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Career Decision-making Difficulties among Student Veterans

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CAREER DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES AMONG STUDENT VETERANS

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To my grandfather, Joseph Mishak, who showed me that you grow most in life from being both vulnerable and invincible. To my mom, Lori, who has inspired me to work toward her balance of being soft and successful. To my dad, Ron, whose footsteps I follow in trying to be both a traditionalist and a rebel. To my husband, Joe, who continually shows me that the world is changed by the power you use and the compassion you have while doing so. To my committee, Dr. Stead, Dr. Phillips, and Dr. Horvath, each of whom provided support and guidance. And to my cohort, who made the most mundane tasks in life an adventure. I cannot thank all of you enough.
ABSTRACT

Difficulties in career decision-making are among the most prevalent academic and vocational problems (Amir & Gati, 2006; Osipow, 1999; Tagay, 2014). Many college students, including Veterans, struggle with the decisions they must make within higher education and while transitioning between school and work (Mau, 2004). In recognizing career decision-making difficulties, it is imperative to focus on the student Veteran population, as cultural factors have an influence on one’s career development and career decision-making processes (Mau, 2004; Tagay, 2014). Additionally, military culture is little understood and additional exploration of unique military factors could lead to a better understanding of Veterans’ problems in career decision-making (Vacchi, 2012). The current study is one of the first to examine the relationships between career decision-making difficulties and demographics based in military culture for Veteran students in the United States.

Utilizing the taxonomy developed by Gati and colleagues (1996), the relationship between career decision-making difficulties, as measured by the Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996) and the demographic variable of age, and the cultural factors of level of deployment and combat experience were examined utilizing a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). The sample consisted of 209 (143 Male, M Age = 32.07 years) Veterans and Reservist students who have attended Midwest universities in the United States. Results suggested that participants who are younger demonstrated higher levels of Lack of Readiness. Main effects for both level of deployment and combat experience were statistically nonsignificant. The findings from this study suggested that military students may experience similar levels of difficulties as their civilian counterparts.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Historically, there has been a partnership between institutions of higher education and the military. This partnership began with the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, which is commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). The G.I. Bill offered financial support to Veterans through education and training, loan guarantee, and unemployment pay. The enactment of the G.I. Bill had a significant impact on higher education (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Education assistance for Veterans has systematically evolved throughout the years since the initial G.I. Bill. The most recent Bill, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (henceforth also referred to as Post-9/11 G.I. Bill), has strengthened the partnership between the military and institutions of higher education.

With the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, colleges and universities in the United States have seen an increase in the number of student Veterans enrolling in higher education (Barry, Whiteman, Wadsworth, & Hitt, 2012). The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill funding has been enticing more institutions to look at the Veteran and military population as a critical recruitment opportunity (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). In fact, McBain and colleagues (2012) surveyed 690 higher education institutional leaders and found that 64% reported increased effort to recruit Veterans.
The Post-9/11 Bill provides extensive educational benefits to Veterans seeking financial support for higher education. Specifically, it entitles Veterans to benefits such as financing the cost of tuition, providing a monthly housing allowance and yearly book and supply stipend, and offering a payment to individuals who relocate from highly rural areas (O’Herrin, 2011; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). As a result of this, an increasing number of Veterans and military students are enrolling to complete degrees at campuses across the nation (Brown & Gross, 2011). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office report of 2011, approximately 700,000 service members and Veterans attended higher education and training programs aided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). These recent enactments and changes in policies have been a catalyst for the significant influx of Veteran students and have made this the largest enrollment within campuses since World War II (Cook & Kim, 2009).

The increased number of Veteran students present in higher education provides an opportunity for growth within academia. Specifically, institutions will need to adapt techniques for intervening in and assisting with experienced difficulties. Many college students, including Veterans, struggle with the decisions they must make within higher education and while transitioning between school and work (Mau, 2004). However, career decision-making difficulties for Veteran students have been largely unstudied in the United States. Identifying the unique challenges that Veterans face could facilitate institutions in understanding the needs of these students and appropriately addressing their concerns (Brown & Gross, 2011).

Making decisions about career is an important, complex process (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). Difficulties in career decision making are among the most prevalent academic and vocational problems (Amir & Gati, 2006; Osipow, 1999; Tagay, 2014). Although there is
not a singularly accepted definition, career decision-making difficulties are commonly recognized to comprise aspects of indecision and indecisiveness (Gati, 2013; Kelly & Lee, 2002). Gati, Krausz, and Osipow (1996) define career decision-making difficulties as the difficulties keeping one from making the most appropriate career decision. Regardless of particular semantics, there is an overall consensus within the literature that difficulties in career decision-making are prevalent in regard to the college population. A survey conducted by Gianakos (1999) concluded that approximately 50% of college students in the United States report difficulties in making career decisions. Locating the types of these difficulties, and identifying where they stem from, is necessary in order to provide individuals with the help they need (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). In recognizing career decision-making difficulties, it is imperative to focus on the student Veteran population, as numerous studies have documented the influence that cultural factors have on one’s career development and career decision-making processes (Mau, 2004; Tagay, 2014). Therefore, students who have a military background likely face additional concerns due to the impact of military culture (Vacchi, 2012).

Veterans who enroll in higher education are a subgroup of nontraditional students (Cook & Kim, 2009; O’Herrin, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Ogren (2003) suggested that Veterans who returned from World War II were the first nontraditional students to enroll in colleges and universities. These student Veterans encounter unique challenges as they register in universities after returning from the military (Brown & Gross, 2011; Fouad, Guillen, Harris-Hodge, Henry, Novakovic, Terry, & Kantamneni, 2006; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Green & Hayden, 2013). Although studies have documented that military students experience similar issues to traditional students, it is critical to recognize that they also bring a unique set of concerns related to their military service (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Green & Hayden, 2013). The
significant increase in Veterans enrolling in higher education requires professions to address the needs of this population in order to create and utilize the most appropriate career intervention topics (Hayden, Ledwith, Dong, & Buzzetta, 2014). One of the most significant areas to address for student Veterans in the United States is the difficulties they face with career decision-making. Although student Veterans’ enrollment is continually on the rise, there is limited information available regarding student Veterans’ career decision-making (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Persky and Oliver (2010) emphasized that counselors and advisors should be trained to identify and address problems that are unique to Veterans. The authors went further by saying that Veteran-specific counseling should replace the generalized counseling that Veterans presently receive (Persky & Oliver, 2010). Current research has argued that in order to work effectively with military students, it is vital to understand how the unique characteristics of the military impact them (Hall, 2011).

Cultural and contextual support play a significant role in the way individuals make career decisions (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Mau, 2004; Tagay, 2014). Although decidedness and related constructs of career-decision making have been well documented in the literature, specific cultural relevancy is continually being investigated (Osipow, 1999; Osipow & Gati, 1998; Mau, 2004). The failure to understand the impact of culture on the decision-making process and issues related to culturally different individuals could potentially result in inappropriate assumptions and invalid conclusions (Mau, 2004). Therefore, investigating these career constructs for nontraditional students is critical to understanding where and how to intervene. More specifically, it is important to recognize and investigate the characteristics within the career decision-making process that could be problematic to decision-making attitudes and behaviors in an effort to prevent later difficulties in career development. As the culture of
the military and of institutions of higher education have stark differences, student Veterans are likely to experience career-decision making problems differently to traditional college students in the United States.

**Purpose of the Study**

Currently, there is limited literature about student Veterans’ career decision-making (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Research literature suggests that Veteran students are in need of more effective, helpful resources regarding careers within the college setting (Vacchi, 2012). Predominantly, the literature demonstrates that current college resources are not properly addressing all of the unique needs of individuals within the military culture (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). There is an overall lack of understanding of detailed career related aspects of student Veterans in the United States (Green & Hayden, 2013). While many colleges have a student Veteran’s association, these programs may not be meeting the needs of Veterans in terms of career decision-making difficulties. Furthermore, the military culture is not firmly understood, and additional exploration of unique military factors could lead to a better understanding of problems in career decision making difficulties (Vacchi, 2012). The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and the demographic variable of age, and the cultural factors of level of deployment and combat experience.

**Significance of the Study**

The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of the types of career decision-making difficulties that are common for Veteran students in the United States. Additionally, this study aimed to examine specific demographic variables, and the potential relationship they have with such difficulties. Ideally, this investigation attempted to provide evidence that Veteran students are in need of more effective interventions and resources.
regarding career decision-making within the college setting. It also delivered information related to the experiences that Veteran students have within the military culture, and how they may play a role in academic success. This study comprised military students who are currently serving, and those that have served in the past, in order to gain a deeper, broader understanding of this populations’ overall experienced difficulties.

**Military Culture**

Culture is a manifestation of the shared ideology for a particular society or group of people, such as religions, organizations, or nations. Furthermore, it refers to commonalities in values and priorities as well as perspective toward environment, ideas, interpretation, and norms (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006). Specifically, military culture has a language, a code of manners, norms of behavior, belief systems, dress, and rituals (Reger, Etherage, Reger, & Gahm, 2008). Previous literature has posited that the culture of the military is comprised of a diverse group of people in American society that must be understood as uniquely different from the civilian world (Hall, 2011).

Although there are cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity within the military, the military is a culture in its own right (Fenell, 2008; Hall, 2011). Military service has been found to not only dramatically shape a person’s culture, but in some capacities, to define it (Meyer & Brim, 2016). Indeed, military culture often replaces previous cultural beliefs (Fenell, 2008). In recognizing that the military is its own specialized culture, it has become increasingly important to acknowledge that it requires the same level of attention as other cultures. In fact, previous research has identified that it is essential to acknowledge and understand the culture of the military when working with military personnel (Hall, 2011). Furthermore, it is vital to understand how the unique characteristics of the military impact the service members in order to
work effectively with them (Hall, 2011). For example, Hoge (2011) emphasized that enhanced mental health outcomes in military personnel requires advanced treatment options and improved military cultural competence.

Military organizations represent a specific occupational culture which is fairly isolated from the rest of the general society (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006). The dominant view of military culture is immersed in the traditions and practices of aggressiveness and masculinity (Titunik, 2008). The military emphasizes discipline and hierarchy, prioritizes the group over the individual, and uses specific rituals and symbols to convey important meanings and transitions. As many of the tenants of military culture are blatantly defined by law, it is more defined than most cultures (Meyers & Brim, 2016). Military law requires commanding officers and those in authority to demonstrate honor, patriotism, and subordination in all that they do. The military is a highly structured institution that potentially exposes its members to a variety of stressors in the within daily affairs (Elliott, 2015). To understand present day student Veterans, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the culture that produces Veterans.

The common experience of all military service members is that they each undergo the initial basic training, otherwise known as boot camp (Vacchi, 2012). Military service may entail chronic strain (Bashman, 2008; Wheaton, 1994). A central characteristic of military culture is the foundational authoritarian structure (Hall, 2011). The military system requires rigidity, regimentation, and conformity (Hall, 2011). Previous studies have noted that Veterans may experience culture shock as a result of the stark contrast between military life and institutions within civilian life, such as universities (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). The studies have stated that the depending on variables such as length of enlistment, rank and status when leaving the military, and experiences during wartime, Veterans may experience culture shock.
Prior research has classified specific characteristics that are associated with military culture and military life (Hall, 2011; Ridenour, 1984). Ridenour (1984) identified core characteristics of military culture, which include frequent separations and reunions, regular household relocations, living life by the notion of the “mission must come first,” the need for families to adapt to rigidity, regimentation and conformity, early retirement from careers, rumors of loss during a mission, detachment from the mainstream of nonmilitary life, the security of a system that exists to meet the families’ needs, work that usually involves travel and adventure, the social effects of rank on the family, and the lack of control over pay, promotion, and other benefits. Ridenour (1984) also recognized that large segments of civilian society may also experience the previously mentioned characteristics. However, in the civilian world, these occurrences are usually not confronted all at once or altogether. In essence, although individuals in the civilian world may be able to relate to some of the experiences of military personnel, it is unlikely that these experiences have occurred to the same degree or capacity.

According to a survey conducted in 2011 by the Pew Research Center, civilian understanding of the military continues to decline as fewer serve in the military (Morin, 2011). Within this study, only 23% of Veterans surveyed indicated that they believe that the general public understands the unique problems that they experience. This lack of understanding may be due to a muted view on military culture and life, but may also be linked to less individuals serving within the military. Overall, approximately 8% of the U.S. population has served in the U.S. military at some point in time. Currently, less than 0.5% of the U.S. population has served in any capacity within the last 10 years (Meyer & Brim, 2016). This statistic is noteworthy as the U.S. is presently in the longest period of continuous war within its history.
Troops have continually returned to the United States from the wars in the Middle East. Upon return, many of these Veterans have decided to use their earned benefits by attending college (Elliott, 2015). Sander (2012) reported that at least one-half million Veterans used their post-9/11 GI bill benefits, which is expected to increase as Veterans come back to the U.S. Once Veterans return home, other stressors come into play, such as mental health concerns, finances, work-life balance, and adapting to academic culture (Elliott, 2015; Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). The transition from soldier to student is often a difficult one (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Burnette & Segoria, 2009; Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009).

By the time that Veterans enter a college campus, they have experienced socialization into a military culture that is markedly different from the culture in higher education (Tinoco, 2014; Vacchi, 2012). The environment that Veterans are accustomed to is one that is demanding in nature. Veterans have been conditioned by military standards, which have a large emphasis on discipline and teamwork (Vacchi, 2012). There are many expectations set for Veterans that may be helpful within a college environment, such as being habituated to meet or exceed expectations that are set for them. However, military culture and academic culture have considerable differences.

Accustomed to regimented military life, Veterans enter the college atmosphere to find that it is vastly different (Tinoco, 2014). Academic culture is generally considered more liberal, especially when compared to the military culture (Elliott, 2016; Hamilton & Hargens, 1993). The clash of these two atmospheres is demonstrated in multiple aspects. For example, individuals in the military are required to adhere to strict obedience. Within military service, all instructions are provided and questioning orders is rare (Tinoco, 2014). Conversely, college students are encouraged to challenge authority and question rules and practices (Elliott, 2016;
Vacchi, 2012). Additionally, military culture instills a belief that seeking help from others is a sign of weakness (Hall, 2011; Kim, Thomas, Wilk, Castro, & Hoge, 2010). Military culture is often unfamiliar to educators (Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobson, 2011). Furthermore, national surveys have indicated low military cultural competence and limited educational efforts on military culture (Meyer & Brim, 2016). Furthermore, Veterans may often be met with others’ ambivalent attitudes toward the wars (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). However, changes have started to occur on campuses as the institutions are working toward recognizing the importance of individualized support based on the unique needs of subsets within the student body (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). The most recent literature on Veterans within higher education has largely focused on the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, transitional issues, and student support services.

Military Culture Impacting College Enrollment in U.S. Colleges and universities in the United States have seen an increase in the number of student Veterans enrolling in higher education (Barry, Whiteman, Wadsworth, & Hitt, 2012). The Veterans Educational Act of 2008 enabled the most significant increase in education benefits for individuals in the service and Veterans since the original GI Bill of 1944 (O’Herrin, 2011). The Post-9/11 Bill was designed to create an incentive for service members to pursue higher education. In particular, the assistance covers tuition and fees for in-state public undergraduate education and provides a monthly housing stipend and an annual book stipend (O’Herrin, 2011). These benefits are meant to be attractive to Veterans, in an effort to promote persistence and degree attainment.

The new GI Bill has facilitated a shift within military culture toward a stronger emphasis on the importance of pursuing a degree in higher education. In fact, within the first year of the Bill’s enactment, approximately 500,000 Veterans applied for eligibility. Additionally, more
than 300,000 Veterans and family members used the benefits to attend classes (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). These statistics provide limited insight into the changes in the overall trends of matriculation for Veteran students. Enrollment has consistently been on the rise since the implementation of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Before the enactment of the Post-9/11 Bill, educational enrollment in the United States was influenced by the military changing to volunteer forces. The U.S. military began using educational benefits as incentive for recruitment (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). These benefits were appealing to individuals who lacked the financial resources to pursue a higher education on their own. The new, volunteer military gave soldiers the options of attending college right after high school or enrolling at a later date (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Since the change to an all-volunteer force, other factors have contributed to an increase in Veteran enrollment. Most prominently, the United States’ involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has played a role in the significant increase in Veterans registering for college and has also highlighted the unique challenges for this generation of service members (Kleykamp, 2013; O’Herrin, 2011).

The latest generation of soldiers has unique experiences in comparison to earlier generations of men who were enlisted due to the draft. Most significantly, this is the first generation of soldiers comprised only of volunteers to participate in wars on two fronts (Kleykamp, 2013). Today’s Veterans are more likely to be married and have children than their counterparts of earlier generations. Therefore, there is a greater pressure to enroll in college to build a better future. The effects of a difficult reintegration or inability to acculturate to civilian life has consequences that impact the Veteran’s community, significant other, and children (Kleykamp, 2013). These issues add support to why it is vital to examine different aspects of Veterans’ economic reintegration to civilian life, such as difficulties with career decision-
making. Additionally, Veterans may be reintegrating while trying to handle psychological concerns and physical injuries, which likely impact the usual challenges of college and navigating a future career.

