

Emergent veteran identity:

Toward a new theory of veteran identity in Israeli society

Abstract

Israeli society has seen a gradual decrease in the proportion of compulsory and reserve soldiers amidst growing criticism of the military from those who have previously served. This criticism is connected to a willingness on their part to organize collective action for post-service benefits and influence other post-service-related issues. We argue that a new theoretical concept of an “*emergent veteran identity*” could explain this new social phenomenon for both the Israeli military and others. In this study, 248 Israeli veterans completed questionnaires designed to investigate emergent veteran identity. The results reveal that emergent veteran identity was explained by the perception of the role of the military in society, by the organizational dimensions of veterans’ transition into society, and, to a lesser extent, by combat experiences. Female veterans had a higher emergent veteran identity and exhibited higher transformation limbo. The article also discusses the utility of this new concept for the study of veterans in general and the results’ implications for threats to and the loss of military identity.

Keywords:

Veterans, military identity, Israel, combat experiences, emergent veteran identity

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Introduction

Veteran Identity

The definition of “veterans” can differ between militaries and nations, be more or less inclusive, and vary between policymakers, the public, veteran organizations, and veterans themselves (Dandeker et al., 2006; Burdett et al., 2013). In practical terms, the most inclusive definitions of “veteran” are applied to anyone who has been in military uniform or deployed for a certain amount of time (Gribble et al., 2019). The many definitions across nations and research areas tend to make an implicit assumption that all liability for military service ceases upon becoming a veteran. However, many nations have a reserve liability for those who have served full-time in the armed forces and, given the risk of large-scale conflict in Europe, remind these veterans that their military service may not be complete (Connelly, 2021). Other armies around the world are more involved in day-to-day security conflicts and use reservists on a frequent basis, such as in Israel. Therefore, veteran identity is far from the result of agreed terminology and encompasses a myriad of emotional, social, and economic factors (Burdett et al., 2013), as well as the influence of continuing military expectations on individuals’ identity (Ben-Ari & Connelly, 2022). Finally, ex-military personnel may not agree to be classified according to the formal definitions, implying an incongruence between the perspectives of veterans and their own identity (Burdett et al., 2013).

Within the research literature on veterans, there is a growing awareness of the importance of veteran identity (Thompson et al., 2017). Veteran identity itself has been described as the self-definitions derived from military experience (Adams et al., 2019) or “the prominence of past military service, beliefs, and norms on an individual’s post-military sense of self” (Dolan et al.,

2022, p. 231). Identities are complex, multiple, and multi-faceted, but identities as self-definitions give meaning and can influence behavior. Behaviors influenced by identity can also be both positive or negative in nature, interact with risk and protective factors, and help predict how well veterans cope with life post-service. For veterans who have had traumatic experiences, veteran identities can be predictive of future physical and psychological health challenges and seem of great importance to the adaptation and re-adjustment of combatants (Keeling, 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Pedlar et al., 2019). However, the formation of a veteran identity is far from automatic (Burdett et al., 2013) and can be heavily influenced by social and cultural factors (Dolan et al., 2022). Moreover, even if veteran identity is present, it may not be salient enough to have an impact on behavior (Binks & Cambridge, 2018).

A recent review of veteran identity concluded that the literature to date has tended to concentrate on identity difficulties and not the underlying factors that predict veteran identity (Dolan et al., 2022). The majority of peer-reviewed work on veteran identity has been carried out on volunteer militaries, such as the US or the UK, rather than conscript-based armies.

Furthermore, the few studies on conscript forces tend to concentrate on veterans of particular conflicts. Less work has been done on veterans of large conscript armies engaged in enduring low-level conflicts or whose conscript service consisted of training or non-combat duties typified by serving full-time for a few years before leaving service at a relatively young age.

The Israeli Arena

On April 6, 2022, Israel's Minister of Culture and Sports, Hili Tropper, unexpectedly announced the abolishment of the ceremonial firework display that traditionally signals Israel's Independence Day celebrations. The reason given for this decision was to avoid triggering the traumatic memories of veterans with the sounds and sights of the fireworks. This greater

awareness of the trauma and suffering of war veterans is in accordance with the growing number of research studies tracking veterans' adaptation following war experiences in Israel (Dekel et al., 2016; Levi & Lubin, 2018).

However, a potentially different explanation for the minister's decision is the growing political power of those who have previously served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and who are increasingly organized into collective unions of veterans and shared actions. For example, the Union of Lebanon Wars, a veterans' organization, was able to force the Israeli Ministry of Defense to grant a special decoration for their previously unrecognized service in Lebanon (israeledecorations.net, n.d.). This success was underpinned by the collective weight of the Lebanon Wars veterans' online Facebook page, populated by over 35,000 veterans.

This new veterans' movement and its collective organizations have received little attention from social scientists in Israel. Though mental suffering during and after combat is well-documented, this paper seeks to understand the potential emergence of veteran identity in Israel. This concept may be useful as it could be related to civil- or military-related dimensions, such as the perception of the military or the organizational processes of transferring from the military into society. The research assumption that informs this study is that veteran identity is being developed in Israel. We therefore ask the following questions: What is the association between emergent veteran identity (EVI) and military identity? In addition, we will explore the predictors and relationships of this new concept.

Veterans in Israel

It is interesting to note that the word "veteran" cannot be translated directly into Hebrew, and the phrase "released from the army" ("*meshurar mish'erut bzava*") is instead more appropriate. Such a definition is more general than other definitions, such as that of a person engaged in reserve

duties (“*miluimnik*”). Previously, scholars in Israel often equated “veterans” with immigrants from the former Soviet Union who clung to their role in the Red Army during the Second World War, proudly exhibiting their decorations in parades (Roberman, 2007). This group does not represent the idea of a “veteran” from the IDF, nor does it represent an emergence of veteran identity in Israel. For purposes of this study, and for the case of Israel we define a veteran as someone who has completed their full regular service in the IDF.

