minimal emotional language (2019). In his article, "Is Israel Really Surrounded by Enemies?," Moshe Klein contends with the outdated narrative that Israel is surrounded by adversaries (2018). Klein states that "Israel has

established itself as a military and defense bulwark in the Middle East and is no longer under

serious existential threat" (2018).

Figure 8 Map of Israel and surrounding countries. From Israel country profile, by BBC, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14628835. Copyright date by BBC.

In Figure 8, you can see that Israel is surrounded by the Arab countries of Lebanon, Syria,

Jordan, and Egypt. The Center for Preventative Actions (CPA) provides an interactive guide that

tracks ongoing conflicts around the world (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). The CPA

"seeks to help prevent, defuse, or resolve deadly conflict prevention ... by creating a forum where

representatives of governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations,

corporations, and civil society can gather to develop operational and timely strategies for

promoting peace" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). Collecting information through review

of watch lists, conflict assessments, and government reports, the CPA in consultation with

relevant experts at the Council on Foreign Relations, updates the status of conflicts on a monthly

basis or as events dictate (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

Although there was a cease fire agreement between Lebanon and Israel, tensions have

"recently increased after the discovery of tunnels ... leading from Lebanon to Israel" (Council on

Foreign Relations, 2019). These tunnels are allegedly dug by Hezbollah, "a Shiite political party

and militant organization backed by Iran and designated by the United States as a terrorist group" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). "Despite Lebanon's dissociation policy, Hezbollah's armed component has also been involved in the Syrian civil war... and has led to increasingly hostile rhetorical exchanges between Hezbollah and Israel over Israeli air strikes in Syria" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

In 2018, President Trump made the announcement to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria. This has "increased uncertainty around the role of other external parties ... as well as the future of internal actors" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). With the internal conflict arising within the Middle East, we find extremist groups growing more prominent within the region. This ongoing violence and proxy conflicts could also facilitate a resurgence of terrorist groups" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

The conflicts happening in their respective region are having spillover effects on their neighboring countries. Jordan is experiencing an influx of refugees, and with them unrest and seeds of tension. The Center for Preventative Action explains that "outside actors... increasingly [operating] in proximity to one another ... [raises] concerns over an unintended escalation" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). Omar Al-Shahery et. al. discusses the potential threats of Jordan's generosity of accepting refugees. The concerns are that "as a transit point of external support... Jordan opens itself up to retribution from [Syria's enemies]" (2014, p. 55). Attacks against Jordan's government "could make the country a second battlefield" (Al-Shahery et. al., 2014, p. 55).

Although Egypt is not in close proximity of Syria, Egyptian leaders are also trying to control the extremist groups within their own borders. The Wilaya Sinai, a militant group of a local affiliate of the self-proclaimed Islamic State, continues to carry out terrorist attacks on Egyptian military

and government sites near Egypt's border with Gaza and Israel (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). In order to control the area, Egyptian president Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has enacted "new laws to combat extremism, including one in August 2018 that increased government control over the internet, and has consistently extended Egypt's state of emergency" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). Although Sisi is contending with extremist groups, "critics of Sisi have warned that his government has marginalized poor communities, repressed free speech, and infringed human rights" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). These concerns of his management can expand to more civil unrest.

These conflicts may have affected the upbringing of the modern Israeli; however, Klein believes "relations with Israel and the surrounding countries are normalizing as interest in the Palestinian cause wanes after decades of seemingly little progress or change and the end of intersectional Arab identity" (2018). After comparing Klein's perspective to the CPA's reports, it seems that Klein's article may even be a proximal defense against the reality going on within and around Israel. Klein's article may have been written to give Israelis hope that conflict is on the decline; however, his perspective may be shaped by the fact that Israel has been in a continuous, and possibly never-ending, battle to exist. With an environment that is filled with prevalent mortality salience, Israelis may adopt actions (conscripted militant service) and perspectives (conflict is on the decline) that allow them to survive these dangerous surroundings.

Taubman's research was conducted in 2009 when Israel launched an invasion that started the Gaza War, whereas Klein's article was written more recently when the United Nations and Egypt attempted to broker a ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas Islamic group (BBC News). Klein's article provides insight on how perception of Israel's situation has changed. In a 2009 interview, Israeli Government Spokesman, Mark Regev, explains that on the day of Israel's

ground operation against the Hamas military, Israel's "objective is ultimately defensive ... the idea is to neutralize the threat that is posed to the Israeli civilian population" (NPR). The perception the Israeli population may have transitioned from a defensive stance against enemies to a force that should be reckoned with may have affected Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's results. Students who were soon to be joining the IDF may have felt more motivation to protect their country in the time of a crisis where existential threat was at the forefront of everyone's mind. Similar influx in motivation and military enlistment numbers happened within the American population after the 9/11 attacks. The terrorist attack on American soil increased the number of service members who enlisted and were deployed to a combat zone (Parker et al., 2019).

America's environment is vastly different from Israel. America is land-locked by neutral or non-aggressive neighboring countries and large bodies of water. Although there may be some potential threats involving the cartel through the Mexican border (Council of Foreign Relations, 2019), America has not had any massive foreign enemy presence within its borders for several generations. Although there is some civil unrest between its citizens, the United States puts large amounts of effort into keeping foreign conflicts off American soil. This separation of violence from a majority of the population allows Americans to disengage from the violence because it is not in close proximity of their everyday lives. For example, the most prevalent violence the American people are aware of are the increase of mass shootings. The Gun Violence Archive offers data on the last five years of gun violence with 2019 achieving the highest with at least 385 mass shootings (Gun Violence Archive). The threat of violent events that come from internal parties, such as gun violence from an American that kills another American, may affect a population differently than when the violence originates from an external party. If an internal

member of an ingroup enacts conflict within the collective, the rest may experience stronger

feelings of betrayal that could result in the collective splintering. Disbandment of an ingroup

may leave the members feeling vulnerable and desperate to find another ingroup to join;

therefore, they have higher motivation to partake in risky behavior if it results in acceptance into

another group.

2.9   Difference in Joining as an Officer or an Enlisted

Another difference in the studies is that it is mandatory for each Israeli male citizen to

fulfill a military obligation, whereas serving in the American military forces is a choice.

Although there is research on motivation techniques involving the United States military, no

studies take mortality salience into account (Mankowski, Tower, Brandt & Mattocks, 2015;

Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006). Although there is scarce research on a direct connection with

TMT, the author was able to look at studies that account for motivation and propensity toward

joining military service as cadets (future commissioned officers) and junior enlisted (future

noncommissioned officers).