**Significance of Increased Military Enrollment within College and Universities**

Troops are continually coming back to the United States after more than 15 years of participating in the Global War on Terror. As a result of this, it is expected that the number of Veterans enrolling in higher education will continue to be on the rise (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; McBain et al., 2012). However, despite the already increased participation rates of Veterans in colleges and universities, degree attainment remains obstinately low (Cate, 2014a; Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). Military students pose unique challenges to institutions of higher education. DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell (2008) stated that it is important to understand how military service shapes the disposition of Veterans who are students. Researchers must invest in better understanding this vulnerable population, and what can be done to ensure academic success in the college atmosphere and for career choices (Ellison, Southall, Clark, & Frankel, 2012; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011).

Since the military occupational culture is relatively isolated from the general society, it is important to recognize that it requires a considerable amount from service members (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006). For example, service members are usually on permanent, 24-hour call and must follow orders such as moving locations on short notice (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006). Unfortunately, these requirements are not always void after the Veterans return to civilian life. Therefore, institutions of higher education continually enroll military students who are simultaneously involved in both full-time coursework and part-time military service. Military students can potentially be called to active duty numerous times throughout their college
experience (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). These experiences likely result in interruptions for the student’s academic progress (Brown & Gross, 2011). They also make it difficult for Veteran students to communicate in a timely manner, work effectively with groups, and gain access to the class materials. Brown and Gross (2011) noted that university faculty may see military students as high maintenance or assume that they have special needs when compared to traditional students.

Recent research has emphasized that Veteran students commit to the military first and to higher education second (Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). This mindset and approach is likely much different than that of traditional students, and may be difficult to grasp for individuals not in the military. Raybeck (2010) reported that approximately 97% of college students, faculty, and administrators do not come from a military background. He went further by saying that, due to this lack of involvement, these individuals may be naïve about the military. Potentially as a byproduct, Veteran students often find that colleges and universities lack understanding of their educational needs (Brown & Gross, 2011). Though the influx of Veterans into institutions provides new opportunities for the enhancement of campus diversity, Veteran students encounter numerous problems stemming from the cultural clash between academics and the military (Raybeck, 2010).

Veterans are often challenged by the adjustment from military life to civilian life. Since these students are no longer in military uniform, they are not readily identified as military members or Veterans (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). This can further add to the isolation that Veteran students may feel when enrolled in college. Veterans who enter academia are commonly older and possess more work and life experience than traditional undergraduate college students (Hanafin, 2012). Acclimating to an environment of students who tend to be
younger and unfamiliar of what military service entails can be challenging (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Elliott, Gonzalez, Larsen, 2011; Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). Furthermore, there can be added strain to Veterans, as they are transitioning from a command atmosphere into an open college environment (Brown & Gross, 2011). For example, structuring their own schedule, challenging authority, and being their own bosses is antithetical to military training (Bauman, 2009). These compounding challenges of opposing cultures will only continue to be highlighted as enrollment of Veteran students continues to increase.

Many campuses are facing the issue of how to accommodate the growing population of military students (Grimes, Meehan, Miller, Mills, Ward, & Wilkinson, 2011). As more of these students enter higher education, it is likely that there will be a larger impact of military culture on academic culture. The larger military presence also has the potential to change the way colleges and universities address the needs of these nontraditional students. Setting course standards and expectations around traditional students can potentially further handicap nontraditional students (Brown & Gross, 2011). In recognizing the unique needs that Veterans possess, consideration must be taken to understand the best approach to support Veterans throughout their college experience (Grimes, Meehan, Miller, Mills, Ward, & Wilkinson, 2011). Potentially, identifying and creating additional methods of intervening in problematic academic and vocational characteristics will be beneficial for Veterans’ success.

**Veteran Students Experiencing Issues Related to Career**

The issues that Veteran students experience related to career are multifaceted. Many recent Veterans are pursuing vocational and educational interests to build a secure future upon their reintegration into civilian life (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Studies have demonstrated that many of these Veterans are choosing college as the next step in their career process. Research
has indicated that educational policies, such as the GI Bill detailed previously, motivate the newest generation of Veterans to enroll in college coursework (Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). There has been a continual increase in the desire for educational attainment within the military since the Vietnam War. Studies exploring the educational deficit for Vietnam Veterans indicated that they continued to lag behind nonveteran Americans regarding education (Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013). Furthermore, the most recent generation of Veterans is experiencing unemployment at rates higher than their nonveterans counterparts (Loughran, 2014).

It is well-documented that cultural-contextual factors have a strong influence on individuals’ career behaviors and outcomes (Mau, 2004). Inarguably, military culture has a strong impact on Veteran students’ lives. In order to obtain a full view on the experiences that Veteran students have related to career, it is imperative to understand how successfully recent Veterans are reintegrating into civilian life (Kleykamp, 2013). Veteran students commonly take a pragmatic attitude and approach toward higher education, and likely view it as a means to employment (Hanafin, 2012).

Although service members have received extensive training while in the military, the training consists of a narrow focus. As these individuals return to civilian life, they often attempt to build upon the skills they learned during their service to try to prepare for the civilian world of work (Tinoco, 2014). These specific skills may not be generalizable to available civilian jobs. Furthermore, Veterans who are reintegrating into civilian life likely experience numerous challenges and complications related to their past military service. Some of these challenges entail vocational issues and barriers, substance use disorders, physical disabilities, and mental health disorders (DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Kintzle, Schuyler, Ray-Letourbeau, Ozuna, Munch,
Xintarianos, & Castro, 2015; Morin, 2011). The unemployment rates are at historically high rates when compared to past Veterans (Loughran, 2014).

**Career Decision-Making Difficulties**

The choice of a career is one of the most important decisions that individuals will make within their lifetime. Career decisions are complex. It is imperative to document that career indecision and decision-making difficulties are different constructs (Gati et al., 1996). Career indecision consists of a broader area. Specifically, career indecision encompasses identifying sources of career indecision, such as decision-making difficulties (Gati et al., 1996). To address career decision-making difficulties, Gati and colleagues (1996) developed a model that combined theoretical framework and empirical testing. This approach aims to assist career counselors and professionals to identify types of difficulties encountered by students and will be discussed in depth within the proceeding sections.

Although some individuals are capable of making career decisions relatively easily, many others encounter difficulties prior to or during the decision-making process (Kleiman, Gati, Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 2004). Career decision-making difficulties (CDMD) are a common concern for college students, which carries considerable implications for both researchers and counselors. In fact, several studies have noted academic and career indecision as being a widespread problem among college students in many western countries (Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Kelly & Lee, 2002; Morgan & Ness, 2003). Furthermore, research has suggested that most college students do not have the knowledge and experience necessary to make a fully informed decision regarding choices for their career path (Kelly & White, 1993). Thus, career decision-making difficulties occur often within this population.

Difficulties in career decision making are important to properly address, as they may
result in avoiding the decision-making process altogether, stopping it, or in making a decision that is less than optimal (Gati et al., 1996). Yet, the majority of college programs have largely focused on the needs of traditional students (Luzzo, 1999; Mounty, 1991). Although CDMD occur throughout the college population, career counselors have noted that the process of engaging in career decision-making tasks and activities are of chief concern to nontraditional college students (Luzzo, 1999; Mounty, 1991).

Miller and Winston (1990) set out to establish a deeper understanding of the career decision-making differences that exist between nontraditional and traditional college students. The study labeled nontraditional students as students that were above the age of 25 years old. The authors concluded that these two categories of students have substantially different needs (Miller & Winston, 1990). Healy and Reilly (1989) conducted a study with almost 3,000 college students that investigated these differences more in depth. Participants within this study were instructed to rate their needs in seven career areas, ranging from knowing more about interests to selecting courses relevant to career goals (Healy & Reilly, 1989). The students provided a rating from major need, minor need, to no need at all. The study provided support to the idea that nontraditional student and traditional students experience significant differences in career decision-making (Healy & Reilly, 1989). Specifically, the study concluded that the highest needs of nontraditional students were in exploring courses related to talents and interests and in selecting courses related to goals.

Veteran students are usually older than traditional-aged students and are classified as nontraditional students (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016). Although the particular studies mentioned above focused on age as a separator between traditional and nontraditional students, there are multiple factors to consider when defining nontraditional students, or students with
nontraditional identities. For example, recent studies have indicated that approximately half (47%) of Veteran students are married and raising dependent children (Cate, 2014b). In addition, most student Veterans at least work part time while enrolled in college. Multiple studies have concluded that nontraditional students encounter additional stressors which likely require additional, alternative assistance and techniques when trying to intervene with academia and career.

**Career Decision-Making Difficulties for Veteran Students in U.S.** In general, difficulties in career decision making are among the most prevalent vocational problems (Amir & Gati, 2006; Osipow, 1999). As the number of nontraditional students continues to rise on college campuses across the nation, it continues to become increasingly important that researchers and counselors determine if traditional techniques are appropriate (Luzzo, 1999). Vondracek, Schulenberg, Skorikov, and Gillespie (1995) explored the connection between identity statuses and different kinds of career decisions. The authors found that membership within a specific identity status group was significantly related to the type and amount of career indecision. Additionally, recent research has concluded that there are many factors that can influence an individual’s choice of profession, including gender, skills, values, and culture (Korkut, 2008).

Past research has identified that there are specific academic concerns that Veteran students encounter, mainly of which pertain to transitioning from a structured military life to a non-structured college atmosphere (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Lack of assimilation to campus life may negatively impact academic and career outcomes. There is limited research on how such experiences influence student Veteran’s career decision-making (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016).

Previous research that has focused on CDMD for military students was conducted by
Gati (1999) on individuals in Israel. The majority of studies that have been conducted on veterans and military service members in regard to career decision-making difficulties have focused on individuals with compulsory military service in Israel. Furthermore, a large portion of these studies have been completed on adolescents in high school. However, there are stark differences between these individuals and the experience of the military service members and veterans of the United States. There are many different factors, such as average age and type of service, that occur for individuals in the U.S. Recent research has indicated that many Veterans do not participate in transition assistance programs and, therefore, later share many of the same career concerns (Simpson & Armstrong, 2009).

**Statement of the Problem**

Research literature suggests that Veteran students are in need of more effective, helpful resources regarding career within the college setting (Vacchi, 2012). Specifically, the literature demonstrates that current college resources are not properly addressing all of the unique needs of individuals within the military culture. Overall, there is a lack of understanding of detailed career related aspects of student Veterans in the United States. While many colleges have a student Veteran’s association, these programs may not be meeting the needs of Veterans in terms of career decision-making difficulties. Additionally, the military culture is not firmly understood and further exploration of unique military factors could lead to a better understanding of problems in career decision making difficulties. The proposed study seeks to examine the demographic variables and cultural factors of age, level of deployment, and combat experience within the student Veteran population, and gain an understanding of the relationship they have with career decision-making difficulties.
Significance of the Problem

Current literature overwhelmingly demonstrates that current college resources are not properly addressing all of the unique needs of individuals within the military culture (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Green & Hayden, 2013). There is an overall lack of understanding of detailed career related aspects of student Veterans in the United States (Green & Hayden, 2013). While many colleges have a student Veteran’s association, these programs may not be meeting the needs of Veterans in terms of career decision-making difficulties. If Veteran students are experiencing significant difficulties with career decision-making, negative vocational consequences may potentially follow. By recognizing the aspects of career decision-making that are difficult for Veteran students, an opportunity to prevent or intervene becomes feasible. If colleges and universities are able to identify difficulties that are specific to Veterans, they can implement more focused career interventions.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature to examine the specific challenges associated with career decision-making difficulties within the student Veteran population.

Theoretical Framework

Career decision-making (CDM) processes are referred to in career development theories such as Super’s life-span, Krumboltz’s social learning theory of career choice, Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman’s career decision-making model, Gottfredson’s career theory of circumscription and compromise, and Lent, Brown and Hackett’s social-cognitive perspective (Brown & Lent, 1996; Lent & Brown, 2013). Although measures were created to assess career indecision, there was limited effort to connect career indecision to the process of decision-making. Moreover, there was also a lack of a theoretical context for career indecision (Gati et al., 1996; Hall, 2011). As a result of this gap within research and literature, Gati et al. (1996) developed a model to conceptualize career decision-making difficulties with the aim of being able to identify problems experienced by the decision-maker. They proposed a taxonomy of multiple difficulties that could compromise the construct, positing that there is a group of problems that characteristically lead to the same outcome (Gati et al., 1996).
The taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties is premised on information and cognitive related career decision-making difficulties (Gati et al., 1996; Saka & Gati, 2007). The idea behind the proposed taxonomy is identifying potential difficulties that arise before and during the decision-making process. The advantage of using this theoretical framework is that the aim is to assist counseling professionals with identifying difficulties faced by students. Sepich (1987) ascertained that being capable of identifying the types of difficulties that students encounter has direct implications for counseling and interventions.

Decision Theory

Psychological decision theory aims to provide an orderly way to describe what variables influence choices. According to the framework of Decision Theory, career choice is essential when an individual is in the process of deciding which vocational alternatives to pursue (Gati & Levin, 2014). While in the process, the individual compares and assesses the options and alternatives using a variety of factors. It is assumed that the individuals making career decisions process information relevant to their goals (Jepsen & Dilley, 1974). The factors that are considered in these decisions range from accessibility to feasibility and may be different for every person. Thus, acknowledging each individual’s unique ways of making career decisions can facilitate in uncovering where decision-making difficulties exist (Gati & Levin, 2014).

A decision-making conceptual framework posits that there is a decision-maker, a decision situation, and relevant information being considered from both outside and within the individual (Jepsen & Dilley, 1974). Jepsen and Dilley (1974) state that information is arranged into decision-making concepts based on the function that it serves. Furthermore, this information is categorized per strategy so that the advantageous course of action can be readily recognized (Jepsen & Dilley, 1974). The authors further state that alternative actions are considered which
lead to outcomes, or consequences, being anticipated from each of the potential actions. The anticipated outcomes have two characteristics, which include probability and value. Probability is the likelihood of occurrence in the future, and value represents the importance to the decision-maker (Jepsen & Dilley, 1974). Decision theory comprises of versions of decision-making approaches, which are referred to in the next section.

**Career Decision Making**

Making a career decision is commonly understood as a central and complex task that many individuals encounter during their lifetime (Amir & Gati, 2006; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2006; Lancaster, Rudolph, Perkins, & Pattern, 1999; Osipow, 1999). During the process of career development, career decision-making refers to the important decisions that individuals that can potentially impact major areas of their future (Tien, 2001). Within vocational literature, the construct of career indecision is utilized to denote problems during the career decision making process (Crites, 1976). In today’s society, career paths are becoming less predictable and continually demand more decision-making from individuals (Krumboltz & Levin, 2010). Thus, issues surrounding career decisions are becoming more prevalent. There has been a recent shift from seeing career as a lifetime commitment, to seeing it as a series of choices and transitions (Fouad, 2007).

Fouad (2007) proposed that research in career decision-making can be separated into the two main areas of factors influencing career choices and how people make career choices. Research has focused on a wide array of factors that could potentially influence career choices. For example, much work has been done regarding development over lifespan and self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Super, 1957). Additionally, a considerable amount of research has highlighted the role of work personality on career decisions (Holland, 1958). Contextual factors
such as gender, sexual orientation, culture, and socioeconomic status have also been explored. However, for the purpose of this study, career decision-making will be examined regarding how people make career decisions.

There are many factors that contribute to the complexity and complications that are involved in career decision-making (Gati, 1986; Gati & Levin, 2014). Individuals often find themselves overwhelmed and may struggle with planning their professional future (Illouz, 2008). As a result, various models have been developed to explain this process. In order to be helpful in these scenarios, it is necessary to identify and examine the difficulties that impede career decision making. Specifically, facilitating in individuals’ career decision-making process can be better accomplished if each individual’s unique ways of making decisions regarding career are acknowledged and if the origin of difficulties is discovered (Gati & Levin, 2014).

There are many different aspects involved within the career decision-making process (Gati & Levin, 2014; Hilton, 1962; Katz, 1966). One of the main aspects is that there are numerous, diverse alternatives to choose from. Additionally, there are various factors to evaluate, such as work environment, length of training, and financial obligation (Gati & Levin, 2014). Another aspect to consider includes the uncertainty that exists regarding the current state of employment and the self. Career decision-making involves collecting information about one’s capabilities and preferences. However, most career decisions involve some degree of compromise (Gati & Levin, 2014). Career options may often be limited due to real or imagined social barriers. Lastly, it is important to recognize that individuals may worry about making the wrong choices related to career due to the importance they place on such decisions (Gati & Levin, 2014).
The challenge of coalescing information about oneself and the numerous career options is significant, and a considerable number of people feel ill prepared in handling this situation (Phillips & Jome, 2005; Sauermann, 2005). In order to help people with this difficult task, counselors began by trying to determine what was impeding the individual’s career decision making (Gati & Levin, 2014). Determining the problem facilitated in locating the foci of the difficulties that were being encountered within the process. Gati and Tal (2008) stated that individuals can make better decisions if they are provided with guidance while navigating through the process of choosing a career. Such guidance may be facilitated by utilizing the models of career decision-making described in the next section.

