

Life and Career Planning
Worker Interview

This paper is a brief overview of Loren Williams' life and career choices with a short discussion of it from the perspective of social learning theory and Ann Roe's needs theory. The discussion will include where the theories seem to account for his career choices and where they seem inadequate.

Loren Williams is a sixty-five year old white married male retiree with three adult sons. He has a Ph.D. in industrial psychology and currently trains and consults in multiculturalization two to four days per month with V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc.. He and his wife are co-owners/ operators of Rivendell Lodge, a bed and breakfast. He currently works for continued self growth, fun, meeting interesting people and to help others raise their awareness and deal with issues of diversity. He enjoys building things, historical reading and especially military history while he and his wife enjoy the outdoors and traveling.

L.W. was born the oldest of three sons in Columbia, South Carolina in 1927. His father was chair of the math department at the University of South Carolina and received his Ph.D. when Loren was eight years old. His mother taught math at a high school and in her husband's math department. Big family get togethers, the First Baptist church and academic achievement were important to this family. His father told him in junior high school that if he didn't do well in school his options would be limited.

L.W. told stories of family events when he was a child that he connects to his present work with V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc. The first one was about his mother's father, the Chief of Police for Savannah, Georgia, and his mother. He heard this family story of his granddad throwing a Black man off a street car for sitting in the only empty seat next to Loren's mother. The next story was about his directly experiencing his grandfather's racism over one of L.W.'s childhood heroes, Joe Lewis, a black American boxer. Loren was eight or ten years old when Joe Lewis fought Max Schmelling, a Nazi. Loren had early comic books about Joe Lewis and was excited about the fight. His grandfather put him down for liking Joe Lewis. The third story relating to his current work was about spending the summers from 1931-1935 in Chicago in an apartment complex while his father was completing his Ph.D.. During that time he played in the alleys with Blacks, Asians, Phillipinos and Jewish kids. There was also an old German man who had fought in world war I living down the hall.

Then L.W. shared about his educational experiences starting with math. He'd gotten the

first grade book prior to classes starting and completed all the math problems. When he proudly presented his accomplishment to the teacher on the first day of classes he was told to erase all his answers and do the problems again with the class. Loren also related that he took the college math course, differential equations, from his dad and it was the hardest "B" he ever got.

In elementary school L.W. was good in most subjects and skipped half of second grade and all of fifth grade which put him a year younger than his classmates, who were all white middle class kids. In junior and senior high school L.W. enjoyed history as he does now, but never considered it a career option. The family also had a strong interest in history and especially the history of the Confederate States of America since Loren is a fifth cousin to Robert E. Lee.

His high school ambition of playing football was thwarted because he was too small. He decided to become the sports reporter for the school newspaper instead. He was a member of the National Honor Society all through high school and accepted without consideration the family's strong expectation to attend college.

He held two part time jobs through high school on his own initiative and considered bagging groceries and selling newspapers as fun. L.W.'s earlier job fantasies were being a pilot, an architect, and then through high school an aeronautical engineer, which became his major when first attending the University of South Carolina. He remembered his family approved of his choices as real professions.

Due to World War II, by June 1945 he quit college to enlist into the Navy for four years in a special program in electronics rather than be drafted into the Army. He ended up electronic maintenance on an aircraft carrier. During the time in the Navy L.W. reconsidered his choice of engineering as a career since he'd not been doing well at it in college. He chose to finish at U.S.C. in psychology since he enjoyed that class the most. Loren identified that he'd enjoyed the teacher, being the top in the class, and learning new things, and described it as fun.

After completing a master's degree in psychology he got recalled to the Navy for fifteen months. During that time Loren realized it was the Navy's training and selection of people that interested him the most. That became the primary influence for his choosing to enter the University of Tennessee for a Ph.D. in industrial psychology after discharge. He was clear that he didn't want to teach or do clinical psychology. Reflecting back on his clarity of eliminating those two career options, he shared, "teaching was a sterile occupation just passing on information to people". He got turned off to clinical psychology by having some bad teachers. L.W. was clear his operating style in almost any arena was to facilitate a group or individual to focus on their own objectives and assist them to reach those objectives. He described it as "going into someone's ballpark and helping them to play ball better," which he thought of as

fitting well with industrial psychology. Also while at Tennessee he met his future wife who was an undergraduate psychology major.

