

THE early bird catches the worm. Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. How about we meet at 8am?

Ugh. These are some of my most deplored sentences in the English language.

As a lifelong night owl I've countless times been subject to the tacit peer/family disapproval associated with getting out of bed at 11am. When you walk into the kitchen at 11.30 and make yourself an innocent bowl of cereal, there's that thing the smug early-riser will do where they look at the nearest clock and say something annoying like, "Geez, half the day is already gone." And then they proceed to tell you all about their achievements that morning. "Well, I went for a run. Then I checked my emails. Then I read *War & Peace*. Then I did some grocery shopping. And now I have the rest of the day to relax. Ahhh..."

What you, as a night owl, would like to say is, "Yeah, but you went to bed at, like, 10 o'clock. I was up until three, doing all kinds of shit."

But no, you don't (say this), because you've tried it before and when you're 37 years old and you tell the self-satisfied early-riser that you still go to bed at 3am on a weekday they look at you as if (a) it's about time you accepted being "an adult", (b) you're lazy, (c) you're sleeping your life away, or (d) all of the above.

This has always been the night owl's lot — to be seen as ill-disciplined, sluggish, disorganised and inefficient. A man/woman out of sync with the rhythms of the productive world, a non-contributive entity that's still asleep and dreaming while the rest of the population are already at their desks, making money. And the silly thing is, even though you know they're wrong about you — you know you're really hard-working and dedicated and diligent — you still have this weird sense of guilt about sleeping late, especially when you work from home, like me, and have a partner who's up at 6.30 every morning, showered and out the door barely four hours after you went to bed. Hell, there have been times when my wife has woken particularly early for some ghastly meeting or flight only to be met with the vision of me at my desk, having not even gone to bed yet.

But now, fellow night owls, you can



*We own
the night*

Maligned as lazy and ill-disciplined, night owls now have science to back up their penchant for late nights and later mornings, writes **Oliver Roberts**

direct the early-riser and their haughtiness towards the cold, hard facts of science. According to some very clever men and women in cardigans, there's this thing called "delayed sleep-wake phase disorder", or DSP, and what a welcome acronym it is.

Apparently people with DSP have a genetic thing that causes their circadian

rhythms to be a bit wonky — our body clocks are basically delayed by a couple of hours, meaning our to-bed and wakey times are out of whack with about 60% of the population (DSP affects around 40%). So it's not our fault.

Fortunately, my profession allows me flexi-hours because I work from home. But

what about the DSPers of the corporate world, where firing off emails before 7am is seen as heroic and admirable? What about DSPers forced to attend 8am meetings having gone to bed only five hours earlier? I think we're still a long way from the time when the night owl's circadian quirks will be accommodated. But, as technology gradually begins to draw us away from The Office as an official, be-all-and-end-all place to work and do business, perhaps there's hope for the next generation of late-risers. Perhaps, in 10 or 20 years, night owls will be doing business almost exclusively with other night owls, at night, and develop a kind of Free Mason handshake that'll allow one night owl to recognise another, instead of through the more traditional way which is to recognise each other's bloodshot eyes and caffeine abuse.

Because it is a kind of club. While the early-risers have the sunrise and birdsong, the night owls have the deep post-midnight hush of the suburbs that is so conducive to reflection and creative thought; we have the calls of the creatures of the night (including, obviously, the owl's haunting hoot); we have the intense solitude that comes from the feeling that we're the only one awake in a world that is fast asleep, gone, off in another realm, and so for a few hours every night we own the world in its entirety.

The Carpe Noctem Club* — exclusive, enchanting, a little lonely, but incredibly creative and productive and, now, finally, approved by science.

*Seize the night

While the early-risers have the sunrise and birdsong, the night owls have the deep post-midnight hush of the suburbs

Famous night owls, past and present

1. Gustave Flaubert
2. Winston Churchill
3. Carl Jung
4. J.R.R. Tolkien
5. Elvis Presley
6. Barack Obama
7. Gordon Ramsay
8. Pharell Williams
9. Bob Dylan
10. Trevor Noah