As future commissioned officers, cadets are trained to become commanding officers of

the Armed Forces. Typically, candidates obtain their commission through a Service Academy,

such as West Point, a Reserve Officer Training Corps program (ROTC), or an Officer Candidate

School (OCS). One study was conducted on the types of motives of cadets attending the U.S.

military academy, West Point (Wrzesniewski, Schwartz, Cong, Kane, Omar, & Kolditz, 2014).

Wrzesniewski et al. investigated the difference between instrumental motives and internal

motives (2014) and found that instrumental motives (e.g. grades, bonuses, promotions) can

weaken internal motives like engaging in the activity because it is the moral, interesting, and a

meaningful thing to do. When instrumental motives are offered, they undermine the "internal

motivation that may have been operating, leading to drops in overall motivation, persistence, and performance" (Wrzesniewski et al., 2014, p. 10990). Wrzesniewski et al. warn against the "shotgun" strategies that are employed when recruiting cadets because although it may get more recruits, it may yield worse soldiers (Wrzesniewski et al., 2014). With their results, Wrzesniewski et al. encourage recruiters that by finding "ways to emphasize the internal and minimize the instrumental may lead to better and more satisfied students and soldiers" (Wrzesniewski et al., 2014, p. 10995). People who view their work as a calling find more satisfaction and do better work than those who consider their work a job or a career (Wrzesniewski et al., 2014). Previous research reveals that "people who pursue intrinsic values are more likely to construct a life that has greater potential to contribute to the social good" and the groups they identify with (Arndt et al., 2004, p. 211). With TMT's perspective in mind, people who are made aware of their mortality should rely on internal motivation that is crafted by their surrounding cultural values.

Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) enter military service through recruitment. "They are promoted from the general ranks to positions of prominence due to demonstrating excellence in their duties and among their peers" (Union Media LLC). NCOs tend to be technical experts in their specific jobs and deal closely with the activities of the lower ranked enlisted members of the force. Woodruff, Kelty, and Segal's data suggests that "the institutional and occupational models that have been central to the research agenda of military sociology for three decades do not capture the complexity of motivations to serve" (Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006, p. 363). High-propensity soldiers are strongly influenced by patriotic motives and by their plans for the future; whereas, low-propensity soldiers are more responsive to occupational and monetary motivations (Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006). Propensity and motivation are attributes that can

correlate with an individual's self-esteem. This does not necessarily mean that the individual is not interested in continuing to challenge themselves in other ways. Individuals who would like to enlist in the military and follow the career path toward noncommissioned officer ranks are still able to pursue education and training in leadership, technical expertise, and other distinguishable capabilities. Those with a high sense of self-worth before joining a large organization like the military may look for more opportunities to challenge themselves further than remaining on the general path provided upon enlistment.

High self-esteem males may be searching to achieve symbolic immortality through accomplishing and exemplifying cultural values of courage, bravery, and valor; therefore, partaking in more risky behavior than those with low self-esteem counterparts. In addition, high self-esteem males may be more interested in appeasing their patriotic motives with the different types of stature and coveted attributes that commissioning as an officer can provide. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the following hypotheses:

> H1: Males with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will indicate significantly more motivation to join the military than high self-esteem males who are not made aware of their mortality.

> H2: Males with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will indicate significantly more motivation to pursue the career path of a commissioned officer (CO) than high self-esteem males who are not made aware of their mortality.

Although males in general are more likely to join the military with or without mortality salience, females may display a stark contrast between genders as well as within their own sex. With the

introduction of females to the U.S. military, the culture and standards have been developed to account for the different genders which leads to the following hypotheses:

> H3: Females with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will indicate significantly more motivation to join the military than high self-esteem females who are not made aware of their mortality.

> H4: Females with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will indicate significantly more motivation to pursue the career path of a commissioned officer (CO) than high self-esteem females who are not made aware of their mortality.

Due to previous research, this study proposes that females with high self-esteem are able to cope with mortality salience by self-objectification and can regulate their anxieties of death thought awareness differently than males (Hirschberger et. al, 2002; Morris, Goldenberg, & Heflick, 2014). "Women primed with [death thought awareness] showed an increased tendency to deny themselves humanness in response to mortality salience. Men, in contrast, responded with the opposite tendency" (Morris, Goldenberg, & Heflick, 2014, p. 185). This innate hardiness within high self-esteem females should allow them to actively react to risky behaviors that bring about death-related thoughts as opposed to a passive defense; therefore, high self-esteem females should strive for the riskier challenges more than low self-esteem females offered through a career path of a commissioned officer. When the female respondents with high self-esteem are made aware of their mortality, they may be able to cope with their death thought awareness and have higher motivation to partake in the risky behavior of military service.

3   Research Methods

This study replicated Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's 2006 study as much as possible; therefore, it required a mirrored process. The sample was a convenient, purposive sample; participants were randomly assigned to conditions; however, the series of surveys were distributed to collect an even number of participants for a control group and the experimental group.

First, the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale was given to participants to identify self-esteem levels (See Appendix A).

Next, the mortality salience induction was presented. Participants were prompted with two-open ended questions. The control group was presented with "What is your favorite food?" and "What emotions does the thought of this food arouse in you?" The experimental group was prompted with different questions: "What do you think will happen to you when you physically die?" and "What emotions does the thought of your own death arouse in you?" This portion of the process was not measured, because it acts as a catalyst for mortality salience within the participant. Whereas the control group should have answered with no effect from mortality salience, the rest of the participants should have death thoughts that have been brought to the forefront of the mind, and thus influence their behavior and motivation to volunteer for military services (See Appendix B).

Next was a filler scale. Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler's previous study used a 13-item TV preference scale (See Appendix C). Since the article did not state which scale was used, this study employed a Content-based Media Exposure Scale (C-ME) (Hamer, Konijin, Plaisier, Keijer, Krabbendam, & Bushman, 2017). Serving as a buffer from the individual learning the true purpose of the study, it allows for proximal defenses that are triggered by conscious

thoughts of death to subside, but distal defenses that are instigated by death thoughts that occur outside of the participant's awareness should remain to be analyzed.

The dependent variable of motivation was assessed through a motivation survey. Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler constructed this survey specifically for their study that incorporated "indicators utilized by the IDF Department of Behavioral Sciences to examine perception, attitudes, and knowledge of prospective draftees toward military service" (2006, p. 153). They report the Cronbach alpha coefficient that measured the reliability for the items used within the questionnaire was an adequate score of .84 when 1.00 is a perfect score. It has been translated from Hebrew and pertains to IDF specifically (See Appendix D). After translation, the survey was adjusted to pertain to U.S. military services (See Appendix E). The Likert-scale options were adjusted from level of extent to levels of agreement (Strongly Agree =1, Agree = 2, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5).