L.W. believes that it was partly due to the atmosphere of the cold war in the mid 1950's that he took a job with The Human Resources and Research Office for the Army. While stationed in El Paso, Texas he got interested in research administration. From there he moved to Virginia and The National Training Research Center for the Army to evaluate how to get the most out of electronic training. He'd combined his military experience with electronics with psychology and his interest in training people. L.W. mentioned he helped write and edit the Army doctrine for counterinsurgency that got used in Vietnam. He became executive for all the research for the Army in Washington, D.C., for two years beginning in 1962. *That sounds overwhelming!*

He reported getting bored and increasingly dissatisfied with how little he could impact such a large organization. He didn't realize the above until he'd taken a job offer at Georgia Medical School in 1964 to help critique how doctors are trained. He enjoyed helping develop a new curriculum and start their dental school. He liked the impact he could have and stayed eight years until school politics gave him an incompetent boss.

Then in 1972 he moved to Richmond, Virginia, to do the same job at the medical school at Virginia Commonwealth University. He especially liked branching out into the rest of the academic area evaluating their training and teaching methods. Loren discovered he felt most satisfied working with individual faculty on their problems and needs and began filling in doing jobs nobody else was doing. That was when he got a grant to help white faculty work with Black students and found that in working with their biases he began realizing his own. He connected with the two Black women who set up V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc. and began contracting to assess groups and offer training dealing with diversity.

His wife influenced his taking early retirement and only after leaving the university was he able to realize he was tired of the budget worries and leadership demands such as being responsible for others. Currently he works with V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc. because he can do what he enjoys with no administrative headaches.

L.W.'s volunteer work has been in these later years. It includes serving on boards for a retirement community, Montessori school, and Unitarian church. About the future Loren was very clear and brief. He plans to continue with V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc. training and consulting as long as he's growing and having fun. He and Sarah are getting out of the bed and breakfast business for more time to travel. They got into it to stay connected with people and be in the mountains but found they don't like being so tied down and just want to connect socially.

Through the perspective of social learning theory L.W. had genetic endowment,

environmental conditions, learning experiences both instrumental and associative as well as task skills which set his career course from his Ph.D. father and racist granddad through W W II to working with V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc..

Loren ~~apparently got~~ genetic endowment ^{include} for above average intelligence, academic abilities and a healthy body to allow him to use his gifts. One of the many environmental conditions was the family. It's socioeconomic status allowed and expected Loren to attend college. Therefore he could experience the psychology class and later go on to get a Ph.D.. The family was where he got both the experiences of the grandfather's racism and his parents' allowance of his having multicultural playmates in Chicago. The family also seemed to be a stable and safe place to rear healthy children. So his family was a major environmental condition.

W W II was the important environmental condition that forced Loren to leave college and join the Navy where he got time to reconsider engineering career plans. He received training in electronics which laid the ground work for combining his psychology master's with how the Navy trained people to do electronics when the Navy recalled him. That recall experience furthered his interest in the training and selection of people and led to his choice of choosing the field of industrial psychology after discharge. The cold war and his previous military experience influenced his taking a job with the Army after getting his doctorate.

Other environmental factors on his career direction included growing up in South Carolina in the 1920's exposed to Blacks and racism. Also the politics at Georgia Medical School helped precipitate his move to Virginia and eventually his expansion into the grant for helping white faculty deal with Black students and connecting with V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc.

L.W. also had early childhood learning about racism both by direct instrumental experience from his grandfather and associative learning in hearing his mother tell the story about the grandfather. He also had direct learning playing with kids of other races in Chicago. He had a negative math experience in elementary school and another later with his father's class, which may have made engineering with its math requirements less attractive.. Then he had a very positive learning in psychology classes.