With its compulsory military system – a rarity in the modern world – and its citizen-soldier tradition and constant military and security threats, Israel does not have a clear line between its military and society (Cohen, 2008). Military service, including reserve duties, is also widely accepted as a positive social phenomenon, and there is evidence from interviews that many are convinced that their military service has influenced their social identity post-service (Rosman, 2020). In addition, Israel maintains a large and active reserve component that is called up for duty during national emergencies (Ben-Dor et al., 2008).

As long as veterans remain active, they are constantly entering and exiting the military and so are moving across civilian society boundaries, expressing their military experiences while doing so, which will likely reactivate their military identity (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008; Gazit et al., 2021). Hence there have hitherto been few outward signs of an established veteran community, as identified in many Western countries with solely volunteer armies. The assumption has been that the universal experience of conscript service throughout society, followed by an obligation for reserve service activations, has meant that the development of a veteran identity may not have been salient in Israel due to the continued requirement to adopt a military and/or reservist identity.

However, in recent years, there has been a growing awareness in Israel that large parts of the population are no longer required to enlist for full military service (Ben-Dor & Pedahzur, 2002; Ben-Ari et al., 2021). A number of ex-military politicians have been highly critical of this fact and have received much public attention from highlighting that military service is selective rather than mandatory for some groups in society (Cohen, 2008). It is not too difficult to speculate that this may also have an impact on Israeli military veterans. With selective service, there is perhaps a greater likelihood that they, like their veteran counterparts around the world, may feel separate from wider society due to their experience of military service and feel unique. Some Israeli scholars have reviewed this process and were cautious about its implications for Israel's national security policy (Ben-Dor et al., 2002), but it also relates to veterans' own identity. The tendency for reservists to be used to a lesser extent more recently has certainly been prevalent in the voices of Israeli reservists in combat roles. Combat reservists have been called back for service more often than many other reservists who are exempted and those citizens who did not even enlist for compulsory service (Ben-Shalom & Benbenisty, 2019; Druck, 2021). The changes in the compulsory military system, the more selective call-ups for basic and reserve service, and growing public awareness may help explain why a veterans' movement and veteran identity have only recently come to the fore compared to other nations. It is also worth noting that the growing veterans' lobby in Israel has led to the creation of several formal committees of inquiry that have examined the increasing number of claims made by veterans that they have been denied their post-service rights or that they have suffered from slow and cumbersome bureaucratic practices.

Militarism in Israeli society is another unique aspect and is often considered to be a cultural phenomenon, deeply rooted in the culture of Israel since the early days of its

establishment (Ben-Eliezer, 1995; Eyal & Samimian-Darash, 2019; Kimmerling, 1993; Moshe, 2021; Shklyan, 2022). Many Israelis are thought to be programmed to view diplomatic, strategic, and social issues through a military, warlike lens. There is evidence that this phenomenon has persisted, even though the nature of Israeli wars has changed and the level of existential threat to the existence of Israel has dramatically declined (Ben-Eliezer, 2012). Therefore, it is likely that veteran identity in Israel, in addition to being predicted by previous military identity, service experience, and transition experience, may remain strongly linked to views of the importance of the military in society, the perception and social support of the military and civil community (Castro & Dursun, 2019), as well as continued reserve service and other factors particular to Israel. However, given the previous conclusion that Israeli veteran identity may be less salient in comparison to other armed forces, we have decided to term our measure for it “emergent veteran identity” (EVI).

The evidence demonstrates that veteran identity and previous military identity seem to be very closely related. For example, the Warrior Identity Scale (WIS) has been shown to predict the adaptation of veterans into civilian life (Castro & Dursun, 2019). The WIS is a 31-item questionnaire developed and validated for the measurement of multidimensional military identity (Flack & Kite, 2021; Lancaster et al., 2018) and was originally devised, validated, and tested in the US military but has shown wider validity in a sample of Western armed forces (Op den Buijs et al., 2019). While it remains an interesting question to consider the WIS correlations with different military systems, we desired to examine if this well-validated measure would predict EVI in Israel. Finding a strong relationship between WIS military identity and EVI in Israel would provide substantial support to validate the EVI concept.

Hypotheses

Research across a number of nations has indicated that a strong personal military identity develops from the duration and intensity of one's experience of armed forces service (Connelly & Ben Ari, 2022). Consequently, the necessary shedding of a strong military identity on returning to civilian life can lead to a loss of identity if multiple identities have not been developed through one's military career. As shown in a recent study, the stronger the military identity, the greater its perceived loss for relatively senior personnel who did not develop other identities outside their military career (Lee et al., 2020). The veteran who retains a strong military identity can also be threatened by a perceived drop in the value of their military identity in civilian society. Loss of identity and identity threat are associated with difficulties in adaptation and emotional wellbeing and the belief that life has changed in such a way that the person no longer feels at home in society and no longer has an identity that fits (Lancaster et al., 2018). Individuals whose identity is under threat or perceived to have been lost or who are in conditions of high self-uncertainty can be motivated to seek membership in a new group or identify more strongly with an existing self-inclusive group or social category (Choi & Hogg, 2020). We assume, therefore, that a strong positive military identity (PMI) will be correlated with the desire to establish a new veteran identity as a development of the military identity that now belongs to the past. We thus articulated the following hypothesis:

H1: Emergent veteran identity will be positively correlated with previous positive military identity.