The last survey included a demographic questionnaire. This helped categorize the sample according to other factors such as gender, education level, prior military service, or affiliation to a service member that could potentially impact the level of motivation as well (See Appendix F).

In order to obtain the motivation scale used in the previous study, the author contacted the previous researchers and had them translate the survey into English. The survey was distributed digitally through Qualtrics software. The separate surveys were compiled into one questionnaire but were segmented into smaller sets in order to optimize the user's experience. The digital link was emailed to a list of pre-selected Department of Communication faculty at the University of Texas at Arlington for them to distribute to their students. The link also was posted on the social media platform, Facebook, for participants not within the author's direct line of influence to partake in the study. Digital response was initially low so emailed invitations were

extended to additional UTA professors within the Department of Communication, focusing on classes with large enrollments.

3.1 Variables

3.1.1 Measure: Self-esteem

Self-esteem stems from the foundation of the individual's belief system that helps defend against death thought awareness. To gauge an individual's self-esteem this study used the score from answers of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Survey. Rosenberg's survey is a self-assessment to determine an individual's level of self-esteem from a sum score of 10 questions. Participants can choose answers Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3, Strongly Disagree = 4. Some items are reversed score ("Strongly Disagree" 1 point, "Disagree" 2 points, "Agree" 3 points, and "Strongly Agree" 4 points). Scores are kept on a continuous scale and higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. After the scores were totaled, the information was recoded to bisect the sample into high scores and low scores. The lowest score possible is 10 and highest possible score is 40.

3.1.2 Measure: Motivation to Partake in Risky Behavior.

Engaging in risky behavior can be viewed as a "process of culture creation" and "sharing risks with one's peers may be an important component of forming a group identity" (Hirschberger et. al, 2002, p. 135). To account for this innate motivation to join a collective that partakes in risky behavior, participants were asked how strongly they agree with the statement "I would feel proud to join the U.S. military." The responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5).

3.1.3   Measurement: Gender

Research has shown that death thought affects males and females differently (Hirschberger et. al, 2002). Participants were presented with a demographic question that accounts for the different genders.

3.1.4   Measurement: Mortality Salience Induction

This study focused on the effects of mortality salience; therefore, participants were categorized into two groups – those who are made aware of their mortality and those who were not made aware of their mortality. In order to make the participants aware of their mortality, the survey software Qualtrics randomly presented the set of mortality salience trigger questions or the placebo questions that did not raise the participant's mortality salience. The mortality salience trigger was offered to bring death thoughts to the forefront of participants' consciousness. This trigger asked the participants to answer open-ended questions ("What do you think will happen to you when you physically die?" and "What emotions does the thought of your own death arouse in you?"). The placebo control questions were open-ended questions that asked the participant about the emotion they have when they think about their favorite food ("What is your favorite food?" and "What emotions does the thought of this food arouse in you?"). Participants who were asked questions about their favorite food did not receive the mortality salience trigger; therefore, death thoughts should not have impacted their motivation to partake in risky behavior. The responses to the questions were captured within the Qualtrics system; however, they were not analyzed any further for this study.

3.1.5   Measure: Career Path

The U.S. military offers several career paths within the organization; however, for this study, the author focused on the general entry into the military as an enlisted service member or a

commissioned officer. Enlisted service members are subject matter experts within their military occupation specialty. There are several choices for an enlisted member to specialize in, and it is considered a risky occupation (Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006). Commissioned officers develop the overarching strategic plans for operations and the consequences that pair with their duties may be seen as involving higher risk.

The set of questions served as a gauge for the individual's motivation to partake in a specific risky behavior. Participants were not prompted with information before the survey but did utilize their preconceived opinions about military occupations. The results from the enlistment motivation item ("I want to enlist in the U.S. military") were compared to the individual's motivation to commission as an officer ("I am interested in becoming an officer"). Participants submitted their responses through a 5-point Likert scale. (Strongly Agree =1, Agree = 2, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5).

4   Results

4.1   Respondent Profile

In total, 225 respondents started the survey, but only 219 were completed and valid. Although 1 respondent completed all of the questions, he or she preferred not to answer. This option was included to see if a third option was viable during this study. Since there was no significant number of respondents in this category, their answers were not included within the testing sample. Of the 219 complete responses, 34% were male and 66% were female.

Military affiliation among those who completed the survey may have skewed the participants' responses. To account for their connection, participants were asked how they are associated (Are you affiliated with the military in any way?). Participants were able to choose from "A family member has served/is currently serving," "I have served," "I am currently serving," "I have friends who have served," or they were able to leave the answer blank to represent no affiliation. 205 of the 219 respondents indicated they were affiliated with the military in some way; therefore, the author did not use this factor as a variable within this study.

In order to test the hypotheses, the sample had to be segmented into categories of high self-esteem and low self-esteem. The scores ranged from 34 as the highest level of self-esteem recorded and 10 as the lowest score of self-esteem. For this sample, scores from 10 to 22 were considered low self-esteem and scores 23 to 34 were considered as high self-esteem. Of the 34% who indicated high self-esteem, 21 were males and 53 were females. Of the 66% of respondents who indicated low self-esteem, 55 were male and 90 were female.

4.2   General motivation

In order to test Hypothesis H1, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem males' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware.

> H1: Males with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will indicate significantly more motivation to join the military than high self-esteem males who are not made aware of their mortality.

There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-esteem males not made aware of their mortality (M=2.92, SD=1.31) and high self-esteem males made aware of their mortality (M=2.33, SD=1.00), p=0.280. Therefore, research hypothesis H1 was not supported with this study.

In order to test Hypothesis H3, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem females' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware.

> H3: Females with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will indicate significantly more motivation to join the military than high self-esteem females who are not made aware of their mortality.

There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-esteem females not made aware of their mortality (M=3.00, SD=1.481) and high self-esteem females made aware of their mortality (M=3.14, SD=1.276); p = .719. Therefore, research hypothesis H3 was not supported with this study.

Table 1 General Motivation, high self-esteem			Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
			M	SD	M	SD	P value
H1	High self-esteem, Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.92	1.311	2.33	1.000	.280
H3	High self-esteem, Female	I would feel proud to join the military	3.00	1.481	3.14	1.276	.719

4.3   Career Path

In order to test Hypothesis 2, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem males' motivation to commission as an officer into the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware.

H2: Males with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will

indicate significantly more motivation to pursue the career path of a

commissioned officer (CO) than high self-esteem males who are not made

aware of their mortality.