The task approach skills seem to be less explicit. I can only try to deduce them from the facts since I interviewed mostly for facts. He had valued models in his more racially accepting parents as well as the math problem solving aspects and people aspects of both parents.. He did well in school skipping fifth grade which would help with developing a positive generalization of self as Krumboltz labels what seems like self concept. It seems true since when faced with not being able to play football he was able to change over to sports reporter. When not doing well in engineering he was able to evaluate and change. That seems to infer some positive attitudes

about himself, his capabilities and trying alternatives. /the trying alternatives seems to indicate good problem solving abilities. L.W. seems to have some strong task approach skills from his persistence and level of achievement.

I'm curious about L.W.'s shift from his Baptist upbringing to Unitarian. Did it parallel his shifts to working with diversity? In this case we didn't discuss it, but the spiritual aspect of life and career direction is a major piece missing from social learning theory that can influence direction in one's life. Generally with that major exception social learning theory does broadly explain the factors that shape life and career choices.

I agree with this critique.

L.W. fits Ann Roe's study group profile being a highly educated and outstanding white male. I chose her theory for his seemingly positive parents, their people-oriented careers and his seeming to fit Maslow's hierarchy of needs process. Loren fit Roe's structure even though her 1950 theory seems incredibly simplistic. The 1972 update seems to fit better since she is more inclusive with genetic and environmental experiences.

L.W. seems to have had a lot of secure need structure on Maslow's lower levels. It seems he has been able to deal with the social, ego and self actualizing levels since he came from a secure home that met his physical and safety needs. He certainly seems to have a healthy self esteem and independence going after his own jobs in high school and his own career direction in college. His Ph.D. and his many other achievements clearly indicate he has been working on that level of Maslow's hierarchy. Loren seems to be on the self actualizing level with his current work for V.I.S.I.O.N.S. Inc. and the bed and breakfast business. Both are to meet his desire for expanding himself and feeling fulfilled.

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I wonder about how the experiences with his grandfather fit into Loren's need structure since he connects for himself those early experiences with what he now does and enjoys doing the most at the culmination of his career. So I can speculate that Loren's put down from his grandfather left a need for this self, social, spiritual expression later in his life. Roe's theory attempts to address such an important influence on a child as well as such strong drives as needs.

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So L.W. seems to have had a lot of satisfaction and little frustration as evidenced by what seems to be his functioning at the top level of Maslow's hierarchy with his career at this time. The benefit of a healthy family of origin was that Loren was able to have lower level needs met early on allowing the progress to self actualization. He seems to fit Roe's belief that the child / parent relationship generates needs, interests, and attitudes. His needs structure seem focused on the upper levels since his family seemed to be functioning at a high level. His interests, such as history, he said were imbedded in the family fabric. His attitudes towards learning seem right out of the family, as well as feeling capable and having a more accepting attitude towards

others like his parents. Loren shared that he got the academics orientation from his father and his facilitating style of operating in almost any arena from his mother which he didn't realize until after her death. Before then he'd identified more clearly with his father, not seeing what he'd gotten from his mother.

Roe also leaves out the spiritual aspect of living and therefore of career choice. Roe also didn't take much focus on adult development. Her theory seems more of a single statement than any comprehensive theory that covers the life span. Her theory was psychological and developmental, but only for childhood. The Navy and WW II were very important adult environmental factors in shaping Loren's career both in timing and content which Roe's theory doesn't credit with much impact. She mostly used Maslow's work which fits Loren's development personally and as expressed in his career progression towards self actualization. Loren was right out of the text book for Ann Roe as an above average white male from a above average family, as far as her theory goes. Social learning theory covered the main factors with the exception of his emotional reactions and cognitive sets abouts his early experiences. It seems social learning theory isn't particularly useful in a retrospective study. It is probably easier to explore those mental sets in the present. These two theories seem the best fit for Loren's career pattern in spite of their limitations.

✓ good point -

Very good choices!

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Tom,
This was an extremely interesting interview - well-written, substantive, and thorough - your connections to the theories as well as your critical analysis concerning missing components were both thoughtful and thought-provoking -
Thanks!
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