Consequently, and based on Castro and Dursun's model of military identity transition (Castro & Dursun, 2019), we assumed that transition would lead to identity threat to a greater or lesser

extent and, therefore, that so emergent veteran identity would be correlated with perceptions of this transition.

H2a: Positive experiences of the transition will predict higher rates of emergent veteran identity.

H2b: Negative experiences of the transition will predict lower rates of emergent veteran identity.

Research on the adaptation of veterans and post-combat adaptation has shown that exposure to combat and multiple deployments are correlated with a potentially greater amount of psychological suffering (Di Leone et al., 2016; Kintzle et al., 2018). However, we also assume that combat experience is strongly linked to military identity and so may be used as a validation measure of military identity and as a result of one's emerging identity as a veteran. We therefore formed the following hypothesis:

H3: will be positively correlated with combat experiences.

Given the importance of the military in everyday Israeli life (Ben-Eliezer, 1995; Eyal & Samimian-Darash, 2019; Kimmerling, 1993; Moshe, 2021; Shklyan, 2022), we speculated that there would be a positive correlation between the perception of the military's centrality in Israel and :

H4: Positive views of the military in society will be positively correlated with emergent veteran identity.

Our final hypothesis relates to gender differences. Gender is a key factor in the creation and maintenance of military identity, especially a masculine identity (Dolan et al., 2022; Grimell & van den Berg, 2020). The life experiences of women in the military are generally reported as being more negative compared to those of men. Such a contention pertains to issues of sexual

harassment, a lack of acceptance, and the perception of comparatively more limited military utility (Karazi-Presler, 2020; Strong et al., 2018). As a result, we hypothesized that women veterans would have a lower level of emergent veteran identity during their transition into civilian society:

H5: Women will have lower rates of emergent veteran identity than men.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study comprised 302 students in three Israeli universities who had served in the IDF and were no longer in regular or compulsory service. The criterion for inclusion in the analysis was service in combat, combat support, or administrative roles in combat zone areas. Fifty-four respondents were removed from further analysis due to not fulfilling the inclusion criteria or non-completion of survey items, so the final sample included 248 participants (response rate = 82.11%). No significant differences were found between the excluded and final groups in months of service ($t(270)=.52, p=.62$) or in the distribution of soldiers vs. officer ranks ($\chi^2(1)=.05, p=.82$). Of the participants, 90% were students or had an academic degree, 42% enlisted before 2016 and 54% after 2016 (4% did not respond), and there was an average of 33.3 months in military service ($SD=12.5$). In terms of their rank, 16% were junior officers (lieutenant to captain), and the rest were junior NCOs (sergeants and staff sergeants), so the participants were broadly representative of a typical IDF cohort (Ben-Shalom & Benbenisty, 2019). A large proportion of the participants continued to be assigned to reserve duties ($n=145, 58\%$), about a third were not assigned to the reserves ($n=85, 34\%$), and the rest did not provide an answer. The gender distribution was 117 men (48%) and 112 women (45%), and 19 (7%) did not answer. The

mean age of the participants was 25 (SD=5.4). The bulk of respondents identified as Jews (n=224, 91%), and the rest were Druze, Arabs, or Christians (n=5, 2%) or preferred not to say (n=19, 7%). The sample included 58 participants (23.4%) who perceived themselves as religious, 76 (30%) who identified as traditional, and 88 (36%) who identified as secular; the rest did not disclose their religious orientation. The bulk of the respondents had right-wing political views (n=152, 62%), and the next largest group was those with a centrist political view (n=70, 28%). There was a very small proportion of respondents with a leftist political ideology (n=6, 2%), and the rest (n=19, 7%) did not answer.

Procedure

The data was collected using a self-administered anonymous questionnaire containing 138 closed questions disseminated through Qualtrics. The questionnaires were collected via the formal learning management system used for classes (Moodle) and social networks (usually WhatsApp) across three Israeli universities.

Measures

Background Detail

The questionnaire included questions on individual details such as gender, political attitudes, religious beliefs, education level, and military background details, including year of enlistment, rank, assignment for reserve duties, and role in the military.

Emergent Veteran Identity

This part included seven items assessing the respondents' attitudes toward developing a collective action for veterans in Israel. Participants assessed each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (to a very low extent) to 5 (to a very great extent). The items were designed to elicit emotions and behavioral intentions that would reveal an EVI and included, for example, "If

there were to be a political party of reserves in Israel, I would probably support it”, *“Recently, I’ve found myself concerned about the living conditions of other veterans”*, and *“Veterans should be united in organizing themselves to receive their rightful acknowledgment from the government”*. The internal consistency of the scale was high (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88).

Selected Subscales of the Warrior Identity Scale

The WIS (Lancaster et al., 2018) was adapted into Hebrew using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Three of the items were rephrased or omitted because the translation to Hebrew seemed awkward and could reduce respondents’ willingness to complete the questionnaire. For example, the item *“I am proud of things that veterans have accomplished”* was removed as there is no formal association or organizational structure for veterans in Israel, nor is there a good direct translation for the word “veteran” (as described above). Due to the present interest in the work capability of veterans, these items were replaced by three questions related to occupational advantages following service.