There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-esteem males not made aware of their mortality (M=3.83, SD=1.467) and high self-esteem males made aware of their mortality (M=4.00, SD=1.414); p = 0.796. Therefore, research hypothesis H2 was not supported with this study.

In order to test Hypothesis 4, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem females' motivation to commission as an officer into the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware.

H4: Females with high self-esteem who are made aware of their mortality will

indicate significantly more motivation to pursue the career path of a

commissioned officer (CO) than high self-esteem females who are not

made aware of their mortality.

There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-esteem females not made aware of their mortality (M=4.09, SD=1.376) and high self-esteem females made aware of their mortality (M=4.29, SD=1.056); p=0.590. Therefore, research hypothesis H4 was not supported with this study.

Although the hypotheses focused on participants' interest to commission as an officer, additional tests were conducted to investigate interest in enlisting within the military.

Table 2 Career Path			Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
			M	SD	M	SD	P value
H2	High self-esteem, Male	I am interested in becoming an officer.	3.83	1.467	4.00	1.414	.796
H4	High self-esteem, Female	I am interested in becoming an officer.	4.09	1.376	4.29	1.056	.590
	High self -esteem, Male	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.92	1.443	4.22	1.093	.602
	High self-esteem, Female	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.00	1.295	4.48	1.030	.163

To examine the interest of high self-esteem males in enlisting in the U.S. military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem males' motivation to enlist in the U.S. military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-esteem males not made aware of their mortality (M=3.92, SD=1.443) and high self-esteem males made aware of their mortality (M=4.22, SD=1.093); p = 0.602.

Exploring the interest of high self-esteem females in enlisting in the U.S. military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem females' motivation to enlist in the U.S. military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-

esteem females not made aware of their mortality (M=4.00, SD=1.295) and high self-esteem females made aware of their mortality (M=4.48, SD=1.030); p=0.163.

4.4   Self-esteem

Although the hypotheses were focused on high self-esteem participants, additional tests were conducted to see how high self-esteem participants' results compare with low self-esteem respondents. Table 3 displays results of all high self-esteem tests for easy comparison to Table 4 that contains results of all low self-esteem tests.

Table 3 High Self-esteem		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.92	1.311	2.33	1.000	.280
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.92	1.443	4.22	1.093	.602
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.83	1.467	4.00	1.414	.796
Female	I would feel proud to join the military	3.00	1.481	3.14	1.276	.719
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.00	1.295	4.48	1.030	.163
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.09	1.376	4.29	1.056	.590

Table 4 Low Self-esteem		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.36	1.339	2.67	1.593	.438
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.46	1.427	3.41	1.600	.890
	I am interested in becoming an officer	2.93	1.514	2.93	1.591	.995
Female	I would feel proud to join the military	2.75	1.373	2.82	1.202	.809
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.83	1.567	4.46	0.885	.017*
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.93	1.526	4.32	0.999	.143

In order to test low self-esteem males' general motivation to join the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem males' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the low self-esteem male is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for low self-esteem males not made aware of their mortality (M=2.36, SD=1.339) and low self-esteem males made aware of their mortality (M=2.67, SD=1.593), p=.438.

To consider low self-esteem males' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem males' motivation to enlist in the military in conditions where the low self-esteem male is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for low self-esteem males not made aware of their mortality (M=3.46, SD=1.427) and low self-esteem males made aware of their mortality (M=3.41, SD=1.600), p=.890.

Exploring low self-esteem males' motivation to commission as an officer in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem males' motivation to commission as an officer in the military in conditions where the low self-esteem male is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for low self-esteem males not made aware of their mortality (M=2.93, SD=1.514) and low self-esteem males made aware of their mortality (M=2.93, SD=1.591), p=.995.

Investigating low self-esteem females' general motivation to join the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem females' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the low self-esteem female is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the

scores for low self-esteem females not made aware of their mortality (M=2.75, SD=1.373) and low self-esteem females made aware of their mortality (M=2.82, SD=1.202), p=.809.

To study low self-esteem females' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem females' motivation to enlist in the military in conditions where the low self-esteem female is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was a significant difference in the scores for low self-esteem females not made aware of their mortality (M=3.83, SD=1.567) and low self-esteem females made aware of their mortality (M=4.46, SD=0.885), p=.017.

In order to test low self-esteem females' motivation to commission as an officer in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem females' motivation to commission as an officer in the military in conditions where the low self-esteem female is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for low self-esteem females not made aware of their mortality (M=3.93, SD=1.526) and low self-esteem females made aware of their mortality (M=4.32, SD=0.999), p=.143.

4.5 Gender Differences

Tables 3 and 4 display the differences broken down by gender, while Table 5 shows results when gender is not a variable.

Considering high self-esteem participants' general motivation to join the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem participants' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores

for high self-esteem participants not made aware of their mortality (M=2.98, SD=1.406) and

high self-esteem participants made aware of their mortality (M=2.90, SD=1.242), p=.807.

Table 5 Both Genders		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
High self-esteem	I would feel proud to join the military	2.98	1.406	2.90	1.242	.807
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.98	1.305	4.40	1.037	.142
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.00	1.382	4.20	1.157	.515
Low self-esteem	I would feel proud to join the military	2.59	1.363	2.76	1.345	.440
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.68	1.511	4.09	1.279	.076
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.51	1.588	3.83	1.399	.204

In order to explore high self-esteem participants' motivation to enlist in the military, an

independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem participants' motivation

to enlist in the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and

where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for high self-

esteem participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.98, SD=1.305) and high self-esteem

participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.40, SD=1.037), p=.142.

Investigating high self-esteem participants' motivation to commission as an officer, an

independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare high self-esteem participants' motivation

to commission as an officer in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality

and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for high

self-esteem participants not made aware of their mortality (M=4.00, SD=1.382) and high self-

esteem participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.20, SD=1.157), p=.515.

In order to study low self-esteem participants' general motivation to join the military, an

independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem participants' general

motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their

mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores

for low self-esteem participants not made aware of their mortality (M=2.59, SD=1.363) and low

self-esteem participants made aware of their mortality (M=2.76, SD=1.345), p=.440.

To test low self-esteem participants' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-

samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem participants' motivation to enlist in the

military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are

not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for low self-esteem

participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.68, SD=1.511) and low self-esteem

participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.09, SD=1.279), p=.076; however, it was

approaching significance.

Considering low self-esteem participants' motivation to commission as an officer, an

independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare low self-esteem participants' motivation to

commission as an officer in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and

where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for low self-

esteem participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.51, SD=1.588) and low self-esteem

participants made aware of their mortality (M=3.83, SD=1.399), p=.204.

