THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

In search of role models of successful academic retirement

Citation for published version:
Crow, G 2021, 'In search of role models of successful academic retirement', *Contemporary Social Science*.
https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2021.1983204

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1080/21582041.2021.1983204

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:
Contemporary Social Science

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

OPEN ACCESS

Download date: 22. Dec. 2021

ISSN 2158-2041
Contemporary Social Science
https://www.tandfonline.com/rsoc
Editors:
John Connolly - University of the West of Scotland, UK
Jacqueline Barnes - Birkbeck University of London, UK
Routledge
ACADEMY SOCIAL SCIENCES

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Contemporary Social Science
Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsoc21

In search of role models of successful academic retirement

Graham Crow

To cite this article: Graham Crow (2021): In search of role models of successful academic retirement, Contemporary Social Science, DOI: 10.1080/21582041.2021.1983204

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2021.1983204

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 29 Sep 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 57

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rsoc21

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCE
https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2021.1983204

OPEN ACCESS

In search of role models of successful academic retirement

Graham Crow

School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

ABSTRACT
Academics retire with varying degrees of enthusiasm or reluctance, as is apparent in a variety of data sources. Autobiographies and biographies of academics report diverse trajectories, from treating retirement as a fresh start to continuing or even intensified scholarly endeavour. Fractional contracts and flexible retirement ages in most United Kingdom universities have expanded the range of possibilities available to the latest generation of retirees. Survey and interview data collected recently from later-career and retired UK-based academics reveal broad support for continuing connections with academia, unpaid and paid, although universities' facilitation of this was found to vary. The features characterising ideal retirement, notably continued intellectual stimulation and escape from entanglement in bureaucratic processes in a revised work-life balance that offers more space for families, friends, hobbies and volunteering were easier to identify than named examples of successful role models. Making a clean break from an academic role is rare, while uncertainty about the meaning of retirement is common.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 29 July 2021
Accepted 15 September 2021

KEYWORDS
Higher education; retirement; role models

Introduction

Much has been written about managing academic careers, primarily their earlier stages. The relative neglect of 'the concerns of scholars looking to transition successfully out of the university at the end of their career' (Hay, 2017, p. 200) matters because concluding academic careers risks discontentment (Silver, 2018). Some people required to retire by a particular age (which is no longer the norm in the UK but still applies in certain universities that have adopted Employer Justified Retirement Ages) resent denial of opportunities to continue making a contribution beyond their late sixties and question the purported rationale (Baker, 2019). Conversely, people with open-ended contracts may prevaricate, finding it 'difficult to formulate or discuss plans for retirement' (Davies & Jenkins, 2013, p. 332). Continued employment beyond state retirement age occurs disproportionately among highly-educated professionals such as academics; the consequences of this for younger colleagues' opportunities are disputed, complicated by motivations to continue being primarily non-financial (Lain, 2018). Formal retirement still allows scholarly activities to continue, sometimes extensively, albeit frequently unpaid and not always appreciated.

CONTACT Graham Crow gcrow@exseed.ed.ac.uk

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Centripetal forces exerting an on-going pull towards academia are counteracted by centrifugal forces which put distance between retired academics and their former colleagues and universities. Choices to re-set one's work/life balance and to make way for younger cohorts sit alongside unhappier factors such as lamenting contemporary universities' direction of travel, the sense of having been superseded, feeling 'out of the game' (Tizard & Owen, 2001, p. 262) or 'surplus to requirements' (Hoggart, 1993, p. 290), or having nothing new to say (Gaskill, 2020). It does not follow that academic careers resemble what is reputedly the case for political ones, that they typically end in failure (Powell, 1977, p. 151), but the navigation of retirement remains challenging. Treating the process of academic retirement as one of role exit (Ebaugh, 1988; Silver, 2018) is revealing about how people achieve contentment. Also useful is Eleanor Davies and Andrew Jenkins's typology for understanding the trajectories of the 'continuing scholars', the 'clean breakers', and further intermediate types, such as the 'opportunists' (2013, p. 328) who apply their academic skills in new fields.

Two approaches to studying this topic are adopted here. The first considers published accounts of individual academics from the humanities and social sciences, chosen because opportunities to continue desk-based research exceed those in laboratory-based subjects. Biographical and autobiographical material relates predominantly to people from earlier generations whose level of achievements sets them apart. The second approach draws on material from a UK-based study, conducted in 2020 and aiming to secure a more diverse sample, of later academic careers and retirement which involved surveys, qualitative interviews, and analysis of universities' human resources policies. This latter approach resembles that underpinning an Australian study (which included academic participants) of 'selves in transition from work to retirement' (Taylor, Earl, Brooke, & McLoughlin, 2021, p. 6) which contrasted work-centred and other identities in later life. Conclusions relevant to role models of contemporary academic retirement are derived by drawing on both approaches.