The WIS was subject to factor analysis on a US sample and revealed a 7-scale solution. Given the cultural, language, and military differences, it was considered prudent to run a factor analysis on the Israeli data. This factor analysis revealed a 7-factor solution explaining 62% of the variance, broadly confirming the US-based research scales, although the loadings were different on a number of items. However, as some items, such as identity exploration, were not very relevant to the Israeli situation, only five were chosen for further analysis. We selected these factors because they had a sufficient number of items, and their analysis would allow meaningful interpretation in the Israeli context. The five factors comprised:

- **Positive military identity** – 6 items, such as *“I feel good about my military service”*, *“I am proud to have served in the military”*, and *“I believe I have many strengths due to*

my military service". The internal consistency of the variable was high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87).

- **Skills following military service** – 4 items, such as "*The military taught me useful things that are helping me today*" and "*During service, I learned occupational skills that are helping me today*". The internal consistency of the variable was good (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78).
- **Sense of community with veterans** – 4 items, such as "*Only other veterans can truly understand me*" and "*When I meet other veterans, I can trust them more quickly than other people*". The internal consistency of the variable was relatively low (Cronbach's alpha = 0.63).
- **Sense of friendship with veterans** – 4 items, such as "*I wish I could go back into the military*". The internal consistency of the variable was fair (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73).
- **Rejection of the military identity** – 2 items: "*In general, being a veteran is not an important part of my self-image*" and "*Overall, having served in the military has very little to do with how I feel about myself*". The correlation between the two items was high ($r(243)=0.58, p<0.001$).

Transition from the Military Experience

The individuals' perception of their transition from the military into civilian life was assessed using ten items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The factor analysis revealed a three-factor solution explaining 60% of the variance. The factors comprised:

- **Feeling in limbo** – 4 items, such as “*The passage from the military to civilian life was very difficult for me*” and “*I feel I haven’t had a clear path in my life ever since I left the military*”. The internal consistency of the variable was good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.77).
- **Unfair transition** – 3 items, such as “*I think that my discharge from the military was unfair*” and “*The process of leaving the military was very complicated due to bureaucracy*”. The internal consistency of the variable was good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.74).
- **Desire to return to the military** – 2 items: “*If only I could, I would have re-enlisted immediately*” and “*Ever since I left the military, I’ve felt happier than before*”. The correlation between the two items was high ($r(243)=0.378$, $p<0.001$).

Combat Experience

The perception of military experiences was measured using a 15-item tool assessing the frequency of violent encounters during military missions. The scale was adapted from the US Combat Experiences Scale (Guyker et al., 2013), to which eight items highly relevant to tensions with either terrorists or civilians in current Israeli operations were added. The scale had four response options: 1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = several times, and 4 = many times. Factor analysis with Varimax rotation exhibited a 4-factor solution explaining 70% of the variance. The scale encompassed the following factors:

- **Friction with civilians** – 5 items, such as “*I struggled hand to hand with civilians*” and “*I participated in search-and-arrest operations inside houses*”. The internal consistency of the variable was high (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.90).

- **Friction with enemy forces** – 4 items, such as “*I was exposed to hostile incoming fire*” and “*I fired my weapon at enemy combatants*”. The internal consistency of the variable was good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.81).
- **Witnessing horrors** – 4 items relating to both enemy and civilian friction, such as “*I personally witnessed enemy combatants being seriously wounded or killed*” and “*I witnessed stabbings, gunshots, or hit-and-runs during terror attacks*”. The internal consistency of the variable was good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.74).
- **Personal injury** – 2 items relating to both enemy and civilian friction: “*I was injured in a combat-related incident*” and “*I was wounded while struggling with locals*”. The correlation between the two items was high ($r(243)=0.55, p<0.001$).

Social Perceptions

The social perceptions of veterans refer to their attitudes to the role of the military in Israel, especially of the compulsory draft, and to their perceptions of militarism and anti-militarism. The scale consists of 11 items with five response options, ranging from 1 (to a very low extent) to 5 (to a very high extent). Factor analysis with Varimax rotation exhibited a 3-factor solution explaining 57% of the variance. The factors comprised:

- **The centrality of the military in Israel** – 5 items, such as “*Military service is my entry ticket into the Israeli society*”, “*Everyone should serve in the military*”, and “*Those who did not serve in the military did not complete their duties to their country*”. The internal consistency of the variable was good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.79).
- **Militaristic mindset** – 3 items, such as “*Israel must be militarily strong, or it will not survive*” and “*Israel’s security problems can only be resolved using military means*”. The internal consistency of the variable was low (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.50).

- **Anti-militarism** – 3 items, such as “*Israel puts too much weight on military-related issues*” and “*Israel does not invest enough resources on civic issues due to unnecessary investments in the military*”. The internal consistency of the variable was fair (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.65).

Results

The descriptive statistics of the identity variables are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The aim of the preliminary analysis was to validate the new measurement of EVI. A confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modeling was performed before testing the hypothesized model. The measurement model showed an acceptable fit with the data, and all items loaded more than .50 in their latent factor. The one-factor model provided the best fit to the data, and the data fit indexes were acceptable ($\chi^2_{(11)}=20.184$, $p=0.04$, $\chi^2/df=1.835$, NFI=0.976, CFI=0.989, TLI=0.979, RMSEA=0.060). In addition, we examined the correlations between the new scale and previously validated WIS measures. As indicated in Table 1, we found significant positive correlations between the new measurement of EVI and the validated measures of the WIS (ranging from $r_{(243)}=0.30$, $p<0.0001$ to $r_{(243)}=0.372$, $p<0.001$), as well as a negative correlation with the rejection of military identity ($r_{(243)}=-0.289$, $p<0.0001$). These results support the convergent and discriminant validity of the EVI scale among Israeli veterans.