4.6 Mortality Salience

Additional tests were conducted to focus on the effects of mortality salience directly when

self-esteem was not a variable. Results are shown in Table 6.

In order to explore male participants' general motivation to join the military, an

independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare male participants' general motivation to

join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where

they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for male

participants not made aware of their mortality (M=2.53, SD=1.339) and male participants made

aware of their mortality (M=2.58, SD=1.461), p=.856.

Table 6 Mortality Salience		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.53	1.339	2.58	1.461	.856
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.60	1.429	3.61	1.517	.974
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.20	1.539	3.19	1.600	.988
Female	I would feel proud to join the military	2.86	1.417	2.91	1.225	.812
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.90	1.445	4.46	0.923	.006*
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.00	1.454	4.31	1.008	.141

Investigating male participants' general motivation to join the military, an independent-

samples t-test was conducted to compare male participants' general motivation to join the

military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are

not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for male participants not

made aware of their mortality (M=2.53, SD=1.339) and male participants made aware of their

mortality (M=2.58, SD=1.461), p=.856.

To examine male participants' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-samples t-

test was conducted to compare male participants' motivation to enlist in the military in

conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made

aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for male participants not made aware

of their mortality (M=3.60, SD=1.429) and male participants made aware of their mortality

(M=3.61, SD=1.517), p=.974.

In order to test male participants' motivation to commission as an officer, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare male participants' motivation to commission as an officer in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for male participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.20, SD=1.539) and male participants made aware of their mortality (M=3.19, SD=1.600), p=.988.

To consider female participants' general motivation to join the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare female participants' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for female participants not made aware of their mortality (M=2.86, SD=1.417) and female participants made aware of their mortality (M=2.91, SD=1.225), p=.812.

Exploring female participants' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare female participants' motivation to enlist in the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was a significant difference in the scores for female participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.90, SD=1.445) and female participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.46, SD=0.923), p=.006.

To investigate female participants' motivation to commission as an officer, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare female participants' motivation to commission as an officer in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for female participants not made

aware of their mortality (M=4.00, SD=1.454) and female participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.31, SD=1.008), p=.141.

4.7   Non-military Participants

Additional tests were conducted to filter out participants who served within the military prior to completing the survey or who are currently serving in the military. Self-esteem was removed as a variable for these tests as well in order to increase the sample size available for testing. Of the 181 non-service members, 55 were male and 126 were female. When gender was removed as a variable, there was equivalent amounts of participants who were made aware of mortality (90) and those who were not made aware of their mortality (91).

Table 7 No Self-esteem, non-service member		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male (55)	I would feel proud to join the military	2.81	1.376	2.83	1.465	.945
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.81	1.302	4.00	1.251	.580
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.61	1.334	3.63	1.498	.975
Female (126)	I would feel proud to join the military	3.12	1.340	3.00	1.190	.601
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.36	1.013	4.49	0.842	.410
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.36	1.171	4.37	.902	.926
Both (181)	I would feel proud to join the military	3.01	1.353	2.96	1.262	.776
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.17	1.144	4.36	0.983	.218
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.10	1.272	4.18	1.131	.672

In order to consider non-service member male participants' general motivation to join the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare non-service member male participant' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant

difference in the scores for non-service member male participants who are not made aware of their mortality (M=2.81, SD=1.376) and non-service member male participants who are made aware of their mortality (M=2.83, SD=1.465), p=.945.

Exploring non-service member male participants' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare non-service member male participants' motivation to enlist in the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for non-service member male participants who are not made aware of their mortality (M=3.81, SD=1.302) and non-service member male participants who are made aware of their mortality (M=3.41, SD=1.600), p=.890.

In order to study non-service member male participants' motivation to commission as an officer, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare non-service member male participants' motivation to commission as an officer in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for non-service member male participants not made aware of their mortality (M=2.93, SD=1.514) and non-service member male participants made aware of their mortality (M=2.93, SD=1.591), p=.995.

Considering non-service member female participants' general motivation to join the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare non-service member female participants' general motivation to join the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for non-service member female participants not made aware of their

mortality (M=2.75, SD=1.373) and non-service member female participants made aware of their mortality (M=2.82, SD=1.202), p=.809.

In order to test non-service member female participants' motivation to enlist in the military, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare non-service member female participants' motivation to enlist in the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was a significant difference in the scores for non-service member female participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.83, SD=1.567) and non-service member female participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.46, SD=0.885), p=.017.

Exploring non-service member female participants' motivation to commission as an officer, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare non-service member female participants' motivation to commission as an officer in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware. There was not a significant difference in the scores for non-service member female participants not made aware of their mortality (M=3.93, SD=1.526) and non-service member female participants made aware of their mortality (M=4.32, SD=0.999), p=.143.

5 Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Findings

In conclusion, this study was not able to provide significant support for the predictions; however, one result provided insight on how to adjust the methodology for future studies. Because Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's high self-esteem participants showed more motivation after being made aware of their mortality, this study predicted that high self-esteem participants made aware of their mortality would be more motivated to partake in risky behavior like joining the military; however, the opposite occurred to where low self-esteem participants who were made aware of their mortality tended to be more motivated to join the military, and this is in line with TMT's original hypotheses. Although the original hypotheses were not supported (p>.05), the results for testing H1 was in the direction of prediction while H2, H3, and H4 were in the opposite direction of prediction. The scale of motivation was a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree); therefore, the lower the mean, the higher the motivation. After the results of the original hypotheses were recorded, additional tests were conducted to investigate how low self-esteem respondents reacted to the mortality salience trigger. These means were compared with the means of high self-esteem participants.

Generally, the results show that participants who are made aware of their mortality have less motivation to partake in the risky behavior of enlisting as a service member, commissioning as an officer, or joining the military at all. One significant finding (*p value* <.05) was the t-test regarding participants' motivation to enlist in the U.S. military that looked at all participants who are made aware of their mortality and all participants who are not made aware of their mortality. Perhaps this trend reveals that the mortality salience trigger does not affect Americans as it did with Israeli students. Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's original study consisted of high school

males that are required to serve for two years, whereas this study's sample predominately consisted of female university-level students who are not required to serve in America's military. Perhaps college-level students may not react to risky behavior when there are other opportunities available to achieve immortality. To account for the non-university students, the other respondents may have achieved a sense of immortality that presently satisfies them. For example, some respondents could be parents that feel a sense of symbolic immortality through their children because the study was conducted at a university with a large number of older and non-traditional students (Solomon et al., 2016).

