20 October, 2024

Patricia M. Shields, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief, *Armed Forces & Society*

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Dear Dr. Shields,

Re: Submission of Revised Manuscript ID AFS-24-164

We greatly appreciate your warm words and encouragement. As we wrote in our previous email dated 25 September 2024, your understanding of the situation is inspiring.

We would like to express our appreciation to the reviewers for their thorough and constructive critiques of our manuscript, titled *“Navigating change from within: The impact and challenges of a women’s virtual community to transform gender dynamics in the IDF army.”* Their insightful feedback has been instrumental in enhancing the quality of our research.

We made significant revisions in response to your comments and those of the reviewers. We addressed the issue of coherence throughout the paper. Additionally, we highlighted our research question and the themes that emerged from the interviews. The research design has been more clearly linked to the existing literature.

As per your suggestion, we positioned our research question within the broader conversations taking place in the literature. We endeavored to demonstrate that we are investigating an aspect that has been overlooked or misunderstood in our knowledge of how women can use informal groups to foster organizational change, particularly in the military context. We kept this framing in mind throughout the revised manuscript.

We also clarified the process we seek to reveal. Whereas we did not explicitly use the qualitative technique of process tracing, we made the process more evident through our analysis of the interviews, particularly those with community leaders. These insights have been integrated into our findings and discussion sections.

We updated our sources as suggested and made use of Stebbins’ book on exploratory research. Thank you for this valuable recommendation.

We also consulted Casula’s recent discussion on exploratory research in qualitative research. These insights have been incorporated into the revised revision.

Casula, M., Rangarajan, N., & Shields, P. (2021). The potential of working hypotheses for deductive exploratory research. *Quality & Quantity, 55*, 1703–1725 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01072-9>

Regarding the issue of external validity that you raised, we addressed this concern in our revised version. We more clearly articulated why an international audience of military researchers would find this informal group of Israeli servicewomen and their challenges interesting and relevant. We emphasized the potential for similar informal groups to be instituted in military organizations worldwide and how understanding their dynamics could benefit organizational change efforts globally. This can be seen, for example, in the Results section.

Thank you also for additional sources:

Nowell, B., & Albrecht, K. (2019). A reviewer’s guide to qualitative rigor. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 29*(2), 348-363.

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges*. Academy of Management Journal, 50*(1), 25-32.

We do not currently believe that the study allows for grounded theory building, as suggested by the source you attached. Perhaps additional research in the field or follow-up research will yield such a theoretical contribution.

Once again, we express our sincere gratitude for your guidance and the thorough reviews provided. We believe these revisions have significantly strengthened our manuscript and hope that it now meets the high standards of *Armed Forces & Society Journal.*

Sincerely,

The Authors

Below are our responses to the reviewer’s comments in the table, designed to facilitate tracking the updates/modifications:

Reviewer: 1

Thank you for your detailed comments. We reviewed and made corrections accordingly, including adjustments in phrasing, terminology, and other remarks. Detailed changes are presented in the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Comments to the Author - Overall Impression | Our response |
| First of all, this is an important and significant topic, and the knowledge presented in this article is of theoretical and practical importance for the understanding of the impact of new technologies and platforms on social interaction in organizations. | Thank you for recognizing the importance of our research topic. We greatly appreciate your positive feedback and encouragement. |
| However, the article requires extensive revisions in order to be suitable for publication. There are difficulties in some parts of the article, including the need to align some of the theoretical background with the topics of the research, presenting a more precise and comprehensive method, a different construction of the findings chapter, and a better connection between the discussion, the findings, and the research questions. | We appreciate your thorough review. We made extensive revisions as suggested. We realigned the theoretical background with the research topics, presented a more comprehensive methodology section, added and focused the quotations and their interpretation, and strengthened the connection between the discussion, findings, and research questions. |
| Theoretical Background: Generally, it seems that a part of the background is inaccurate, and not supported by up-to-date references. For example, there is a lack of precise description of the integration of women in the IDF, particularly in the standing army, given the focus on this population (page 4, line 48), or relevant references are missing (e.g., page 4, line 48;  page 5, line 38). | Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We updated our theoretical background with more accurate descriptions and current references, particularly regarding the integration of women in the IDF’s professional army and the role of virtual communities within organizations. |
| In some cases, there is no connection between the topics reviewed in the theoretical background and the subjects addressed in the findings and discussion. For instance, there is a lack of theoretical consideration to the role of virtual communities within organizations, whether they are formal or informal groups, and the organizational changes that the virtual communities elicit. Additionally, note that there are theoretical aspects present in the discussion but not in the theoretical background. | Thank you. We provided a more accurate connection between the theoretical section and the findings and discussion. Additionally, we expanded the discussion of the role of formal and informal virtual communities in organizational changes.  In the findings, we described concrete examples of changes that have transpired in the IDF as a result of the virtual community’s activities. This includes how the new narrative created by the community integrates the women’s personal narrative with the existing organizational narrative. We expanded the discussion on the tension between the organization’s formal narrative and the informal narrative that developed in the community. We also presented the potential long-term implications of this narrative change on the IDF’s organizational culture. |
| There is also no sufficient focus on the context of the IDF and women within it; it seems to be taken for granted in referring to the military as a masculine organization, but a broader discussion on this topic is needed. The reference to the narratives is not sufficient and requires a better theoretical basis. Additionally, there is inconsistency in the use of terms between the theoretical background and the discussion. | Thank you. We edited and focused the definitions of the concepts “organizational narrative,” “gender narrative,” and “alternative narrative.” We also provided specific examples of existing narratives in the IDF. We included more direct quotes from the research participants to illustrate the various narratives. |
| Page 5, lines 29-32- the example should be explained in the context of standing army and not mandatory enlistment. In general, it is important to include more up-to-date references, especially when discussing virtual communities. | Thank you. We updated the references and information throughout the article, particularly regarding virtual communities, and focused our discussion primarily on the professional standing army. |