In accordance with our first hypothesis, EVI was positively correlated with PMI ($r_{(243)}=0.343$, $p<0.0001$). PMI ($M=4.16$, $SD=0.75$) was rated significantly higher by the veterans

than EVI ($M=2.90$, $SD=0.91$) ($t_{(227)}=19.63$, $p<0.001$). These results further support the idea that PMI is important for developing veteran identity. The significant relationships between EVI and skills, community, and friends also confirm and validate the strong links between these factors and EVI.

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics and the correlations between EVI and PMI and the explanatory variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

The results indicate that the transition experiences of “feeling in limbo” and “unfair transition” were ranked relatively low ($M=1.94$, $SD=0.81$, $M=1.65$, $SD=0.86$). The “desire to return to the military” variable was ranked low to intermediate ($M=2.59$, $SD=1.01$). However, it was significantly higher compared to the transition experiences of “feeling in limbo” and “unfair transition” ($t_{(227)}=9.05$, $p<0.001$ and $t_{(227)}=10.64$, $p<0.001$, respectively). Combat experience indicators were ranked relatively low, ranging from $M=1.17$ for the personal injury variable to $M=1.86$ for the friction with local populations variable (SD ranged from 0.46 to 0.96). The participants who were assigned to combat roles reported significantly higher results in the three indicators compared to the administrative, support, and distance combat (i.e., reconnaissance or drone operators) sub-groups – $F_{(3,227)}$ values ranged from 7.54 to 52.54, $p<0.001$. Both combatants and distance combatants reported similar levels for the “witnessing horrors” factor ($M=1.64$, $SD=0.60$; $M=1.50$, $SD=0.79$), and both were significantly higher than for the administrative and support sub-groups ($M=1.20$, $SD=0.28$; $M=1.25$, $SD=0.45$; $F_{(3,227)}=9.37$, $p<0.001$). The values for the centrality of the military and having a militaristic mindset were very

high ($M=3.20$, $SD=0.90$; $M=3.96$, $SD=0.71$). They were both significantly higher than the anti-militarism variable ($M=2.07$, $SD=0.81$, $t_{(236)}=13.22$, $p<0.001$ and $t_{(236)}=25.99$, $p<0.001$, respectively).

Contrary to our second hypothesis, a negative perception of the transition from the military into society leads to stronger EVI: Positive correlations were found between the “feeling in limbo” and “unfair transition” variables and EVI ($r_{(235)}=0.298$, $p<0.001$; $r_{(235)}=0.175$, $p=0.007$). Both variables correlated negatively with PMI ($r_{(243)}=-0.06$, n.s.; $r_{(243)}=-0.335$, $p<0.001$), and significant differences were found between both correlations ($z=4.11$ and $z=5.75$, $p<0.05$). The correlations of combat experiences with EVI and PMI were very low. Only a weak correlation was found between witnessing horrors and EVI ($r_{(232)}=0.20$, $p=0.002$). Our third hypothesis, which postulated that combat military experiences would lead to the validation of military identity and therefore to the positive correlation of EVI with combat experiences, was not supported.

Positive views of the military in Israel, including the variable of the centrality of the military and a militaristic mindset, were positively correlated with EVI ($r_{(235)}=0.336$, $p<0.001$; $r_{(235)}=0.311$, $p<0.001$). Their correlation with PMI was very similar. Negative views of the military in society, including the variable of anti-militarism, were not correlated with EVI and were negatively correlated with PMI ($r_{(235)}=-0.056$, n.s.; $r_{(237)}=-0.353$, $p<0.01$; $z=4.43$, $p<0.01$). Our fourth hypothesis – that positive views of the military in society would be positively correlated with EVI – was thus confirmed.

To explain the predictors of EVI, we computed a regression analysis of this variable. In order to create a concise analysis, we summarized the four variables of combat experiences into a single item. The results are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

The regression equation was significant: $R^2=.559$, $F_{(8, 223)}=12.65$, $p<0.001$, with R^2 (adjusted)=0.312. The results suggest that previous military identity developed in service was a relatively strong predictor of EVI ($\beta=0.332$, $t=4.708$, $p<0.001$). The negative aspects of transitions were also significant ($\beta=0.238$, $t=3.53$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.164$, $t=2.424$, $p=0.016$). Combat experiences were a non-significant predictor, and military importance variables made a minor but not significant contribution ($\beta=0.118$, $t=1.824$, $p=0.07$; $\beta=0.109$, $t=1.731$, $p=0.085$).

We concluded that EVI is predicted by a myriad of resources, including a strong sense of military identity, a feeling of limbo in present-day life, a sense of unfairness about the military transition, and a sense of wanting to return to the military. This is especially the case for those who witnessed horrors, whose military values are central to them, and who retain a strong relationship with a military mindset. PMI is also associated with many of these factors, with a strong rejection of anti-militarism but not the present sense of limbo, and is negatively associated with unfairness, perhaps showing a willingness to accept the military's process in this regard.

Our next analysis probed gender differences in perceptions of EVI and its explanatory variables. The results are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Contrary to our fifth hypothesis, which suggested that women would have lower levels of EVI compared to men, we found that women presented higher levels of both EVI ($M=3.20$, $SD=0.83$;

M=2.64, SD=0.92, $t_{(227)}=4.88$, $p<0.001$) and PMI (M=4.28, SD=0.62; M=4.02, SD=0.82; $t_{(227)}=2.68$, $p=0.008$). Our hypothesis was therefore not proven.