**Models of Career Decision-Making.** Models for understanding the process of career decision-making have been developed to gain insight into how decision-makers process information and make a decision. Career decision-making strategies have been categorized as being normative, descriptive/behavioral, and prescriptive (Gati, 2013; Gati & Tal, 2008; Jepsen & Dilley, 1974; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984). Normative decision-making models have their origin in statistical decision theory (Horan, 1990). This category of strategies demonstrates the importance of rationality. Furthermore, they aim at optimal decision making (Horan, 1990).

**Normative Decision-Making Models.** Normative models of decision-making assume that the individual should choose career options based off of maximum returns (Gati & Tal, 2008). They are based on the notion that humans are perfectly rational when making decisions. Thus, Gati and Tal (2008) posited that these models assume that individuals possess all information related to the decision at hand, can consider all potential outcomes of the decision, can estimate the value of each alternative, and can combine these values into a composite variable. The foundation of these models is evaluating each possible alternative per the variables
of subjective utility and probability. Furthermore, normative models consist of mathematical assumptions, and philosophical and psychological assumptions related to human nature (Gati & Tal, 2008).

Janis and Mann (1977) posited seven procedural criteria that display optimal CDM. The first criteria are that (1) one considers a wide variety of alternative courses of action, and that (2) all objectives and values inherent in the choice are considered. The authors stated that (3) one should consider the costs and risks that accompany each possible alternative, as well as (4) try to obtain new information so that the alternatives can be properly weighed. Even if the (5) new information does not support the choice that was preferred, it should be considered. Janis and Mann (1977) then stated that (6) all the consequences and outcomes should be re-evaluated, even if they were concluded to be unacceptable choices. Lastly, (7) a decision is made and plans for executing the choice are constructed. One may also refer to the alternatives that were considered within this process, should any risks recur (Janis & Mann, 1977).

**Descriptive Decision-Making Models.** Descriptive models are also commonly referred to as behavioral models (Gati & Tal, 2008; Jespen & Dilly, 1974). These models are usually based on principles that are good enough, rather than optimal. These models were created in an effort to describe how people make decisions, rather than focusing on how individuals should make decisions. Descriptive decision-making models consist of multiple strategies that individuals can utilize to make satisfactory decisions. These strategies include satisficing, quasi-satisficing, and incrementalism.

**Satisficing.** This strategy denotes decisions that are good enough by meeting some minimal requirements (Simon, 1967). An individual seeks out a decision that provides a satisfactory outcome, and does not consider alternatives once the decision is found. The idea is
that rather than maximizing, an individual satisfices. This strategy is often made when faced with minor decisions, and can be risky when employed in important decisions.

*Quasi-satisficing.* This strategy is often employed out of moral fulfilment. Janis and Mann (1977) stated that decisions are based on a moral rule. Therefore, decisions should not only be considered good enough but should also be morally justifiable. The moral justification is made based on the opinion of the decision-maker.

*Incrementalism.* Janis and Mann (1977) specified that this strategy involves small, or incremental, decisions being made that are not much different from the current situation. The authors stated that this strategy is used to alleviate insufficiencies in one’s situation. As complex cognitive thinking is avoided, this approach is not used to make radical changes (Janis & Mann, 1977).

The critique of descriptive models of career decision-making is that individuals do not solely rely on rational techniques while making decisions. Furthermore, Gati and Tal (2008) reported that individuals are vulnerable to cognitive biases which can lead to less than optimal decisions. Descriptive models inherently require that the decision-maker has in-depth knowledge about oneself. Additionally, they necessitate that the decision-maker has the ability to process information within a hierarchy of criteria, which entails being aware of alternative options and the consequences of decisions (Krieshok, 1998). This is important to note, as even when rational decisions are attempted, individuals are prone to errors (Bodden, 1970).

*Prescriptive Decision-Making Models.* Prescriptive models aim to offer a framework for a systematic process for making better decisions while acknowledge the limitation of human rationality (Gati & Tal, 2008; Gelatt, 1962; Janis & Mann, 1977). Gati and Tal (2008) claimed that prescriptive models minimize the disadvantages of normative and descriptive models while
incorporating their advantages. Two common prescriptive decision-making models are the Sequential Elimination Model (SEM) and the Prescreening In-depth Exploration of Choice (PIC) Model (Gati, 1986; Gati, 2013; Gati & Asher, 2001a; Gati & Tal, 2008). This model was proposed to demonstrate the pragmatic value of facilitating decision-making.

*Sequential elimination model.* Tversky’s (1972) Elimination by Aspects model proposed that the individual arrives at a decision by methodically evaluating a hierarchy of criteria from the most important to least. After the decision-maker works through the hierarchy, they arrive at a decision (Tversky, 1972). Working from Tversky’s model of decision-making, Gati (1986) developed the SEM. SEM suggests that decisions are made through a process of sequential elimination, which allows the decision-maker to eliminate a choice if it does not meet a specific criterion (Gati, 1986). First, the individual identifies the decision problem and then recognizes the advantages and disadvantages of the accompanying aspects of each choice. Afterward, the individual ranks the aspects in order of importance or priority. Optimal and acceptable levels for each identified aspect is then considered (Gati, 1986). Each aspect is evaluated by priority and alternatives that do not have acceptable levels are discarded. These discarded alternatives are examined again to ensure that acceptable choices were not ignored. Additional information is gathered on the remaining alternatives, and they are ranked per desirability. Lastly, steps for employing the most preferred alternative are taken.

*Prescreening in-depth exploration of choice (PIC) model.* Gati and Asher (2001b) created the PIC model, an extension of SEM. The authors posited that the core of the career decision-making process is to connect well-suited alternatives with what the individual enjoys and is capable of (Gati & Asher, 2001b). The first stage in this model is pre-screening (P), which is based on the elimination-by-aspects strategies by Tversky (1972) presented earlier. Unfavorable
alternatives are rejected, and acceptable alternatives are kept, and are then ranked from most to least important. The next stage is in-depth (I) exploration of favorable alternatives, where the individual gathers additional information to determine which matches the individual’s requirements (Gati & Asher, 2001a). Finally, the third stage is choosing (C) the most suitable alternative. The individual processes prior information that has been gathered and makes a decision.

Each of these aforementioned models demonstrate the complexity of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the models emphasize the need for methods to adequately describe the process of decision-making. Decision making takes place in unpredictable environments in which uncertainty often exists (Gelatt, 1989). It is now commonly accepted that decisions are not made in a pure linear fashion, rather as a process. Within this process, information is arranged and rearranged to make the best decisions possible for the individual (Gelatt, 1989).

**The Taxonomy of Difficulties in Career Decision Making**

There have been various theoretical approaches used to address career indecision, each of which highlights different aspects. These approaches were developed out of a response to Tinsley’s (1992) call for more theoretically-based research on career indecision (Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015). Gati et al. (1996) developed the taxonomy of career-decision making difficulties in an effort to expand previous theoretical and empirical research. The taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making is based off of Decision Theory. This taxonomy was created to highlight how complex the decision-making process can be. Relying on Decision Theory, Gati and colleagues (1996) developed a model of an ideal career decision maker (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). The ideal career decision maker has been described as aware of the need to
make a career decision and can make a decision that is based on an appropriate process and is compatible with the individual’s capabilities and preferences (Gati & Soka, 2001).

The classification system that Gati and colleagues (1996) proposed is hierarchic. Within the structure, broad groupings of career difficulties are separated into categories and then subcategories based on finer distinctions (Tien, 2001). Based on a sample of Israeli young adults and American university students, they developed the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making by categorizing difficulties according to those experienced before beginning the process, and those experienced during the process. The idea behind the proposed taxonomy is identifying potential difficulties that arise before and during the decision-making process. These potential difficulties are divided into three major clusters, which are then further subdivided into ten categories (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). The categories are not independent of one another, and therefore, individuals may experience difficulties in more than one category. The three clusters comprise (a) Lack of Readiness, (b) Lack of Information, and (c) Inconsistent Information. Each of the clusters classifies different types of difficulties that may arise either prior to entering the decision-making process or once an individual is engaged in the decision-making process itself (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). The first cluster, Lack of Readiness, includes three difficulty categories that may arise prior to the career decision-making process. These three categories include (1) lack of motivation to engage in career decision making, (2) general indecisiveness concerning all types of decisions, and (3) dysfunctional beliefs, which may consist of irrational expectations and thoughts about career decision-making (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016).

Both the second and the third clusters categorize difficulties that may arise while an individual is engaged in the decision-making process. The second cluster, Lack of Information, consists of four different categories which include (4) lack of knowledge about the steps
involved in the career decision-making process, (5) lack of information about the self, (6) lack of information about the various potential occupations or majors, and (7) lack of information about the ways of obtaining additional information (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). The third major cluster includes three categories, involving Inconsistent Information, due to (8) unreliable information, (9) internal conflict, and (10) external conflicts (Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015).

The validity of the taxonomy has been empirically tested and supported using the Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 2000; Gati et al., 1996; Kelly & Lee, 2002; Mau, 2001; Osipow & Gati, 1998, Tien, 2001). Various studies have demonstrated that career decision-making difficulties are associated with multiple facets of career characteristics and outcomes (Fouad et al., 2006; Gati, Gadassi, Saka, Hadadi, Ansenberg, Friedmann, & Asulin-Peretz, 2010; Kleiman et al., 2004). The taxonomy and CDDQ have been tested and validated in Eastern and Western cultures, such as White, African, Hispanic, and Asian American (Gati et al., 1996; Tien, 2001; Sovet, Tak, & Jung, 2015; Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015; Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). Additionally, they have been utilized and validated for various age-groups (DiFabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Fouad et al., 2006; Gati & Saka, 2001; Levin, & Gati, 2014; Mau, 2001). Although the validity of the career decision-making taxonomy has received wide support, its cultural implications and relevancy remain relatively unexamined (Mau, 2004). As a result of this, research has started investigating cultural differences using the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties and the CDDQ (Mau, 2001; Sovet, Tak, & Jung, 2015; Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015). Following this line of research, the present study focused on career decision-making difficulties for Veteran students.

**Empirical Support for the Taxonomy.** The majority of the research pertaining to CDM has characterized the construct as a developmental task of adolescence (Crites, 1976; Super &
Careers are no longer seen as solely being long-term and stable, with numerous people entering and exiting many jobs in their lifetime. As a result of this, CDM is increasingly being recognized as an ongoing experience within an individual’s vocational involvement.

Career decision-making constructs are being examined for older workers as well as for young individuals who are making entry-level career choices (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Research is now recognizing that the main categories within career decision-making difficulties are being experienced by people of a variety of ages. As reported previously, difficulties in career decision-making is representative of multidirectional influences (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996).

**Empirical Support with Adolescent Samples.** Albion and Fogarty (2002) compared the career decision-making difficulties questionnaire across two age cohort groups. The first group consisted of 121 students from eleventh and twelfth grade, 78 of which were girls and 43 of which were boys. The second group comprised 127 adults who ranged in age from 18 to 65 years old. Within the 127 adults, 86 were female and 41 were male (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Adults reported fewer problems regarding lack of motivation. The subscale of Lack of Information presented as a single dimension for both age groups, which demonstrates that when people believe they have problems due to lack of knowledge, they likely view it as a global concern about their ignorance of the process (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Overall, results from this study indicated that most problems individuals experienced were related to their adherence to dysfunctional myths about careers and to their lack of information. The authors concluded that the model fit both age groups, signifying that there is a common pattern of difficulties experienced by individuals of all ages (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Albion and Fogarty (2002) provided support for the notion that career decision-making difficulties are an important area to investigate for individuals of all ages, rather than focusing all efforts on young adults and
adolescents. Additionally, this study highlighted the similarities and differences across age cohorts.

Mau (2004) investigated the cultural dimensions of career decision-making difficulties based on race: White, African, Hispanic, and Asian American high school and university students at U.S. schools. In this study, the sample population comprised 361 (158 boys and 203 girls) at two public high schools with an average age of 15.9 years ($SD = 1.3$; age range 13 to 20). The class divisions represented in the study were 114 freshmen, 67 sophomores, 101 juniors, and 76 seniors (with 3 participants not responding). The racial composition of the sample was predominately White (162), followed by African American (59), Hispanic American (45), Asian American (14), and 81 participants who fell into other categories, such as Native Americans, exchange students, and those who did not report ethnicity (Mau, 2004). A statistically significant difference was found regarding race/ethnicity. Asian American students reported significantly greater difficulties than students who identified as White American, African American, and Hispanic American (Mau, 2004). This study highlighted the need for recognizing cultural differences in the difficulties of career decision-making tasks.

Germeijs, Verschueren, and Soenens (2006) examined how indecisiveness as part of the career decision-making process relates to the process of choosing a study in higher education. The sample population comprised 281 adolescent students in their last year in high school. A three-wave, longitudinal design was implemented, with students receiving the same two questionnaires at the beginning, middle, and end of their last school year. The sample mean age was 17 years 3 months at the first wave. The results of this study demonstrate that indecisiveness may be considered a risk factor for future coping with several career decisional tasks (Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006). Higher levels of indecisiveness at the
beginning of Grade 12 predicted lower levels of the perceived amount of information about oneself and the environment. Furthermore, these higher levels of indecisiveness also predicted lower levels of decisional status at the end of Grade 12. The authors found that indecisiveness had a negative effect on the degree of commitment with the chosen study when students were at the end of Grade 12.

Individuals usually make their first career-related decisions at some point during adolescence (Gati & Saka, 2001). Adolescent students often must make decisions regarding educational and vocational opportunities. Gati and Saka (2001) were interested in examining these decisions, plus the additional decision of choosing the type of army service the adolescent prefers, for Israeli high school students. The authors investigated career decision-making difficulties among 1,843 Israeli adolescents in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade (Gati & Saka, 2001). The sample consisted of 579 students from 9th grade, 687 from 10th grade, and 477 students from 11th grade. The authors concluded that boys reported higher difficulties than girls in external conflicts and dysfunctional beliefs. Additionally, they highlighted that countries with different characteristics, such as countries that do not have compulsory military service, could potentially have different difficulty categories or decision tasks.

Constantine, Wallace, and Kindaichi (2005) examined perceived occupational barriers (i.e. career decision-making difficulties) and perceived parental support and their prediction on career certainty and career indecision. The sample was 151 African American upper level high school students, comprised 88 girls and 63 boys. The participants had a mean age of 16.67 years, ranging in age from 15 to 18. The participants were juniors (39.1%) and seniors (60.9%). All of the participants indicated that they were United States natives. Results suggested that perceived occupational barriers were positively predictive of career indecision, and perceived parental
support was positively associated with career certainty for the sample. These results provide recognition for the importance of considering contextual variables, such as perceived occupational barriers and perceived parental support, in the career decision-making processes of African American adolescents (Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005).

Each of these studies provides evidence for further investigation into the unique aspects of decision-making difficulties. Germeijls, Verschueren, and Soenens (2006) demonstrated that subcategories of career decision-making difficulties, specifically indecisiveness, may be predictive of, and risk factor, for future concerns. The study conducted by Gati and Saka (2001) confirmed that there are gender differences regarding career decision-making difficulties. Furthermore, their research suggested the need to investigate characteristics specific to other countries, as they offered the idea that there may be differences. Lastly, Constantine, Wallace, and Kindaichi (2005) confirmed the necessity to consider contextual variables in the career decision-making processes.

**Empirical Support within College Samples.** Mau (2004) investigated cultural dimensions of career decision-making difficulties among 513 undergraduate students from an urban university in the midwestern United States. The sample was 198 men and 310 women, with 5 that did not report gender. The sample had a mean age of 22 years, and ages ranged 15 to 54 years (Mau, 2004). The year of study was separated as follows: 296 freshmen, 118 sophomores, 49 juniors, 42 seniors, and 3 unknowns. The racial composition was predominately White (381) followed by African American (37). The results suggested that Asian American students, both high school and college aged, perceived significantly more difficulties in career decision-making than other groups (Mau, 2004). The Asian American students reported more difficulties than White and Hispanic American students before the career-decision making process, and more
difficulties than White and African American students during the process (Mau, 2004). The
White American students perceived the fewest career-decision making difficulties. Mau’s (2004)
article confirmed the need to examine cultural influences when considering career decision-
making difficulties. This article emphasized the differences that can potentially occur across
cultural affiliations regarding the decision-making process.

Saunders and colleagues (2000) investigated dysfunctional career thinking as a component of career indecision among 215 undergraduate students from a large southwestern university. The sample comprised 55 (26%) males and 160 (74%) females of which 158 (73.5%) were Caucasian, 25 (11.6%) African Americans, and 14 (6.5%) Hispanic, Latin Americans. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 25 years. The study determined that dysfunctional career myths are significantly associated with the state of career indecision, and was also significantly associated with vocational identity, state and trait anxiety, locus of control, and depression (Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000). The authors hypothesized that dysfunctional career thinking will provide additional information about the nature of career indecision. Furthermore, they argued that it is important to effectively address dysfunctional career thinking in order to move forward in the decision-making process (Saunders et al., 2000).