Auto/biographies, obituaries and other accounts of potentially model later lives

Autobiographies and memoirs written from the vantage point of retirement recount the journey there. The cultural studies scholar Richard Hoggart, who concluded his career as Warden of Goldsmiths College, commended this exercise, since he 'had not seen the road so clearly until making this backward scamper'. Hoggart's 'life and times' (1993, p. 269, x) predated the 2011 change which freed most UK-based academics from fixed retirement ages. He continued to publish extensively in retirement, remarking in his later eighties 'I do not wish to sit in the garden looking at the flowers or listening to the birds. I am neither a Joiner of Societies nor a Hobbies man … . I feel that I must write' (2005, p. 117). Fear of repetition, of going 'round and round the same old tracks' (1993, p. 273), was offset by a sense of unfinished business, of new insights about fundamental matters such as the relationship between self and others (2001, ch.2), akin to the sociologist Norbert Elias's 'we-I balance' (1991).

Most of Elias's extensive writings appeared subsequent to retiring from his University of Leicester post. This was captured in the observation: 'When, in 1962, Elias reached retirement age, he did not retire from sociology. On the contrary' (Goudsblom &

Mennell, 1998, p. 125). His prize-winning book *The Society of Individuals* (Elias, 1991) appeared in his ninetieth year. He died peacefully in his study aged 93 having 'continued to write in full vigour until the very end' (Mennell, 1992, p. 271). The same pattern of following formal retirement at 65 by decades of prolific publication applied to his fellow sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who treated his work as a lifelong vocation (Bauman & Tester, 2001). Bauman was 'unstoppably creative' (Thompson, in Wagner, 2020, p. 352). He advised academics 'to retire from active university service as soon as possible' (in Reisz, 2008, p. 38); prior to his retirement, administrative tasks had, he claimed, left 'no time for thinking or writing' (in Wagner, 2020, p. 326). Such individuals use retirement to redouble efforts in academic research, publication and engagement with the world of ideas, providing prime examples of 'continuing scholars'.

No set route to continued academic engagement in retirement exists. Elias left the UK for continental Europe where his work had a wider following, while Bauman stayed in his adopted city of Leeds, retaining university connections. Their personal lives were also contrasting. Elias never married, imagining that family life might have impeded his work (1994, p. 78), whereas Bauman's wife Janina was his 'main collaborator' (Wagner, 2020, p. 347) long into his retirement period, when he also worked with his daughter Irena. Hoggart finally settled in Farnham, about which, in retirement, he wrote a book (Hoggart, 1994), dedicated to his wife, Mary. Family connections feature prominently in Hoggart's writing (Bailey, Clarke, & Walton, 2012, p. 2). He observed of his life that 'home and family have provided a firm centre', making him 'less self-centred' (1993, p. 299, 274), and as a result more philosophical than rueful regarding missed academic opportunities.

The anthropologist turned sociologist Peter Worsley regretted that his book *Knowledges* (Worsley, 1997) generated only limited attention, since he thought it 'the best thing I had done'. Published more than a decade into his retirement from Manchester University, it followed renewal of interest in the subject of his first book. Engagement with 'the flood of publications' on the topic published in the intervening period was combined with continuing travel, albeit 'less strenuously' (2008, p. 244, 254, 253) than previously and less extensively than when researching the entity that he had helped to name, 'the third world' (Worsley, 1984). His remark that 'there comes a time when one has used up the empirical data in one's notebooks; a time too when one has nothing new that one desperately wants to say in theoretical terms' implies re-balancing of activities during a long-lasting retirement. Prominent among the things considered 'more important in life than books, academia and world development' (2008, p. 265, 244–245) were family members, including grandchildren. His wife Sheila's 'healthy disbelief that academia and intellectuals are the centre of the universe' (1984, p. xiv) embodies similar sentiments.

Academic pursuits in retirement being shaped by unfinished business from earlier in a career also fit Chelly Halsey's history of his discipline, sociology (Halsey, 2004, p. v) and the further project to which it led (Halsey & Runciman, 2005). Halsey's autobiographical reflections include the proposition that the institution of retirement 'needs immediate abolition', capturing his enthusiasm 'for both flexible and voluntary employment and for a citizen's income throughout life'. His autobiography's dedication to his grandchildren indicates the pull of family relationships. The experience of having come to be 'treated like an old man, lots of past tense and use of me by younger colleagues as a memory bank' (1996, p. 238, 239, 2) is recounted regretfully, the title of his autobiography notwithstanding. No such sense of being treated as past one's prime characterises the account of retirement by Halsey's Oxford contemporary, the industrial sociologist Alan Fox. When Fox's employment ended he completed another book and then wrote his autobiography, alongside many other activities:

Retirement from academic work cannot be said to have brought any "problem of enforced leisure". A new-found enthusiasm for gardening; chores for the local community centre; two days a week helping to run an Oxfam bookshop; these things have taken care of that. (1990, p. 259)

He and his wife Margaret also resolved to make the most of their good health while it lasted. Among the autobiographers considered here, Fox comes closest to Davies and Jenkins's (2013) 'clean breakers'.