Women also scored higher for the “feeling in limbo” (M=2.10, SD=0.81, M=1.81, SD=0.81, $t_{(227)}=2.69$, $p=0.008$) and “desire to return to the military” (M=2.83, SD=1.00, M=2.35, SD=0.97, $t_{(227)}=3.72$, $p<0.001$) transition variables. Male participants scored significantly higher in the “friction with civilians” (M=2.27, SD=1.00, M=1.44, SD=0.71, $t_{(225)}=-7.03$, $p<0.001$) and “friction with enemy forces” (M=1.49, SD=0.68, M=1.14, SD=0.28, $t_{(225)}=-5.22$, $p<0.01$) combat experience variables. There were no other significant differences between the male and female participants.

We speculate that these results could be attributed to the unequal number of combatants in the sub-sample across genders. As a result, we computed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) that included variables for close combatants compared to other duty groups and men vs. women. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

A two-way ANOVA was performed to analyze the effect of gender and combat duties on both EVI and PMI. The multivariate results indicate overall significant differences in gender (Wilks' lambda = 0.878, $f_{(2,224)}=15.541$, $p<.001$; $\mu^2=0.122$), combat duties (Wilks' lambda = 0.972, $f_{(2,224)}=3.221$, $p=0.04$; $\mu^2=0.028$), and the interaction between gender and combat duties in the combined dependent variable (Wilks' lambda = 0.959, $f_{(2,224)}=4.78$, $p=0.009$; $\mu^2=0.041$). The univariate analysis indicated significant differences between men and women in both EVI ($f_{(1,225)}=20.737$, $p<.001$, $\mu^2=0.109$) and PMI ($f_{(1,225)}=6.270$, $p<.001$, $\mu^2=0.051$). In addition, it

indicated significant differences between close combat and other duties for EVI and PMI ($f_{(1,225)}=3.376$, $p=0.035$, $\mu^2=0.02$; $f_{(1,225)}=2.087$, $p=0.046$, $\mu^2=0.018$) and a significant interaction between gender and combat duties for EVI and PMI ($f_{(1,225)}=3.288$, $p=0.038$, $\mu^2=0.019$; $f_{(1,225)}=4.149$, $p=0.005$, $\mu^2=0.034$). There was also a significant interaction effect ($f_{(1,229)}=4.37$ and 8.03 , $p<0.05$). This can be explained by there being a significant difference in EVI and PMI between men who were in combat roles and those who were in non-combat roles. There were no significant differences in rates of EVI and PMI between women in combat roles and those in other roles. EVI was higher for women than men in both combat and non-combat roles, but there were no differences in PMI between men and women in combat roles. Women in non-combat roles had significantly higher PMI than men, but they scored no differently from women in combat roles.

Following these results, we developed the idea that the number of reserve duties conducted by veterans could have contributed to the differences in EVI. We created a new variable to divide those who had been called up to the reserves for at least a day from those who had not. The result indicated that 53% ($n=117$) had been called up for reserve duties, whereas 47% ($n=105$) had not. Independent t-tests across all research variables revealed significant differences between the two groups in combat experiences, where those who had been called had a significantly higher mean in the total index of combat experiences variable ($M=1.55$, $SD=0.51$; $M=1.35$, $SD=0.46$; $t=3.01$, $p<0.01$). The results reflect that those who had been called up had combat duties ($n=84$, 72%). The gender distribution across the new variable was significantly unequal: 75% ($n=85$) of men were called up compared to 31% ($n=33$) of women ($\chi^2=35.2$, $p<0.001$). Of those who were assigned to combat duties, men were more likely to be called up

(n=74, 78%) than women (n=10, 43%). The fact that women were less likely to be called up for reserve duty may explain their higher scores in the “feeling in limbo” transition variable.

Discussion

The Concept of Emergent Veteran Identity

The purpose of this study was to explore the theoretical concept of EVI as a response to current developments in veteran identity in Israel. The literature on veteran identity reveals that the concept of a veteran is not only varied in terms of inclusion (Dandeker et al., 2006) but also in terms of definition (Burdett et al., 2013). Clarifying this terminology is significant for researchers who are interested in veterans in a manner that exceeds the formal definitions of who is a veteran by law.

The results of our study help to remedy this dissonance by exploring a case study in which veteran identity is being developed and is thus in a state of incongruence. In addition, the study sought to create a measurement tool for this concept, used it to explain how EVI is created and what its correlates are, and presented it as an important factor in the adaptation process of veterans (Pedlar et al., 2019). This study will thus be informative not only to the Israeli case but also more generally as the IDF and other militaries share similarities, such as the decrease in the population’s military involvement and changes in recruitment policies. Hence, we argue for greater attention to be paid to the way veteran identities are modified amidst structural changes and organizational modifications.

The bulk of the research on veterans and veterans’ identity has been conducted in professional militaries in which a person is either in the military or outside it and is unlikely to return (Duel et al., 2021). The WIS, for example, was developed in the context of the US military

and proved useful in understanding veterans' transition process into the civilian sphere and its potential correlated difficulties (Lancaster et al., 2018). The current research has added insights to this concept by using it alongside the new measurement of EVI in the context of the citizen-soldier of the IDF (Cohen, 2008).

EVI is itself a useful concept for understanding developments in the veteran landscape both in Israel and in other contexts. This research has captured new aspects of veteran identity in an array of areas, including veterans who have served in the state military and then as contractors, female veterans, veterans who have engaged in new types of warfare, and veterans of new eras and conflicts. Social networks – both online and in real life – are reshaping veteran identity as groups and individuals change both the way they see themselves and their expectations of society and government. The EVI measurement that we have developed could therefore assist in future empirical research into this concept in other militaries.