Reviewer: 2

Thank you for your detailed comments. We reviewed these comments and made corrections accordingly, including adjustments in phrasing and terminology, along with other remarks. Details of these changes are presented in the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Comments to the Author - Overall Impression | Our response |
| This is a really interesting article that explores how an unofficial facebook group for female career officers in the IDF actually had an impact on the organizational culture of the IDF. | We greatly appreciate your positive feedback on our article. Thank you for recognizing the interest and importance of our research topic. |
| I have no real gripes about the findings or the results. I learned a lot about the topic. It was both informative and well written.  One issue ought to be made clarified. Is there any way to tell us what percentage of career officers are women? Likewise what percentage of conscripted officers are women? I can understand there being less female officers in front-line or combat roles. That makes sense. Yet taking into account all the non combat positions in the IDF generally, to include all the positions in the navy, Air force, Tech Fields, and logistics, is it true that there are significantly less female officers in the IDF as a whole? Any way to get actual numbers on this? Or a even a source that specifically refers to this? | Following your comment, whereas detailed percentages are not readily available due to security considerations, we included up-to-date, published information in our literature review. |
| **The overall framing of the article needs a lot of work though.** 1) I understand the climate in academia these days. From the title and the Abstract alone it is really unclear to pinpoint what exactly is the topic of the article. The title and the abstract really do need to mention Israel and/or the IDF.  At a glance readers need to know what the empirical focus of the article is. | We sincerely thank you for your feedback on the framing of our article. The title and abstract now clearly mention Israel and the IDF. |
| 2) The introduction says a lot without really saying anything. The introduction needs to tell us in very clear and specific language: What is the topic? What is the argument (thesis), and what theoretical contribution does the article make to the field? | We appreciate the feedback. We updated the introduction to provide a clearer focus on the topic, purpose, and theoretical contribution of our research. |
| 3) Relatedly we need to know a lot more about this group Eshet Hayil. The correct translation for the group BTW is not ‘Wonder Women’, but rather’ Wםmen of Valor’ and comes from the final chapter of the Biblical book of proverbs. The chapter is traditionally sung at Friday night Sabbath dinners. | Thank you for the comment. We examined this issue when we spoke with community members, but in light of your remark, we re-examined it. The intention was to evoke ‘Wonder Woman’ in the comic book sense, as an all-capable woman who can take care of herself and effect change. The biblical ‘Eshet Chayil’ (Woman of Valor) is indeed multi-talented. Still, her primary mission, as perceived by our interviewees, is that of a wife and caretaker of her private family rather than an influential figure in the public sphere. |
| What exactly is this group? When was it created? How many members does it include? What kind of topics are discussed? What kind of conversations happen in this group? All this information needs to appear early on in the article. The reader needs to know what exactly the topic of the article is early on. | Thank you. We included more detailed information about the Eshet Chayil group, including the year of establishment, number of members, discussion topics, etc. These changes can be found in the relevant subsection. |
| 4) I will say a lot of this information is included in a Hebrew article referenced in the bibliography. This article is well written in Hebrew and offers a lot of the information that really ought to be in this AF&S Draft H. & Bar-Schindler (6 March 2022). The village crazy people: The organizational challenge, the sets, and innovation in a changing world. Bein Haktavim. Issue on women: The potential of the system. Accessed 12 March 2022. [https://bit.ly/3HTCbTj](https://bit.ly/3HTCbTj" \t "_blank) (Hebrew) | Thank you for highlighting this important source. We revisited the Hebrew article and incorporated key information that was not previously included in our manuscript. This additional context regarding the Eshet Chayil group can now be found in the relevant section, as well as in the chapter discussing women in the IDF. Furthermore, we ensured that all information was properly cited and contextualized for our English-speaking audience. |
| All in all this is an interesting and important article, just some real hard work needs to be done on the framing in order for it to be publishable | Thank you. We hope we have fully addressed your comments. |

Once again, we appreciate your encouragement and help and thank the two anonymous reviewers for helping us to upgrade the ms.

The Authors