The Nottingham-based social work academic Olive Stevenson might have retired early given that her final years in employment 'were sad in many ways' (Stevenson, 2013, p. 115) as she fell out of favour in policy-making circles. She nevertheless persevered and was 63 when she 'officially retired', after which 'Olive's work rate remained extraordinary as she continued to teach, supervise research students, research, write, do consultancy, give public lectures and do pubic service work' (Ferguson, in Stevenson, 2013, p. xi). In sustaining a career over six decades she resembled the sociologist Barbara Wootton, whose 'dread of being idle after a long life of influence and action' meant that to her 'the concept of retirement was quite alien'; this was so much so that 'the greater part of her achievements came after the mid-1950s' (Oakley, 2011, p. 307, 3). In her case the balance shifted from 'academic and social scientist' to 'public servant and peer' (Wootton, 1967), which places her as one of Davies and Jenkins's (2013) 'opportunists'. This shift coincided with the major life changes of leaving her husband George and relocation from London to the country. Becoming a Baroness aged 61 exemplifies Wootton's continuing commitment as 'an outstandingly vigorous public figure' (Halsey, 2004, p. 64). Another sociologist elevated to the House of Lords who 'never stopped working' and for whom 'retirement did not exist in his vocabulary' (Briggs, 2001, p. 313) was Michael Young. Young's extensive on-going activity included a re-study of East London which commenced thirty-five years on from the original's publication, by which time he was in his late seventies. His involvement continued 'up to the day of his death' (Dench, Gavron, & Young, 2006, p. 2). He was unconvinced by the case for compulsory retirement ages, which he considered had 'lurched from one shaky rationalisation to another' (Young & Schuller, 1991, p. 8) during the twentieth century.

Available source material is uneven in what it reveals, for example, what it conveys about personal life. Young combined continued writing and social entrepreneurship with re-marriage and parenthood in his eighties but his biography, written 'in lieu of an autobiography' (Briggs, 2001, ch.1), says little about the latter. Ann Oakley encountered difficulties accessing 'the private side of Barbara Wootton's life' (Oakley, 2011, p. 5), and for Elias there is only the passing comment that 'about his private affairs he was always discreet' (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p. 1). By contrast, Stevenson used her memoir 'to allow my personal life a degree of publicity' (2013, p. 2), including details of therapy, while Hoggart is expansive about his working-class, Methodist upbringing as an orphan in Leeds and its enduring influence on his personality. His ruminations in retirement, prompted by 'the sense of an ending' (2001, p. 229), contained incongruities. A conference experience of being marginalised, treated like 'an aberrant, one-man fringe' by proponents of 'the latest shift of theory' clearly still irked many years on; academic 'disputation' (2005, p. 75, 72) seemed to him to come more readily to people from more privileged backgrounds.

Hoggart was aware that academic life favoured those blessed by self-assurance which, even after a successful career, he found 'hard to reach much of the time' (1993, p. 274). In bleaker moments retirement could 'seem little more than a fag end', while at others he 'could "bridle" … at the assumption that you can have little to say at 80-odd' (2005, p. 4, 6). On bad days, 'doors seem to be progressively closing behind as we inch forward' (1993, p. 295), but a more optimistic tone marked his comment that authors are not necessarily the best judges of what among their legacy will prove most enduring and what 'fruitless' (1994, p. xiv). Hoggart's response to such uncertainty about how posterity will evaluate a career was a stoical resolve to 'just go on and on', sustained by a belief in the correctness of the 'convictions' (1993, p. 279, ch.9) he absorbed early on. His successor as Director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was praised in these terms: 'A good test of the steadiness of an individual's sense of self is the frequency with which 'I' appears in his conversation; Stuart Hall used it less than anyone I have known. His intellectual energy went into ideas, not self-presentation' (1993, p. 91). For Hoggart 'the airs of those who feel themselves superior' (1988, p. 54) were anathema.

The unevenness in what autobiographies and biographies reveal about their subjects' personal lives does not necessarily reflect concern to protect privacy; it can indicate a belief that such matters have only limited relevance to understanding a person's trajectory. Hall regarded the details that fill memoirs as not 'of much intrinsic interest or significance' (2018, p. 10) and his Open University geographer colleague Doreen Massey was suspicious of 'origin stories' (Lee, 2018, p. 162) which framed later career outcomes in terms of earlier formative experiences. Likewise, Wootton is not the only academic to have regarded her life and career as 'more like a series of accidents happening to me than a pattern of my own making' (1967, p. 278). Serendipity features prominently in personal accounts of academic trajectories (Crow, 2020a), although the suspicion exists that autobiographers may lack perspective on the matter. Bauman's biographer Izabela Wagner contests his claim that 'his biography was typical for his generation and had not particularly influenced his work', noting that 'after learning the details of his life, I was convinced of the opposite' (Wagner, 2020, p. 3). Biographers see things that their subjects overlook, and vice versa. And if autobiographies can be selective in their coverage, they can also be frank. Worsley's includes passages of revealing candour, notwithstanding his observation that 'everyone's life has passages that they'd rather forget' (2008, p. ix). Put another way, 'silences and gaps' (Oakley, 2011, p. 4) characterise the genre, along with confessions and, for the self-important, hubris.