Another significant finding (*p value* <.05) was the t-test that looked at low self-esteem females who are made aware of their mortality and low self-esteem females who are not made aware of their mortality regarding their motivation to enlist in the U.S. military. This specific finding indicates that when low self-esteem females are made aware of their mortality, they are less motivated to join the military. Additional tests that removed self-esteem as a variable resulted in the same significant results. When testing female participants' motivation to enlist in the military, the t-test that compared female participants' motivation to enlist in the military in conditions where the individual is made aware of their mortality and where they are not made aware resulted in a *p value* < .05 (p=.006). As mentioned earlier, females may be able to cope with their death-thought awareness by self-objectifying themselves, resulting in having no desire to partake in risky behavior. This study predicted that high self-esteem females who are made aware of their mortality would be up for the challenge of risky behavior the military offers; however, the findings of the additional tests indicate that low self-esteem females who are made aware of their mortality are slightly more motivated to join the military than high self-esteem females who are made aware of their mortality, although the results were not significant.

Although there were no significant findings, additional tests were conducted with a refined sample group. Participants who indicated that they had served within the military prior to the completion of the survey or are currently serving were filtered out, so the independent t-tests compared only non-service members. Participants who are currently serving or have served may have a stronger connection to the military since they identify themselves within this ingroup of military service members. The loyalty Americans feel toward their ingroups can increase their motivation of military service because they already identify as that collective. Although there was no significant finding, the trending motivation was generally in the same direction; individuals who are made aware of their mortality are less motivated to join the military than those who are not made aware of their mortality. The motivation of non-service members without self-esteem as a factor is generally lower than the motivation of all participants without self-esteem as a factor. This means that service members likely impacted the results with a biased perception of the military by already being included within the organization.

The findings from the present study were not significant in most instances, and the trending direction of the means does not follow what previous research signifies. Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's study revealed that "mortality salience led to higher motivation to serve in the army among young men with high self-esteem," whereas, this study showed that low self-esteem males had higher motivation (2006, p. 156). Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler expanded upon the results of the original TMT hypothesis by saying high self-esteem individuals are affected by mortality salience as long as it bolsters their original cultural worldviews, whereas this study broadens the original hypotheses even further by revealing how low self-esteem individuals who are affected by mortality salience are more motivated to partake in risky behavior if it aligns with their cultural worldviews. For this study, perhaps this inverse trend is a result of high self-esteem

males who already receive their risky behavior and challenging activity in other forms like participating in higher education courses or aggressive sports activities.

Another reason for this inverse trend could be due to how the individual perceives the U.S. military. Researchers state that military service can depict altruistic motives like patriotism and other symbolic immortality (Woodruff, Ketly, & Segal, 2006); however, perceptions can change due to the effects of current events and social environment (Magee & Kalyanaraman, 2009). If the actions of the U.S. military or any affiliations with the organization do not align with the individual's worldview, then participants may see the military as an outgroup and begin to subconsciously dehumanize the organization (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2016).

The differing results from Taubman-Ben-Ari and Findler's research could be due to the difference in cultures of Israel and the United States. The contrasting cultural values will affect what the population deems appropriate for existential defense. Hofstede Insights even prefaces their analysis of Israeli culture with a warning that the results may not be a true representation of Israeli society because of the influx of the abundance of refugees. The difference in power distance effects can affect where the individuals receive their cultural values (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Being individualistic, Americans will find difficulty in developing strong connections to their numerous collectives; whereas Israelis rely on their sense of collectivistic society (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Although Israel's is not clearly defined as either masculine or feminine, masculine dimensions within both cultures lead to their strong desire to overcome challenges (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). This could explain why low self-esteem participants have higher motivation than high self-esteem participants to partake in risky behavior like joining the military. With a strong sense to avoid uncertainty, Israelis may be more cautious than Americans to partake in risky behaviors (Hofstede, Hofstede,

& Minkoy, 2010). Both countries affinity for short-term orientation may affect how individuals appraise mortality salience threats (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). For example, an individual may not worry about the harmful effects of smoking cigarettes if they are imbedded within a war zone and surrounded by other threatening death reminders. Indulgence was not recorded for Israel; however, this dimension could reveal how well the different countries are able to control their urges and desires in order to adhere to ingroup guidance. These cultural differences need to be accounted for when comparing value systems and the effects mortality salience has on each dimension.

In addition to the cultural worldviews guiding the individuals' value systems, the environmental difference between facing violence from external factors (i.e. war) or internal violence (i.e. mass shootings) may contribute to the hardiness of the population. The United States military offers hardiness training to combat anxiety in combat situations. This study was not able to find any hardiness training opportunities the Israelis may have access to; however, their environmental factors of constant existential threat may naturally develop hardiness that is similar to that of the United States military service members. These differences could help explain the difference in results.

5.2 Limitations

There are limitations to this study. The first limitation is that the study relies on a convenience sample process. Although it was useful to gather data, future studies should survey participants at particular times within their military service careers. By surveying soldiers and officers at different levels of their standard military careers, we would be able to identify any change in motivation and effects of TMT over time. Previous research only looks at cadets and soldiers in initial training, but no longitudinal studies have been conducted to examine the effects

over the course of the individual's career. The studies reviewing cadet motivation do look at different graduation classes; however, the study focuses on motivation and job satisfaction with no correlation to mortality salience (Wrzesniewski, Schwartz, Cong, Kane, Omar, & Kolditz, 2014). Studies on enlisted soldiers only look at motivation after an average of 1.8 years of service, a term that is filled with more occupational training sessions than actual job execution (Woodruff, Kelty, & Segal, 2006).

A second limitation is that the author did not track participants' current perceptions of the military and the possible occupational hazards they believe to be relevant. Originally, the study was to filter out participants who are affiliated with the military. Unfortunately for this study, a majority of the participants were affiliated so the author was not able to filter out their responses. Those who are affiliated with a military member may have an altered perception of the military as an organization due to second-hand information (if they know someone who is currently serving or by personal experience). Future studies should investigate ways to control the effects of these preconceived perceptions.

A third limitation is the number of female respondents that largely outweighed male respondents. In order to show true results of gender difference, there should be equal amounts of respondents of each gender. Researchers can expand their sample size if given enough resources to accommodate their methodology. For this study, the trending means of the female respondents may be more reliable than the male respondents.

The last limitation is the possible lack of understanding of career choices offered within the U.S. military. This study focused on the general paths of an enlisted soldier route or a commissioned officer route. The average individual may not be properly informed of the requirements that are demanded or the opportunities offered for each career path. Researchers

can provide documentation that gives an overview and purpose of each career path that will educate the participant. This informed decision could affect the participants' reaction to mortality salience further; therefore, the researchers should investigate message formation that surrounds this topic.