Kleiman, Gati, Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, and Lenz (2004) examined the relationship between two measures of career readiness and difficulties, as well as the relations between the measures regarding the individual’s decidedness about career path. The measures investigated were Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996) and the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati et al., 1996). The study comprised 192 university students, of which 93 were male and 109 were female. The majority of the sample consisted of Caucasians (73%) and African Americans (11%). Of the
participants, 12 (6%) were freshmen, 93 (46%) were sophomores, 51 (25%) were juniors, 45 (22%) were seniors, and 1 individual was a graduate student. The mean age of the sample was 20.17 years. Kleiman and colleagues (2004) concluded that participants with a higher degree of decidedness reported lower levels of difficulties. Furthermore, they reported that both the CTI and the CDDQ were able to distinguish among individuals at different stages of the career decision-making process. They found class-year differences in lack of readiness due to indecisiveness. The most salient difference existed when comparing seniors with sophomores, which was evidenced by seniors reporting lower levels of various difficulties. These results provide support for Tinsley and colleagues’ (1989) claim that younger students are more undecided than older students (Kleiman et al., 2004). Furthermore, the authors posited that the CTI and the CDDQ were successful in locating specific difficulties faced by decision-makers for aspects of their lack of readiness. They suggested that future research should conduct further evaluations involving an individual’s unique characteristics (Kleiman et al., 2004).

Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz, and Gati (2013) investigated the differences between career indecision and career-indecisiveness constructs. Indecisiveness is known as the outcome of a history in which a person has not attained the necessary skills, knowledge, or abilities to cope with vocational decision making or other common problems (Holland & Holland, 1977). The authors included associations between career indecision and indecisiveness through personality traits, career decision-making self-efficacy, perceived social support, and emotional intelligence. The sample consisted of 361 University of Florence students where 187 were women and 174 were men. The participants’ median age was 24.04 years, and ages ranged from 23 to 27 years old (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz, & Gati, 2013). The dominant majors of the sample were psychology (9.4%), natural sciences (9.1%), and law (9.1%).
The racial makeup showed that the participants were predominantly White Italians from middle-class backgrounds. The study results suggested that career indecision is most highly associated with emotional intelligence, whereas career indecisiveness is most highly associated with personality traits, specifically emotional stability (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz, & Gati, 2013). For both women and men, the rate of predictability was stronger for indecision over indecisiveness.

Kelly and Shin (2008) examined the correlates of chronic career indecision through effects of neuroticism and negative career thoughts, and feelings on lack of information. Lack of information is one of the core elements of chronic career indecision, and of career decision-making difficulty (Kelly & Shin, 2008). The sample included 310 first-semester students, of which 149 were female and 161 were male. These students were enrolled in an academic and career planning class at a large Midwestern university. In order to be enrolled in this course students need to enter the university without a decided major of study. The average age of the participants was 18.17 years. The participant sample was predominately European American (86.1%) followed by Asian American (5.6%) and less than 5% identified as being Latino American, international, and African American students, respectively. Results from this study suggested that negative career thoughts and negative career feelings explained a large amount of the variance in lack of information for career decision-making (Kelly & Shin, 2008). The influence of reported levels of neuroticism on lack of information was indirect and fully mediated by negative career thoughts and feelings.

Lease (2004) explored racial and academic type group differences among career locus of control, career-related mentoring, career decision-making difficulty, and work-related knowledge. For the study, 433 college students were recruited of whom 294 were women and
were men. The racial makeup of these participants was 180 African American and 253 White students (Lease, 2004). There were 42 other respondents from other racial makeup, but the study excluded these participants prior to analysis. Student participants were from 4, two-year community colleges that offered both associate degrees and technical certificates of credit in a variety of academic areas \((n = 23, 34, 67, \text{ and } 53)\), three were private liberal arts colleges with one being a predominantly Black college \((n = 10, 47, \text{ and } 76)\), and one was a state university \((n = 123)\). Participants’ average age was 23.62 years with a range in age from 16 to 62 years.

Research findings suggested that African American students reported greater work knowledge but a more external locus of control than their White student counterparts (Lease, 2004). Further, an external career locus of control was associated with decision-making difficulties. However, White students reported greater career decision-making difficulty than African American students. The author reported that race and type of academic institution did not moderate the relationships between locus of control, work knowledge, and career decision-making difficulties.

Botha and Mostert (2013) compared university students with low and high career uncertainty to determine what the significant predictors were. A total of 782 university students participated in the study. They were categorized as either certain \((n = 644)\) or uncertain \((n = 135)\). The sample consisted of 91.2% of Caucasian participants and 64.3% females. The participants were between the ages of 21 and 29 (Botha & Mostert, 2013). The results found that there were multiple statistically significant predictors for career uncertainty. Lack of information about the decision-making process, lack of information about occupations, inconsistent information due to internal conflict, exhaustion, lack of information about ways of obtaining information, inconsistent information due to external conflict, cynicism, and lack of dedication were all statistically significant predictors.
Morgan and Ness (2003) examined the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties with a sample of Canadian university students in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy, sex-role identification, and stage of identity development. The sample comprised 149 first-year students, of which 62% were women and 38% were men. The majority of the participants (48.3%) were 18 years of age, and 80% were 19 years of age and younger (Morgan & Ness, 2003). Within the sample, 73% indicated that they identified as Caucasian, 8.7% were Asian, and the remaining individuals indicated other responses. The results of the study indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between career decision-making difficulties and self-efficacy. The authors reported that as the CDDQ (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996) is also related to career decision-making self-efficacy provides support for the construct validity of this instrument (Morgan & Ness, 2003). Additionally, the study found that sex-role identification can be an important variable in the career decision-making process. This study offers evidence for the necessity to examine unique factors in relation to career decision-making difficulties.

Mau (2001) examined the validity of the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996) in relation to its cultural relevance. In the study the relationships between career decision-making difficulties and career indecision were also examined in relation to two cultural groups, United States and Taiwanese university students. The sample consisted of 1,566 participants with 540 undergraduate students from the United States at a large Midwestern university. The sample comprised 212 men, 323 women, and 5 who did not respond (Mau, 2001). The average age was 22 years, with ages ranging from 15 to 54 years. Most the participants were freshmen students (58%) followed by sophomores (23%), juniors (10.3%), and seniors (8.3%). The racial-ethnic composition showed predominantly Caucasian, which consisted of 74% of the sample (Mau, 2001). The Taiwanese
sample consisted of 1,026 undergraduate students from 13 universities in 53 different fields of study. The sample population consisted of 474 men, 549 women, and 3 who did not respond (Mau, 2001). The participants’ average age was 19.9 years, with ages ranging from 17 to 28. The results suggested that in comparison to the United States students, Taiwanese students report experiencing more difficulties in career decision-making and tend to be more indecisive in their career decision-making than U.S. students (Mau, 2001).

Fan, Cheung, Leong, and Cheung (2014) examined cultural differences in relation to the contributions of perceived family intrusiveness to CDMD. Their sample consisted of 1,563 Hong Kong college students, which had 551 men and 1,012 women. The participants were from all nine Hong Kong universities. The average age of the participants was 20.43, with ages ranging from 17 to 30. The study focused on 796 freshman and 767 sophomore students. The second group of participants was from a Midwest university in the U.S. The participants were 329 freshmen and 38 sophomores, consisting of 292 women and 75 men. The average age of the participants was 19.24 years, and ranged from 18 to 23. Of the U.S. students the majority were White (75%) followed by less than 7% for each African Americans, international students, and Asian/Pacific Islanders. The results suggested that that perceived family intrusiveness significantly contributed to CDMD, which was mediated by the relational personality traits. In relation to the cultural differences, the research suggested that the significant influences of family orientation were only supported in the Hong Kong sample and not by the U.S. participation sample (Fan, Cheung, Leong, & Cheung, 2014).

**Empirical Support for Adult Samples.** Currently, the literature has displayed an increasing interest in studying individual variables associated with the career decision-making process (DiFabio, Palazzeschi, & Bar-On, 2012; Nilsson, Flores, Berkel, Schale, Linnemeyer, &
Summer, 2007). For example, researchers have investigated the role of personality traits in
career decision-making processes (Saka & Gati, 2007; Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008). Di Fabio and
Palazzeschi (2009) investigated the role of emotional intelligence and personality traits in
relation to career decision difficulties among 296 young, Italian workers ranging in age from 18
to 29 years old. The sample comprised 179 males and 117 females, with a mean age of 21.09.
The authors reported that the traits of extraversion and emotional stability have inverse
relationships with career decision-making difficulties (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009). The
notion is now relatively accepted that individuals who are more emotional stable likely
experience less career decision-making difficulties before and during the process (Albion &
Fogarty, 2002).

Saka, Gati and Kelly (2008) investigated and validated a theoretical framework for
analyzing the emotional and personality-related aspects of career-decision-making
difficulties. In their model there were three main clusters: pessimistic views, anxiety, and self-
concept and identity. In the study there were 728 Israeli participants, of which 34.9% were
males and 65.1% were females with an average age of 21.87 years. Ages ranged in years from 19
to 30). There were 276 U.S. college students, 128 males and 148 females, from a large Midwest
university. The participants mean age was 19.9 years. The racial makeup of these participants
was 238 Caucasian, 20 Asian American, 18 Hispanic, and 8 African-American participants. All
students were freshman enrolled in a career-development course, which required undecided
major status to enroll. The results provided evidence for cross-cultural validity of the proposed
model, using a college student sample from the United States (Saka, Gati, & Kelly,
2008). Furthermore, the authors stated that the cross-cultural validation uncovered diverse
expression and effects of career decision-making difficulties in cultures that have divergent
educational and occupational systems (Saka, Gati, & Kelly, 2008). One such difference was the stage of life at which major career decisions are considered, which revealed that individuals from the U.S. typically begin considering career choices at a younger age.

The aforementioned research provides support for several different concepts regarding career decision-making difficulties. Of importance to the current proposed study, the research establishes the rationale to investigate adults within college and university populations. These studies also demonstrate that there is a need to investigate various unique factors that may play a role in career decision-making difficulties, such as differences seen related to gender, age, and culture (Fan, Cheung, Leong, & Cheung, 2014; Kleiman et al., 2004; Lease, 2004; Mau, 2001; Morgan & Ness, 2003). Additionally, multiple studies highlighted the impact that individual experiences may have within the decision-making process, including aspects such as personality traits (Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, Asulin-Peretz, & Gati, 2013; Kelly & Shin, 2008).

**Concerns within College Populations**

Making a career decision is a complex task (Amir & Gati, 2006). Career decision-making is one of the most studied issues within vocational psychology (Amir & Gati, 2006; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984; Osipow, 1999). These decisions regarding career are made throughout different stages of life. Career decisions involve selecting a role from nearly limitless professions and making the decision to pursue that particular field (Kuzgun, 2000; Tagay, 2014). Career decision-making necessitates collecting information about one’s preferences and capabilities and the various options that are available for career paths. Subsequently, individuals must process this gathered information. The literature has demonstrated that many individuals, especially younger adults and college students, do not feel capable of properly doing this (Gati & Levin, 2014; Phillips & Jome, 2005; Sauermann, 2005; Tien, 2001).
Although these decisions can come rather easily for some, they can be difficult for others (Sauermann, 2005). In fact, many individuals encounter difficulties before or during the decision-making process (Campbell & Cellini, 1981; Gati et al., 1996; Phillips & Jome, 2005; Rounds & Tinsley, 1984; Sauermann, 2005). Amir and Gati (2006) suggested that if these difficulties are not adequately addressed, the individual could potentially be prevented from making any decision or could lead to an unfavorable choice. It is imperative to locate where the difficulties in career decision-making occur in order to intervene appropriately. Furthermore, identifying these problem areas is critical for college and university students, as they are directly confronted with making decisions about which career path to follow (Morgan & Ness, 2003).

For the college population, decisions related to career are some of the most important they will ever make in their lives (Tagay, 2014). Recent research has indicated that if an individual is able to effectively make career decisions, it can lead to an increase in satisfaction with life and help an individual feel good (Çolakkadioğlu & Güçray, 2007). Çolakkadioğlu and Güçray (2007) Conversely, regretting or making the wrong career choice can have financial and psychological consequences (Gati & Amir, 2010). It is important to note that most career development and career counseling programs within colleges and universities focus on the needs of traditional students (Luzzo, 1999). These students are typically between the ages of 18 and 22 and are not likely generalizable to the student Veteran and military population.

College students often experience career indecision and related career decision-making difficulties. Difficulties are often experienced since college students encounter a variety of developmental tasks within their college career (Fouad et al., 2006). Fouad and colleagues (2006) examined whether university students were psychologically distressed of had difficulties to indicate whether they needed career services, whether they were aware of the services offered.
by the campus counseling and career services, and whether they used the services. The sample consisted of 694 university students, 38% were men and 62% were women. The majority of the sample was Caucasian (77%). Results indicated that students felt a lack of readiness to make a decision. Within this scale, students rated dysfunctional beliefs as the greatest career decision-making difficulty (Fouad et al., 2006). Furthermore, lack of information about stages of career development process and lack of obtaining information about occupations were also found to be areas of difficulty. Students additionally indicated they were concerned with external and internal conflicts. This study demonstrates the various areas college students experience issues with regarding career decision-making difficulties (Fouad et al., 2006).

**Issues Specific to Veterans**

Veterans who attend college are likely to encounter numerous challenges (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). As the student Veteran population continues to increase, it is vital to understand experiences and characteristics that may set them apart from the traditional student body. Previous literature pertaining to Veteran students has primarily focused on mental health concerns. Specifically, much of the literature examines mental health concerns such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), major depression, and substance abuse following deployment (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Ingala, 2012). Tanielian and Jaycox (2008) stated that 20% of returning service members from Iraq and Afghanistan reported experiencing symptoms of PTSD or major depression. Of importance, many Veterans return with mental health concerns yet less than 50% receives any mental health treatment (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

For service members who have been deployed, there are numerous psychological issues that arise. For example, there is a high percentage of these Veterans coming home with PTSD and traumatic brain injury (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Several studies have reported that
multiple deployments correlate with more severe psychological concerns (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Sundin and colleagues (2014) investigated the prevalence of PTSD, hazardous alcohol consumption, aggressive behavior, and multiple physical symptoms in U.S. and United Kingdom (U.K.) military personnel deployed to Iraq. Data utilized in this study were collective from one U.S. \((n = 1560)\) and one U.K. \((n = 313)\) study that examined post-deployment mental health in military members who were deployed to Iraq in 2007 and 2008. Soldiers from the U.S. who were deployed to Iraq consistently had higher rates of mental health problems, specifically PTSD. Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan has been associated with increased rates of alcohol misuse and with aggressive behaviors for both samples (Sundin et al., 2014). The authors proposed that the differences found between the U.S. sample and U.K. sample were likely due to differences in experiences, such as levels of combat exposure and length of deployment.

Furthermore, results indicated that the U.S. sample was older and more likely to have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. sample who were deployed were less likely to report having career intentions of staying in the military (Sundin et al., 2014). In acknowledging this information, it becomes imperative to investigate deployment information when assessing Veteran demographics.

Although they are aware of the risks accompanying military service, many individuals are likely to encounter unpredicted struggles subsequent to the end of their military service (Karney, Ramchand, Osilla, Caldarone, & Burns, 2008). Previous research has examined the characteristics of military culture and has concluded that they frequently lead to negative psychological traits (Wertsch, 1991). These challenges often result in an increased risk of Veterans developing problematic health outcomes and behaviors, which may result in negative social actions. For example, Veterans report negative consequences such as facing legal
problems, having problems with substance use, and handling social stigma (DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Kleykamp, 2013). Kleykamp (2013) examined unemployment, earnings, and college enrolment for Veterans using the Current Population Survey (CPS) data from 2005 to 2011. The CPS surveys approximately 60,000 households each month and serves as the primary source of national labor force statistics in the United States. Results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in unemployment between Veterans and non-Veterans. The study also reported that female Veterans experience a more severe employment penalty than male Veterans, and black Veterans experience less of a penalty when compared to white Veterans. Additionally, Veterans have reported unique concerns related to their psychological adjustment difficulties potentially having negative consequences on future career opportunities (Litz & Orsillo, 2004).

Past research has identified that there are specific academic concerns that Veteran students encounter, mainly of which pertain to transitioning from a structured military life to a non-structured college atmosphere (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Mares & Rosencheck, 2004). Lack of assimilation to campus life may negatively impact academic and career outcomes. Additionally, recent research has also focused on academic preparation, engagement, and achievement (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). In a study focused on 25 students who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) found that academic preparation for college was deficient for many of these individuals. The authors reported that this deficiency applied to Veteran students who were returning to campus to recommence their studies and for those who were entering college for the first time.