One shortcoming of autobiographies is their incompleteness regarding the remaining years of retirement. Wootton's was necessarily silent on 'the twenty years of activity that were still to come' (Oakley, 2011, p. 4). Obituarists are better-placed to tell the full story, albeit constrained by requirements of brevity and timeliness. Obituaries nevertheless offer useful insights, reporting on academics with centripetal trajectories keeping them tied to academia and on others with centrifugal trajectories leading them to new pastures in retirement. The range of activities taken up by the latter group is remarkable, as in a different way is the dedication of those in the former group who are undeterred by advancing years or by awareness that future generations will supersede the achievements of even the greatest individuals (Crow, 2020b). Obituaries may be written about diverse people, although Bridget Fowler found a growing concentration on distinction in research so that 'those who are only reliable administrators, locally illustrious Deans or worthy teachers no longer appear' (2015, pp. 130–131). Thus while the medium of autobiography is dominated by elite figures (Elias, Fox, Hall, Halsey, Hoggart, Stevenson, Wootton and Worsley include, amongst other distinctions, a Peer of the Realm, the recipient of a CBE, two Reith Lecturers, and three Presidents of the British Sociological Association), and a pre-dominantly male elite at that, obituaries are also skewed in terms of coverage.

If a role model's function is to show others what it is possible to achieve, not everyone will look to accounts of eminent figures for inspiration. Nevertheless, their life stories are instructive, not least because retiring from prominent positions may mask initial disadvantage; Fox, Halsey and Hoggart all described upward mobility from humble origins (Fox's reference to his distinctiveness among Oxford colleagues through having 'a wage-earning background' (1990, p. 222) is telling), while Elias's experiences as a Jewish exile from Nazi Germany and Hall's Jamaican origins constituted different types of disadvantage, as did Worsley's and Wootton's treatment by the academic establishment as outsiders due to, respectively, their communist politics and gender. (Even though she does not identify it as an obstacle to career progress in the same way, Stevenson's sexual orientation also deserves mention in this context.) Hoggart has been described by members of a succeeding generation as a model 'public intellectual' whose career was more organic than the conventional pattern of 'ladder climbing' (Bailey et al., 2012, p. 196, 200). Arlie Hochschild's feminist critique of 'the clockwork of male careers' (2003, ch. 17) similarly celebrates role models who eschew established patterns of accumulated individual accomplishments framed in terms of institutionally-endorsed goals that may turn out to be personally unfulfilling. That said, Hochschild warns against focussing so much on the good of the group that an individual's interests become lost to view (Crow & Laidlaw, 2019).

The summary picture of academic retirement derived from autobiographies and biographies is that it may follow one of three broad trajectories: continued (and in some cases intensified) scholarly activity, a clean break from academia, or an intermediate position of continuity and change in which new or revived extra-curricular interests are accommodated alongside enduring academic endeavours. The first two of these correspond to Davies and Jenkins's (2013) 'continuing scholars' and 'clean breakers' but the intermediate group is captured only imperfectly by their category of 'opportunists' because this downplays the continuing importance of academic activity alongside new interests. Their two other types, 'avoiders' (who prevaricate about the decision) and 'the reluctant' (who leave academia unwillingly), were absent in this auto/biographical literature, although the option now available of staying in employment beyond what were previously set retirement ages may see the former type gaining prominence among current academics, especially as fractional contracts have further widened the range of options available. Similarly, some universities' introduction of Employer Justified Retirement Ages is one route to reluctant retirement. The next section considers what recent interview and survey data reveal about contemporary perspectives on these rival models of later life.

The search for contemporary role models.

A postal survey of retired university staff conducted some two decades ago (Tizard & Owen, 2001) found it common for academics at pre-1992 Universities in England to retire formally earlier than the compulsory retirement ages then in operation, but for subsequent re-employment by universities on a part-time basis to happen more often than not, particularly for men (who made up 88% of the sample). Taking up other income-earning activity such as consultancy was also quite widespread. Along with unpaid academic activity this made for a complicated picture of what ‘retirement’ meant for the study participants, who were three to five years into the process. The majority spent increased time on leisure activities, and nearly half undertook voluntary work, but it was not true for everyone that satisfaction with their lives had been improved by retiring; those who had stayed longest in employment were the least likely to report increased contentment in retirement.