5.3 For Future Studies

When conducting future studies researchers need to account for cultural differences that could affect results. These differences are entry into military services (volunteer vs. conscription), environment (favorable vs. hostile) and neighbor relations (allies vs. enemies). Although Hofstede Insights states that culture is slow to change, there may be some differences within these past 10 years, since the Taubman et al. (2009) study was done. Not only should Israel's survey be reconducted, but Hoffstede Insights even mentions that data was not collected for their 6th dimension of indulgence. A country's indulgence score is "defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkoy, 2010). Further research into how an individual's indulgence is related to their desire to partake in risky behavior could provide insight on another factor that should be taken into consideration when replicating this study.

In addition to cultural differences, individual participants may already have preconceived notions of the military. For future studies the questionnaire should include information that offers details about the different career paths within the military. Also, Q1 (I want to enlist in the military) and Q4 (I am interested in becoming an officer) should mirror each other in vocabulary to mitigate misunderstanding of the difference between "want" that is used in Q1 and "interested" used in Q4.

Another suggestion is to account for nontraditional gender selection. This survey offered an answer choice for the respondent to not be categorized as female or male. With a growing transgender population, future studies may need to take this into account when categorizing effects of gender differences. Perhaps researchers may need to guide studies away from gender biased behaviors and more on the basis of personalities or attributes.

This study can be expanded upon with qualitative data analysis. The open-ended questions that served as the mortality salience trigger were not taken into account during analysis of this study; however, the answers could be coded to reveal more findings. The answers could be coded further into categories that follow previous research. For example, certain code words that appear within the answers could be attributed to literal immortality or symbolic immortality. The answers to the second trigger question ("What emotions does the thought of your own death arouse in you?") can be placed within a scale of emotions – tranquility, sadness, fear, or acceptance. This qualitative data may reveal subconscious behaviors about how the individual is coping with these death thoughts.

Not only can the open-ended responses reveal the effects death thoughts have on the individual, but perhaps future studies should investigate ways to categorize death thoughts. Mortality salience can be brought about by different situations and events, meaning there may be different types of death thoughts that affect individuals in various ways. For example, women may be affected by the thought of death thoughts that are correlated to pregnancy or menstruation, whereas males could not be affected at all. To stay within this study's scope, future studies can see how individuals react when death thoughts are related to patriotic values.

Lastly, future studies should investigate the effects of military specific messaging campaigns. The results of this study support that military recruiters should mitigate

communication that makes the individual aware of their mortality. A longitudinal study should

be conducted to see the retention pattern of individuals who were given mortality salience

messages. Individuals who were made aware of their mortality before joining the military may

reveal a positive trend in completion of a service obligation in good standing.

5.4   Real World Application

The research involving TMT and military service members is scarce. Although there are

studies that view mortality salience and behavior as connected, few studies correlate TMT with

military occupation. The studies that do provide commentary of TMT with the U.S. military do

not account for the difference in combat arm occupations and support positions (Hoyt, Simon &

Innella, 2011; Taubman-Ben-Ari & Findler, 2006; Florian, Mikulincer & Taubman, 1995).

Future studies can examine how mortality salience effects the varying roles within the military

and other high risk-behavior occupations. Does mortality salience have a stronger effect on

people who are not directly in harm's way but are providing aid to those who are? For those who

are in high risk situations, are their defenses against mortality salience stronger if they believe

they have more control over the situation than those monitoring events from afar? Academic

research on the differing roles and motivations of the different types of officers is scarce as well.

Although commissioned and noncommissioned officers are leaders, their duties focus on

different aspects of the mission at hand. So, how does mortality salience, either initially or over

the duration of their career, effect their motivation to pursue the different leadership

opportunities?

Every year the budget for military services is adjusted to the needs of the current mission

and proposed plans of action. The results from this study may contribute to researching effective

decision-making processes to where these funds should be allocated in order to acquire soldiers

that are more likely to stay within the ranks as well as techniques on keeping the public informed about military actions and involvement with global conflict.

The findings can help mold communication campaigns with public audiences. The U.S. military is scattered throughout the world, meaning many of the American public rarely interact with a service member directly. This lack of interaction turns to reliance on the information being disseminated through television programs. Applying the findings to the U.S. military communication plans may enhance the strategies when scheduling TV programs, advertisement placement, and broadcasting of news stories surrounding the military. Media strategists should take into account the words or images that could potentially serve as a mortality salience trigger and how that will impact other messages being promoted by the military. The findings of this study suggest that military promotional messaging should stay away from triggering mortality salience in its communication efforts.

Another application could be the creation of effective outreach programs that include the surveys within this study. Recruiting teams would be able to increase their comprehensive screening process of potential candidates. The addition of the surveys and analysis can provide an in-depth report on the candidate's mental capabilities that will aid in their training and retention within the service of the military. Perhaps these screenings will be able to attribute to the individual's assigned military occupational specialty code (MOS). From the results of self-esteem levels and their reaction to a mortality salience induction, the U.S. military would be able to categorize participants by their mental capabilities in addition to the factors already in place to determine promotion rates (i.e. physical fitness, professional review, level of potential leadership).

Understanding TMT and the effects it could have in an occupation that could potentially induce mortality salience more often than most may lead to the development of more effective training programs within military units. Although there is resiliency training already in place within military education programs, the results show how the programs can be adjusted to account for how mortality salience affects the different genders and occupations. Training soldiers and officers to communicate and defense techniques to stave off mortality salience in order to keep self-esteem intact should increase the job performance and mental longevity of the individual.

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Appendix A

Rosenberg Survey

Instructions

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

R1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R2. At times I think I am no good at all.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R6. I certainly feel useless at times.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R9. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R10. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

R11. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Scoring: Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Give "Strongly Disagree" 1 point, "Disagree" 2 points, "Agree" 3 points, and "Strongly Agree" 4 points. Sum scores for all ten items. Keep scores on a continuous scale. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

Appendix B

Mortality Salience Trigger

Control group
What is your favorite food?
What emotions does the thought of this food arouse in you?

Experimental group
What do you think will happen to you when you physically die?
What emotions does the thought of your own death arouse in you?

Appendix C

TV Preference Filler Scale

Please report for every question <u>how often</u> you watch this type of content on TV/Internet/DVD. This could be clips on YouTube, music videos, quiz shows, television shows, in video games, in the cinema, etcetera. So, it does not matter <u>where</u> you watch it, but <u>how often</u> you watch it.

For each statement, you encircle one number.