Joanning (1975) investigated the academic performance of Veterans at the University of Iowa and concluded that Veterans earned a higher grade point average (GPA) than their nonveteran counterparts. It is important to note that the sample in this study focused solely on
Vietnam era Veterans and that there was not a differentiation between military service and combat (Joanning, 1975). Multiple studies have determined that Veterans do not attain a 4-year college degree at the same rate as non-Veterans (Card, 1983; Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013).

Yet, there is limited research on how such experiences influence student Veterans’ career decision-making (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). However, studies have shown that academic achievement and behavior within an educational atmosphere can be influenced by students’ physical and mental health (Ellison et al., 2012; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011; Shea & Fishback, 2012). This is important to recognize when considering the state in which Veteran students are entering college. For example, research has reported that the most recent generation of Veterans is more likely than previous generations to survive battlefield injuries, possibly as a result of improvements in protective gear and medical technology (Gawande, 2004). Therefore, these individuals are also more likely to experience lasting psychological and physical problems (Clark, Scholten, Walker, & Gironda, 2009; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Warden, 2006).

Some Veterans are returning with combat-related disabilities, which may complicate enrolling and succeeding in college (Elliot, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). It has been reported that the wars fought in Afghanistan and Iraq are the most sustained combat operations since the Vietnam War (Litz & Orsillo, 2004). As a result of this, it is common that Veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom have reported experiencing physical ailments such as post-concussive traumatic brain injury, vision loss, or hearing loss (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). These concerns are important to address as they can negatively influence cognitive functioning, such as focus and memory, which can impact academic success. Additionally, research has identified
that chronic pain from such physical traumas correlates with an increased rate of PTSD (Clark, Scholten, Walker, & Gironda, 2009).

Approximately one quarter of returning Operation Iraqi Freedom (or Operation Enduring Freedom) Veterans have reported experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress, PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). PTSD in Veterans has been reported to contribute to problems with poor physical health, alcohol abuse, poor family relationships, and issues with intimacy (Hoge, Terhakopian, Castro, Messer, & Engel, 2007; Hoge, McGurk, Thomas, Cox, Engel, & Castro, 2008; Jacobsen, Ryan, Hooper, Smith, Amoroso, Boyko, & Bell, 2008; McDevitt-Murphy, Williams, Bracken, Fields; Dekel, Enoch, & Solomon, 2008; Galovski & Lyons, 2004; Ray & Vanstone, 2009). These significant issues resulting from war can weigh heavily on Veterans’ abilities to be successful in school (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011).

The results of previous research have emphasized that Veterans face specific academic concerns such as assimilating to campus life and lack of support within universities (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). Furthermore, the National Survey of Student Engagement (2010) reported that student Veterans were less engaged in academic activities when compared to their nonveteran counterparts. The students surveyed also reported that their campuses were less supportive toward their needs. Previous research has highlighted that there is not a national-level systematic effort to assist student Veterans within higher education (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

All of the previously mentioned factors offer a slight glimpse into the state that Veterans are returning in. Furthermore, they offer insight into the experiences that Veterans are bringing with them when entering the college environment. Although there has been a considerable amount of attention provided toward the aforementioned clinical and medical issues, little
emphasis has been placed on the career development needs of Veterans (Simpson & Armstrong, 2009). Current career counseling professionals and researchers should be aware of the career development concerns of this population to assist in better future outcomes for life and work.

**Demographic Variables and Cultural Factors**

The demographic variables and cultural factors that were examined within this study include age, level of deployment, and combat experience. Each of the aforementioned aspects is detailed in the following sections.

**Age.** Decision-making is widely considered to be the interaction between a problem that needs to be solved and the process in which it is solved within a specific environment. Largely, there has been a recognition that age plays a role in decision-making. Lizarraga, Baquedano, and Cardelle-Elawar (2007) investigated the influence of gender and age in the importance to factors in the decision-making process among 589 participants. The sample consisted of 294 men and 295 women between the ages of 18 and 25 years. The sample was grouped into three developmental stages, which include youths 18-25 years ($n = 207; 97$ men and 110 women), adults 26-65 ($n = 205; 100$ men and 95 women), and retired persons ($n = 177; 87$ men and 90 women). The study concluded that there are significant gender and age differences in the decision processes of the participants (Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, & Cardelle-Elawar, 2007). The authors suggested that individuals lacking in knowledge and experience in certain decision areas, which usually occurs in youth, have a less sophisticated way of contrasting elements involved in the decision-making process.

Within the literature surrounding issues related to career development, age has traditionally been associated with measures of career maturity (Blustein, 1988). Luzzo (1993) stated that theoretically, a relationship between age and career development is expected.
Differences related to age have been documented throughout the literature, but conflicting results have been found within the general college population (Luzzo, 1993). However, studies have concluded that past career planning and work experience are benefits to older students as they engage in career decision-making (Healy, O’Shea, & Crook, 1985; Luzzo, 1993).

Albion and Fogarty (2002) examined the relationship between age and career decision-making difficulties among 248 upper high school juniors and seniors. The sample comprised male and female participants, of which 121 were juniors and 127 were seniors. They reported that although there is a common pattern of difficulties experienced by individuals of different ages, older individuals reported fewer difficulties with Internal Conflicts and Conflicts with others than did younger students. Furthermore, research has identified that age-related data are important because the construct is used to provide a criterion index for the development of career interventions (Patton & Creed, 2001).

Age and Veterans. Research has recognized that Veterans typically enroll in college at an older age than their nonveteran counterparts (O’Herrin, 2011). Cook and Kim’s (2009) report was the first attempt to assess the current state of programs and services for Veterans on campuses across the United States. The report was based on survey results from 723 institutions. The authors determined that in 2007 – 2008, 85% of military undergraduates were 24 years of age or older (Cook & Kim, 2009). Age is important to assess, as many college and university programs have traditionally focused on the needs of students roughly between the ages of 18 and 22 years of age (Luzzo, 1999; Mounty, 1991). Miller and Watson (1990) argued that students outside of this age bracket experience substantially different developmental needs than traditional students.
Jenrette (2004) investigated the impact of age on career decision-making difficulties among the Veteran population. The sample consisted of military personnel who were within six months of leaving the military, either by retirement or by separation. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 65 years ($M = 40$). Results indicated that, compared to their younger counterparts, Veterans who were 50+ years of age reported more career decision-making difficulties in the Lack of Readiness area (Jenrette, 2004).

**Level of Deployment.** Level of deployment refers to whether a military service member has been deployed. Acknowledging experience with deployment is important, as student military members frequently encounter issues associated with academic withdrawals and subsequent re-enrollments (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2007). Lengthy and multiple deployments can create stress exposure, and psychological distress, with extensive effects on student Veterans’ daily lives (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). A qualitative study conducted by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell among 25 military students (2008) found that one of the most disruptive aspects of military service reported by students was being unexpectedly called to a new duty assignment. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) argued that such cultural and contextual factors play a role in the way individuals make career decisions.

Rumann and Hamrick (2010) explored the transition experiences of college student Veterans who returned from war zone deployments and re-enrolled in college ($n = 6$). Individuals interviewed reported challenges with resuming relationships and initiating new relationships and friendships (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Deployment is not necessarily a negative situation and can provide unique experiences to the service members (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Studies have shown that deployments can help create a level of maturity, possibly due to traveling the world and
experiencing other cultures (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). Level of deployment, therefore, could potentially have different impacts on each Veteran. Particularly, since deployments vary in length and location, it is important to identify the unique experiences that these Veterans have.

Hoge, Auchterlonie, and Milliken (2006) examined the relationship between combat deployment and mental health problems among 303,905 Army and Marines who returned from deployments to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and other locations such as Bosnia. The authors stated that mental health problems reported upon post-deployment were significantly associated with combat experience. Current literature posits that the stress of multiple deployments and separations make it difficult to counseling military students (Vance, 2015). Furthermore, military students who have been deployed have been shown to struggle with career planning and decision-making (Vance, 2015).

Previous research has supported that deployment and exposure to combat experience resulted in an increased risk of PTSD, major depression, substance abuse, functional impairment in social and employment settings, and increase use in use of healthcare services (Hoge, Castro, & Messer, 2004). Kehle and colleagues (2011) investigated the mental health diagnoses and comorbidity in soldiers after deployments and explored the relationship between mental health functioning and quality of life. The sample consisted of 348 post-deployment soldiers, of which 87% were male and 93% were Caucasian. The authors found that depressive disorders were the most common diagnoses, and non-PTSD anxiety disorders and alcohol use disorders were the next common (Kehle, Reddy, Ferrier-Auerbach, Erbes, Arbisi, & Polusny, 2011). Furthermore, rates of such disorders were higher in soldiers who had been deployed than community and non-deployed military samples. Additionally, comorbidity was common within this sample. Perhaps
such stressors negatively impact aspects related to an individual’s ability to handle psychological stress.

Making an effective career decision involves integrating knowledge about the self and about occupation, and also involves an individual’s ability to handle psychological stress (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1996). A study conducted by Lustig, Strauser, and Zankas (2012) investigated the relationship between psychological distress and dysfunctional career thoughts among 42 consumers of a state-federal vocational rehabilitation agency. The sample mainly comprised African Americans (60%), who ranged in age from 20 to 63 years ($M = 38.8$, $SD = 13.0$). The results of the study support the relationship between dysfunctional career thoughts and psychological problems. Furthermore, the study concluded that individuals who have higher levels of commitment anxiety also experience more anxiety, depression, self-esteem problems, external stressors, and family and marital problems. This study helps highlight the need to investigate important factors such as deployment, which can influence negative psychological outcomes, such as distress.

Stead, Watson, and Foxcroft (1993) examined the relationship between career indecision and irrational beliefs among 153 black undergraduate students. The sample population comprised 89 male and 64 female first year students from a South African university. The mean age of the sample was 21.8 years ($SD = 3.79$). Results indicated that responses endorsed anxiety related to events that have a low probability of occurring. The authors stated that it is possible that career indecision can be extended by excessive worry regarding events that are unlikely to largely impact career decisions (Stead, Watson, & Foxcroft, 1993). The study concluded that further research is needed related to irrational beliefs and career indecision. As deployment has been linked to psychological distress, and psychological distress has been linked to dysfunctional
thoughts, it is important to recognize that dysfunctional thoughts, or irrational beliefs, have been linked to career indecision. It may be that physical and cognitive challenges that student Veterans faced during deployment could negatively impact career decision-making.

**Combat Experience.** Four generations of soldiers in the United States have been exposed to military combat during this century (Gimbel & Booth, 1994). Wars are not only traumatic for a nation but are often transformative for the individuals that are involved within them (Lifton, 1992). The experience of war places the soldiers who fight in a special category within the general population (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Exposure to unforgiving physical conditions and threat of attack are situations that negatively impact service members’ well-being. Compulsion to attack others, and proximity to death and dismemberment, are additional stressors that service members may be exposed to for several months at a time (Basham, 2008). Nash (2008) goes as far as stating that military combat is one of the most stressful experiences imaginable. The disruptive events of combat may illicit a level of maturity not often demonstrated in the typical civilian college student (Lifton, 1992).

Colleges and universities across the United States have been experiencing an influx of student Veterans whose recent experiences may consist of combat missions, clearing dead bodies, being shot at, and shooting others (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Limited knowledge exists about the precise experiences that combat Veterans bring with them to campus (Lifton, 1992). Although many combat experienced students may not have PTSD, it has been posited that every individual involved in a war zone will manifest symptoms of Combat Operational Stress (COS; Cantrell & Dean, 2005). Furthermore, recent research has evidenced that military combat has similarities to stressors such as being in a violent relationship or living in a dangerous neighborhood (Campbell, 2002; Ross & Mirowsky, 2001). Additionally, studies
have suggested that combat veterans are a student population with special needs, and therefore, require support from both policymakers and institutional programs (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009).

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) investigated how combat Veterans who became college students make the transition to campus life. The study comprised of 6 women and 19 men, all of which were enrolled full-time in universities. The authors concluded that combat Veterans are a student population that have special needs, which can be related to re-entering civilian life after combat experience. Furthermore, they stated that these Veterans require support from both policymakers and program providers (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Additional studies have shown that combat experience plays a role in negative outcomes, such as alcohol and drug use (Horan, 1990). It may be that the influence of these negative outcomes due to combat experience adversely impact the career decision-making process.

The ability to engage in career- and work-related activities may be impacted by an individual’s exposure to traumatic events (Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, & Uruk, 2006). Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, and Uruk (2006) examined the relationship between trauma symptoms and the career development process of 131 undergraduate students. The age of the sample ranged from 18 to 51 years ($M = 22.2$, $SD = 5.7$). Most of the sample was Caucasian (53%) and African American (42%). The majority of the sample was female (88%). The study concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between higher levels of trauma symptoms and higher levels of dysfunctional career thoughts and lower levels of work personality (Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, & Uruk, 2006). Furthermore, results indicated that increased levels of traumatic symptoms may negatively impact the major aspects of the career development process. This
study provides evidence that trauma symptoms negatively relate to an individual’s ability to make effective career decisions (Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, & Uruk, 2006). Re-experiencing war trauma, avoidance, numbing, and hyperarousal can potentially impact a Veteran student’s ability to deal with the additional stressors of university life (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Zinger and Cohen (2010) used a qualitative research design to obtain information from returning Veterans from Afghanistan and/or Iraq. The study investigated the experiences of 10 returning Veterans and explored the challenges many Veterans encounter when reentering the classroom. The Veterans detailed numerous ways in which they changed as a result of their military service and combat experience. Furthermore, the study highlighted how combat experience can leave Veterans with brain injuries, hearing impairment, and visual impairment which can also negatively affect their abilities to succeed in building future academic and occupational success (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) stated that there is a need to update the literature on student-Veterans in order to include those having served in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Summary and Gaps in Literature**

Military service tends to be correlated with a collection of physical, emotional, and educational outcomes that vary by background characteristics and unique, service-related experiences (Durdella & Kim, 2012). As a result of this, there are a multitude of issues that present a challenge to the student Veterans as they reintegrate into higher education (Tinoco, 2014). Currently, there is limited research about student Veterans’ career decision-making (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Specifically, military culture is not firmly understood, and additional exploration of unique military factors could lead to a better understanding of problems in career decision making difficulties (Vacchi, 2012).
Previous literature has focused on various, general characteristics involving career decision-making difficulties for university students. For example, studies have explored the role of personality, gender, culture, and age in relation to such issues (Fan, Cheung, Leong, & Cheung, 2014; Kleiman et al., 2004; Lease, 2004; Mau, 2001; Morgan & Ness, 2003). Studies that have investigated military populations have done so in locations where there is a compulsory service (Gati et al., 1996; Gati & Saka, 2001). Many researchers have noted the differences in individual experiences that exist between military members who are involved in compulsory service rather than voluntary service (Vacchi, 2012). Cultural differences, as evidenced in the aforementioned research, likely exist between such groups and could potentially shed light on various difficulties experienced throughout the career decision-making process.

The literature does not explicitly investigate demographic variables and cultural factors that may play a role in voluntary Veteran students’ career decision-making difficulties. There is an overall lack of understanding of detailed career related aspects of student Veterans in the United States (Green & Hayden, 2013). For example, there is not literature investigating the influence of such aspects as level of deployment career decision-making difficulties for student Veterans. Previous research has focused on mental health outcomes for Veteran students, or has only assessed academic outcomes such as academic success and engagement. As stated, previous studies investigating career decision-making difficulties for military members have largely focused on individuals engaging in compulsory military service.

**Aims and Hypotheses**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and the demographic variables and cultural factors of age, level of deployment, and combat experience. The sample consisted of Veterans and Reservist students
who have attended or are currently attending Midwest universities in the United States. The aim of this study was to provide descriptive data of career decision-making difficulties and its relation to age, level of deployment, and combat experience.

The proposed study tested the following hypotheses using MANOVAs:

_Hypothesis 1:_ There will be a relationship between the veterans’ age and (a) *Lack of Readiness*, (b) *Lack of Information*, and (c) *Inconsistent Information*.

_Hypothesis 2:_ There will be a relationship between the veterans’ level of deployment and (a) *Lack of Readiness*, (b) *Lack of Information*, and (c) *Inconsistent Information*.

_Hypothesis 3:_ There will be a relationship between the veterans’ combat experience and (a) *Lack of Readiness*, (b) *Lack of Information*, and (c) *Inconsistent Information*.

_Hypothesis 4:_ There will be a 2-way interaction between veterans’ age and level of deployment.

_Hypothesis 5:_ There will be a 2-way interaction between veterans’ age and combat experience.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the research design, participants, data collection measures, procedure, data analysis, and the limitations of the proposed study.