Seeking in part to update this study and re-using or updating many of its 67 questions, a mixed methods project including on-line surveys for current and retired academics (completed by 81 and 161 participants respectively) and qualitative on-line interviews with fewer, more open-ended questions (involving 54 interviewees) was undertaken with data collection running from May to October 2020. This followed ethics approval for the arrangements made to protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality and to ensure their informed consent. All participants were UK-based academics. The survey participants responded to the invitation in various fora to take part, while the interviewees were recruited by snowball sampling. The surveys were completed anonymously, but interviewees were not encouraged complete the survey, so while some overlap is possible the two groups are treated as discrete.

Roughly two thirds of both groups (161 survey participants and 34 interviewees) were retired (defined as receiving most or all of their income from pensions), and retired survey participants were on average 8 years into their retirements (that is, twice as far as Tizard and Owen’s participants had been). Roughly twice as many men as women took part in the study, and participants ranged in age from those in their fifties to those in their eighties. Some participants had retired in their fifties while others were still working full-time more than a decade past state retirement age, but among survey participants who had retired the mean age of retirement was 64 for men and 63 for women, an increase of 3 years on Tizard and Owen’s (2001, p. 255) findings. The majority of retired survey and interview participants were aged 70+, and the majority of survey and interview participants who were still working were aged under 66. Table 1 gives the detailed age and gender profiles of the study’s participants.

Table 1. Age and gender profile of study participants.

	Aged <60	Aged 60–65	Aged 66–69	Aged 70+	Male	Female	Other
Working survey participants (81)	6	39	30	6	48	33	
Retired survey participants (161)[a]	2	16	32	110	109	49	1
Working interviewees (20)	8	6	2	4	11	9	
Retired interviewees (34)		6	2	26	23	11	
Total survey participants and interviewees (296)	16 (5%)	67 (23%)	66 (22%)	146 (49%)	191 (65%)	102 (35%)	1 (0.3%)

[a] This figure includes the three participants who preferred not to give their age or gender.

The survey samples were overwhelmingly white, with only 3% of retired participants who answered the question and 1% of the participants still working self-identifying as BAME. Interviewees were not asked to identify their ethnicity. Approximately three quarters of both survey participants and interviewees were or had been professors. The survey and interview samples contrasted in relation to academic discipline: only a minority of survey participants came from non-STEM subjects, but the majority of interviewees came from these social sciences and arts and humanities subjects (that is, those covered by Research Excellence Framework panels C and D). To preserve anonymity, survey participants were not asked to identify their present (or, if retired, former) university or the country of the UK in which they worked, but interviewees were associated with 21 universities in England and 8 in Scotland; 37 interviewees worked at pre-1992 institutions, 17 at post-1992 institutions.

In the thematic analysis of the interview data relating to the diverse influences on academic trajectories on which this paper focuses comparison with others emerged as important, although not necessarily as anticipated. Interviewees were asked whether they identified with particular individuals as role models, and a surprisingly-frequent response was that people did not, and in some cases were hostile to the very idea that they might: ‘I don’t look for them. I don’t like role models. Or usually I look at other people and think “That’s not what I want”. It’s very rare for me to think “Oh, I wish I was like that”’ (interviewee 9). One regarded the concept as ‘trans-Atlantic psychobabble’ (interviewee 18), while another felt no need for role models, describing himself as ‘largely self-propelling’ (interviewee 8). An additional reason for caution was that ‘Circumstances vary so much that what is applicable to one person in one generation may have little relevance to another in a following generation’ (interviewee 32).

A related comment was that role models had not been available to the ‘generation of women who have broken ground … . [who have] had to do it our own way’ (interviewee 31). This point is compatible with Hochschild’s (2003, ch.17) proposition that role models may prove particularly useful for women (and others, such as people from minority ethnic backgrounds) who have had to confront treatment by the academy as outsiders. The stories of the academic women whose negotiation of obstacle-strewn career paths provide ‘doughty role models’ (David & Woodward, 1998, p. 18; see also Thompson, Plummer, & Demireva, 2021, p. 229) reinforce this case. There are parallels between graduate students being provided with role models for academic careers and the discussion of whether particular individuals have managed the transition to retirement in ways that might usefully inform mid- and later-career academics.

Among those interviewees who entertained the possibility that role models may serve a useful purpose for academics approaching retirement, it was not always felt necessary to identify particular individuals, simply the trajectory that had been followed and the qualities exhibited. Thus interviewee 12 said ‘I admire those who have been quite decisive about it. So I suppose the people I admire are the people who have made a clean break … . those who are sort of like, “Okay, I’ve done what I want to do there and that’s it”’. Interviewee 6 was likewise influenced by people who represented the ethos that ‘there is life after academia’. Interestingly, these two interviewees used the similar expressions of ‘hanging on’ or ‘hanging around’ to convey the danger as they saw it of colleagues not recognising the signs that the time to move on had arrived. At the other end of the clean break/continuing scholars spectrum there was some admiration for people who devote their retirement to on-going academic activity, because they 'give people an idea of what academic life might be like if you didn't have to spend a lot of time in administration and doing unnecessary bureaucratic chores, filling out forms on how long you spend on academic work', people who 'give you an idea of what it is to be a true historian' (interviewee 1). In this vein, more than one interviewee mentioned Bauman's celebrated achievements in publishing and public engagement post-retirement.