How often do you watch (on the Internet/TV/ games/mobile phone/DVD) …	Never	Incidentally	Sometimes	Often	Very often
1 … people who fight?	1	2	3	4	5
2 … people who openly talk about sex?	1	2	3	4	5
3 …people who use drugs?	1	2	3	4	5
4 …people who destroy someone else's belongings?	1	2	3	4	5
5 … people who shoot at another person?	1	2	3	4	5
6 … people who drink a lot of alcohol?	1	2	3	4	5
7 … people who are having sex?	1	2	3	4	5
8 … people who steal?	1	2	3	4	5
9 … people who help someone?	1	2	3	4	5
10 … people who stand up for someone?	1	2	3	4	5
11 … a quiz?	1	2	3	4	5
12 … talk shows?	1	2	3	4	5
13 … shows where houses or cars get a makeover?	1	2	3	4	5
14 … shows about nature or animals?	1	2	3	4	5
15 … shows about travelling?	1	2	3	4	5
16 … cooking shows?	1	2	3	4	5
17 … the news?	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D

Original Motivation for Army Service Scale

1. To which extent do you want to enlist to the IDF?
1. I don't want it at all   2. I don't want it 3. I'm indifferent 4. I want it 5. I want it very much
2. Do you feel proud due to the fact that you are going to serve in the IDF?
1. not at all 2. no 3. yes 4. yes, definitely
3. In case it was decided that serving in the IDF was on voluntary basis, how would you act?
1. I would volunteer to serve for the period of three years [which is the current compulsory service for men in Israel]
2. I would volunteer to serve for the period of two years
3. I would volunteer to serve for the period of one year
4. I would not volunteer to serve at all
4. If you had the opportunity, would you be interested to become an officer?
1. not at all 2. no 3. yes 4. yes, very much
5. If you had the opportunity, to which extent would you be interested to join a combat unit?
1. to a very small extent   2. to a small extent 3. to a moderate extent 4. to a great extent 5. to a very great extent
6. To which extent do you agree, that whoever is capable to serve in a combat unit, should do so?
1. to a very small extent   2. to a small extent 3. to a moderate extent 4. to a great extent 5. to a very great extent
7. Do you think that every citizen should be obliged to serve in the army?
1. not at all 2. no 3. yes 4. yes, definitely
8. Do you think, that serving in the army will be physically difficult for you?
1. not at all 2. no 3. yes 4. yes, definitely
9. Do you think, that serving in the army will be mentally difficult for you?
1. not at all 2. no 3. yes 4. yes, definitely

Appendix E

Motivation for Military Service updated

M1. I want to enlist in the U.S. military. *
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
M2. I would feel proud to join the U.S. military. *
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
M3. How many years would you be willing to voluntarily serve in the U.S. military?
4 or more / 3 / 2 / 1 / 0
M4. I am interested in becoming an officer. *
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
M5. If you had the opportunity, to which extent would you be interested to join a combat unit?
Not at all interested / Slightly interested / Somewhat interested / Very interested / Extremely interested
M6. Whoever is capable to serve in a combat unit, should do so.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
M7. I believe that every citizen should be mandatory to serve in the military.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
M8. If I served in the military, I believe it will be physically difficult for me.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree
M9. If I served in the military, I believe it will be mentally difficult for me.
Strongly Agree / Agree / Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Appendix F

Demographic Survey

D1. What is your age?

- 18-24 years old

- 25-34 years old

- 35-44 years old

- 45-54 years old

- 55-64 years old

- 65-74 years old

- 75 years or older

D2. Please specify your ethnicity

- White

- Hispanic or Latino

- Black or African American

- Native American or American Indian

- Asian / Pacific Islander

- Other

D3. **Education:** What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? *If currently enrolled, highest degree received.*

- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

- Some college credit, no degree

- Associate degree

- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree

- Professional degree

- Doctorate degree

D4. **Marital Status:** What is your marital status?

- Single, never married

- Married or domestic partnership

- Widowed

- Divorced

- Separated

D5. **Employment Status:** Are you currently…?

- Employed for wages

- Self-employed

- Out of work

- A student

- Retired

- Unable to work

D6. **Military Affiliation**: Are you affiliated with the military in any way? (Checkbox)

- A Family member has served/ is currently serving

- I have served

- I am currently serving

- I have friends who have served

D7. **Gender**:

- Male

- Female

- Prefer not to answer

Appendix G

High self-esteem		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.92	1.311	2.33	1.000	.280
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.92	1.443	4.22	1.093	.602
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.83	1.467	4.00	1.414	.796
Female	I would feel proud to join the military	3.00	1.481	3.14	1.276	.719
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.00	1.295	4.48	1.030	.163
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.09	1.376	4.29	1.056	.590
Both Gender	I would feel proud to join the military	2.98	1.406	2.90	1.242	.807
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.98	1.305	4.40	1.037	.142
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.00	1.382	4.20	1.157	.515

Low Self-esteem		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.36	1.339	2.67	1.593	.438
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.46	1.427	3.41	1.600	.890
	I am interested in becoming an officer	2.93	1.514	2.93	1.591	.995
Female	I would feel proud to join the military	2.75	1.373	2.82	1.202	.809
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.83	1.567	4.46	0.885	.017*
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.93	1.526	4.32	0.999	.143
Both Gender	I would feel proud to join the military	2.59	1.363	2.76	1.345	.440
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.68	1.511	4.09	1.279	.076
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.51	1.588	3.83	1.399	.204

*p-value < .05

No Self-esteem		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male	I would feel proud to join the military	2.53	1.339	2.58	1.461	.856
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.60	1.429	3.61	1.517	.974
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.20	1.539	3.19	1.600	.988
Female	I would feel proud to join the military	2.86	1.417	2.91	1.225	.812
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.90	1.445	4.46	.923	.006*
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.00	1.454	4.31	1.008	.141
Both	I would feel proud to join the military	2.74	1.393	2.80	1.312	.741
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.79	1.440	4.18	1.219	.035*
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.71	1.527	3.93	1.341	.259

No Self-esteem, non-service member		Not made aware of mortality		Made aware of mortality		
		M	SD	M	SD	P value
Male (55)	I would feel proud to join the military	2.81	1.376	2.83	1.465	.945
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	3.81	1.302	4.00	1.251	.580
	I am interested in becoming an officer	3.61	1.334	3.63	1.498	.975
Female (126)	I would feel proud to join the military	3.12	1.340	3.00	1.190	.601
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.36	1.013	4.49	0.842	.410
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.36	1.171	4.37	.902	.926
Both (181)	I would feel proud to join the military	3.01	1.353	2.96	1.262	.776
	I want to enlist in the U.S. military	4.17	1.144	4.36	0.983	.218
	I am interested in becoming an officer	4.10	1.272	4.18	1.131	.672