Research Design

This study employed a nonexperimental, correlational design. This design explored the interrelationship between variables of interest without any active manipulation of the independent variables by the researcher (Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Wang, & Thompson, 2016). Utilizing the taxonomy developed by Gati (1996), the relationship between career decision-making difficulties, as measured by the Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996) and the demographic variables and cultural factors of age, level of deployment, and combat experience were examined. Each of the five hypotheses were individually tested via MANOVA. In this research design, the independent variables were age, level of deployment, and combat experience, and the dependent variables were lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. The use of this design provided the study with quantitative data measuring the trends of the participants on scales administered within the questionnaires. The population for the study was Veterans with university experience who have served in the military for the United States. The study utilized questionnaires consisting of self-report instruments with acceptable reliabilities and validities.
Participants

The sample consisted of Veterans and Reservist students who are currently attending or have previously attended a Midwest university in the United States. The study intended to recruit at least 200 participants. Initially, the Veterans and military students were conscripted through email from the Veteran student support programs at one public university in the Midwest United States. Due to personnel changes within the university, the study was unable to recruit enough participants to move forward. Therefore, recruitment revisions were requested and approved regarding the original Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission. Consequently, two other institutions of higher education were contacted in an effort to recruit more participants. All three final institutions were within the Midwestern United States. The first institution was a state public university, the second was a private university, and the third was a community college. As the study originally intended to use one university for recruitment purposes, the demographic survey did not inquire about which university/college the participant attended. Thus, results were unable to differentiate between the responses of the three institutions.

The Veteran student support programs within each of the institutions consisted of both Veterans and Reservists. These students have either attended the university or college, or currently still attend. Initial contact was made via email by each institution’s respective Veteran/military support programs to inquire about interest in participating in the study. Additionally, the emails included referral information for local Veterans that may not be able to be reached via this method.

The final sample consisted of 68% male ($n = 143$). The sample as a whole was not considerably diverse in race, consisting of 87% White ($n = 181$), 5% Hispanic/Latino ($n = 11$), 3% Black/African American ($n = 6$), 3% Other ($n = 6$), 1% Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 3$), and
1% Native American \((n = 2)\) participants. Ages ranged from 18 through 60 years old \((M = 32.07, SD = 8.49)\), while student status comprised 60% full-time \((n = 125)\), 18% graduated \((n = 37)\), 17% part-time \((n = 36)\), and 5% completed partial degree. Education status consisted of 6% freshman \((n = 13)\), 16% sophomore \((n = 33)\), 15% junior \((n = 32)\), 20% senior \((n = 41)\), 32% graduated with bachelor’s degree \((n = 66)\), 8% graduated with master’s degree, and 1% graduated with doctorate degree. Branches included 26% Army \((n = 55)\), 20% Navy \((n = 41)\), 19% Airforce \((n = 39)\), 18% Marine \((n = 37)\), 9% National Guard \((n = 19)\), 2% Coast Guard, and 7% served within multiple branches during the length of their career. Additional sample demographics are described in Table 1.0.

**Measures**

The measures that were utilized within this study include a demographic questionnaire that will collect self-report data, the Combat Experiences Scale, and the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire \((Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996)\). Descriptions of both measures are provided in the following sections.

**Demographic Questionnaire.** A demographic questionnaire was administered via online survey format to gather data on participants’ unique characteristics \((See APPENDIX A)\). Variables included age, level of deployment, and current student standing. The survey consisted of close-ended questions, with both type entry answers and checked boxes answers. The age range began at 18 years due to focusing on individuals who have military service, and who are enrolled in college.

**The Combat Experiences Scale** \((CES; King et al., 2006; Vogt et al., 2008; Vogt et al., 2013)\). The Combat Experiences Scale is a 17-item scale that is based off of self-report data \((See APPENDIX B; King et al., 2006; Vogt et al., 2008)\). This instrument is a part of the larger
Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory (DRRI), which was developed to assess deployment-related factors that are implicated in the health and well-being of military Veterans (Vogt, Proctor, King, King, & Vasterling, 2008). The DRRI comprises scales that evaluate 2 predeployment factors, 10 features of deployment, and 2 postdeployment factors. The original inventory was developed over a 4-year period using an item development process. The development processes consisted of studying existing combat literature, focus groups with Veterans, and review by content experts and Veterans (Pietrzak, Johnson, Goldstein, Malley, Rivers, Morgan, & Southwick, 2010).

In order to enhance the DRRI’s applicability across a variety of deployment-related circumstances and military subgroups, a revision of this instrument was undertaken in 2013 (Vogt, Smith, King, King, Knight, & Vasterling, 2013). The development process of the revised scale followed the prior procedures, in terms of utilizing focus groups with Veterans to inform an assessment of the content validity of original DRRI measures, examination of item and scale characteristics of revised scales in a national sample of 469 OEF/OIF veterans, and administration of refined scales to a second national sample of 1,046 OEF/OIF veterans to confirm their psychometric quality (Vogt et al., 2013). Finalized DRRI-2 scales demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability and criterion-related validity. The scale’s internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability, and criterion-related validity were confirmed through psychometric analysis of multiple datasets (King et al., 2006; Pietrzak et al., 2010; Vogt et al., 2008). Convergent and discriminant validity was confirmed within U.S. Gulf War and Iraq War Veterans (King et al., 2006; Vogt et al., 2008). These measures of deployment risk and resilience factors can be employed as stand-alone instruments of the can be administered as the full set of scales (Vogt et al., 2008).
The CES assesses combat, which is one of the features within deployment. The scale measures exposure to combat-related circumstances, such as firing a weapon, being fired on by enemy or friendly fire, and witnessing injury or death (Pietrzak et al., 2010). It is important to note that the war-zone factors refer to objective events and circumstances. Veterans are asked to rate items based off a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Never” to 5 = “Daily or Almost Daily”). An item example includes “I personally witnessed someone from my unit or an ally unit being seriously wounded or killed.” Higher scores indicate greater combat exposure. Cronbach’s alpha on CES items was 0.93 (Pietrzak et al., 2010; Pietrzak et al., 2011).

**The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati, 1996).** Based on decision theory, the CDDQ was developed to test the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties (Gati et al., 1996). Gati and colleagues (1996) detailed decisions as having the three generic attributes of a decision must be made, several alternatives are available, and each alternative has several aspects that can be compared and evaluated. The authors also specified four characteristics that are exclusive to career decisions which include the following: the number of alternatives may be large, extensive information is available about each alternative, each alternative can be fairly described only by considering several aspects, and there is uncertainty about the characteristics of both the decision maker and the career alternatives (Gati et al., 1996). Thus, decision-making difficulties were identified through theory and empirical research which resulted in the development of the hierarchical taxonomy (Kelly & Lee, 2002).

On the basis of the hierarchical taxonomy, Gati and colleagues (1996) constructed a set of items to correspond with each of the 44 difficulties in the theoretical model. In an effort to prevent against cognitive overload and motivational decrease, only one item was created to represent each difficulty. Ten scales were then defined based off of the proposed ten categories.
Each of the scales has a specific set of items that represent the set of difficulties included in that category (Gati et al., 1996). In order to empirically test their taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties, Gati, Osipow, Krausz, and Saka (1998) administered the CDDQ to a sample of 259 young Israeli adults and 304 American university students. Results revealed that the pattern of relationship among the 10 decision-making difficulty categories was similar to their hypothesized pattern within both samples. Additionally, the authors reported that there were no statistically significant differences between the two samples (Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 1998).

The 34-item version of the CDDQ was utilized in this sample. The CDDQ is a multidimensional questionnaire which describes each individual's difficulties in terms of the ten categories (Gati et al., 1996). The CDDQ includes 34 statements corresponding to the career decision-making difficulties in the theoretical taxonomy (Osipow & Gati, 1998). There are 10 difficulty scales defined that correspond with the 10 difficulty categories in the taxonomy (Osipow & Gati, 1998; Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015). The participants were asked to use a 9-point Likert scale to rate the degree to which each statement describes them (1 – does not describe me to 9 – describes me well). The score of the ten difficulty scales is defined as the mean of each of the items in the category, and the score of the three major clusters is defined as the mean of the difficulty categories within the cluster (Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015).

The taxonomy consists of three major difficulty clusters, divided into 10 specific difficulty categories. The first cluster is Lack of Readiness and includes three difficulty categories that may arise prior to the career decision-making process (Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015). These three difficulty categories consist the following: (1) lack of motivation, (2) general indecisiveness, and (3) dysfunctional beliefs. The second and third clusters include difficulty
categories that may arise during the career decision-making process. The second major cluster includes four categories, which revolve around Lack of Information. The four categories include: (4) the career decision-making process, (5) the self, (6) occupations, and (7) ways of obtaining additional information (Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015). The third major cluster consists of three categories, regarding Inconsistent Information due to (8) unreliable information, (9) internal conflict, and (10) external conflicts. Validity for the taxonomy and for the questionnaire has been empirically tested and supported in various studies (Gati et al., 1996; Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 2000; Lancaster, Rudolph, Perkins, & Patten, 1999; Osipow & Gati, 1998; Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015).

Gati and colleagues (1996) administered the CCDQ to two different cross-cultural samples. The study consisted of 259 young Israeli adults and to 304 American university students. The Israeli sample comprised 147 men and 112 women, ages 19 to 23 years ($M = 20.68, SD = 0.74$). The American sample consisted of 186 men, 105 women, and 13 individuals who did not include their gender, ranging in age from 17 to 23 years ($M = 18.70, SD = 1.10$). Most of the participants were freshmen (74%) and sophomores (18%). The majority of the sample were Caucasian (71%) and Asian Americans (15%). Results demonstrated that CDDQ scores have 3-day test-retest reliability coefficients that range from .50 to .80 (Gati et al., 1996). The median Cronbach’s alpha for reliability of the ten difficulty scales was .78 and .77 in the Israeli and American samples, respectively (Gati et al., 1996; Gati, Osipow, Krausz, & Saka, 2000). Internal consistency estimates regarding the subscale scores range from .29 to .95, and Cronbach’s alpha was reported as .95 for the total scale score (Gati et al., 1996).

Within the Israeli population, the reliability of the Lack of Readiness Scale was .70 (Gati et al., 1996). Gati and colleagues (1996) reported that the low reliability of Dysfunctional Myths
(.78) contributed to the moderately low reliability of the major category of Lack of Readiness. Other scales within this major category had moderate to high reliabilities, with Lack of Motivation being .90 and Indecisiveness being .76 (Gati et al., 1996). The reliabilities of the two other major categories were much higher. The reliability of Lack of Information (.91) comprised Lack of Knowledge About the Process (.86), Lack of Information About Self (.87), Lack of Information About Occupations (.90), and Lack of Information About Ways of Obtaining Additional Information (.67). The last major category, Inconsistent Information, had a reliability of .91 within the Israeli sample, and consisted of the scales Unreliable Information (.78), Internal Conflicts (.79), and External Conflicts (.88; Gati et al., 1996). The reliability for the whole questionnaire was .80.

Within this study, the reliability of the scales for the American population varied in the same manner as within the Israeli sample (Gati et al., 1996). Congruent with the Israeli sample, the major category of Lack of Readiness had the lowest reliability (.63). The authors still attributed this score to the impact of the Dysfunctional Myths scale reliability (.40). Within this major category, the reliability scores of Lack of Motivation (.53) and Indecisiveness (.69) were higher. Again, the two other major categories had higher reliabilities with Lack of Information being .95 and Inconsistent Information being .89 (Gati et al., 1996). The reliabilities for the scales within Lack of Information were Lack of Knowledge About the Process = .86, Lack of Information About Self = .91, Lack of Information About Occupations = .88, and Lack of Information About Ways of Obtaining Additional Information = .66 (Gati et al., 1996). The reliabilities within the American sample for Unreliable Information = .79, Internal Conflicts = .75, and External Conflicts = .88 (Gati et al., 1996). The total reliability for the questionnaire was .95.
Support for these findings was provided by Nauta’s (2012) study which investigated 188 college students at a large Midwestern university in the United States. The sample consisted of 72% women and 28% men, with a mean age of 19.56 years ($SD = 2.04$). Of the participants involved, the majority were freshmen (52%) and sophomores (26%). In this study, the CDDQ subscale scores have Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .27 to .91. The alpha for the total score was .94 (Nauta, 2012).

Within the current research study, the Cronbach’s alphas were largely congruent with the literature. The category of Lack of Readiness had the lowest reliability of the three major clusters (.71). Consistent with previous studies, the other two major categories had higher reliabilities. Lack of Information remained the highest reliability (.96). Inconsistent Information had a reliability of .89 within this sample.

Osipow and Gati (1998) examined the construct and concurrent validity of the CDDQ by analyzing the responses of 403 university students from the United States. The authors examined the empirical relations of the CDDQ with two measures that are also associated with career decision-making, the Career Decision Scale (CDS; Osipow, Carney, & Barak, 1976; Osipow & Winer, 1996) and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSES; Taylor & Betz, 1983). As hypothesized, the correlation between the CDDQ and the CDS was positive (.77). Additionally, as expected, these two scales were negatively correlated with the CDMSES (-.50 and -.52), respectively (Osipow & Gati, 1998).

Lancaster, Rudolph, Perkins, and Patten’s (1999) research in the U.S. supported the construct validity of the CDDQ. This study assessed the reliability and validity of the CDDQ, along with differences between decided and undecided groups of students. Furthermore, discriminant validity was assessed by using measures of anxiety and social desirability. The
sample included 268 students from a private Midwestern university, of which 131 were male and 137 were female. The participants ranged in age from 17 to 56 years, with a mean age of 20 years. The majority of the sample were freshmen (52%) and sophomores (28%). The correlation between the CDDQ Total and the CDS was .82 ($p < .01$). Convergent validity indicated that the CDDQ and the CDS measured similar constructs. Additionally, discriminant validity was confirmed, as the CDDQ discriminated against both anxiety and social desirability (Lancaster, Rudolph, Perkins, & Patten, 1999). The results provide evidence for the reliability and validity of the CDDQ.

**Procedure**

Veterans and Reservists from universities in the Midwestern United States were recruited via email. The study started with receiving the approval of each university’s Institutional Review Board or Veteran student support program. Access to Veterans and Reservists was obtained from the university’s Veteran support program. The email consisted of the following components: a request for participation, a description of the study, detailed directions, and the web address link for where participants access the online survey and questionnaire. The emailed link allowed participants to complete the survey at their leisure. The survey was administered through Survey Monkey, an internet-based survey service. The self-report questionnaires were expected to be completed in under 30 minutes.

Prior to beginning the surveys, contributors received a thorough explanation of the purpose and potential benefits and risks associated with their participation. The service members were notified that their involvement in the study is voluntary, and that there would not be any negative consequences if they decide to not participate or finish the study. They were informed that any personal information is kept separate from their survey data. Additionally, identification
and survey data are secured on separate encrypted databases. Individuals received a code to access the online survey and questionnaire, which is stored and used for data analysis.

After the participants successfully read and completed the informed consent information, the instruments were administered. The instruments were administered in the same order as the previously reported measures section. After the measures were completed, participants were provided with a screen that indicates their answers were successfully recorded. After data were collected from an adequate number of participants, the data were then analyzed.

**Analyses**

Before data analysis, the data were screened for missing data, outliers, and violations of normality, and multicollinearity. After collection, the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to conduct statistical procedures. The current study used an alpha level of .05 for all significance tests as a standard for rejecting the null hypothesis. The likelihood of Type I error was reduced by utilizing multivariate analysis rather than multiple univariate analyses. Descriptive statistics were used for all measures.

In order to compare differences among groups of Veterans, a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was utilized. A MANOVA is a generalization of univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). However, unlike ANOVA, the covariance between outcome variables in testing the statistical significance of the mean differences is used. MANOVA can be employed when there are several correlated dependent variables and a singular, overall test on the set of variables is desired rather than performing multiple individual tests. Additionally, it is argued that the more important purpose of using a MANOVA is when the researcher wants to compare the means of multiple groups in research designs that evaluate differences in patterns of means on several outcome variables (Warner, 2013). For example, a MANOVA can examine whether
scores on an inventory differ significantly across numerous groups. In the current study, the independent variables were selected from the demographic information obtained from participants’ self-report data, and include age, level of deployment, and combat experience. The demographic variable of age will be used as a continuous variable, entered directly from participant response. The dependent variables were lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information scores from the CDDQ (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow; 1996). Using a MANOVA allowed for intercorrelations among variables to be considered when assessing group differences. Additionally, employing a MANOVA reduced the experiment-wise level of Type I error (Warner, 2013).
Aims and Hypotheses

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and the demographic variables and cultural factors of age, deployment, and combat experience. The final sample consisted of 209 Veterans and Reservist students who have attended or are currently attending Midwest universities in the United States. The study proposed that there will be relationships between the Veterans’ age, deployment, and combat experience separately with (a) Lack of Readiness, (b) Lack of Information, and (c) Inconsistent Information (MANOVA). The study also proposed that there will be 2-way interactions between Veterans’ age with both deployment and combat experience. Lastly, it was hypothesized that there will be a 3-way interaction between Veterans’ age, level of deployment, and combat experience.

Preliminary Analysis

The original data collection yielded 289 participants. Each of these individuals provided consent to participate in the study prior to being answer survey questions. Data cleaning and missing data analyses were done per the recommendations of Hair and colleagues (2010). Following these guidelines, 77 total participants were omitted from data analysis. Nine
subjects were excluded due to not completing any of the data. These participants provided consent to continue with the study, and then discontinued prior to filling out any of the demographic survey or measures. Six participants were removed due to age standards. Fifty-four participants were removed due to not completing any of the measures. These participants filled out the demographic survey but discontinued the study prior to providing any information for the measures. The remaining eight participants were removed due to omitting 30 percent or more of the data within the dependent variables being assessed (Hair et al., 2010). The sample of study completers consisted of 212 participants.