Between these two ends of the spectrum were several interviewees who appreciated balance. These included the interviewee who regarded his former supervisor as a role model: 'He just carried on working, but he always had a very good work-life balance … It's unhealthy to work until you drop or absolutely stop doing everything then have nothing to do in your life' (interviewee 51). For interviewee 42, envy of people who 'are amazing in that it seems like they never retired' was quickly tempered by the recognition that 'I don't want to be working the whole time … . [If] you are in your mid-seventies you don't need to flog yourself like this anymore'. Balance was also a theme for interviewee 21, whose former colleague 'carried on learning … alongside [tending] his allotment', and was admired for doing so because 'they satisfy different parts of his personality'.

In the relatively few instances where interviewees named specific individuals as role models, they were used to illustrate particular qualities. Thus Barbara Tizard was pointed to as a model of someone 'active, engaged with life, doing different things' (interviewee 38). Amongst the balanced set of things undertaken subsequent to her formal retirement was the study of retired university staff mentioned above. Stuart Hall was identified as an example of 'people who have managed to keep going in their fields way beyond the time of their institutional structure', in his case returning to long-standing personal interests

> which were very much to do with art and literature. He went off and became a Professor of Sociology and well-known political theorist, Marxist, all very serious stuff, but he did love art and literature and he found a way to spend the last 20 years of his life mainly doing that, which he hadn't had time to do before. And I thought that was a tremendously admirable thing to do. (interviewee 49)

Another role model identified was David Morgan, whose obituary (Scott 2020) following his death aged 82 prompted his identification by an interviewee as someone leaving behind enduring achievements. He was remembered as

> in many ways an exemplary academic because he's gone on, contributing to everything from debates to writing. … . very sadly he's gone and obviously leaves people behind, but never mind in a way because he's not only a loving person but he's an achiever, he's an intellectual achiever, and I think that's what I'd like said about me, I'd achieved certain things, and it makes it all worthwhile.
>
> Interviewer: And maybe it's having achieved things without trampling on other people?
>
> I think that's very important, because I don't feel David ever trampled on anyone. (interviewee 24)

This interviewee lauded such individuals for their 'commitment to a vocation' and their 'sense of purpose', and for their 'aspiration to achieve something'. It is unsurprising to find

David Morgan remembered in this way in a book about pioneers of social research, along with his partner, Janet Finch (Thompson et al., 2021, pp. 174–177). For each of these suggested role models retirement marked a new phase in life without a radical break from what had gone before. Academic endeavour continued, and they fit best the 'continuing scholars' category, albeit characterised by greater control over the activities pursued and their scheduling than had been the case when they were accountable to their employers.

The survey participants were not asked to identify role models of people who had been successful in managing their later careers and the transition to retirement, but insights into their preferred trajectories can nevertheless be gleaned from their answers. Among retired survey participants, 66% felt that they had retired at the right time and 5% would have preferred to retire earlier. About a fifth (21%) would have preferred to retire later than they did; the majority of this group had retired between the ages of 65 and 68 and included some who had been subject to compulsory retirement, which is one indicator of falling into Davies and Jenkins's (2013) 'reluctant' category. But only 26% of retired survey participants had retired later than 65, and 53% of participants reported being more contented and a further 38% no less contented with life following retirement, suggesting that those who hankered after continued employment (the 'reluctant' retirees) constituted under 10%. Another indication that people feeling excluded from academia following retirement comprise a relatively small proportion of the whole is given by over 80% of participants identifying no additional academic activities in which they would like to participate, while fewer than 10% stated a wish for greater contact than they had with former colleagues either at their previous institution or more broadly in the academic world. Academic discipline had not made a great deal of difference to age of retirement for survey participants who had retired but for those still working STEM subjects saw only 20% anticipating retiring by 66 while for those in arts, humanities and social sciences the figure was 47% (albeit in a small sample including 21% undecided).

Treating retirement as an opportunity to make a clean break from academia also accounted for only a minority of retired survey participants.13% reported that they did not require ongoing contact with the academic world in general, and 23% that they did not want ongoing contact with staff at their former institution, although this pattern of response did increase with age, indicating that the break from academia for this group may not occur immediately upon retirement for everyone. This is consistent with the finding that 47% of retired survey participants had continued with some employment in the university sector following retirement (defined as the point at which pensions account for the majority or all of a person's income), and at the time of the survey 35% were spending at least half of the equivalent of a working week on academic activities (both paid and unpaid), and a further 33% less than half but more than the little or none spent by the remaining 32%. Research was more prominent than teaching or supervision in the activities undertaken. Put another way, a balanced arrangement of continuing with academic activities post-retirement and combining these with other activities such as volunteering, spending time with family members, and pursuing hobbies was the predominant pattern among retired survey participants. Voluntary work for at least five hours a week was being undertaken by 33% of retired survey participants, 8% were caring regularly for grandchildren and 10% for other relatives, and 50% were spending a lot more time on activities which had no direct academic connection (such as travel, gardening, music and art) than they had when employment had generated the majority of their income.