The correlations between EVI and the WIS provide considerable support for the utility of the concept as well as the concurrent validity of the scale. The medium to high correlations found provide important further evidence (Op den Buijs et al., 2019) that the WIS is useful across militaries since the citizen-soldier of the IDF is very different from the professional characteristics of members of the US or Canadian militaries. In addition, the correlations between the WIS factors and the EVI were not the same across possible explanatory variables, especially concerning the negative aspects of the transition process.

Similarly, while PMI was a potent predictor of EVI, the perception of the transition process and, to a lesser extent, the centrality of the military in society and adhering to a militaristic mindset were also significant predictors. Our interpretation is that PMI is related to past experiences of military service, and while EVI is strongly related to this, it is more

influenced by perceptions of the present. Similar contentions anchoring the positive dimension of veterans' military identity in their past experiences have recently been made, while the centrality of their military identity was identified as a distinct variable (Di Leone et al., 2016).

We conclude that EVI is highly related to perceptions of unfairness regarding the transition process and feelings of limbo in the present or possibly of criticism among veterans. PMI, on the other hand, was not related to feelings of limbo and was, in fact, significantly negatively correlated to feelings of an unfair transition. While a strong sense of this variable implies an acceptance of military processes and perhaps also of suffering during war, EVI implies more criticism and willingness to organize as a group. EVI is, therefore, a different construct, partially but not fully explained by the veteran's PMI.

In the transforming process from the military, the emergence of a veteran identity has seldom been studied, as most research connects military identity to issues of trauma and stress (Dekel et al., 2016; Levi & Lubin, 2018), but the social dimensions of this transformation are of great interest as well. Issues of criticism and willingness for union or reunion could have social and individual consequences at the same time. The Israeli case could be informed by the experiences of other militaries on this subject, especially concerning identity threat and sense of loss (Lancaster et al., 2018; Pedlar et al., 2019).

The expectation from Israeli society regarding veterans is that they will be honorably discharged and then get an education and join the workforce. There is very little expectation for them to become career military personnel. Nevertheless, this attitude ignores the feelings of loss described that could occur among veterans who lose contact with the military. We speculate that these theories are significant in explaining why veterans are losing contact with the military, as

the IDF is now more selective in its recruitment and mobilization policies (Ben-Ari et al., 2021; Druck, 2021).

Another possible source of EVI variance was predicted to arise from combat experiences (Guyker et al., 2013; Kintzle et al., 2018), but this was non-significant as a predictor. Two of the variables making up combat experience had low correlations with EVI; only the “witnessing horrors” variable was significantly correlated. Since the scores for combat experience were relatively low and the spread of scores more limited, it may be that the strength of combat experience as a predictor was somewhat reduced.

The Military Process

There is evidence in our results regarding the relationship between the organizational structure and EVI. In contrast to our preliminary hypotheses, based on extensive research on gender differences in the military (Di Leone et al., 2016; Karazi-Presler, 2020), we found that women in our sample had higher levels of PMI and EVI. They also expressed a greater desire to return to military service. These results were found when we controlled for the role of gender and direct combat versus other military duties.

We suggest that the interpretation of these surprising results rests in the way the military process in Israel impacts the veterans’ forging of their past PMI and their current EVI. As part of their training and preparation for their arduous tasks, combatants in the IDF receive more institutional training (Ben-Shalom et al., 2019). They are organized into cohesive units, and the level of attrition in these courses of preparation is high. Only those who are thoroughly able and willing remain. The result is a very high PMI that lingers after the period of compulsory service is completed. However, men are more likely to return to reserve service than women, and

therefore they reactivate their military skills and know-how, in contrast to women, the majority of whom do not (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008).

In recent years, however, the IDF has gradually increased the number of women in the military, including in forward areas, combat roles, and operational tasks. In our sample, we had a significant number of female combatants and distance combatants. These roles are demanding, depend upon extensive training, and are performed amidst crucial and often operationally significant events. However, on completing their full-time service, these women do not return to the uniform, and their skills, friends, and military identity are not reactivated. The well-developed system of reserve service in the IDF, which has been more selective in recent years (Ben-Dor et al., 2002); Druck, 2021), will not call them back. As a result, the activation of their sense of belonging is important leverage against a sense of identity threat and the consequent sense of loss (Cacace et al., 2021). The transition process into civilian life for this group could therefore involve more of a sense of loss and longing (Castro & Dursun, 2019). This is a possible explanation for the high rate of feelings of limbo and the higher desire to return to military service among women in our sample.

In essence, and this is an intriguing idea that should be studied further, these women could be seen as the equivalent of veterans in the professional militaries of other nations: they were called up to serve, they have done their duty amidst arduous undertakings and developed a sense of PMI, but they are now away from the military and are unlikely ever to return. While recent studies on women's experiences in the IDF recounted harsh treatment within a male-dominant environment (Sasson-Levy & Lomski-Feder, 2022), our results provide another perspective on this aspect of IDF workforce development. Israeli researchers have been keen on gender integration in the military but caution against its implications for Israeli national security

policy (Ben-Dor et al., 2002). The results of the current study provide an interesting dimension for this policy on the individual and societal levels to consider post-military service for women who have served.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study was conducted using a sample of students who are relatively young and come from relatively affluent socio-economic backgrounds. The sample also contained a high proportion of individuals who claimed to be right-wing in their politics. While this is broadly representative of the Israeli parliamentary elections in November 2022, it may be the result of the sampling procedure and location. This issue requires an extensive and separate study that not only examines emerging veterans' political views but also explores militaristic and anti-militaristic viewpoints and how political views and ideology may mediate views of the military, militarism, and EVI. As a result, the sample used in this paper should be expanded, using a larger and more representative sample with a longitudinal design. Using such a methodology will allow both sub-groups of veterans with varied socio-economic backgrounds to be compared and the way veteran identities are developed over time to be tracked.