Chi-squares ($\chi^2$) and $t$-tests were computed to examine potential differences between study completers and non-completers. These analyses were conducted to ensure that the study was not limiting the types of responses that were elicited. Analyses suggested no statistically significant differences in demographic factors between the groups, $p > .05$. The sample used within this study is comparable to the most represented demographics within the military population, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Descriptive statistics of the sample are again provided in Table 1.0 through Table 2.2.

All dependent and predictor variables were assessed for outliers, using the standardized absolute value cutoff of 3.29 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Multivariate outliers were identified using Mahalanobis Distance with the probabilities against $p < .001$ (Hair et al., 2010). A total of three multivariate outliers were identified using this criterion and were subsequently excluded from analyses. Removal of the outliers did not significantly impact the results, but they were still excluded from the sample. The final sample size consisted of 209 participants (Demographics, Table 1.0, Table 2.0, Table 2.1, & Table 2.2).
Preliminary analysis examined the means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, and Cronbach’s Alpha ($\alpha$) for each of the predictor and criterion variables used within the hypotheses. The $\alpha$ values ranged from .71 to .96, demonstrating good reliability. The detailed results of this analysis are reported in Table 3.0.

**Multivariate Analysis of Variance**

Prior to conducting the MANOVAs, the following assumptions of MANOVA were tested: there are no univariate or multivariate outliers, there is multivariate normality, there is a linear relationship between each pair of dependent variables for each group of the predictor variable, there is a homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and there is no multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010). In order to assess if the dependent variables were linearly related to each other, a scatterplot matrix between the dependent variables was examined. The assumption of linearity was met for each group of the MANOVA separately, suggesting that the power of the test is not reduced. Absence of multicollinearity was checked by conducting correlations among the dependent variables. There was a correlation found between the two variables age and deployment, $r = .21$, $n = 221$, $p = .002$. Further, there was a statistically significant correlation between deployment and combat experience, $r = .49$, $n = 221$, $p = .000$. The equality of covariance matrices assumption was met as assessed by a statistically nonsignificant Box’s $M$ test ($\text{Box’s } M = 8.06$, $p = .244$).

Examination of the data revealed that there is not substantial divergence between the predictor variables of deployment and combat experience, as those who interacted with and/or witnessed combat were asked about their experiences that occurred specifically during deployment. Consequently, deployment and combat experience were each examined separately with the predictor variable of age. In order to test hypothesis 4, the first MANOVA was
conducted with age and deployment as predictor variables, and with \textit{Lack of Readiness}, \textit{Lack of Information}, and \textit{Inconsistent Information} as dependent variables. Findings did not support hypothesis 4, revealing that the 2-way interaction between age and deployment was statistically nonsignificant (Table 4.0). The MANOVA was rerun without the 2-way interaction to examine the main effects, testing hypotheses 1 and 2 (Table 5.0). When the Bonferroni correction was applied, there were no statistically significant relationships. Although against traditional practices, the relationships were then examined without using the Bonferroni correction. This action was taken in an attempt to learn more about the data, notably with an increased risk of Type 1 error rate. Without the Bonferroni correction, a statistically significant main effect of age and \textit{Lack of Readiness} was found at the $p < .05$ level, $F(2,1) = 5.059$, $p = .026$ (Table 6.0). The participants who are younger demonstrated higher levels of \textit{Lack of Readiness}, indicating that younger military students experience increased difficulty with feeling motivated to make career decisions, general indecisiveness, and dysfunctional beliefs about career decision-making, $r(221) = -.188$, $p = 0.01$. There were no other statistically significant relationships found. These findings offer support for hypothesis 1, indicating that there is a relationship between Veteran’s age and \textit{Lack of Readiness}. However, results do not provide support for hypothesis 2, which posited that there would be a relationship between level of deployment and (a) \textit{Lack of Readiness}, (b) \textit{Lack of Information}, and (c) \textit{Inconsistent Information}.

Subsequently, a MANOVA was conducted with the predictor variables of age and combat experience, with \textit{Lack of Readiness}, \textit{Lack of Information}, and \textit{Inconsistent Information} as dependent variables. This MANOVA was conducted in order to examine hypothesis 5. Findings showed that the 2-way interaction between age and combat experience was statistically nonsignificant, indicating that hypothesis 5 is not supported (Table 7.0). As with the previous
MANOVA, the MANOVA was rerun without the 2-way interaction to examine potential main effects (Table 8.0, Table 9.0). These relationships were examined, with and without the Bonferroni correction, and there were still no statistically significant results found. Hypothesis 3 stated that there would be a relationship between Veterans’ combat experience and (a) *Lack of Readiness*, (b) *Lack of Information*, and (c) *Inconsistent Information*, which the findings did not provide support for.

In an effort to gather more information about the data, the other independent variables were explored. The independent variables that were examined included: status within the military, branch served, era during enlistment, identified gender, student status, education status, and relationship status. As some of the variables had categorical groups with only a few participants, such variables required collapsing into fewer categories. Multiple $\chi^2$ analyses were employed, and analyses suggested no statistically significant differences, $p > .05$. 

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Table 1.0  

**Sample Demographics**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age, Years; Mean (SD)</td>
<td>32.07 (8.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex, Male; n (%)</td>
<td>143 (68.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Been Deployed; n (%)</td>
<td>134 (64.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Combat Experience; n (%)</td>
<td>147 (70.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch; n (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>55 (26.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airforce</td>
<td>39 (18.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast Guard</td>
<td>4 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Guard</td>
<td>19 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>41 (19.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>37 (17.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>14 (6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Status; n (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Duty</td>
<td>24 (11.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Guard</td>
<td>25 (12.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>6 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>60 (28.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservist</td>
<td>7 (3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity; n (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3 (1.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
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<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>181 (86.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship; n (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>46 (22.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>37 (17.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>95 (45.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>25 (12.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Status</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>36 (17.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>125 (59.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>37 (17.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses, Partial Degree</td>
<td>10 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>n (%)</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>33 (15.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>32 (15.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>41 (19.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Bachelor’s</td>
<td>66 (31.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Master’s</td>
<td>17 (8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Doctorate</td>
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$n = 209$
Table 2.0

Descriptive Statistics – Not Deployed with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qdeployed</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1

Descriptive Statistics – Deployment with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qdeployed</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2

Descriptive Statistics – Combat Experience with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CESSum</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>27.69</td>
<td>12.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.46</td>
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</table>
Table 3.0

*Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliability Coefficients*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Deployment</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CES</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lack of Information</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Inconsistent Information</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>32.62</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>24.25</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( SD )</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>11.68</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.48</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01, *p <.05**

Note: CES is the Combat Experiences Scale, Readiness is representative of Lack of Readiness which is a major difficulty cluster from the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire, Lack of Information is a major difficulty cluster from the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire, Inconsistent Information is a major difficulty cluster from the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire. Coefficient \( \alpha \) scores are presented in the diagonals where appropriate.
Table 4.0

Multivariate Tests – Age and Deployment with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$V$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$df_2$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deployed</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>1.604</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>207.0</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>2.390</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>207.0</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployed$\times$Age</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>1.269</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>207.0</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Table 5.0

Multivariate Tests – Age and Deployment with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>V</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>df²</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deployed</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>208.0</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td>.012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>1.960</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>208.0</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.027</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Table 6.0

Test of Between-Subjects Effects – Age and Deployment with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qdeployed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>1.978</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>.903</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>5.059</td>
<td>.026*</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>2.626</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>.393</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
### Table 7.0

**Multivariate Tests – Age and Combat Experience with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$V$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$df_2$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CESSum</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>.696</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CESSum$\times$Age</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Table 8.0

Multivariate Tests – Age and Combat Experience with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$V$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$df_2$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CESSum</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.026</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>.994</td>
<td>.022</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Table 9.0

Test of Between-Subjects Effects – Age and Combat Experience with Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CESSum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>1.717</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
<td>0.492</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Readiness</td>
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<td>.998</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Information</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>.005</td>
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</table>

*p < .05
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Overview

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and the demographic variables of age, and the cultural factors of deployment and combat experience. The study intended to assess these relationships as measured by a demographic questionnaire, the Combat Experiences Scale (King et al., 2006; Vogt et al., 2008; Vogt et al., 2013), and the Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (Gati, 1996). The following hypotheses were examined: 1) There will be a relationship between the Veterans’ age and (a) Lack of Readiness, (b) Lack of Information, and (c) Inconsistent Information (MANOVA), 2) There will be a relationship between the Veterans’ level of deployment and (a) Lack of Readiness, (b) Lack of Information, and (c) Inconsistent Information (MANOVA), 3) There will be a relationship between the Veterans’ combat experience and (a) Lack of Readiness, (b) Lack of Information, and (c) Inconsistent Information (MANOVA), 4) There will be a 2-way interaction between Veterans’ age and level of deployment, 5) There will be a 2-way interaction between Veterans’ age and combat experience, 6) There will be a 3-way interaction between Veterans’ age, level of deployment, and combat experience.
This study utilized Psychological Decision Theory and the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties as a framework. Psychological Decision Theory resolves to offer an orderly way to describe what variables influence choices (Jepsen & Dilley, 1974). Decision Theory posits that there are many factors an individual considers when making a decision, and that these factors may be different for every person. Acknowledging each individual’s unique way of making career-related decisions can assist with determining where decision-making difficulties exist (Gati & Levin, 2014).

As previously mentioned, the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making is based off of Decision Theory (Gati et al., 1996). This taxonomy was created to highlight how complex the decision-making process can be and demonstrate that this process is specific to each individual. This framework emphasizes the multiple, complex facets within the decision-making process (Gati et al., 1996). Subsequently, the CDDQ was developed based on the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making. Analyses from the current study largely produced statistically nonsignificant results across all domains and variables assessed. In order to gather more information regarding the data, analyses parted from traditional practices. When examining the main effects without interactions, there was a statistically significant main effect found for age and Lack of Readiness. This finding suggested that students who were younger in age reported more difficulties in the categories related to a lack of readiness. Specifically, the lack of readiness is due to lack of motivation, indecisiveness, and dysfunctional myths. This outcome provides support for prior research that has specifically investigated career decision-making difficulties for the general, civilian student population (Kleiman et al., 2004; Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, & Cardelle-Elawar, 2007; Tinsley et al., 1989). Further, this finding also provides evidence for the
framework being utilized, as it highlights the complexity of factors that influence the career decision-making process. Findings will be discussed in terms of the independent variables used within this study, namely age, deployment, and combat experience.

**Age.** Consistent with the current findings, prior research studies concluded that younger students were more undecided than older students and demonstrated increased struggles with difficulty categories within the major category of *Lack of Readiness* (Kleiman et al., 2004). Previous literature has recognized that military students enroll in college at an older age compared to their civilian counterparts (O’Herrin, 2011). As formerly mentioned, Cook and Kim (2009) determined that in 2007 – 2008, 85% of military undergraduates were 24 years of age or older. The demographics from the current sample are consistent with this general report. The average age for civilian college students is under 25 years, while the average age of this sample was 32 years of age. Miller and Watson (1990) noted that students outside of the traditional age bracket (18-22 years) experience substantially different developmental needs. However, their study was not specific to a military student population. Results from the current study are not generally consistent with this finding. Largely, the present findings suggested that older Veteran and military students do not appear to be more likely to experience substantial differences in career decision-making difficulties when compared to their younger counterparts.

Previous research has examined career decision making difficulties with military personnel who were within six months of leaving the service. These service members left the service specifically due to either retirement or separation (Jenrette, 2004). Findings suggested that compared to their younger counterparts, Veterans who were 50 + years of age reported more career decision making difficulties in the *Lack of Readiness* area (Jenrette, 2004). Although this finding is not consistent with the current results, there are substantial differences between the two
samples that may have impacted the outcome. For example, the previous study targeted individuals that were within six months of leaving the military, rather than including participants who are active duty or reservist status. Furthermore, the mean ages of the two samples were significantly different. The sample within the previous study had a mean age of 40 years, while the present study sample had a mean age of 32 years. Another difference to consider is that the current study specifically targeted individuals with college/university experience, whereas this was not a criterion for the Jenrette (2004) research. The current study cannot generalize results to individuals who are 50+ years of age as only 10 participants met such criteria.

Prior research has suggested that civilian American students are largely impacted by the *Lack of Readiness* cluster (Mau, 2001). When assessing college-aged samples across different cultures, research has shown that collectivist populations (e.g., Taiwan) are impacted less by *Lack of Readiness* and more by *Lack of Information* (Mau, 2001). American students are more likely to work before they graduate from school, tend to make their own career decisions, and are encouraged to pursue individual aspirations. Further, American students are given opportunities to gather information regarding career options and outcomes, which may make them more prepared for the latter stages of the career decision-making process. These culture factors potentially influence why American students are more likely to experience issues prior to making career decisions (*Lack of Readiness*), rather than during the decision-making process (*Lack of Information, Inconsistent Information*; Mau, 2001; Mau 2004, Willner et al., 2015).

**Deployment.** Prior to this study, little to no research had examined the impact of deployment on career decision making difficulties for military students. Therefore, how deployment may or may not impact *Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, or Inconsistent Information* has not been well-established. Results of the current analyses did not find deployment to be a statistically
significant predictor of career decision-making difficulties. The Vance (2015) research utilized qualitative case study methodology to examine decision-making considerations in terms of pursuing a master’s degree within the Army. This research was focused on specific, unique experiences that existed for each service member. Military students who were deployed struggled with career planning and decision making (Vance, 2015). The Vance (2015) investigation concluded that, although there are themes that may provide insight into students’ perspectives, rationales for decision-making were unique to each service member. The study suggested that previous challenges and barriers, such as the stress of deployment and separation, impact such decisions and also make counseling military students difficult. The study also provides insight into the idea that military students are inexperienced at career decision-making, and that they do not give thought to such issues until after leaving the service (Vance, 2015). Since military members may not be immediately focused on their long-term future and career, and are more focused on their current assignment, they may be less likely to report difficulties with making such decisions. Previous research has suggested that the salience of the decisions at hand impacts the experienced difficulties one demonstrates (Mau, 2001; Vance, 2015, Willner et al., 2015).

Notably, there are several key factors that may have influenced the non-significant relationship between deployment and Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, and Inconsistent Information in the current study. Some of these key factors include assessing variation in type of deployment, length of deployment, number of times deployed, deployment region, era, and military occupational specialty (MOS). In transparency, the current study underestimated the unique variables that encompass each deployment experience. Gathering more specific details
may have allowed for a more accurate view of the impact deployment has on career decision-making difficulties.

**Combat Experience.** One’s exposure to traumatic events may impact career- and work-related activities (Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, & Uruk, 2006). A study conducted by Strauser, Lustig, Cogdal, and Uruk (2006) among civilian college students concluded that there was a statistically significant correlation between higher levels of trauma symptoms and higher levels of dysfunctional career thoughts and lower levels of work personality. The current analyses suggested there was not a statistically significant relationship between combat experience and the major category of *Lack of Readiness*, which comprises such career difficulties. There are several noteworthy differences between the current study and the Strauser et al. examination of traumatic events and career related difficulties. For example, the previous study specifically assessed a sample of individuals who identified as being exposed to traumatic events, and subsequently measured these participants’ trauma symptoms. While combat experiences increase the likelihood that one will simultaneously be exposed to traumatic events, not all combat experiences are traumatic. Further, Strauser and colleagues assessed undergraduate, civilian students who had traumatic experiences unrelated to combat.

The CES used within this study measures combat experiences based on a number of different events that may potentially take place during deployment (King et al., 2006; Vogt et al., 2008; Vogt et al., 2013). However, not all of these events may be experienced as traumatic to the service member. For example, endorsing such items as “I went on combat patrols or missions,” may yield differences in levels of experienced trauma when compared to such items as “I personally witnessed civilians (for example, women and children) being seriously wounded or killed” (CES; King et al., 2006; Vogt et al., 2008; Vogt et al., 2013). Further, the current sample
comprised individuals who were deployed yet did not endorse witnessing or experiencing combat. It is important to note that trauma symptoms were not examined for the 134 participants who did endorse combat experience. Therefore, the present analyses are unable to distinguish combat experiences from events the participant may categorize as traumatic. Since the CES does not break down the scale scoring based on type of combat experienced or whether these experiences were seen as traumatic, a direct comparison cannot be made between trauma symptoms and career decision-making difficulties.

Little to no research has investigated how combat experience impacts Lack of Readiness, Lack of Information, or Inconsistent Information. The lack of research may possibly be due to efforts being focused on military-civilian transition, military student retention, and the emotional and psychological distress that military service members incur. Further, the military is structured in such a way that career decision-making is less salient and not as pressing throughout one’s military career (Vance, 2015, Willner et al., 2015). Previous literature regarding combat experience focuses on the influence of transition and the psychological and emotional state of military students (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). The present research study did not find a statistically significant, predictive relationship for levels of combat experience and career decision-making difficulties. Statistically nonsignificant results may highlight the advanced capability military students with combat experience possess as a result of such experiences, or the results may propose that such experiences do not negatively impact career decision-making within this population.