Without necessarily knowing it, the retired survey participants were more likely to be following in the footsteps of Halsey and Worsley (whose retirements balanced academic and other activities) than in those of Elias and Hoggart (who prioritised continued writing for publication). Of course, the general lifting of the requirement to retire at a particular age in 2011 may have led those wishing to 'just go on and on' (as Hoggart put it) to be found among the survey participants still working. Indeed, the members of this group were on average 65, and although 26% were planning to retire by the time they had reached 66 (the current state retirement age), 53% were planning to work beyond this point, more than a third of them into their seventies. A further 21% were undecided, the majority of whom had already worked at least four decades in higher education, which suggests some affinity with Davies and Jenkins's 'avoiders'. This pattern was clearly gendered, with the majority of men but only a minority of women operating with a planned retirement date beyond 66. Another indication of changed working arrangements having a bearing was that the option of moving to a fractional contract had been taken up by 42% of those aged 66 and over. This option was also mentioned by several interviewees who appreciated the opportunity to work more flexibly and/or less intensively.

Overall, 20 (12%) of retired survey participants agreed with the statement that 'Retired academics need to make a "clean break" from work and treat retirement as a fresh start', a sentiment with which 11 (14%) of working survey participants concurred. This was also the view of some interviewees, such as the one for whom retirement 'is a new chapter, perhaps described as the closing of one door and the opening of others. I see it as an opportunity to start afresh and reinvigorate … It is simply moving on to a different challenge' (interviewee 25). But this is a clear minority position. The same is true for the opposite option of employment continuing to provide the majority of a person's income into their seventies and beyond, certainly for the retired survey participants but also for those still working, although for this latter group there was the potential for two in five to still be working at 70 if all those currently undecided followed that option. This leaves the largest group, in all likelihood the majority, devising an intermediate strategy of retiring but retaining some degree of connection to academic activity.

Among retired survey participants, although for most of this group the academic work that they undertook was unpaid, the general picture was of former employing institutions that were facilitative of these endeavours. Their former universities provided access to library, email and computing services to the majority (94%, 89% and 65% respectively) while over a third (38%) had access to a shared office. A slight majority, 53%, reported former colleagues providing a welcoming environment, although 10% reported the opposite and a further 14% received mixed messages, indicating that a significant minority were left with the impression that colleagues felt that the time had come for them to move on. An interviewee described graphically the disappointment of coming to feel discarded: 'Once you retire you rapidly become invisible. It's like being thrown overboard' (interviewee 39). Retired staff associations have the potential to alleviate such feelings, and some are very active, but by no means all universities have them, and those that do rely on retired staff to sustain them. For these reasons it can be concluded that Tizard and Owen's concerns 'about the failure of universities to give adequate status and resources to retired academics' (2001, p. 253) have been addressed only partially in the intervening period.

Conclusion

Ebaugh's analysis of role exit in various settings (occupational and other) suggests that disengagement from a former activity is managed more effectively to the extent that it has been anticipated, and conversely experienced with difficulty by those 'who have little or no idea of what they will do after' (1988, p. 181). Amongst academics across all disciplines this latter point applies to Davies and Jenkins's (2013) categories of 'avoiders' and 'reluctant' retirees; by contrast, 'continuing scholars', 'clean breakers' and 'opportunists' in different ways plan ahead. The conclusion that planning matters will arguably increase in salience as the effects of recent changes to pension entitlements are felt. Retirees from previous periods will therefore not have been in directly comparable positions but will still have the potential to inform such planning. Although few named individuals were identified by interviewees, and although neither interviewees nor survey participants constituted representative samples of UK academics, the elements of successful academic retirement strategies emerged clearly enough from the interviews and the surveys. A minority make a clean break from academia to strike out in new directions, another minority continue to have being an academic as their core identity, but a larger number than these two groups combined will aspire to retain a degree of engagement in academic endeavour in conjunction with other interests in a shifting work/life balance. In this context it is unsurprising to learn that there is widespread uncertainty about what constitutes 'retirement', reproducing Tizard and Owen's (2001, p. 254) finding and confirming the trouble with the question that several autobiographies and biographies reported.