Another important source of comparison is cross-national research. Parallel comparisons with similarly aged veterans of professional militaries or among older veterans in two or more militaries would be informative. Such research will allow the EVI theory to be more generalized and further developed according to individual and societal dimensions. The analysis of these different dimensions will also enable an understanding of the processes involved in the development of identity and its relation to either trauma or pride and to the connections between veterans and the political sphere and between the activities of veteran groups in the media and social networks. The correlation of EVI with mental health variables is also significant,

especially when evaluating present social perceptions with past combat experiences. There seemed to be little predictive relationship between reserve status and EVI, but this issue requires further investigation in light of recent work on how reserves manage their military identities and create meaning from their position between civilian and military society (Gazit et al., 2021; Connelly & Ben Ari, 2022).

Conclusions

The landscape of Israeli military service is changing, allowing researchers to take innovative views of the concept of veteran identity and the ways in which it is being developed. We speculate that our results and insights could be informative for other militaries undergoing structural changes. We concur that veteran identity is being developed in the national, institutional, and individual spheres. The incongruence in the definition of veteran identity results in part from this gradual process (Dandeker et al., 2006). The IDF is becoming more selective in terms of compulsory and reserve service, and a growing number of those who leave compulsory military service may not return despite being highly trained, strongly identifying with and encultured to the military. There is also greater awareness of veterans' rights and criticisms of the way veterans are handled by government ministries. Theories of veteran transition highlighting the difficulty of coping with identity threat and identity loss during this process point to veterans being drawn together in social groups. This is a new phenomenon for Israel, and so EVI is a valuable concept for further investigations into this new reality for Israel's veterans.

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Table 1*Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson's Correlations of the Identity Variables (N=243)*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Emergent veteran identity (EVI)	2.90	0.91	1.00	.343***	.300***	.365***	.372***	- .289***
2. WIS – Positive military identity (PMI)	4.16	0.75		1.00	.618***	.271***	.540***	- .302***
3. WIS – Skills following military service	3.08	1.01			1.00	.243**	.403**	- .266***
4. WIS – Sense of community with veterans	3.05	0.85				1.00	.297***	- .340***
5. WIS – Sense of friendship with veterans	3.03	0.89					1.00	- .361***
6. WIS – Rejection of military identity	2.37	1.01						1.00

Note. Maximum score is 5 for means for all variables.

*p<0.05 ** p<0.01, ***p<.001

Table 2

Means & Standard Deviations of the Explanatory Variables and Correlation with Emerging Veteran and Positive Military Identity

Variable	Range	M	SD	EVI	PMI
Transition experience					
Feeling in limbo	1-5	1.94	0.81	.298***	-.068
Unfair transition	1-5	1.65	0.86	.175**	-.335***
Desire to return to the military	1-5	2.59	1.01	.200**	.276***
Combat experience scale					
Friction with civilians	1-4	1.86	0.96	.091	.090
Friction with enemy forces	1-4	1.33	0.54	.099	.110
Witnessing horrors	1-4	1.47	0.58	.201**	.099
Personal injury	1-4	1.17	0.46	.120	-.078
Social perception of vets					
Centrality of military	1-5	3.20	.090	.336***	.398***
Anti-militarism	1-5	2.07	0.81	-.056	-.353***
Militaristic mind set	1-5	3.96	0.71	.311***	.309***

Note. EVI = Emergent veteran identity, PMI = Positive military identity.

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3*Regression Equation of Explanatory Variables over Emergent Veteran Identity (EVI)*

Variable name	β	t	Sig
WIS – Positive military identity (PMI)	.332	4.708	.000
Feeling in limbo	.238	3.533	.000
Unfair transition	.164	2.424	.016
Desire to return to the military	.027	.439	.661
Combat experiences	.060	1.041	.299
Centrality of military	.118	1.824	.070
Anti-militarism	-.045	-.716	.475
Militaristic mindset	.109	1.731	.085

Table 4*Independent T-Test for Emergent Veteran Identity Explanatory Variables Across Genders*

Variable name	Male (n=117)		Female (n=112)		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Emergent veteran identity (EVI)	2.64	0.92	3.20	0.83	4.88***
WIS – Positive military identity (PMI)	4.02	0.82	4.28	0.62	2.68**
Transition experience					
Feeling in limbo	1.81	0.81	2.10	0.81	2.69**
Unfair transition	1.69	0.89	1.63	0.83	-0.51 n.s.
Desire to return to the military	2.35	0.97	2.83	1.00	3.72 ***
Combat experience scale					
Friction with civilians	2.27	1.00	1.44	0.71	-7.03***
Friction with enemy forces	1.49	0.68	1.14	0.28	-5.22***
Witnessing horrors	1.52	0.56	1.41	0.60	-1.47 n.s.
Personal injury	1.21	0.53	1.11	0.37	-1.61 n.s.
Social perception of vets					
Centrality of military	3.11	0.99	3.26	0.81	1.25 n.s.
Anti-militarism	2.11	0.81	1.95	0.75	-1.92 n.s.
Militaristic mindset	3.94	0.75	4.00	0.66	0.66 n.s.

Note: **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Table 5*ANOVA Analysis of Duties and Gender on Identity Measures*

Variable name	Close-combat male (n=97)		Close-combat female (n=23)		Other duties male (n=20)		Other duties female (n=89)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Emergent veteran identity (EVI)	2.74	0.91	3.21	0.90	2.12	0.80	3.20	0.82
WIS – Positive military identity (PMI)	4.12	0.67	4.20	0.74	3.53	1.25	4.30	0.59