Implications for Theory

Psychological Decision Theory and the taxonomy of difficulties in career decision-making both emphasize how multifaceted the decision-making process can be and demonstrate
that decision-making is unique to each individual (Gati et al., 1999). Prior studies have shown support for utilizing this framework in American civilian populations and military populations (Mau, 2001; Osipow & Gati, 1998). The current study contributes to existing research as there is limited theoretical information regarding this specific population. Findings of the current study support these frameworks, indicating that Veterans and military student populations may not be heterogenous in their decision-making. The current study did not find statistically significant results, yet previous qualitative research has concluded that this population indeed struggles with various career decision-making difficulties. This present research contributes to these frameworks by highlighting that many factors likely impact decision-making processes for military students. Further, these factors are specific to each individual and may carry a unique influence (i.e. not all military students will react the same way to the shared/different experiences they have).

The validity of the career decision-making taxonomy has received wide support, and recent research has started investigating cultural differences using the taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties and the CDDQ (Mau, 2001; Sovet, Tak, & Jung, 2015; Willner, Gati, & Guan, 2015). Aligned with this research, the current study focused on how military cultural influences could potentially impact these career decision-making processes. Though other studies have examined cross-cultural impacts on such constructs, limited to none have explored the military cultural factors of deployment and combat experience. Findings of the present research did not provide support for the military cultural influences of combat experience and deployment impacting these career decision-making processes.

Particularly, multiple studies have provided support for the structure of taxonomy systems assessing the career decision-making difficulties of American college students (Gati,
Osipow, Krause, & Saka, 2000; Mau, 2001; Osipow & Gati, 1998). However, previous research has noted that each country may have different characteristics or different decision tasks that potentially impact the relative salience of the various difficulty categories (Gati & Saka, 2001). For example, aside from the specific population being assessed (such as targeting middle school, high school, or college populations), countries likely have different structures within their educational systems that should be considered. Cross-culture impact for career decision-making difficulties has already been evidenced in American civilian college student populations (Mau, 2001). Yet, the taxonomy system did not yield a good fit for other student populations, such as Taiwanese college students (Mau, 2001). Mau (2001) concluded that the lack of model fit for Taiwanese students suggested decision-making difficulties may vary as a function of cultural differences. Although the current findings provide some insight into how military culture and career decision-making difficulties for U.S. military students, there is a need to incorporate more specific factors. As limited research has been explicitly directed toward military culture, defining how this culture could potentially influence career tasks was generalized from other similar constructs and studies.

Implications for Research

The present study contributed to understanding the career decision-making difficulties that Veteran and military student populations encounter. Based on the current literature and understanding of cultural impacts on career decision-making difficulties, the following implications for research are offered.

Although the sample was generally representative of the total military force, future samples should target various minority groups within the military culture. Since the composition of the total military force continually changes, minorities are increasingly represented throughout
various branches and positions. More targeted studies should assess if these minority groups face their own unique career decision-making difficulties, and if their military experiences influence such difficulties. Prior studies have assessed general cultural impacts but limited to no studies have specifically investigated minority groups and cultural impacts on career decision-making difficulties within the United States military student population (Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005; Mau, 2004). Although studies have documented gender differences within career decision-making difficulties, research has not yet focused on gaining knowledge about the experiences of non-male genders and their military cultural influences (Gati and Saka, 2001; Mau, 2004; Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, & Cardelle-Elawar, 2007).

Future studies would benefit from further quantifying the cultural variables of combat experience and deployment. As previously mentioned, gaining additional details about both of these variables could potentially shed a more accurate light on their influence. Such details include assessing when deployments took place (e.g., did they interrupt coursework), how many times the service member has been deployed, the length of each deployment, and MOS within said deployments. Future studies could also explore the potential traumatic symptoms that may have resulted from combat experience. Additionally, research may benefit from comparing civilian students with psychological distress/traumatic symptoms to Veterans and military members who have experienced combat experience. Furthermore, although there is a large body of research focused on psychological distress and mental health outcomes specifically for military members, future research should assess such variables in the context of military culture and career decision-making difficulties in the military student population (DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Kintzle, Schuyler, Ray-Letourbeau, Ozuna, Munch, Xintarianos, & Castro, 2015; Morin,
2011; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Exploring such details in a qualitative way may also be beneficial to gather rich data specific to each individual’s experience.

Notably, qualitative studies are not consistent with the current findings. Qualitatively, military students have reported struggling with career planning and decision-making (Vance, 2015). Literature has suggested that military service members are inexperienced at career decision-making. Further, the literature has detailed that military mind-set impacts such career struggles, as service members are largely told what they are going to do throughout their enlistment (Vance, 2015). Future studies should extend more in-depth exploration of these observations.

Implications for Practice

The present study supported that there is a statistically significant, predictive relationship between age and Lack of Readiness. Specifically, military students who are younger in age experience greater difficulties related to Lack of Readiness. This finding suggests that efforts should continue to be placed on preparation for career decision-making, in the beginning of the process. Further, the study concluded that the military students within this sample did not experience statistically significant issues related to Lack of Information or Inconsistent Information, both of which occur during the decision-making process. Within the university and college atmosphere, greater assistance should aim to intervene early in the decision-making process with incoming, younger military students.

The current research possesses practical implications for school counselors and university personnel who interact with Veteran and military student populations. Earlier research specifically with the CDDQ has demonstrated that, in general, students should be taught basic decision-making skills (Gati & Saka, 2001). Research explicitly focused on military students has
highlighted the importance of campus services being supportive of this population’s needs (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Potentially, the increase in Veteran and military support centers on college and university campuses may be playing a positive role in such students not reporting statistically significant issues related to career decision-making difficulties. On the contrary, the findings of this study suggest that Veteran and military students may not experience substantial needs related to such tasks.

Noted in previous literature, school counselors can use the CDDQ to facilitate the identification of groups of students who share similar difficulties within the three major categories (Gati & Saka, 2001). As individuals are grouped by experienced difficulties, they may benefit from participating in the same interventions. In emphasizing previous literature, colleges and universities are encouraged to continue to share best practices and conduct research within this population in order to promote academic achievement and provide a positive environment (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Furthermore, although mental health issues were not a direct factor of interest within this study, there is a considerable number of Veterans and military service members who are coping with negative psychological issues consequential of their service. Literature suggests that lengthy deployments (noted as longer than six months) and multiple deployments contribute to increased experiences with psychological concerns (Department of Defense Mental Health Advisory Team, 2007). Campuses need to be prepared to support such service members upon their enrollment into courses. Previous research has also noted that counseling military students who have experienced multiple deployments and separations is challenging (Vance, 2015). Specific support through college counseling centers and Veteran and military student centers on campuses may help alleviate negative experiences while the service members are becoming students.
Limitations

The limitations of the current research study must be considered, especially in relation to multiple statistically nonsignificant findings. First, in terms of literature and research, this study served to fill a gap regarding U.S. military students’ career decision-making difficulties. There have been limited studies that have investigated career related constructs in military student populations in the United States, and therefore, there is scarce foundational literature. Previous studies completed on U.S. military students have focused on career transitioning and onVeteran-specific services available on university campuses (Cook & Kim, 2009; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Additionally, the majority of studies have used qualitative data to study military student populations (e.g. Veterans in transition from military to college, CDMD for military students in Israel, civilian assimilation; Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009).

Several specific methodological limitations must also be addressed. First, the composition of the sample within this study needs to be discussed. The Department of Defense (DoD; Demographic Report, 2016) reported that the total military force consists of approximately 83% males. The percentage of women within the military has hovered around approximately 16% since the year 2000, with little increase. Further, the total military force largely comprises White/Caucasian (70%), married (50%) individuals aged 25 years or younger (40%), respectively (DoD Demographic Report, 2016). The sample used within this study is comparable to the most represented demographics within the total military force population. Although this is an ideal overall representation of the total military force, it differs slightly from the average student within higher education.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2017) reported that in the Fall of 2016, students enrolled within institutions of higher education were more likely to be female
(56%), White/Caucasian (60%), under the age of 25 years old attending two-year institutions, respectively. Based on the type of universities, such as public, private, or community, these statistics may change. Therefore, studies conducted on civilian U.S. college and university populations may not be generalizable to the national military student population and vice versa.

Consequently, as the demographic composition of the Military progressively changes, this study may not capture the unique experiences of minority service members. This study is also limited in terms of assessing how intersectionality between numerous cultures may impact career decision-making difficulties.

Another limitation of the study includes not having a comparison group. Specifically, greater knowledge may have been gathered about U.S. Veteran and military students’ career decision-making difficulties if they were assessed against a sample of comparable civilian counterparts. The results are currently being interpreted in isolation, with only military member responses. Adding a civilian group would also potentially allow for more generalizable results.

Next, the measures in this study relied on participants’ self-report data. In research, it is accepted knowledge that self-report data can be limited. For example, even straightforward questions have the potential for misunderstanding (Stone, Bachrach, Kurtzman, & Cain, 1999). Self-report data also opens the possibility for inaccuracies of reality or dishonesty within reporting. However, especially in cases where one seeks to measure the participant’s unique, perceived experience, self-report data is a necessary measurement method (Stone et al., 1999). Additionally, the data collection occurred within a specific geographical location. The participants in this study have likely shared similar training and experiences within their military service. As the sample is taken from Midwest universities, there may be a disproportionate representation of certain demographic variables. Although this limits the study’s overall
generalizability to other areas throughout the United States, it will ideally add beneficial
information to the vocational aspects within U.S. military culture. It is also important to note
that computerized interpretations should not negate the clinical relevance of the individual’s
background, experiences, and unique traits.

Further limitations include information gathered regarding combat experience and
deployment(s). As the study did not specifically require deployment and combat experience, a
subset of the sample population was utilized for the associated analyses. Levels of combat
experience and deployment potentially were not assessed in enough detail for the study at hand.
Although both constructs have been generally explored within military student populations, they
have largely been examined through qualitative measures or through their associated outcomes,
such as the experience of transitioning or the impact of such stressors psychologically
(Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Studies have
indicated that combat military students are a special needs student population, and thus require
additional services in order to meet their educational goals (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell,
2009). Specifically, deployments are seen as disruptive, life-altering transitions (Schlossberg,
Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how deployment, or multiple deployments,
impact military service members, more detailed information should be gathered. For example,
using previous deployment experience as a “yes or no” construct does little to provide thorough
insight into each of these experiences. It may be that this variable was too general, and that each
deployment is not equal. Gathering information regarding type of deployment, length of
deployment, number of times deployed, when deployments occurred (e.g. before, during, and/or
after enrollment in college courses), deployment region, and MOS may provide greater specifics
into how deployment may or may not impact career decision-making difficulties. On the contrary, the statistically nonsignificant findings between deployment and career decision-making difficulties within the current study may also provide evidence that the service members who have been deployed have been confronted with difficult challenges that have matured them (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Regardless, not accounting for the more specific details for the variables of combat experience and deployment potentially prevented insight into how these unique experiences may influence career decision-making difficulties.

Due to unforeseen recruitment issues, revisions were made to the original IRB. As mentioned previously, the study intended to solely recruit from one public university. Two additional institutions were added in order to gain enough responses. Since the demographic questionnaire did not inquire about which university/college the participant attended, results were unable to differentiate if the institution attended impacted responses. Further, analyses were incapable of assessing if there were differences between the institutions. The institutions were systemically different from one another, consisting of a public university, a private university, and the last being a community college. Being able to assess this factor within the analyses may have potentially provided additional insight into the study’s results.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and the demographic variable of age, and the cultural factors of deployment and combat experience. Specifically, the study intended to gain a better understanding of the types of career decision-making difficulties that are common for military students in the United States. This investigation attempted to provide some evidence that military students are in need of more effective interventions and resources regarding career decision-making within the
college setting. The study aimed to deliver information related to the experiences that Veteran students have within the military culture, and how they may play a role in academic and occupational success. The current findings suggest that military students may have many unique, cultural influences to consider within their career decision-making process. Although the present study suggests that younger military students likely experience career-related issues regarding *Lack of Motivation*, the predictive factors accounted for are likely a small part of the overall cultural influences. Due to issues in properly measuring and assessing military cultural factors, such as combat experience and deployment, additional difficulties were potentially unrecognized within the study.

Previous literature has noted the developed maturity that military members have, likely due to leadership positions being held during their service time or difficult challenges being faced (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). In this instance, it may be that military students are able to handle career decision-making tasks due to their more advanced life experiences or specific military training. This study did not compare United States Veteran and military students to their civilian counterparts. Therefore, results are unable to conclude if military students are more or less likely to experience career decision-making difficulties related to the general student population. Further, since this study did not account for potential differences within the 3 different systemic types of universities/colleges, results are unable to decipher if type of intuition plays a role in such tasks.

The current study is the first to examine how age and military cultural factors potentially impact career decision-making difficulties. When main effects were explored, this study suggested that students who were younger in age reported more difficulties in the categories related to a lack of readiness due to lack of motivation, indecisiveness, and dysfunctional myths.
This outcome is consistent with prior research that has specifically investigated career decision-making difficulties for the general, civilian student population (Kleiman et al., 2004; Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano, & Cardelle-Elawar, 2007; Tinsley et al., 1989). There have been previous studies conducted to understand career decision-making difficulties for individuals within the military, and for individuals within United States’ colleges and universities, but limited to none that have assessed the population that share both characteristics. Further, no prior studies have explored how military culture can play a role in such difficulties. The present study makes a needed contribution to the literature by examining potential U.S. military cultural influences in career decision-making difficulties. Given that higher numbers of military students continue to enroll in colleges and universities, it seems pertinent to gather more information on their experiences. Further details are needed on this growing population, as Veteran and military programs become increasingly more prevalent throughout institutions of higher education. As this study cannot provide evidence that Veteran and military students are not unique, emphasis must be placed on the continued need for Veteran and military support programs on college and university campuses. Continued exploration for individual, unique experiences within military culture is important to attend to the shifting needs and decisions that military students have.
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APPENDIX A

Demographic Survey

1. In which branch (or branches) of the United States Military have you served?
   - Merchant Marine
   - Army
   - Air Force
   - Marine Corps
   - Navy
   - Coast Guard

2. Veterans Era/ Location served during:
   - WWII
   - Cold War
   - Korea
   - Vietnam
   - Gulf War
   - OIF-Operation Iraqi Freedom
   - OEF-Operation Enduring Freedom
   - OND-Operation New Dawn Iraq
   - Peace Time
   Other (please specify) [ ]

3. Current or past status (Check all that apply)
   - Active Duty
   - Reserves
   - National Guard
   - Retired
   - Veteran
   - Transition from Service

4. What is your age?
   Please Specify (18 – 100)
5. Please indicate which gender you identify with.
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other

6. Please indicate your race/ethnicity.
   - Black or African American
   - White or Caucasian
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Native American or American Indian
   - Other

7. Please indicate your relationship status.
   - Single
   - Married
   - Separated
   - Divorced

8. Are you currently a part-time or full-time student?
   - Part-time student
   - Full-time student

9. Please indicate your current education status.
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior

10. Have you been deployed during your military service?
    - No
    - Yes
11. Please indicate your cumulative amount of time spent deployed.

☐ 0 – 3 months
☐ 3 – 6 months
☐ 6 – 12 months
☐ 12 – 24 months
☐ 24 + months

12. Do you have any combat experience?

☐ No
☐ Yes
The statements below are about your combat experiences during your most recent deployment. As used in these statements, the term “unit” refers to those you lived and worked with on a daily basis during deployment. Please mark how often you experienced each circumstance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During deployment...</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice</th>
<th>Several times over entire deployment</th>
<th>A few times each week</th>
<th>Daily or almost daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ...I went on combat patrols or missions.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. ...I took part in an assault on entrenched or fortified positions that involved naval and/or land forces.</td>
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<td>3. ...I personally witnessed someone from my unit or an ally unit being seriously wounded or killed.</td>
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<td>4. ...I encountered land or water mines, booby traps, or roadside bombs (for example, IEDs).</td>
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<td>5. ...I was exposed to hostile incoming fire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. ...I was exposed to “friendly” fire.</td>
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<td>7. ...I was in a vehicle (for example, a “humvee”, helicopter, or boat) or part of a convoy that was attacked.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. ...I was part of a land or naval artillery unit that fired on enemy combatants.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. ...I personally witnessed enemy combatants being seriously wounded or killed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. ...I personally witnessed civilians (for example, women and children) being seriously wounded or killed.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. ...I was injured in a combat-related incident.</td>
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<td>12. ...I fired my weapon at enemy combatants.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13.</strong> I think I wounded or killed someone during combat operations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.</strong> I was involved in locating or disarming explosive devices.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.</strong> I was involved in searching or clearing homes, buildings, or other locations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16.</strong> I participated in hand-to-hand combat.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>17.</strong> I was involved in searching and/or disarming potential enemy combatants.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>