Role models of continuing scholars may emerge through using retirement to hand on a legacy to future generations in organizational form, as in the cases of the Norbert Elias Foundation http://norbert-elias.com/about-elias-foundation/, the Bauman Institute https://baumaninstitute.leeds.ac.uk/ and the Morgan Centre https://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/ (to take just three examples), but this is only one of many possibilities. The theory of role models states that they 'need not be known personally to the individual' and may even be figures who are 'legendary' rather than 'real' (Marshall, 1994, p. 454). It is, however, notable that those interviewees who identified role models of successful academic retirement selected people known personally to them and through that connection appreciated their individual qualities. Put another way, role models need to resonate as a person 'someone wants to be like or could become' and are thus 'highly personal and idiosyncratic' (Hochschild, 2003, pp. 233–234). They are, first and foremost, points of reference who help us to become the person we seek to be.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the editors and the journal's anonymous referees for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Leverhulme Trust under grant RF-2019-623.

Notes on contributor

Graham Crow, FAcSS, is Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Methodology at the University of Edinburgh. His interests include the sociology of community, sociological theory, comparative sociology, and research methodology. He is currently writing a book about Ann Oakley.

References

Bailey, M., Clarke, B., & Walton, J. (2012). *Understanding Richard Hoggart*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Baker, S. (2019, December 30). Physicist wins employment tribunal over Oxford retirement rule. *The Times Higher*. https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/physicist-wins-employment-tribunal-over-oxford-retirement-rule#survey-answer

Bauman, Z., & Tester, K. (2001). *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Briggs, A. (2001). *Michael Young*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Crow, G. (2020a). Hedgehogs, foxes and other embodiments of academics' career trajectories. *Contemporary Social Science*, *15*(5), 577–594.

Crow, G. (2020b, May 5). Lessons from academic careers. *Discover Society*.

Crow, G., & Laidlaw, M. (2019). Norbert Elias's extended theory of community: From established/outsider relations to the gendered we-I balance. *Sociological Review*, *67*(3), 568–584.

David, M., & Woodward, D. (1998). Introduction. In M. David, & D. Woodward (Eds.), *Negotiating the glass ceiling* (pp. 3–21). London: Falmer.

Davies, E., & Jenkins, A. (2013). The work to retirement transition of academic staff: Attitudes and experiences. *Employee Relations*, *35*(3), 322–328.

Dench, G., Gavron, K., & Young, M. (2006). *The New East End*. London: Profile Books.

Ebaugh, H. (1988). *Becoming an EX*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Elias, N. (1991). *The society of individuals*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias, N. (1994). *Reflections on a life*. Cambridge: Polity.

Fowler, B. (2015). The media and collective memory: The obituaries of academics. In M. Dawson, B. Fowler, D. Miller, & A. Smith (Eds.), *Stretching the Sociological imagination* (pp. 120–140). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Fox, A. (1990). *A very late development*. Warwick: IRRU.

Gaskill, M. (2020, September 24). On quitting academia. *London Review of Books*, *42*(18).

Goudsblom, J., & Mennell, S. (1998). *The Norbert Elias reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hall, S. (2018). *Familiar stranger*. UK: Penguin.

Halsey, A. H. (1996). *No discouragement*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Halsey, A. H. (2004). *A history of sociology in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Halsey, A. H., & Runciman, W. G. (2005). *British sociology seen from without and within*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hay, I. (2017). *How to be an academic superhero*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Hochschild, A. (2003). *The commercialization of intimate life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hoggart, R. (1988). *A local habitation: Life and times 1918-40*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Hoggart, R. (1993). *An imagined life: Life and times 1959-1991*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoggart, R. (1994). *Townscape with figures*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Hoggart, R. (2001). *First and last things*. London: Aurum Press.

Hoggart, R. (2005). *Promises to keep*. London: Continuum.
Lain, D. (2018). *Reconstructing retirement*. Bristol: Policy Press.
Lee, R. (2018). Doreen Massey, Biographical Memoirs of Fellows, The British Academy. https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/982/Memoirs_17-10_Massey.pdf
Marshall, G. (1994). *The concise Oxford dictionary of sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Mennell, S. (1992). *Norbert Elias*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Oakley, A. (2011). *A critical woman*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
Powell, E. (1977). *Joseph Chamberlain*. London: Thames and Hudson.
Reisz, M. (2008, February 21). Senior service. *Times Higher Education*, 38–41.
Silver, M. (2018). *Retirement and its discontents*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Stevenson, O. (2013). *Reflections on a life in social work*. Buckingham: Hinton House.
Taylor, P., Earl, C., Brooke, E., & McLoughlin, C. (2021). *Retiring women*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
Thompson, P., Plummer, K., & Demireva, N. (2021). *Pioneering social research*. Bristol: Policy Press.
Tizard, B., & Owen, C. (2001). Activities and attitudes of retired university staff. *Oxford Review of Education*, *27*(2), 253–270.
Wagner, I. (2020). *Bauman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Wootton, B. (1967). *In a world I never mad*e. London: George Allen & Unwin.
Worsley, P. (1984). *The three worlds*. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson.
Worsley, P. (1997). *Knowledges*. London: Profile Books.
Worsley, P. (2008). *An academic skating on thin Ice*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
Young, M., & Schuller, T. (1991). *Life after work*. London: Harper Collins.